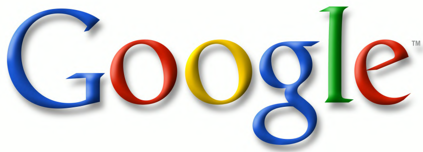

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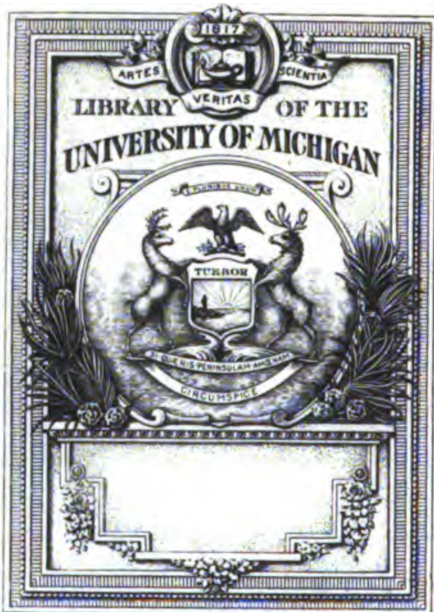

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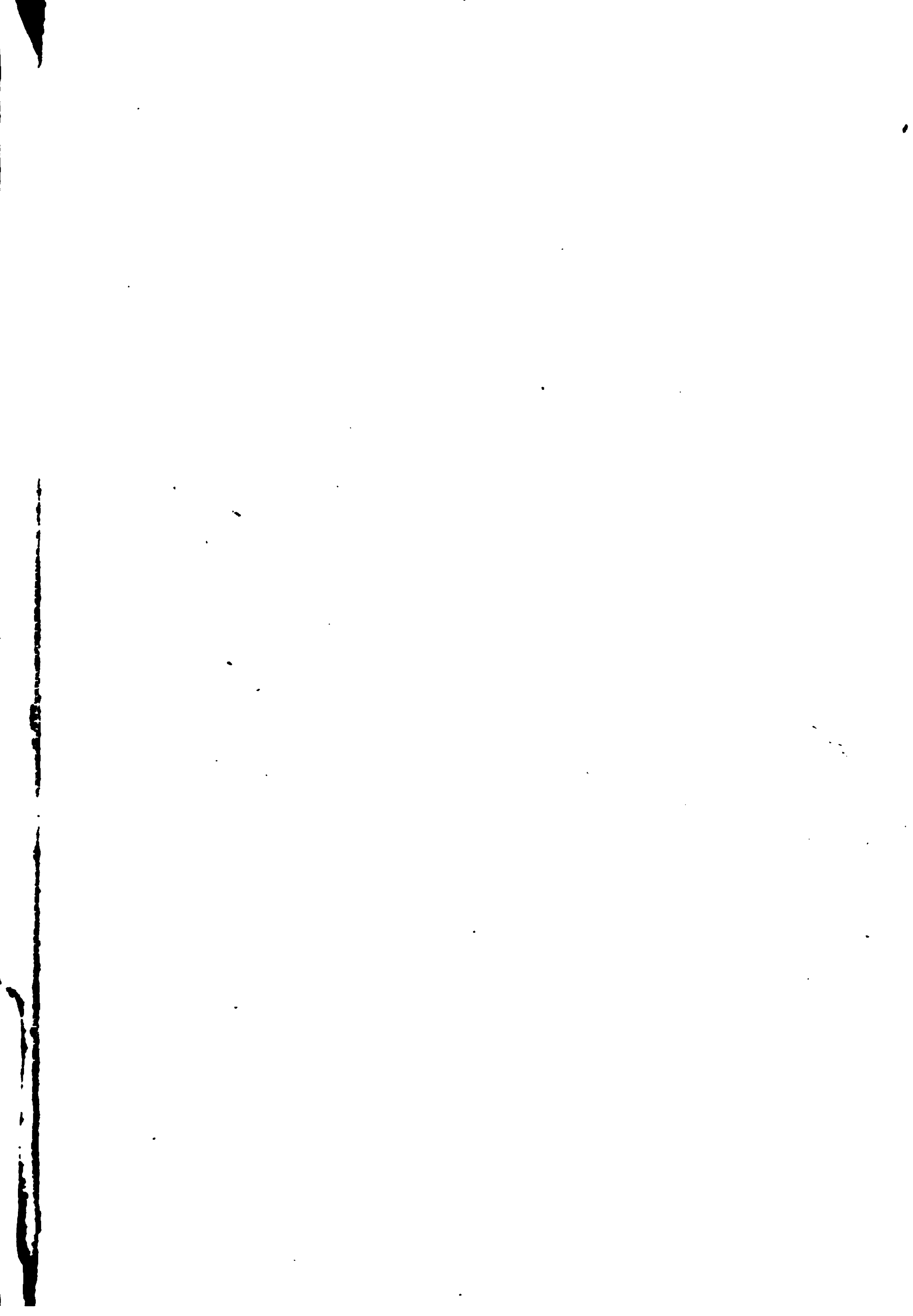

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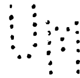

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THE ARGOSY.

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ON THE TRAIL OF A MYSTERY.

BY HUGH R. VANATTA.

A story of the Kentucky mountains, in which are set forth the ramifications of a feud. What befell a newspaper man who ventured among the combatants, and how he discovered that tact is oftentimes as serviceable as valor.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.

MY FIRST ASSIGNMENT.

I WAS fortunate in applying at the editorial office of *The Pioneer*, for it so happened that Mr. Forsythe, the managing editor, was not only in a genial mood, but he had a half hour at command and there were no visitors ahead of me.

"Mr. McIntyre, I am glad to see you," said he heartily, waving me to the only chair that was not piled with half a foot of exchanges. "Let me see --today is Thursday; you were graduated Tuesday or Wednesday?"

I blushed with a thrill of pride at this evidence that the managing editor knew something about me. And yet after all what was strange in his having such knowledge? Was he not the controlling spirit of one of the leading newspapers of the West? He must have noticed that I was the valedictorian of my class, and *The Pioneer* gave quite a full summary of my essay "The Demands of Higher Journalism."

No doubt Mr. Forsythe had read that synopsis and would be charmed to peruse the entire article. Modesty forbids me to mention some of the glowing praise it had received from discriminating friends.

"We had our commencement exercises on Tuesday," I replied, with a smiling acknowledgment of his implied compliment.

"And you would like a situation on *The Pioneer?*" he continued, lighting a cigarette and leaning back in his chair.

"Well," I replied, uncrossing and then crossing my legs again; "my folks have urged me to take up the profession of law, but I have always had a partiality for journalism. I think the field is broader and there is a better chance to develop one's talents."

"Undoubtedly, provided one has talents to develop. I judge you have had no experience on a newspaper."

"Not as yet; I understand there are a good many newspaper men who made their start as editors. You know there are some people who are born editors."

"I was not aware of that," replied Mr. Forsythe, with a grave countenance, and he sent two parallel streams of cigarette smoke through his nos-

trils. "So far as my experience goes the best editors have begun at the bottom. That was the case in *this* establishment. My own first essay was as printer's devil."

These words acted somewhat as a damper on my vaulting ambition. Having a knowledge of my "Demands of Higher Journalism," Mr. Forsythe ought to have felicitated himself on the chance of securing my services as editorial writer, but his last remarks caused an unpleasant doubt on my part.

But I meant to come down gracefully.

"A preliminary training is an advantage in all professions, but, Mr. Forsythe, you will admit that in some cases far less training is required than in others?"

"I have never known an instance in which a man got too much of it. That there is an infinite variety of talent among men can no more be questioned than the infinite variety of form and feature. One fact, however, may be accepted as long since demonstrated: no person has half as much ability as he believes he has."

By this time a clearly formed suspicion had outlined itself in my mind. The managing editor of *The Pioneer* was having a little quiet fun at my expense. He enjoyed clipping the wings of budding geniuses.

"Mr. McIntyre," said he, with more earnestness in his manner than he had yet shown, "perhaps you were surprised to hear me speak of your graduation, before you said anything about it yourself. In all large newspapers the editors learn the date of the various college commencements from the tremendous increase in the number of applicants for situations on the paper. For assurance and the very sublimity of self conceit, give me the college man who has just graduated with honors. He conceives it to be his mission to reform the world and reconstruct the social universe, and the most grievous blow of his life comes when he learns that the world is not yearning for him, and refuses to take him at his own estimation. Now, I shouldn't wonder if you delivered an essay on some subject connected with the modern newspaper. Am I justified in my suspicion?"

I was a little irritated.

"My paper on the 'Demands of Higher Journalism' received several compliments, and *The Pioneer* did not deem the space wasted that was devoted to a summary of it."

"Perhaps it was not. Now, Mr. McIntyre, I have no wish to discourage the ambition you have formed to enter our field, for it is a broad one and there is need of all the brightness and ability that can be secured. Doubtless you believe you have talents in that direction, but you are as likely to be wrong as right."

The managing editor was clipping my wings with a vengeance. I felt resentful, but it would not pay to show any anger. Observing my flushed face and silence, Mr. Forsythe continued, after an almost imperceptible pause:

"To avoid raising any false hopes on your part, I may say that there isn't a single vacancy on *The Pioneer* from the post of chief editorial writer down to the newest space reporters. On the contrary, we can cut down twenty per cent of our force and be the better for it. There isn't an editor or specialist writer on the paper who did not begin at the bottom; we aim to train our men to their work; the writing of a single good article or even of two or three, does not prove that the writer can keep it up or that he will be equal to the demands that are sure to be made upon an editor's capacity.

"Now, you came here believing you had but to make your wishes known to receive an instant proposal from us. It is possible you fancied we would set you to work as an assistant editor. Dismiss all such ideas from your mind. You wrote a paper upon the 'Demands of Higher Journalism.' No doubt it

was well expressed, and no doubt that so far as its value to practical modern journalism is concerned nine tenths of it was rubbish; for no one but a callow youth would venture to give instruction to men who were successful editors before he was born.

"But, let that go. The applications from fresh college graduates for situations on *The Pioneer* that have been received within the past ten days are between ninety and one hundred. These applications have been filed without giving the slightest encouragement in any one case. Now, Mr. McIntyre, what do you think ought to be done with *your* application?"

My hopes, which were at the boiling point when I stepped into the managing editor's sanctum, had sunk to zero. Not very graciously I replied, "Nothing," and rose to go.

Mr. Forsythe laughed and motioned me to be seated.

"Your answer is so sensible that it has prepossessed me in your favor. I thought it only right to speak plainly and truthfully to you. Perhaps I have raised the question in your mind as to what earthly chance there is of a young man of ability entering journalism, and you have answered the question by saying there is no chance at all."

"You have certainly shown such to be the fact," I remarked.

"The impression is erroneous, for though the opportunity is slight, nevertheless it exists. A man of ability will carve the way for himself. He cannot be repressed."

"To come to the point," said I, with returning assurance, "in what way can I prove my fitness providing I have a spark of it, which I very much doubt?"

"Go out through the city; visit the police courts; wander through the levee section; study human nature wherever you see it; avoid the beaten paths; strive to be original as well as observant; do things differently from others; study simplicity and directness of speech; avoid all attempts at style and fine writing; put your ideas in language that will interest a child; be graphic, pointed and accurate, and when these conditions are complied with, send me your contribution and it will be impartially considered, and my decision will be based, perhaps not wholly upon its merits, but upon the availability of the article for *The Pioneer*."

Having delivered himself of this eminently sensible advice, the managing editor lit another cigarette, leaned back in his chair, and waited for my response.

"I will admit, Mr. Forsythe, that the path which I pictured as lined with roses, is filled with thorns. Still I am hopeful of forcing a passage through it."

"Well expressed, and don't be discouraged if your first dozen efforts are failures——"

He stopped so abruptly that the cause was apparent. In the midst of his sentence, he had suddenly thought of an opening for me. I knew it and my heart fluttered with renewed hope.

"You look like an athlete; have you ever played football?" he asked.

"I have been full back for two years on our eleven, and I think helped a little in winning the championship for our college last year."

"Good! How are you on horsemanship?"

"I was born and lived in Texas until I entered college."

"Better yet! The boys there learn to ride before they know how to walk. I presume," he added with a smile, "you know something of firearms."

"Such a question is almost an insult to a Texan."

"Best of all! Your early training presupposes that you are brave, daring, cool and resourceful. All these qualities being assumed, I am prepared to make you a proposition."

Wondering and expectant I awaited his explanation.

"You have heard of the feud that has been going on for months in the mountains of Kentucky?"

"You allude to the Baker and Howard feud in Clay County?"

"The same; there have been others, but this one just now occupies the attention of the whole country. It is a disgrace to civilization, but all the same it exists, and the reports from there are more interesting than those from the Philippines."

"I wonder, Mr. Forsythe, that you have not sent a correspondent to that section."

"We sent two of our best men. The first one was mobbed, fired upon and notified that if he did not make himself scarce within twenty four hours, he would be turned into a human sieve. He deemed it best to heed the warning, and he came back with a message to me that certain death awaited any and every newspaper reporter who dared to come within range of the Winchesters of those mountaineers."

"You said you had a second correspondent."

The face of the managing editor became thoughtful and he sighed.

"Dick Montgomery was one of the brightest young men I ever knew. He graduated last year from your college."

"He was an intimate friend of mine and one of the best of fellows," I said sadly.

"He won a place on *The Pioneer* by following the advice I gave you a few minutes ago. In the face of the warning brought by his predecessor, and against my advice, he persisted in going into Kentucky as representative of our paper. We had two letters from him, in which he referred lightly to the personal danger he ran. The last one arrived nearly six weeks ago. We have made every effort and expended a great deal of money, but have not been able to gain the first scrap of information concerning him since."

"What is your explanation?"

"Only one explanation is possible; somewhere among the gloomy recesses of those mountains the bones of poor Dick Montgomery are bleaching, and will never be found by his friends, unless through some accident. Now, Mr. McIntyre, it will sound strange to you to hear me lay this proposition before you, after telling you how I tried to dissuade Dick Montgomery from the venture. I don't advise you to follow in his footsteps, but, if you choose to do so, after knowing all the facts, I wish you to understand that while any news that you can send us of the feud will be most welcome, my personal anxiety is to learn the facts about Montgomery."

"I shall start for Kentucky this evening."

"Don't be hasty or too rash. Since you have a twofold purpose *The Pioneer* will bear your expenses and pay for your services whether they are successful or not. You understand the nature of this business as well as I, and I am not competent to give you advice except in a general way. Your deftness with firearms, your horsemanship, and familiarity with danger are of inestimable value, but, above all, let me urge you to be cool, tactful and prudent, for without such qualities you cannot hope to succeed. Get any news to us in the quickest way possible, and remember that *The Pioneer* is not only able but willing to pay every expense that you may incur."

Just then the foreman of the composing department asked for instructions concerning some display head. Mr. Forsythe excused himself for a minute and hastily penciled a note which he handed to me.

"Take that to the cashier," he said, "and he will fire you up. Good by!" he added as he grasped my hand; "God bless you and bring you back safe and successful."

Three days later, I was in the depth

of the wild, mountainous region of Eastern Kentucky.

CHAPTER II.

TOM AUCKLAND, MOUNTAINEER.

Managing Editor Forsythe's plain words had done me a world of good, and on my way to the mountainous region of Kentucky, I had put in a big lot of thinking.

That I was "fresh," when I entered the sanctum of *The Pioneer* I am free to admit—but there was precious little of that feeling left, when, liberally provided with funds, I left the office and, as soon as I could complete my brief preparations, set out for my perilous field of operations.

I will not be accused of a lack of modesty when I repeat what I had said to the editor. I was a good horseman, and pistol and rifle shot, and the fact that I played a leading position on the football eleven for two seasons is proof that I ranked well as an athlete.

But a man can be all these and incur the fate of being incontinently snuffed out by some treacherous mountaineer, who is in the last stages of consumption and physically afraid to meet a boy in a fair fight.

The question which I turned over in my mind hundreds of times while speeding toward Kentucky on the trains was as to the best method of earning my salary and making myself "solid" with *The Pioneer.* When finally I left the cars at McVeyville, and hiring a tough, wiry pony, by paying his full value in advance, headed into the mountains, the question was still unanswered and the problem unsolved.

About the only thing I had settled upon was that I must under no circumstances admit I was a newspaper correspondent, for such men were as unpopular in that section as internal revenue officers.

I had thought of assuming any one f a dozen different characters, such as drummer, lightning rod agent, land prospector, hunter, traveler, but there was objection to each of them. I finally fixed upon that of a representative of a Chicago syndicate which had reason to believe the mountains in that section of Kentucky contained valuable coal and iron deposits, with a suspicion of zinc and lead. This belief on the part of the capitalists had led them to send me into the country to prospect and make an investigation.

The attractive feature of this character was that it ought to awaken hopes among the people of selling their miserable lands for five or ten times the value at which they had been held. Reasoning along this line to the end, they should treat me with the greatest consideration, and make sure even that the wind did not blow too unkindly upon me.

The unattractive feature of the character was the probability that not a single person would believe a word I said.

I carried only a meager supply of paper and pencils—not enough to condemn me as a newspaper correspondent, for they are not the only persons who take stationery with them on their travels. My traveling bag contained a few indispensable articles, and my revolver was at my hip, where it could be drawn at an instant's need. Of course, it was my only firearm, for it would have been not only absurd but a "dead give away" for me to display a Winchester.

Thus accoutered, I rode my pony over one of the roughest mountain roads I have ever seen. It was up and down but gradually ascending, broken by gullies, hollows and washouts until it seemed impossible that any wheeled vehicle could make its way over it. And yet it had been done, for the tracks were too plain to be mistaken.

The afternoon was cloudy and overcast, and the air chilly with the promise of a cold storm. I had ridden fully ten miles and had not seen a single human habitation or a solitary person. The

man from whom I hired my pony told me the country was sparsely settled, but I ought to sight two or three mountaineers' cabins before night closed in.

He added that the people were mighty suspicious of strangers and that I was undertaking a risky business in going among them—a piece of information that was in the nature of a superfluity.

It still lacked a couple of hours of nightfall, when I came to a small, clear spring that, bubbling from the ground at the side of the road, disappeared a few paces away among the rocks and undergrowth. I was thirsty and so was my horse.

Swinging out of the saddle, I knelt down and quaffed of the refreshing fluid, while the animal thrust in his silken nose alongside of my face and drank his fill. I love an intelligent horse, and had already formed an affection for the one that had brought me thus far on the road whose termination I could not guess.

When his thirst was satisfied, he raised his head, the cool water dripping from his mouth, looked at me with an almost human expression and sighed with enjoyment. I patted his warm, moist neck to his evident pleasure.

"Good boy, Jack," I said, repeating the name I had heard his owner use; "it has been a pretty hard tramp, up hill all the way, and I hope we haven't much further to go."

Just then he threw his small ears forward, looked partly behind him and uttered the faintest possible whinny. I understood his kind well enough to know what this meant. He had heard something suspicious.

Its nature was not left long in doubt. An answering neigh came from the road, a short distance below me, followed by the unmistakable sound of a horse's hoofs, walking over the same course that I had come.

"Some one is following me," was my thought, as I laid my hand on the butt of my revolver; "but for this stoppage, he would have shot me from the rear before I suspected my danger."

The thought was scarcely formed when a man rode into sight around a sharp turn in the highway. Hardly a dozen yards separated us when we caught sight of each other.

I was a moment quicker than he, so it was impossible for him to get the drop on me. Had I chosen, I could have shot him from his horse, but such action would have been indefensible, nor did I yield to the impulse to order him to throw up his hands. Instead, I called cheerily:

"Howdy, pardner! Glad to see you."

He was a massive fellow, fully six feet in height, of herculean frame, dressed in coarse, half hunting costume, with a slouch hat, heavy spiky hair that dangled about his shoulders, and a face covered almost to the temples with a long, bushy black beard.

His hat being pulled down to his brows, left just enough room for the large piercing jet eyes to glare like those of a wild beast watching its prey through a matted hedge.

His horse was a powerful, bony animal, well fitted to carry such a rider, who held a Winchester resting across the saddle in front in a way that confirmed my belief that had he been able to come upon me unawares, his first act would have been to send a bullet between my shoulders.

Although so little of the man's countenance was visible, it was evident he was surprised at his failure to catch me off my guard. There was one prolonged stare of those terrible black eyes, and then he nodded and sullenly growled:

"How'dy? Who might you be?"

"Joseph McIntyre," I replied, "just from Chicago; who are you?"

"Tom Auckland; I live a little way up the road."

As he spoke, he indicated the direction by a flirt of his head.

"Good; I'll go with you."

By a quick movement, I vaulted into the saddle, taking care as I did so not to turn my back on him for an instant, and holding him all the time in my field of vision. I knew that despite his massiveness he was as active as a cat, and that he held no good will toward me.

Drawing my pony beside his, I assumed a confidence I was far from feeling.

"I find it pleasant to have company over such a lonely road; how far off is your house?"

"'Bout a mile," he answered, with a partial thawing out of his reserve.

"Night is so near that if you are willing I'll stay with you till morning."

"Jim Goepel lives a couple of miles beyont my cabin."

"I'll go there if you don't wish to keep me."

"Our latch string is allers out to everybody in these parts," he remarked, as if he felt my reproach, "'cepting the Gulick boys, damn 'em!"

"What's the matter with *them?*"

"Hain't you ever heard of the Gulick boys?—the twins?"

"Never heard of them."

"They b'long to the Baker party—they've killed two of our folks and lamed another for life. Jack and Sam are twins. There was four of 'em at first, but Bill and Pete graderally got tired and laid down, and it was me that helped Pete lay down," added Tom Auckland with a chuckle; "that leaves only the twins and the old man and woman—but they're all cold p'ison."

Now there was tremendous significance in this remark. It might be it did not contain a word of truth. I suspected it was a feeler intended to lead me to reveal my sentiments.

Of course, I knew all about the Howard and Baker factions, representing the respective parties to the last hideous feud in Kentucky. The words of Auckland implied that he belonged to the Howard side, but it was probable he was a partisan of the Bakers and was trying to entrap me.

And yet it might be the other way, and since the whole thing must remain for a time in doubt, my cue was to be non committal.

To feign total ignorance of the mountain feud would confirm the suspicion of my companion.

"I believe," I said, as if turning the question over in my mind, "there's some sort of quarrel between the Howard and the Boker—or is it Baker?—families, and that their relatives and friends have taken sides. I think there have been several lives lost."

"Humph! I reckon," replied my companion with a grunt.

"Well, I have no interest in their quarrels," I remarked indifferently; "I have come into this part of the country on different business."

"What mought the same be?"

"Well founded reports have reached Chicago that there is a good deal of coal and iron in this section; I represent a company of wealthy men who want to make certain of such being the fact before they buy the lands."

"Wal, pardner, there ain't any mistake about it, for I've seen it myself, and there's lots of coal and iron on my property."

"I congratulate you, Tom, for I don't suppose very high prices have been paid for land in this part of Kentucky."

"Him that can git three dollars an acre counts himself lucky; how much do you 'uns give for land that it's sartin has coal on?"

"Well, it is hard to say, for you can understand there may be a good deal or only a small amount of coal; if it should happen to be of the cannel kind and there's a lot of it, the land would be cheap at a thousand dollars an acre."

It was the most foolish thing I could have said, for I overshot the mark. If I had named a hundred dollars an acre, the man might have believed me, but the sum specified destroyed the last vestige of credence he may have been disposed to put in my assertions.

I saw my blunder and attempted to modify it, but it was too late. Tom Auckland's distrust had intensified Our horses struggled along for a few rods side by side, and he remained silent for several minutes after I ceased speaking. Then, ignoring the fact that I had given him my name, he said:

"Stranger, do you know what I think of what you just told me?"

"No."

"It's a damned lie!"

Inasmuch as this assertion was truth, I smiled to myself and said airily:

"It doesn't make any difference what you think; I'm sure your land is not the only property about here that contains coal and perhaps iron; I'll let you alone and look elsewhere."

This threat did not worry him nor remove his distrust. He made no reply, but an unpleasant fact quickly made itself apparent.

Tom Auckland was trying to drop to the rear. There could be no doubt of his purpose. He was seeking a chance to get the drop on me and shoot me unawares. I defeated his attempts for a time by the deft handling of my pony.

While holding the rein with my left hand and using my knees to keep a firm seat, I kept my hand on my revolver. The presumption was that Auckland had a similar weapon somewhere about him, though I did not see it. He was depending upon his Winchester, and without a doubt he was a dead shot.

Finally he deliberately pulled his horse, and waited for me to ride in advance. Instantly I did the same, swerving Jack slightly so that the mountaineer and I faced each other without turning in our saddles. Like a flash I whipped out and leveled my revolver.

"You can't play it on me, Tom Auckland! Ride right alongside like a man, and the next time you try the sneak game, I'll let daylight through you quicker than chain lightning! I've seen what you were up to, and it has been in my mind more than once to shoot. You hear me?"

CHAPTER III.

A CAPTURE.

STARTLING as was the turn of affairs to Tom Auckland, it was instantly succeeded by a still more startling situation.

Jack, my pony, who had given me opportune notice of the approach of the mountaineer, again threw his pretty ears forward and emitted a faint neigh, which as before was answered similarly, but this time from the front. Auckland jammed his spurs into his horse's flanks, and the beast with one bound placed himself at my side and slightly in advance, thus throwing me a single pace to the rear.

At the same moment two horsemen came in sight around the bend in the road, hardly a hundred yards distant. Quickly reining up their animals, they loomed tall and large in their slouch hats and mounted on their huge, bony horses.

"They're Zach Peters and Dick Warman," said my companion; "they b'long to the Howard gang."

"Then they are friends," I replied, recalling one of his speeches.

"Not a bit of it," he said with an oath; "look out! they're going to shoot!"

My companion brought his Winchester to his shoulder with lightning-like quickness and seemed to fire at the same instant, but no quicker than the two who had halted on the rise above us. The three reports rang out simultaneously and frightful execution was done.

Tom Auckland's horse made a frenzied plunge forward, and with a cry of agony rolled over on his side. The rider leaped clear, and I knew by his exclamation he had been hit.

That I myself had served as a target was proven by the zip of a bullet which

grazed my cheek. In that terrible second I saw an impressive sight.

One of the Howard men, looming clear and distinct in the gathering gloom, flung his arms upward, so that he resembled the figure of a cross, with a Winchester rifle suspended and falling from one cross piece, and then with a cry he dived to the ground, as if it were water into which he meant to plunge.

Tom Auckland's bullet had sped true and either Zach Peters or Dick Warman was as dead as Julius Caesar.

I had taken no part in the affray, since the distance was too great for the effective use of my revolver.

The moment Auckland freed himself from his falling horse, he made a couple of tremendous bounds that carried him to the side of the road, where he was out of range for the time of the repeater of the remaining enemy.

This much I saw, for it all took place, as may be said, in the twinkling of an eye, and then, with almost the same swiftness, I ceased to be a spectator.

The firing and confusion threw Jack into uncontrollable panic. He spun around like a top, and with the bit between his teeth went down the road like a meteor. I exerted myself with might and main, but he continued his terrific pace over the gullies and broken places and turns of the highway, at the imminent risk of his neck and mine, and it was not until he had gone fully two hundred yards that I was able to check his speed and bring him to a standstill.

But when he was turned about, he absolutely refused to go back. No urging affected him, though I was confident that in a short time he could be soothed into obedience.

But there was not a minute to throw away. Tom Auckland was wounded and confronted by an unwounded enemy, who would show him no more mercy than one of Geronimo's Apaches. I slipped out of the saddle.

"Go where you choose, Jack; we must part company."

I paused only long enough to remove my traveling bag, which had been tied to the saddle, and holding it in my left hand, and my Smith & Wesson in my right, I loped up the road to where I feared my acquaintance was *in extremis*.

Danger makes strange bedfellows. I had just finished a threat of shooting Tom Auckland, when in the same moment we became companions in deadly peril and presumably friends.

It was impossible to forget the spot, even if it had not been marked by the dead body of the mountaineer's horse. The afternoon was drawing to a close, but it would not be dark for a full hour.

The two members of the Howard gang had vanished. One of them must have dragged the lifeless form of his comrade to the side of the highway and sent the horses beyond reach.

Recalling where I had seen the figure of the giant mountaineer as he leaped to the protection of the rocks and undergrowth, I halted and peered cautiously around.

He was invisible, and, puzzled to know the cause of his going so far, I called in a suppressed voice:

"Helloa, Tom! where are you?"

A slight rustling followed, and the slouch hat, glaring eyes, and matted whiskers were slowly shoved into sight from behind a mass of stone close to the road and on my right hand.

"I warn't sartin, pard, that was you, but I'm glad to see you and to obsarve that you was luckier than me."

I was instantly at his side.

"Were you hit hard?" I asked, noticing blood on the sleeve of his right arm.

"No," he replied with a sniff, "but I'd rather been hit harder than to have catched it as I did. Do you obsarve that I won't be able to handle my Winchester till the blamed thing heals?"

He illustrated how the bullet that had ranged along his forearm, passing out near the elbow, had temporarily paralyzed the muscles. While he could use

the arm freely from the shoulder, he had no control below the elbow.

"I reckon, pard, you know how to handle a Winchester?" he said inquiringly, and, without aiming to boast, but rather to quiet his misgivings, I said:

"When your arm gets well I should like to challenge you to a shooting match. I know you're a good shot, for you proved it, but I believe I can beat you."

"Mebbe you can, but I won't believe it till it's done. But you can beat me *now*, pard, and I'll turn my gun over to you."

"Have you a pistol?"

"Yes, but it's at the house."

"Keep your rifle, even if you can't shoot it; I prefer my revolver for close quarters, and it's getting so late in the day that there won't be anything else done. Hadn't I better bandage your wound?"

"No," he replied impatiently; "I'll wait till I get home, and let the old woman fix it up for me."

"I think you winged one of those fellows."

"I reckon I did; all the men belonging to the Howard gang are the meanest on earth, but Dick Warman was the meanest of 'em all. He shot twice at my old woman, and had a hand in the killing of young Nancy Carter last summer over in Rattlesnake Ridge. I'm so glad when I think it was my luck to wind up his clock that I don't mind the little scratch he give me."

"They must have ridden directly by your home?"

"Of course, and if it wasn't that I didn't hear any shooting I'd be sure my old woman and my boy Jake had had a row with them, but they didn't."

I was uneasy over Zach Peters, who had not been harmed in the encounter of a few minutes before.

"What's become of him?"

"He's nosing around somewhere not far off; you see he doesn't know how bad I catched it; if he had knowed he would have been down here and finished me before you could have got back."

"Well, the job won't be quite so easy now," glancing furtively to the right and left and behind me, for the situation was a most disquieting one, since, as will be perceived, the advantage was wholly with Zach Peters, who had every chance of stealing into a position from which he could pick off his old enemy without betraying himself or running the risk of a return shot.

"Tom, this won't do," I said the next minute; "we are simply inviting that fellow to shoot us both at his leisure."

"What else can we do, pard?"

"I'll make a change of position; stay where you are, and we'll see what we'll see."

"All right," was the philosophical remark, as, assuming a crouching posture, I noiselessly stole away from the spot.

The situation was peculiarly delicate. Tom Auckland was helpless, and if discovered by Zach Peters would be at his mercy. My comrade was too proud to ask for quarter, and it would not be granted if asked. Men who shoot down an unarmed prisoner, when guarded by militia, are not the ones to pay any regard to the usages of civilized warfare.

The perplexing question with me was as to the right direction to take after leaving my wounded comrade. Zach Peters had every point of the compass from which to choose in making his approach, and by parting company with Tom, I was likely to leave the way open for his enemy to reach him.

Obviously the only course for me to follow was to go but a short distance, and then depend mainly upon my sense of hearing to detect the stealthy coming of the foe.

By this time it was beginning to grow dark. Although rain still threatened, it did not fall, but it was chillier than ever.

Without any convincing reason for the conclusion, I believed Peters would

enter the wood, and, penetrating far enough, take a course parallel to the highway until he reached a point opposite where he had seen the wounded mountaineer leap to cover, and then stealthily work his way toward the road, but this conclusion was, as I have shown, just as likely to be wrong as right.

It is curious how a man placed in our situation, while using marked diligence and caution, often fails to do the thing so plainly to his advantage that a child would perceive it. I cautiously made my way through the tangled undergrowth, believing I was doing so with a noiselessness that would have deceived an Indian, when I stopped short, overwhelmed by the absurdity of the whole thing.

In the name of all that was sensible why was Tom Auckland staying at the point where he had first taken refuge, and where his enemy would naturally look for him?

Being wounded in the arm only, he was as able as ever to travel. His home was but a short distance off, and nothing was easier for him than to thread his way through the wood to the cabin where he would be safe.

And yet this line of action "as plain as the road to the mill" had not occurred to the veteran mountaineer, nor to myself, who claimed to have a fair amount of common sense.

The first departure from the spot by Auckland would place him and his enemy upon equal terms, so far as such a thing was possible, since each would be a fault as to the location of the other.

"I'll be hanged!" was my disgusted thought; "I'll go right back to Tom and show him what fools we have been——"

Just then, and before I could take more than a single step, a soft rustling caught my ear. It came from the front, and, instantly halting, I crouched low, for I did not doubt that it was made by Zach Peters, and that by a lucky chance I had not only struck the point where he turned to steal upon Auckland, but had actually passed beyond it.

This was providential, indeed. He could not have failed to note the panic of my pony and his headlong dash down the road with me in the saddle. The sight removed all fear that he might have held of my figuring in the game, and the possibility of my reaching a point to the rear of his position could, in all probability, never have occurred to him.

The gloom was so deep that I could not discern objects more than fifty feet distant. Little more than half that distance I made out the slouched hat and broad shoulders of Zach Peters, the barrel of his Winchester also showing, as it projected just beyond his face. His back was toward me, and he was bent far over and moving with the care and stealth of a panther creeping upon its prey.

Why should he think there was any possible danger from behind? He was between two fires and did not suspect it.

It would have done him no good had he known the truth, for, from the moment I recognized the dim figure in the deepening gloom, I was his master. If any person ever had the drop on another I had it on him.

With my revolver in my right hand and at my side, I strode rapidly toward him, never once removing my eyes from the crouching form gliding slowly away from me. The first few steps on my part were made cautiously, but, after that, I was careless.

Consequently, when less than half the intervening space was passed, he heard me, and rising suddenly to the upright position, turned and, Winchester in hand, confronted me. With an imprecation he demanded in a fierce undertone:

"What do you want? Who are you?"

"Your master, Zechariah! Drop that rifle quicker than lightning or I'll

bore a hole through you! One—*two*—THREE!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNTAINEER'S HOME.

No man is quicker to realize that the drop is on him than he who has often gained it on others.

Before I had uttered the word "three," Zach Peters allowed his Winchester to fall at his feet as abruptly as if his two arms had suddenly become paralyzed.

"Hands up!" I commanded, and he promptly reached for the stars.

Then I advanced to his side, and dropping my traveling bag, rapidly ran my hand over his clothing, not forgetting the capacious bootlegs into which his trousers were tucked. I failed to find any pistol.

"I hain't any gun but my rifle," he growled.

"And I'll take charge of that," I said, picking up the weapon.

I shifted it to my left hand, carrying my bag and the smaller weapon, while I retained my revolver. Under the circumstances, I preferred to place my chief reliance upon the pistol. Stepping back a couple of paces, I added:

"You can lower your hands, but don't forget that on the first attempt at a trick you're a dead man."

Thus confronting each other, Zach Peters demanded:

"Who the devil are you?"

"The man you tried to shoot a little while ago when I was riding with Tom Auckland."

"But you wheeled about and scooted," said my prisoner, evidently still mystified over my unaccountable reappearance.

"My horse was scared by the firing, but I soon got him under control, and came back as quickly as I could."

"What made you come back *here?*"

"To look for you; I knew you would try to sneak in on Tom."

"Say, stranger, he was hit purty hard, warn't he?"

"No; he caught it in his forearm, but the bullet went through the head of his horse first, and didn't do him much damage."

"I wish it had gone through *his* head first," exclaimed my prisoner with inexpressible fierceness; "if it hadn't been for you, stranger, I'd 've finished him. Say, who are you any way, and what have you to do with our quarrel?"

"I'll give you the particulars some other time; it's enough for you to know that for the present I am a friend of Tom Auckland."

"I knowed the Baker gang was trying to bring in outside folks to help 'em, but they may bring a hundred men, not counting the State militia, and it won't do 'em a bit of good; we'll clean 'em all out!"

"An hour ago I had never seen or heard of Tom Auckland; he was looking for a chance to shoot me when I got the drop, and that made a sort of truce."

"You seem to be hell on getting the drop; what's your game?"

Enough light remained for my prisoner to note that I wore a brown business suit, and that my dress was spruce and natty. I did not look as large or as muscular as was the fact, and the rough mountaineer scanned me from head to foot with a certain admiration, for nothing appeals so strongly to his class as physical prowess.

We were silent and motionless for a minute or two, each scrutinizing the other with an interest that could not have been greater. Suddenly from behind his beard, almost as shaggy as Tom Auckland's, sounded a chuckle.

"I know what you are, stranger."

"What am I?"

"One of them infarnal newspaper fellers; you've come into the mountains to larn all about the quarrel between the Bakers and Howards. The best thing you can do, stranger, is to git out agin as quick as you know how. You hain't the first one that has tried that

thing, and you won't be the first that *stayed* here."

"Do you know anything about a newspaper man named Dick Montgomery?" I asked, forgetting my caution in my sudden interest.

It was an unfortunate question, for it not only gave me away, but put the prisoner on his guard. Instantly he became as uncommunicative as a clam.

"Don't know nothin' 'bout him; never heerd of such a chap."

"Well, there's no use of our wasting time here," I replied indifferently, and then raising my voice I called:

"I say, Tom! I've got your man! Come over here and tell me what to do with him."

The distance was so slight that my voice readily reached the mountaineer, and immediately I heard the Hercules threshing through the wood and undergrowth.

Zach Peters calmly faced about in the direction of the noise and deliberately folded his arms.

"Tom's got me," he remarked as coolly as if referring to the weather.

"What do you mean? Do you imagine he intends to shoot you?"

"In course; that's what I'd've done with him if I had the chance, and what he'll do with me; that's the style of doing business in the Kentucky mountains."

I was glad to receive this notice, and it was a most fortunate thing for Zach Peters himself: I assumed position between him and the approaching mountaineer, who appeared a few minutes later.

He was quick to see the tall, erect figure, partly screened by my own form, and abruptly halted, amazed.

"Why, he's *alive!*" he fairly gasped.

"Of course; why shouldn't he be? He surrendered to me."

Auckland stood for a few moments absolutely speechless. The fact that I had allowed an enemy to make submission and had spared his life was beyond the mountaineer's comprehension. Then I saw him attempting in an awkward way to manipulate his Winchester, so as to bring it to bear on Peters, but the relative positions of the three were such, and his own weakness so marked that I was in as much danger as Zach Peters.

"I say, pard, jest stand a little to the left," said Tom pleasantly; "only a little way and I'll fix things."

"No, you won't; he's my prisoner, and I shall dispose of him as I see fit; on the first attempt to harm him, I shall shoot you!"

Tom ceased his clumsy essays and stared at me with a blank wonderment that was laughable. Why it was I protected the man in my power was beyond his comprehension, though I suspect he found a partial explanation in the belief that, like the American Indians, I had reserved him for a fate far more dreadful than sudden death.

The situation was becoming strained, when I remarked:

"Your house isn't far off, and your arm needs looking after; let's go there, taking this man with us as a prisoner."

The proposition suited Auckland, and it was easily carried out. He took the lead, with the captive following, and I bringing up the rear. In this way I could keep a close watch of him and defeat any attempt at escape, though I am not certain, had he made a break, that I should have interfered, for it was plain that unpleasant complications were at hand with the members of Auckland's family, who were certain to share his sentiments with him.

It was an impressive fact that neither of my companions seemed to give a thought to Dick Warman, the victim of this savage encounter. Somewhere in the vicinity lay the form of the man, stark and stiffening in the gloom of the mountain wilderness, another victim to one of the most senseless feuds that ever disgraced a sovereign State of the American Union.

It may have been that we passed within a few paces of the figure, but if

so neither Auckland nor Peters gave any evidence of it.

Not one of us exchanged a word with the others while passing through the wood. Auckland, quite properly, acted as guide, and led the way around a number of boulders and rocks, through masses of matted undergrowth and hollows, and over depressions and ridges. We suddenly debouched into a clearing, several acres in extent, that bordered the highway over which all the parties to the encounter just described had been riding only a short time before.

In this clearing, and no more than fifty yards from the road, stood the log cabin of Tom Auckland, with other crude structures at the rear, in which was stowed the hay and fodder intended for his horse (that needed it no more) and his cow. The cleared ground, which was fairly fertile, was cultivated, and later in the season must have produced a considerable crop of vegetables.

Without hesitating, Auckland led the way along a well marked path across the clearing to the side door, pulled the latch string, and entered. I had noticed that a light was burning inside.

Zach Peters held back, but only for a moment, when with a certain stolid heroism, he stalked after the leader, and I, with a presentiment that trouble was at hand, stepped hastily forward, so that I almost trod on his heels.

The house which we entered was a typical mountaineer's home. The structure was of logs dovetailed at the corners, and the chinks filled in with dried clay. A broad fireplace occupied almost one entire side of the room, which was the only one below stairs, serving therefore as a parlor, sitting-room, and kitchen. As I learned afterward, the upper story was divided into two sleeping apartments, reached from below by a sloping ladder at one corner.

The furniture was of the crudest character, consisting of a table, a few chairs, stools, and cooking utensils. There was no stove, the food being prepared over the roaring fire in the wide hearth, after the manner of the pioneers of New England.

At one side of the room was a row of pegs from which were hung a number of coarse garments, some of which I observed belonged to a female. A tallow candle on the table and the light of the fire on the hearth filled the apartment with a ruddy illumination.

Seated at the table, sewing on a garment by the light of the candle, was a tall, bony, angular woman, keen eyed and alert of movement. Pausing in her work, she looked up, without moving, as the door opened, and recognizing her husband, said in the most matter of fact manner:

"Helloa, Tom! what's the matter with your arm?"

"I met a couple of the Howard gang."

"I reckoned so—wal, my gracious!"

Directly behind her husband loomed the slouch hat and massive shoulders of Zach Peters, whom she recognized as he entered, with me so close that I had closed the door before she could add anything to her exclamation.

The naturally self possessed woman was agitated by the sight, as she might well be. She rose as abruptly to her feet as a jumping jack, displaying fully six feet of stature, with her coarse skirts clinging so closely that nowhere below the shoulders was her amplitude greater than that of a man. That our prisoner was an old acquaintance was proven by her next words.

"Wal, Zach Peters! what brings *you* here?"

"This young man, which his name is Mr. McIntyre, and he's from Chicago, tuk him prisoner," explained the husband, who, with a wave of his hand, added:

"Gentlemen, take seats and make yourselves to hum."

Impressed by the grim humor of the situation, I sat down in the nearest chair, placing my traveling bag beside me and holding my captured Winches-

ter between my knees. As the wife glanced curiously at me, I removed my derby and said: "Good evening, Mrs. Auckland; I am glad to see you!"

Without replying, she looked again at Peters, who had also sat down, crossed his muscular legs, and placed his slouch hat over one knee. The movement of his heavy beard showed he was smiling, as he calmly met her gaze, but he did not speak.

"I 'spose it was you that give Tom his hurt?" added the wife, who showed no hurry to look after her wounded husband.

"Dunno whether it was me or Dick Warman; I aimed the best I knowed how, but it mought have been Dick that plugged his hoss and winged Tom."

"And what did *you* do, Tom?" asked the wife, turning angrily upon her husband.

"Dropped Dick Warman in his tracks," was the proud reply.

"And who's this lily faced young lady in man's clothes that you've fetched into the house?" continued the woman with a scornful glance at me.

"Hold on there, Becky! I'll own he looks a good deal like a dude, but he's got sand; if it hadn't been for him, Zach would've dropped me, dead sure."

"That's so," heartily assented Mr. Peters, "and it was him that got the drop on me, and which the same he fetched me in here as a prisoner of war."

"I don't believe a word of it!" said the woman, dropping into the chair, as if some one had struck her on the crown with a mallet, her thin lips compressed and her gray eyes flashing.

The husband now deemed it best at this point to give an account of the hostile meeting already described, doing so in his characteristic fashion. Zach Peters helped him along by an occasional nod of his head and the exclamation, "That's so!" while I, as was becoming, held my peace, and once or twice blushed, as is fitting for a modest man when he hears himself praised.

CHAPTER V.

A STORMY RECORD.

THERE could be no mistaking the meaning of the glances which Mrs. Becky Auckland shot toward Zach Peters during the course of her husband's narrative. Never was more deadly hatred concentrated in a look, and I half expected her to leap to my side, snatch up the Winchester, and shoot the prisoner dead. The bitterest, fiercest, most merciless partisans in those mountain feuds were the women.

"Come, wife, let's have supper," was the strange wind up of Tom Auckland's story.

Without a word, the woman rose to her feet and began preparing the meal of hominy, bacon, coarse bread, and coffee. When it was ready, we drew up our chairs, and Tom Auckland bowed his head, closed his eyes, and asked one of the most touching "blessings" to which I have ever listened.

There had been a pause long enough to permit his wife to dress and bandage his wound, which was more trifling than either one of us had suspected. Indeed, the numbness of the muscles had passed almost entirely away, and Tom announced that on the morrow at the latest he would be as ready as ever to act his part in the feud as a partisan of the Baker clan.

It need not be said that throughout the incidents I have described, I kept up a big amount of thinking, and was busy speculating over the outcome of the series of curious adventures in which I had unexpectedly become involved.

In the first place, the remark of Zach Peters proved that he knew something about the fate of Dick Montgomery, who had vanished from the knowledge of men as utterly and completely as if lost in the depths of the Soudan.

From my brief experience with Peters, I believed I had gained to a certain extent at least his good will. If he had any spark of manliness in him, and I believed he had, he ought to feel grateful to me, for he owed me much. My resolution was to retain and strengthen that good will, so far as the opportunity might present itself.

How all this was to be brought about must be left to the future, but nothing was more certain than that the events which had opened with a rush would continue to be interesting to the end, and that end in the nature of things could not be far off.

The evening meal was marked by perfect freedom of conversation. One of the deadliest enemies of the household sat at the table, and had he and the head of the family met an hour later in the woods, they would have flown at each other like a couple of tigers, and never rested until one or both were killed; but now no long separated brothers could have been more cordial than they, although each knew the real feelings of the other toward him.

Remembering that Tom had spoken of a son, I inquired about him, and was told that he had gone out on a " hunting " excursion that afternoon, and was liable to return at any moment or might be absent until the morrow.

When the meal was finished, Tom threw several logs on the fire, and lit his corncob pipe, first offering one to Peters, who accepted and began puffing it.

" I hain't any more pipes," Auckland said apologetically to me, " and I'll be obleeged if you'll smoke first and I'll foller."

" I never smoke a pipe," I replied, " thanking you all the same."

Opening my traveling bag, I brought out a handful of cigars, and offered them to the two men. They declined, preferring the corncobs, while I, of course, stuck to my Perfectos.

One problem gave me no little concern. What disposition was to be made of Zach Peters, our prisoner? The question threatened a new and troublesome complication, but I wisely decided to leave its answer to events as they developed.

It was quite evident that, despite the sharp tongue and temper of the wife, the husband was master in that household. He did not say much to indicate this fact, for it was not necessary, but it was apparent from the manner of the couple as well as an expression dropped now and then by the shaggy Hercules.

Supper being ended, and the " things " cleared away, the wife resumed her sewing at the table. Whatever attention was demanded by the cow and domestic animals had been given by her before our arrival. She took no part in the conversation unless directly appealed to, but the expression of her hard, wrinkled face and her manner showed she was keeping up a lot of thinking, while a furtive glance cast at intervals toward the imperturbable Zach Peters left no doubt of her sentiments concerning him.

The conversation among Auckland, Peters, and myself was curiously unrestrained. I took pains to act out my character of the agent of a syndicate of capitalists, hunting for coal and iron lands, and impressed upon the prisoner that if he or his friends held any tracts that hinted of mineral wealth it might be to their interest to cultivate amiable relations with me.

All this was good enough in its way, but I could not shake off the impression that neither of the two men believed a single word of my statements. Their pretense of doing so was too thin to deceive me.

By some strange fatality they had hit the truth. I was a newspaper correspondent in quest of information, and Zach Peters had not failed to note my sudden interest in the fate of Dick Montgomery, the missing representative of *The Pioneer*.

A curious train of circumstances had placed these two men under obligations

to me. I had been the means of saving the life of Tom Auckland and had done a similar service for Zach Peters, and yet the service in each case was preceded by the deepest kind of humiliation. Men don't forget such things, and, as I viewed it, it was very doubtful whether I would receive similar consideration when the tables were turned.

My aim was to run the conversation in the direction of the missing newspaper men, for hints were dropped that Montgomery was not the only representative who had entered this region and never got out again; but my companions were cautious.

To me the talk of the two mountaineers was exceedingly interesting, for it gave me a vivid knowledge of the leading vendettas that have terrorized that region at intervals for a full half century.

The origin of the famous feuds in Kentucky has generally been of a political nature. One party having obtained control of affairs has pushed its power so far that some of the members, of the least standing, perhaps, come to blows; blood is shed, and probably a life taken. Then the factions take sides and support the belligerents, and within a few weeks the feud is on between powerful political enemies, though perhaps all belong to the same party.

Such was the beginning of the latest feud in Clay County. For more than a half century the White family were the political rulers of the section, and, walled in from the outside world by hills and mountains, they held their own against the opposing faction in their own party, for no new citizens came into the country.

In 1897, Will White's term of office as sheriff expired, and his brother, Ben White, Jr., who had been Will's deputy, became a candidate for sheriff. The power of his family and friends seemed absolute, but their management of affairs was such that the Phillpotts, also Republicans, formed a coalition with the Democrats and nominated Gilbert Garrard for sheriff. Although the normal Republican majority in Clay County was a thousand, Garrard came within less than a hundred votes of election.

The campaign was bitter, and intense hostility developed between the Whites on one side and the Garrards, Phillpotts, and Bakers on the other. When this feeling was at the intensest point, A. B. Howard, a friend of the Whites, and Tom Baker, a strong supporter of Gilbert Garrard, became involved in a quarrel over a judgment against Howard which Baker had brought. Such an act is looked upon by the Kentucky mountaineers as of so unspeakable meanness that it constitutes a mortal insult.

The Bakers and Howards naturally went to fighting, and, as a matter of course, the Whites sided with the Howards and the Garrards supported the Bakers. Will White roundly abused the Bakers to old Mrs. Lucas, who told them that White had threatened to kill all of the Baker family. Learning of this, Tom Baker armed himself, and, meeting Will White, shot and killed him.

This act roused the latent devil of the Whites, and, as the reader will recall, Tom Baker, while at Manchester, awaiting trial and under protection of the State guards, was shot dead, in June, 1899, from an adjoining house by an ally of the Whites. This added fuel to the feud, which raged more fiercely than ever.

Going back a few years, the French-Eversole feud of Perry County was another illustration of a similar state of affairs. The Eversoles were the political bosses of the section, and none but they and their friends could be elected to office. Fulton French made the attempt, failed, and hostilities opened.

Beginning with a trivial encounter, a mountain war was set on foot which cost the State of Kentucky more than a hundred thousand dollars and filled thirty eight graves, seventeen of which

belonged to the Eversoles. It is probable that Fulton French and Joe Eversole spent one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, most of which was paid out by French, who had to hire his fighting men.

Kentucky has been a State of vendettas. The first of importance was the Hill and Evans feud, which, beginning in 1829, continued for more than twenty years. The leaders were practising physicians, and became enemies through a dispute over slaves. The clans were as ferocious as Apaches, and peace did not come until twenty seven graves had been filled by the bloodthirsty combatants.

The Strong-Amy feud, in Breathitt County, was the first to break out after the war, and it lasted for thirty five years, the deaths averaging one a year. Once a conflict by moonlight in an open field resulted in five killed and half a dozen wounded.

The Howard-Turner feud in Harlan County ran for ten or twelve years, during which thirty men were killed and a great deal of property destroyed by fire. Wilson Howard, one of the leaders, made the mistake of killing a man who did not belong to either faction. He was hanged for the crime and the feud stopped.

The history of the Martin-Tolliver feud of Rowan County is unique. Craig Tolliver was one of the most desperate wretches that ever lived, and for years he held Morehead and Rowan counties in such terror that the people hardly dared to call their souls their own. The state of affairs became so unbearable that Governor J. Proctor Knott put forth every energy to end it. After spending more than a hundred thousand dollars he gave it up.

Boone Logan, at that time, was a young lawyer of Morehead, and expressed his indignation to the Governor, who shook his head.

" It's no use; the only thing to do is to let the people keep shooting until all are killed; then we shall have peace."

" I don't see the need of waiting until then," remarked the young lawyer.

" Would you like to take the contract? "

" I am willing."

" Go ahead."

There was genuine Kentucky grit in Boone Logan. He mortgaged his home and bought a thousand dollars' worth of rifles and ammunition, armed a hundred of the most determined men in Rowan County, and opened proceedings.

The first step was to swear out warrants for the arrest of Tolliver and his men, who opened fire on the posse that attempted to serve the papers. Logan showed the instincts of a soldier by secreting his men around the hotel in which the Tollivers had taken refuge, and posted others along the road that they were likely to take when they left the house.

The fire quickly became so hot that Tolliver and his men ran out and tried to escape, only to be caught in a cross-fire, which killed Craig and several others, beside wounding a number. The remainder fled the country, and the vendetta was extinguished.

I have deemed it proper to introduce this summary of the most notable feuds in Kentucky, in order that my readers may appreciate the perilous situation in which I had voluntarily placed myself, for I had entered the very heart of lawlessness, and have told enough to show that in doing so I virtually took my life in my hands.

It is a mistake to think the leaders of these feuds are men of low standing and no culture. The Whites are descended from the same family that produced John White, once speaker of the House of Representatives, and are closely related to John D. White of Clay County, who has served two terms in Congress.

Many of the young men and women of the mountains are fairly well educated. They are found in the Laurel Academy at London, at Jackson, the

Harrow School at Cumberland Gap, and the State College of Kentucky at Lexington. At the last institution some of the highest honors have been taken by young men from the mountains.

The actual fighting men, however, belong to the lower strata of mountain society, many of them being unable to read, but ready to hunt men to the death, so long as the employer is prompt in paying the wages of one dollar a day and "found," with an occasional present of a suit of clothes for extra good work in killing his fellow beings.

CHAPTER VI.

OH, GENTLE WOMAN.

ONE of the strangest experiences of my life, and one that will always remain vivid in my memory, was that evening spent in the mountaineer home in Kentucky.

While the wife sat silently sewing by the light of a candle on the table, taking no part in the conversation, Tom Auckland and Zach Peters smoked their corncob pipes and I my cigars, talking as if we were lifelong friends, met in the most social sort of a reunion.

The mountaineers especially were like two brothers, laughing and joking with each other as they recalled the stirring scenes in which they had been active, and the striking fact came out that they had fought on the same side in the French-Eversole feud. Unquestionably both had committed deeds during that fearful vendetta, which, while they would have been proud to dwell upon if alone, they hesitated to refer to in my presence.

And now they were the deadliest of enemies, who would eagerly begin shooting at each other on the first opportunity. Undoubtedly, each was working for wages promptly paid by the leaders of the factions.

The situation was so unique and so tempting that I determined to appeal to their manliness and common sense to end it, at least as far as they were concerned, and I was awaiting the fitting opportunity to do so, when a startling and unlooked for interruption took place.

A heavy footstep was heard on the two pieces of planking which served for a porch, the latchstring was twitched, and the door swung inward. A bony youth, with freckled face and immature features, stepped across the threshold. He was attired much the same as the two men, in slouch hat, coarse coat and trousers that were tucked into the tops of his big cowhide boots. He was very tall and thin, and the instant my eyes rested on him, I knew he was Jake Auckland, son of my host and hostess.

The moment he closed the door, he glanced wonderingly at me, and then at Peters, who was looking steadily at him. The next second he uttered an oath and leveled his Winchester at my prisoner.

"Zach Peters! Damn you! I've got you now!" and he pulled the trigger.

Fortunately I had noted the venomous gleam in the eyes of the youth, and suspected what was coming. He stood so near me that I had only to leap to my feet and shove the muzzle of his weapon aside, with the result that the bullet was buried in the logs behind the intended victim.

"None of that!" I commanded, still grasping the gun barrel with my left hand and shoving my revolver into his face, all aflame with passion; "he's my prisoner, and if you shoot him you're a dead man!"

"Who are *you?*" he demanded, wrenching his rifle free; "stand out of the way, or I'll let daylight through you!"

"Not much you won't, my young friend! I've got you dead to rights!"

Quickly as all this took place, the seconds had been wonderfully improved by Zach Peters. With a panther-like bound, he snatched up his own Winchester, which I had been com-

pelled to abandon, when I rose to my feet, and with a backward leap stood at bay in the corner of the cabin.

And so suddenly that the action of the two seemed simultaneous, Tom Auckland backed away with his own gun ready for instant service, whether it should be to shoot me or the glowering neighbor in the corner. He had regained enough command of his wounded arm to do this.

The wife glanced affrightedly from one to the other, and then rising to her feet without a word, stepped quickly to the fireplace, where, as she turned about, she not only had a good view of the scene, but was not likely to be hit by the flying bullets.

Young Jake Auckland was in such a rage that only one thing could avert a fatal collision between him and me, and fortunately that intervention came at the right moment.

"Jake!" thundered his father, "put down your gun!"

"I will as soon as I shoot that devil in the corner."

But he would have had a hard time in doing this, for Zach Peters had his Winchester in hand and was ready for him, while it is hardly necessary to say that I was in a white heat of anger, and my threat was not an idle one.

Evidently the elder Auckland brooked no interference with his authority, and the disobedience of his son incensed him beyond bearing. With a muttered imprecation, he strode across the room with the intention of chastising the youth, who, knowing what was coming, sullenly lowered his gun and became as meek as a lamb.

"All right, dad, but I don't understand it."

"Wal, you *will* understand it mighty quick, if you don't do as I tell you. We uns and Zach Peters are as much at outs as ever, but it happens jest now that he b'longs to this chap and not to us."

Jake turned and looked curiously at me.

"And who's *he?*"

"A friend of mine; he kept Zach from shooting me a while ago."

"That's so," came in solemn but hearty tones from the corner.

The Auckland scion looked at me, then in his father's face, and then across at his enemy in the far corner of the room. His freckled countenance expanded into a broad grin which revealed his big, yellow teeth.

"Wal, I'll be hanged if I understand this infarnal bus'ness."

The mother, seeing there would be no shooting, silently resumed her seat at the table and continued sewing. All at once, her maternal solicitude asserted itself.

"Jake, have you had supper?"

"Yas—I stopped at Budd Snyder's; me and him hev been hunting."

"What did you git?"

"Nothing; we laid behind a blind all the afternoon, but none of the Howard gang came within range, and, when it was dark, we give it up."

A "blind" is simply an arrangement of leaves and limbs to serve as an ambush. During the trial of some of those concerned in the feuds, it came out that a man sometimes lay behind one of these blinds, day after day, for more than a week, waiting for his victim to appear in the highway in front of his hiding place.

"Bad Tom Smith," employed by Fulton French, testified that he was paid a dollar per day, and he confessed to killing six men, though eight deaths were charged to his account. Most of this deadly work was done from behind blinds. Tom was so successful that he started into killing on his own account, his victim being a physician while lying asleep in bed. It was a great mistake of Tom's, for he was hanged for the one crime, though French secured his acquittal of the other five, to which he confessed.

"Set down! set down!" said Auckland heartily, waving us to chairs, as he helped himself to one; "let's see,

Zach, where was I in my story?" he continued.

Tom leaned his Winchester against the side of the cabin, and Zach left his in the corner, as he came forward. I shoved my pistol into my pocket, but Jake remained standing, with his weapon grasped tightly in his hand.

"You see, Zach, that time you fired at Bill Watson and missed him——"

"Something was wrong with my gun, Tom."

"Yes—I b'leve that's so, but didn't I wing him purty? Jake, what's the matter with you?" demanded his father, turning and glaring at him.

"Nothing," replied the son, meekly leaning his rifle against the logs near the door and taking a chair so near me that I immediately improved the occasion by opening a conversation, doing so in a low tone, for his father had resumed the story that had been interrupted by the incidents just narrated.

Clearly, Jake was entitled to an explanation of the remarkable situation, and I gave it to him as succinctly and clearly as I could, omitting only that portion which showed the sinister intention of his father toward me, though it really would have made no difference in the feelings of the son.

When I told of the killing of his parent's horse, Jake cast a resentful glance at Zach Peters, who at that moment threw back his head and roared with laughter at some joke of Auckland, whose huge shoulders bobbed up and down with merriment. The son did not speak, and it was plain he was in a mood far different from that of his elders.

Suddenly there came a lull in the talk of the men. Auckland's back was toward me, and he turned about and looked over his shoulder, as if inviting me to say something. With a feeling that the opportunity was providential, I did so.

"Has it never occurred to you two neighbors that you are the champion fools of Clay County?"

This was direct and personal, and both looked at me with such a blank expression of bewilderment that I laughed.

"There are others beside you, but you have no excuse for your course. From a time before either of you was born, Kentucky, as well as a few other States, has been disgraced by the most wanton, cruel and causeless feuds; hundreds of men, who had not the slightest cause for quarreling, have shot their neighbors down in cold blood; homes have been desolated, households darkened with sorrow, children orphaned and hearts broken because of a quarrel between two scoundrels, who kept out of harm's way themselves and hired friends to become enemies and murder one another. Now, why should not you be as you were before this miserable feud started?"

I "paused for a reply," but there was none. Auckland and Peters smoked their corncobs and stared silently at me. Jake fidgeted in his chair and never once removed his eyes from my face; the mother held her needle suspended for a moment and glanced at me with an expression which I could not understand. Then she resumed her sewing.

"You and scores of others do not venture abroad without your firearms. Instead of neighbors greeting one another with a cheery 'good morning,' you begin shooting as if to ward off the attack of rabid dogs. Now, wouldn't you prefer to see the good old times come back when you were all friends instead of deadly enemies?"

"I reckon, Zach, it would be more comfortable," said Auckland, looking at his neighbor, who, without removing his pipe, nodded his head and replied, "That's so."

"Then what's to prevent it?"

"Let the Baker chaps stop shooting and we'll do the same."

"That hits me right," assented Auckland, "but," he added with a grin, "I reckon there ain't many of the boys

on either side that you can git to think that way."

"Well, right here is the place to make a beginning."

Zach Peters was less sanguine than I hoped. He puffed out a volume of smoke and solemnly swayed his head.

"Stranger, it won't work; there's too many in the bus'ness; the leaders are spending too much money, and it's a blamed sight easier arning wages by layin' behind a blind all day, smoking your pipe and waiting for one of the other fellers to come in range, than it is hoeing the ground and getting out lumber. 'Spose me and Tom should agree to a truce: that means we shall stand still and let the others shoot us down in our tracks."

"It has that 'ere look," assented Tom.

"No one denies your right to defend yourselves, but you needn't go hunting for victims; you can let others know what you have done, and so far at least as you two are concerned, you can be friends. Am I right?"

Tom and Zach, still puffing their pipes, looked at each other with the oddest expression conceivable. For a full minute neither uttered a word, and then it was Auckland who spoke in so low a tone that but for the breathless silence of the room, his words would have been inaudible.

"What do you say, Zach?"

"I'm agreeable."

"Jake," said I, delighted at the way things were going, "you must shake hands, too."

The face of the youth was a study. He was not smoking, and his naturally red countenance was more crimson than ever. He compressed his lips, and his eyes flashed.

"Zach Peters killed our horse, and I don't shake hands with him."

"Yes, you will!" said his father, sternly; "come over here and shake hands!"

The son rose sullenly, and had begun slouching across the room, when his mother leaped from her chair like a tigress. Her face was ablaze with passion, her eyes snapped and she trembled from head to foot.

Dropping the garment she had been sewing to the floor, she leaned toward her husband, and shaking her long, bony finger, said in words that fairly scorched:

"Thomas Auckland, listen to me! If you're such a sneak and coward as to make up with the likes of Zach Peters, you can do it, but no son of mine ever shall! Jake, if you take the hand of that villain, I'll kill you!"

The husband may have been, as a rule, master of his household, but he certainly was not when his wife was "roused." All were cowed and awed before that awful embodiment of wrath, and none more so than myself.

Fixing her flaming gaze upon the speechless youth, she stamped her foot and shook her lean forefinger.

"Set down, Jacob Auckland! *Set down!*"

He looked questioningly at his father, who grimly nodded.

"Reckon you'd better, Jake!"

She was too flurried to resume her work, and again faced her husband, who was thoroughly scared by her words and manner.

"You hain't shook hands with him yit, Thomas Auckland?"

"Not yit, Becky!"

"Wal, do it now, *if you dare*, Thomas Auckland!"

The husband turned toward his neighbor. Zach took his corncob from between his lips and said:

"I reckon, Tom, we'd better call it off."

"Jes' so; I'm agreeable."

I count myself sensible that I made no attempt up to this point to interfere, but rarely have I been more disgusted and angered.

"Zach Peters." I now said; "since you are my prisoner, I order you to pick up your Winchester and go home."

"That hits me 'bout right," he replied with a chuckle, promptly rising, taking up his gun and striding across the room to the door whose latch he lifted.

I expected some interference from the father and son, due to the vicious fierceness of the woman, and I was prepared to draw my pistol if it should be necessary, but it was not. The two men stared at the mountaineer, without any movement to use a weapon against him. His heavy footsteps sounded for a moment on the planking, and then, as he stepped off on the soft earth, all was silent.

"Thomas," added the wife in a lower voice, "do you know how late it is? Shall I read a chapter in the Bible while you offer prayer?"

"Just as you say, Becky."

And she took down the sacred volume and proceeded to read in an even and well modulated voice, after which we all knelt and the husband offered up a prayer of touching simplicity and earnestness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW OF A TRAIL.

No people in the world are more hospitable than the mountaineers of Kentucky. The Aucklands insisted upon surrendering one of the upper rooms to me, but I would not hear to it, and a blanket was spread in the corner of the lower floor, as a primitive shake down for me. I am not sure that I was wholly unselfish in making this choice.

There was only the single door below stairs, which was locked by drawing in the latchstring; the embers on the hearth were smothered by covering them with ashes to preserve the coals until morning, and bidding me good night, the procession went up the steps of the sloping ladder, the wife in the lead candle in hand, and the son dignifiedly bringing up the rear.

A new candle was lit from a match which I produced and placed on the table. As it was quite early in the evening for a newspaper man, I explained that I would read a while before lying down. So I was left alone.

The night was of pitchy darkness, and now and then the rain spit against the curtained window panes, and the wind soughed mournfully around the mountain cabin. No situation could have been more dismal than mine, and yet the newspaper correspondent must rise above all moods and be superior at all times to the most depressing surroundings.

I was not conscious of any lowness of spirits, as I lit a cigar, drew my chair to the table, spread out my note paper, sharpened my pencil and began writing. I had a good story and meant to make the most of it.

Managing Editor Forsythe and I had agreed upon a number of details of my work before I bade him good by. In the first place, I did not bring any of the large office envelopes with me, upon which the address of *The Pioneer* was printed, for in case of search by the inquisitive mountaineers, they would have been as dead a give away as were the documents found in the boots of Major André. In their place, were a number of envelopes addressed to M. M. Forsythe, Secretary of the Syndicate Real Estate Company, with the number and street of his private residence. True, this was only a weak *prima facie* evidence that would be instantly dissipated by the breakage of the seal, an offense against the United States government which those fellows would not hesitate to commit at any time.

And so, by the light of the tallow dip, I wrote out my story for *The Pioneer*, beginning at the moment of leaving the rickety train at the railroad station, and ending with the evening devotions of the mountaineer's family. Since this was my first essay at correspondence, and I had a good story to tell, I spent

fully two hours on it, crossing out, interlining and revising until at last I was fully satisfied.

Then I wrote a private letter to Forsythe, telling him of the hint I had received about the missing Dick Montgomery and of my intention to follow up the trail if possible until the truth was learned. Finally, my writing was finished and the big envelope sealed over its precious contents.

My instructions were that when I had any important news and was within reach of the telegraph to use it freely, but when there was no urgency in the matter, as in the present case, to rely upon the mails.

But a big hiatus remained to be filled. It was fully a dozen miles to the nearest post office, and I had no horse to take me thither. Doubtless my pony Jack had made his way straight homeward and was at that moment in the stable of his owner. The only horse belonging to Tom Auckland had been killed, and consequently no animal could be obtained of him. Nothing seemed to remain except a foot journey to the post office unless I could hire some one to take my letter thither.

I had sealed the missive which lay on the table before me, and clasping my hands on the back of my head, tipped my chair back while I smoked my cigar and turned over the problem in my mind.

I presume I had sat thus for some ten or fifteen minutes, hearing as in a dream, the spitting raindrops against the window panes, and the occasional moaning of the wind, when I became conscious of the intrusion of something upon my meditations, which, while intangible for the time, was yet too distinct to be laid to a figment of the imagination.

At first, I attributed it to some movements of the sleepers up stairs, but the sounds of heavy breathing had been heard a considerable time, and when I snuffed the " thief " out of the candle and peered over its top at the skeleton ladder, nothing was visible to cause any misgiving.

All at once the truth flashed upon me. The noise came from the *outside* of the cabin. With a shiver of apprehension I reflected how easy it would be for any one to pick me off with his Winchester from either of the two windows, for though a coarse muslin curtain was stretched across each, there were spaces at the bottom and sides through which one could locate me with unerring certainty.

Concentrating all my faculties into that of listening, I heard through the soughing wind a slight noise at the window adjoining the door, and glancing thither, noted that one lower corner of the muslin had curled slightly upward, leaving a clear triangular space of glass, some three or four inches in diameter at its widest part.

The moment I observed this, I saw something else of a more startling nature: a shining object that reflected the dim light of the candle.

A cold shiver ran down my spine, and for a few seconds I was transfixed by the conviction that I was looking into the muzzle of a Winchester rifle leveled at me, but the horrible sensation vanished, when the gleaming thing was partially eclipsed for the hundredth part of a second, immediately after glowing forth with the same steady persistency as before.

That which I saw was a human eye that, while glaring steadily at me winked. This of itself could not be dangerous, but the chances were that a Winchester rifle was directly behind it, and my situation was anything but a " healthful " one.

And then we glared steadily at each other for a full minute, as if it were a contest of nerve and steadiness of vision. Whoever the man was, he knew that I saw him and did not shrink from the fact.

Suddenly yielding to a curious impulse, I dropped my feet on the floor,

whipped out my revolver and bounded toward the gleaming eye as if bent on puncturing it with a bullet. As I expected, it instantly vanished.

"You oughter plugged him first and made your jump afterwards."

Jake Auckland, fully dressed, was standing behind me, his speckled face expanded into a broad grin. He had descended the ladder so softly that I was unaware of his presence until he spoke.

"I guess we'd better."

With which remark he seized a chair and moved it to a position where it was out of range from either window.

"A good idea," I assented, imitating him with an alacrity that brought the grin back to his countenance.

"Did you see it?" I asked with an involuntary shiver.

"What? Zach Peters' eye? Of course I did."

"How do you know it was *he?*"

"By the color of his eye; they are a sort of greenish gray, which you must have observed yourself."

"Come now, Jake, that won't do; you're only guessing."

"I guess I *am* guessing," he chuckled, "but it was Zach all the same."

"What could he want?"

"To see how the land lays."

"Do you think he intended to shoot?"

"No; for if he had he'd've shot before you got a chance to see him. Then why should he shoot *you?*" asked the young man, looking wonderingly at me.

"I'm sure I don't know—but, Jake, why are you not asleep?"

"'Cause I'm awake, I 'spose," he grinned, "but say, I couldn't sleep; I knowed I wouldn't be able to, so I didn't take off my clothes; I kicked around till I couldn't stand it no longer and come down the ladder."

"What's the trouble?"

"Hanged if I know! It must be what you said; I was hopping mad at first and glad the old woman put her oar in and wouldn't let me shake hands with Zach Peters. Gee whiz! but when she gits riled haint she got a whole team?"

"It looks that way," I assented.

"I should smile; it takes a good deal to scare the old man, but she done it tonight."

"It certainly had that look; she seems to be very bitter against the Howard clan."

"Yes; she can't get over the loss of the roan, which either Zach Peters or Dick Warman shot."

"Jake, how much wages do you and your father get for this business?" I asked abruptly.

"A dollar a day apiece and found," was his prompt reply; "besides I had my rifle give to me and you can see she's a beauty," he added, with an admiring glance at the weapon leaning against the logs in the corner.

"You mean by being 'found' that your ammunition is furnished free to you?"

He nodded his head and I did not deem it best to question more closely in that direction.

"What I said this evening appears to have disturbed you."

"Yes; you observed that we was all a lot of damned fools. Them words didn't set very well at first, but the more I thought of 'em the more truer they seemed, till I made up my mind to come down stairs and tell you I agreed with 'em. We are the damndest fools in the whole State of Kentucky."

"There is no doubt of that; this feud has got to end sooner or later in some way, or it will be mighty poor satisfaction to your mother to be left a widow without any son to take care of her in her old age, to say nothing of the other families that must sup sorrow."

"The trouble with me," said Jake, tipping his chair back and crossing his legs, "is that I don't see how me and dad can do anything to stop it."

"You and Zach Peters and his friends can come to an understanding;

he proved that this evening," I said rather warmly.

"*That's* easy enough—but, don't you see there's too many men in it? Before we could get word to the others and have the thing understood, we'd all be riddled like a sieve—and *that* wouldn't be pleasant," added Jake with another grin.

"I admit the difficulty, but by keeping your powder dry and making a beginning, no harm and much good may be done in time."

"I'll have a talk with dad in the morning, and it *may be*—though there ain't much chance for it—we may bring the old woman round. I'd have a good deal more hope if it warn't for that dead hoss."

The young man was in a mood where nothing was to be gained by further urging, and I switched off again:

"Jake, would you like to earn five dollars?"

His gray eyes sparkled.

"Wal, I rather guess I would."

"You see that stamped letter lying on the table? I'll give you five dollars to take it to McVeyville and mail it tomorrow for me, and I'll pay you now."

He brought his chair forward with a bang, turned and stared at me.

"Do you mean it, pardner?"

By way of reply, I fished out my wallet and handed him a bill.

"Wal, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed, gingerly taking the money; "I never earned anything so easy in all my life; I'll start now if you want me to."

"Tomorrow will be time enough; remember you will have to walk there and back."

"A dozen miles each way—that's nothing—humph! But I'd rather you'd wait till I mailed the letter and got back before you paid me."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

I stepped to the table, picked up the bulky envelope and handed it to him, remarking:

"This is a secret between you and me."

"Don't you worry about that."

"Put it in the inside pocket of your coat and keep it there till you reach McVeyville."

He took the letter and glanced fixedly at the superscription as if to show me he could read it, but Jake did not deceive me, for he held it upside down.

"All right," he said, shoving it out of sight; "that letter will be mailed at McVeyville tomorrow before noon, if I live to reach the place; I'll start as soon as I can swaller a mouthful of breakfast and a cup of coffee, and say, pardner," grinned Jake, "if you've got any more letters to mail at half them rates, I'm yours to command."

"There will be no cutting of rates, and I hope to employ you a good many times."

"I say, pardner," he added, dropping his voice to a husky whisper and leaning toward me, "you're one of them chaps that writes things for the newspapers, ain't you?"

"Since I can trust you, Jake, I will own up that I am, but that's another secret between you and me. I don't intend to write anything but the truth and no one should object to that."

"No one does except infarnal fools and them's the very folks you're going to write about. I say, pardner, you hain't got *me* in there, have you?" he asked, shaking with silent laughter at the thought.

"Yes; I refer to you, but say nothing that would displease you, for I couldn't say anything else and still be truthful."

It took the young man a minute to grasp the whole length and breadth and depth of this compliment, whereupon he grinned and again tipped his chair back and crossed his legs.

I had gained a faithful ally and determined to use him for all he was worth, which promised to be a good deal. The munificent wages I offered had secured his devotion, beside which

I suspect the young man felt a certain respect for me because of the way I had managed matters.

"Jake, can you tell me anything about a friend of mine who visited this section some two months ago?"

"Was he a newspaper man like you?"

"Yes—but he didn't resemble me in appearance unless it was in dress. He was short, stockily built, with very black eyes, hair, mustache and goatee."

"I remember him," replied Jake, compresssing his lips and nodding his head by way of emphasis.

"His name was Montgomery."

"Dunno nothing 'bout his name, but I know him from the way you described him."

"Where is he now?"

"*Somewhere over on Rattlesnake Ridge.*"

I looked sharply at Jake.

"What do you mean?"

"I was hiding in the woods one day, for I had catched sight of a gang that was too hefty for me. There was four of 'em, and one of 'em was the man you told me about."

"Were they on foot?"

"No; all was on horseback, and your friend was riding in the middle and he didn't have no gun, which showed he was in the same fix as Zach Peters after you run agin him tonight."

"Did you know his captors?"

"I reckon."

"Who were they?"

"There's no use of my telling you two of their names, but the third was Zach Peters and it looked to me as if he was boss of the job."

"Do you know where they were going?"

"To Rattlesnake Ridge."

"Where's that?"

"T'other side of the valley, 'bout six miles off, over yender."

Jake Auckland jerked his thumb toward the eastern point of the compass. I hesitated to ask the next question, but forced myself to do it.

"What was their errand? What did they do with their prisoner?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"Dunno; but I can make a tollyble guess."

"What is your guess?"

"Wal, then I guess they give him the *witch's parole.*"

"The 'witch's parole'! What the mischief do you mean by that?"

Jake threw up his chin and laughed heartily.

"I'm 'sprised at your ign'rance; dad says the 'witch's parole' was something they had in war times, and it's purty much the same as 'losing' a prisoner. S'pose now, when you got the drop onto Zach some hours ago, you should have ordered him to make a run for it, and, as soon as he started to run, you begun blazing away at him, taking the best aim you knowed how; do you foller me?"

I nodded in the affirmative.

"Wal, that would be giving Zach the witch's parole."

"What earthly chance has a man of escaping with his life?"

"Not much, I 'low, specially when there's three dead shots shooting at him."

"Then," said I with a sinking of the heart, "poor Dick Montgomery is dead."

"It looks much that way, but still there's one chance in a million that he ain't. Don't forget that I ain't sartin he got the witch's parole."

"Jake, did you never hear the particulars of that murder?" I asked indignantly.

"I never heard nothing; I seen the gang riding past with their man, and that's all I really knowed."

"I'll pay you fifty dollars if you find out the whole truth and locate the grave in which Dick Montgomery was buried."

And then came the hideous reply:

"It ain't sartin that he ever *was* buried."

"I can understand that such men would leave his body to rot above ground as a prey to vultures and wild beasts, but we may find his bones and give them decent burial, and I'll pay you the reward for your help in doing that."

Instead of showing the exhilaration I expected over this offer, judging from the effect of the five dollars given him, Jake Auckland became gravely thoughtful. It was evident he was turning over some serious problem in his mind.

"I can't see that there's any great difficulty in the way; you know every foot of the country for twenty miles around, and it is not far to Rattlesnake Ridge; we will go there together and make search; no harm can follow if we fail, and there is always the possibility that we may learn something."

"It ain't that, pardner; the Baker and Howard gangs fight each other as hard as they know how, but when it comes to newspaper men, both gangs do their purtiest to wipe 'em all off the face of the yarth. It'll be tough work to foller up your friend and I'll have to run agin everybody, but by thunder! *I'll do it!*"

He slapped one hand on his knee, compressed his lips and shook his head in a way that could not have been more emphatic. His mental debate was ended, and no matter how great the risks to be encountered, he determined to go with me to the end. Somehow or other, I placed great hope upon this decision.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

"But say," Jake suddenly exclaimed, "what 'bout this yere letter? Do you want me to keep it till we're through this new job?"

"No; take that to McVeyville and put it in the post office; then come back to me as soon as you can."

"Shall I bring that pony of Gaffkins?"

"You mean the one that ran away with me? Will it be safe to use him to ride to Rattlesnake Ridge?"

"It would be safe 'nough, but you can't do it, for the bridle path is only for a part of the way; I'll bring him here and let dad keep him till you're ready to ride hum, which I hope, being it's you, will be purty soon."

"Do you think Gaffkins will let me have him after his running away with me?"

"Dunno; proberly the pony was always gun shy and you didn't hurt him any, and, if you hired the animal by the day, Gaffkins will be glad 'nough for me to bring him back; it'll save time, too."

"If you start early you can get back by noon with the pony?"

"Dead easy; but I can do a blamed sight better than that."

"How?"

"By starting *now.*"

"Gracious! it is hardly midnight," I said, looking at my watch; "it is as dark as pitch, there's a fine rain falling, the weather is cold, and the storm promises to increase."

"What of it?" he demanded with a contemptuous sniff, rising to his feet and beginning his preparations, which were of the simplest character.

His coat was a rough resemblance to a pea jacket, and, as has been shown, he wore the slouch hat so popular among the Kentucky mountaineers, though other kinds of headgear are common. He buttoned the coat to his chin, tucked his trousers more carefully into the tops of his big cowhides, looked at his cartridge belt, and then stepped to where his rifle stood and picked it up.

"You can tell the old folks in the morning that I've gone after your hoss, and say," he added in a cautious whisper, "I reckon you'd better put out that candle till I git a start. If anybody's hanging round he can see me too plain when I open the door."

With a puff I extinguished the light, and the embers being covered with

ashes, the room was in impenetrable darkness. I heard the latch raised, a guarded footstep, and then the door was gently closed. Standing and listening for several minutes, nothing came to me but the faint patter of the rain, the soughing of the wind and the moaning of the forest like the distant sound of the ocean. Jake Auckland had started upon his long, laborious walk, and I was alone.

I stood by the door for a few minutes, listening to the whirling raindrops and soughing of the wind in the darkness. From above stairs, sounded the heavy, regular breathing of the couple who suspected nothing of what had been going on below.

I lay down on the blanket in the corner, using my traveling bag as a pillow. With my face toward the fireplace, I watched the red glow of some of the embers, penetrating through the blanket of ashes, and glowering upon me like the eye of an ogre. A tiny point showed that the candle wick was alive, but it suddenly went out, though the pungent smell of the smoke remained in my nostrils for some time. Finally, with the soft patter of the occasional raindrops against the window panes, and the dismal sighing of the wind, I fell asleep.

When I awoke, it was with a confused, dreamy murmur in my ears that for some minutes I failed to recognize. Then, when I opened my eyes, I first noted the tall, angular form of Mrs. Auckland moving about the room. Day had fully come and breakfast was nearly ready.

I noticed that she stepped softly, often glancing toward my corner, as if afraid of disturbing me. Coming to the sitting position, I bade her good morning, flung the blanket aside, and rose to my feet.

She greeted me in her grave, severe manner, and before I asked the question, said:

"Tom is out to the barn 'tending to the critters; breakfast is ready, and he'll be here in a minute; you can wash at the spring."

"Thank you; where is it?"

She stepped to the door, pulled it open, and pointed along a well marked path, leading into the wood at the rear of the cabin. Bag in hand, I moved briskly over the trail for perhaps fifty yards, when I came to one of the finest springs it has ever been my good fortune to see. It bubbled up at the foot of a black oak, several of whose gnarled roots formed a border at the rear, and one served as an elastic support to my chest as I lay down and quaffed my fill of the crystalline, icy cold fluid.

It may have been a primitive "toilet set," with which kind nature had provided me, but I was grateful, and when I hurried back over the path, I was a-hungered and in buoyant spirits.

A surprise greeted me at the cabin. Tom Auckland and his wife had sat down at the table, but they awaited my arrival before saying grace, and seated in his accustomed place was the grinning Jake, showing no signs, except some splashes of mud on his clothing, that he had traveled more than a score of miles since midnight. From what I have said, it will be understood that the weather had cleared up, and the sun was shining.

"Wal, I done it!" he said, as I cordially shook his hand and joined the group around the board.

"I am glad to know it, for it was important——"

"Old Gaffkins didn't want to let me have the pony at first, but when I told him the critter hadn't run away with you, but you, thinking as how you wouldn't need him any more, let him go, and you had changed your mind, and would pay him a good price by the day, why he was mighty glad to let me have him, and he's in the stable now, where dad'll 'tend to him right well till you need him agin."

Blessings on Jake's towhead! He was shrewder than I, and, seeing that I was on the point of giving away the

secret of the letter, he switched me off, and made the most natural explanation in the world of his night journey to McVeyville.

"You must have had a hard time of it, Jake," I said with a glow of gratitude; "for it was as dark as a pocket, and I never traveled over a rougher road."

"But you see I knowed it so well I could've done it with my eyes shut. Now and then one foot went into a hole up to my neck, or I tumbled over a rock that I'd forgot about, but that warn't nothing, and I landed in McVeyville long before daylight. It didn't take me long to knock up Gaffkins and tell him I'd come to town to git his pony for a gentleman as was making us a little visit."

"You did splendidly."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jake indifferently; "when I got into the saddle it was fun to set the pony flying up the road. It *was* rather risky, and he stumbled now and then, but we hadn't gone very far when day begun breaking, and then it was dead easy. I let him out, and arriv on time. Dad tells me they've moved Dick Warman."

I did not catch the meaning of this abrupt remark until the father explained:

"Yas; knowing jest where Dick took his dive off his hoss jest 'bout time I pulled trigger last night, I went down that way airly this morning to look round; Dick ain't thar."

"His friends have removed the body," I suggested.

"Yas; Dick'll have a reg'lar bang up funeral."

"Wonder if they'll invite *us*," remarked the son, with one of his expansive grins.

"Jacob," said the mother reprovingly, "it ain't right to joke on such things; it would hurt the feelings of his friends fur us to show ourselves at the funeral."

"It's a blamed sight more likely *we'd* be the ones that would git our feelings hurt."

And, overcome by his own witticism, the Auckland heir stopped eating for a moment, leaned back in his chair, and shook with laughter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLIND.

No time was wasted in preliminaries. The parents understood that I had engaged Jake to accompany me upon a little excursion we had in mind and they interposed no objection, nor did they manifest any curiosity to learn its nature.

One of the most striking characteristics of these mountaineers is the philosophy with which they accept the most momentous events.

Since there was no saying whether I should return by this route, I took my traveling bag with me, my only weapon being the revolver which had served me well, though it had not seen any active service. I might have secured a Winchester in that home of firearms, but preferred to rely upon the smaller weapon. When we started down the mountainside and across the narrow valley to Rattlesnake Ridge, Jake Auckland was a few paces in advance, his cartridge belt buckled round his slim waist and his rifle resting on his shoulder.

I couldn't restrain a feeling of admiration for this lank, muscular youth, who, although only eighteen years old, was as tall as his mother. Unable to read or write, he was versed in the lore of the woods, and fitted to serve as a model for one of Cooper's border characters. What first impressed me was that although he wore the largest and heaviest of cowhide boots, and seemed to walk with his usual gait, he did it with the noiselessness of an Indian warrior stealing through the forest in his moccasins.

Crossing the highway near the

house, my guide entered upon a clearly marked path, along which he made his way with the easy self assurance he would have shown in passing to and from the spring near his home.

The ground steadily descended for a couple of miles, when we reached the bottom of the valley which had about the same width, and then we arrived at the base of Rattlesnake Ridge which was our destination. Perhaps we should not see any person at all, but more than likely we would, for the White, the Howard and the Baker boys were abroad in the land, and when they met, flint and steel struck.

The descent was gradual, leading through an exuberant wood, so matted in many places with undergrowth and vines that the trail was hidden and of little use, but Jake Auckland kept to it, brushing aside vegetation, or ducking under and dodging it with a skill that could not have been surpassed, and which I tried but failed to equal.

At intervals, he stopped, and, turning his head, raised his hand as a signal for me to do the same. Doubtless, he was listening, and I also used my ears for all they were worth, but at none of these stoppages did they bring me any knowledge.

The edge of the narrow valley was reached without the slightest incident out of the ordinary. Then, curiously enough, the trail broadened and grew more distinct.

"It is this way till we strike Rattlesnake Ridge," explained my guide.

"And how is it at that point?"

"Just the same, but the path turns off and goes along the ridge till we reach the road that leads to Manchester. We stop follering the trail at the ridge and climb through the woods to the p'int I have in mind."

It was clear that Jake was pursuing a well defined plan of his own, which he did not think it necessary to explain to me. He was making for some point, where he hoped to pick up definite information of the fate of Dick Montgomery, though how it was to be done passed my powers of conjecture.

We had almost crossed the valley and were near the termination of the trail, so far as its use to us was concerned, when Jake, who was a dozen paces in advance, and walking with extreme caution, abruptly stopped, and, without looking around, raised his hand as a signal for me to halt. I obeyed and kept my eyes on him.

He stood motionless for fully five minutes, his head and shoulders bent forward in the attitude of intense attention. I knew that those gray eyes and keen ears had detected something suspicious.

Then I saw his freckled face over his shoulder and he beckoned me to approach. I did so with the utmost care.

"What is it?" I asked in a whisper when I reached his side.

"You can see that the trail leads straight ahead, without a turn for more'n a hundred yards," he said in a tone as guarded as mine.

"Yes."

"Now look along it till close to the turn and then squint to the right and let me know what you see."

Following the direction indicated, I saw the growing pines and oak with plenty of undergrowth, but that was all, and the scene resembled what I had looked upon almost from the moment we left his cabin that morning.

"I detect nothing unusual," I replied after my scrutiny.

"What do you obsarve off to the right, fifty feet back from the trail, and atween them two pines, as straight as pipe stems and without a branch for a dozen yards from the ground?"

"Nothing, except a mass of dense undergrowth."

"And they look all right?"

"So far as I can see."

"*Wal, they ain't!*" was the disgusted response; "don't you notice that the leaves are faded and drooping like?"

"I have pretty good eyesight, Jake, but it is beyond my power to see *that*."

"Wal, it's so, and it shows that them branches and bushes ain't as natur' made 'em; they've been moved from somewhere else, and they've been where they are and where they don't b'long till the leaves begin to droop."

"And what does all this mean?" I asked with a suspicion of the truth.

"Umph! it means that them leaves and branches is a blind; there's a man laying behind 'em with a loaded Winchester waiting for some one to pass in front, so he can draw bead on him."

"Is he waiting for *us?*"

Jake humped his shoulders and chuckled.

"I reckon we'll do as well as any one."

"Then we must turn back and give it up."

"I rayther guess not; that ain't Jake Auckland's style."

"What will you do?"

"Flank him."

"But he may have seen us."

"Not much; he ain't keeping as sharp a lookout as that; he's waiting for his man to come in fair range, and he's had too much watching to do to strain his eyes more'n he has to. Now, sneak back till *we* can't see the blind."

Bending low, and moving slowly and softly, I led the way for fifty paces, when Jake said in an undertone:

"That'll do."

I straightened up, and, looking back over the trail, found we were well beyond sight of the blind.

"Now, we'll turn into the wood and move round behind that devil; he ain't looking for anybody from *that* p'int of the compass, and we'll have him foul."

"What do you intend to do, Jake?" I asked with an involuntary shudder.

He humped his shoulders in his peculiar fashion and chuckled.

"That depends; but, I say, pardner, if there's any shooting to be done on our side, I'll do it."

"I hope, Jake," I interrupted, "that you don't intend to steal up behind that man and shoot him without warning. It would be a crime, and besides there may be two or three of them."

He had brought his Winchester from his shoulder and now tapped it significantly.

"She's a repeater; come on, and step mighty light."

He turned into the wood on the right, and began picking his way over a course that would lead him a number of rods to the rear of the blind, while with a strange mixture of emotions, I did my best to imitate him.

Though I had resolved to take no part in the impending tragedy, I felt as guilty as if I were the principal. If there was any way by which to avert it, I should have eagerly seized it, but I could see none.

If through a pretended slip I warned the man, I should only precipitate the fight between the two, with the certainty that it would be pushed to a finish. At any rate I was getting a vivid taste of this mountain feud business, and I recall that it occurred to me I should have another good story to forward to *The Pioneer*, provided the issue of the encounter was what was to be hoped.

Meanwhile, we were pushing through the wood with the deliberation and caution of veteran scouts. Jake maintained his place a dozen paces in advance, his body crouching and his attention fixed upon the blind which he was steadily approaching.

But no one could advance without giving attention to his footsteps. There was a good deal of undergrowth and bushes, and now and then a detour had to be made to pass a boulder or mass of obtruding rocks.

At the end of ten or fifteen minutes I was able to locate the deadly ambush, where one man or more was waiting to shoot down in cold blood some other man against whom he had not the slightest cause for personal enmity.

However, I could not discern anything that resembled a person. I saw that a pole or sapling had been

stretched from one pine to the other, and there fastened at a height of four or five feet from the ground. Against this rested a mass of branches—the inclination being away from the trail—roughly arranged to resemble the natural growth, and making a secure screen for the man or men lying behind it, and who, by means of loopholes, commanded a fatal advantage over any one passing along the path. These blinds have been used repeatedly, with terrible results, in the Kentucky feuds.

Fifty feet further, I caught my foot in a vine, stumbled, barely saving myself from falling. Jake looked round like a flash, and seeing that I was near a broad flat boulder, motioned for me to stand still, and I was glad to do so, for I was too close to the crisis for comfort. I lay down, but my position was such that by peeping carefully out I could clearly see everything that took place without exposing myself to detection.

Observing what I had done, Jake Auckland gave me no further attention. His Winchester was so held that he could raise it like a flash and fire. It would seem that it mattered not if his enemy did discover him—for, before he could shift his weapon around and aim, my guide would have all the chance he wanted, and it need not be said he was the man to take it.

I noticed that he availed himself of the partial protection of the tree trunks, crouching occasionally as he glided behind some huge rock, but never removing his gaze for more than a second from the blind.

At the moment I was beginning to suspect our enemy had discovered his danger and moved away, a slight agitation at the rear of the ambuscade showed he was there, and no doubt unsuspicious of his peril.

It was apparent he had been lying down, but, as if conscious of the approach of drowsiness, he slowly rose to his feet, stretched his arms lazily over his head and yawned. His Winchester was seen leaning against one of the pines at his right, where he could readily grasp it at sight of any one coming along the trail.

CHAPTER X.

WARM QUARTERS.

Instinctively I felt that the crisis was at hand. The man was heavily built and of short stature, and, thrilled by the impending tragedy I could not remove my eyes from him. I saw him turn partly round and then—he vanished!

For an instant, I was sure my vision had played me some fantastic trick. One moment, he was in plain view, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, he was gone.

Mystified, I turned toward Jake Auckland, and then the explanation flashed upon me, as it should have done, when I noticed that the rifle of the stranger, which, as I have stated, was in plain sight, had also disappeared.

With a quickness almost incredible, and, at the same instant that he discovered his peril, he had bounded behind the pine against which his weapon leaned, snatching it on the fly, and whisking to cover before the alert Jake could fire, but not before he himself slipped fully behind the tree which he had already partly used. It was the sight of young Auckland thus "full panoplied" that made clear the extraordinary situation to me.

Both men were shielded, and each was on his mettle, as watchful as two veteran Sioux and ready to take instant advantage of any chance that offered. They were armed with Winchesters and inspired by a hatred that was as deadly as it was senseless.

From my safe outlook, nothing escaped me. Since the stranger was invisible to Jake, I saw nothing at first of him, though I was certain he was

behind the trunk, against which his rifle was leaning a moment before. While intently watching it, a faint puff of smoke seemed to be expelled from the bark, the spitting crack of a Winchester broke the stillness, and Jake Auckland chuckled. He had succeeded in drawing his enemy's fire, without harm to himself.

Had this been the situation a half century or more before, when repeating rifles were unknown, that single shot would have sealed the doom of the man who fired it, for his enemy would have been upon him before he could reload; but Jake Auckland was too wise to attempt anything of the kind, knowing that he was certain to run against a bullet before he could pass half the intervening distance.

My own situation was now most peculiar. After firing, the stranger slightly shifted himself to the right.

While this did not bring him within range of Jake's rifle, it did bring him within sight of me. I plainly saw his shoulder and the side of his face. Of course he knew nothing of my presence in the vicinity, and I took care not to tempt him to send a shot toward me.

The space was considerable, but I believed there was a good chance of reaching the man with my revolver, had I chosen to make the attempt, but it need hardly be said that nothing would have tempted me to do such a thing.

But what would Jake Auckland not have given for my chance?

With two men of equal skill and cunning thus confronting each other, everything pointed to several hours' delay before one could gain any advantage. It was this fact that caused Jake to attempt a trick shrewd of itself, whose termination astounded no one more than himself.

Jake suspected from my position that I had a partial sight of his foe. He knew further that I would make no effort to injure him, unless in self defense. His scheme was to let the latter know he was threatened by two men instead of one, and to impress him that the second person was one of the most dreaded of the mountaineers, who fought on the side of Jake Auckland.

Calling across to me, he substituted the name of this mountaineer for my own:

"I say, Vic Hawkins, are you watching out?"

Before I could make suitable reply, the stranger, hearing the voice, called back:

"Is that you, Jake Auckland?"

"I reckon; who are you?"

"Why, *I'm* Vic Hawkins!" was the astonishing reply, as the other stepped into full view and laughingly came forward.

Remarkable as it may seem, Jake, in addressing me under an assumed name, had used the real name of the man whose life he was seeking. In other words, Mr. Hawkins, instead of being an enemy waiting to pick us off with a Winchester, as we came within range, was an ally of the Baker clan, ready and eager to do duty in its service.

Jake again showed his shrewdness in introducing me as a gentleman who was looking up some coal and mineral lands, and giving no hint of my real business. As for Hawkins, Jake summed up the situation in the exclamation:

"He's one of us!"

I never saw a man with blacker eyes and hair, and he was little more than five feet in height, but with immense shoulders, chest and the sturdiest of arms and legs. He would have proven the toughest kind of a customer in a rough and tumble encounter.

"Who be you lookin' fer?" asked Jake.

"Bill Harbridge and Jim Sawyer; they've been due any time, but are a deuced long while in coming. Say, pardner," and Hawkins suddenly turned toward me, "what do you think of *that?*" and he pointed to the ar-

rangement of branches and leaves already described.

"It is a cowardly and sneaking trap that an Apache Indian ought to be ashamed to use against an enemy."

Hawkins' face flushed and he said:

"The Howards and Whites begun the game on us. They've picked off more'n one of our men from them blinds."

"That doesn't make it any the less shameful——"

"*Sh! down!*" interrupted Hawkins; "somebody's coming!"

He dropped his head, and, running like a rat to the rear of the blind, crouched behind the screen.

Jake was but an instant later, and there seeming nothing else left for me, I hurried after both.

As I stooped down behind the shelter, a feeling of inexpressible disgust came over me as I realized the situation in which I had placed myself. A fine position for me to occupy, with the probability that a fight would open in the next few minutes.

I reflected, however, that my revolver would not be expected to keep company with the two Winchesters, and I could not be compelled to shoot, and yet our enemies were not likely to make any discrimination among us when business opened.

Vic Hawkins must have been a veteran at bushwhacking, thus to discover the approach of enemies before I could detect the faintest evidence of it; but we had hardly assumed our positions, when, peering through the leaves and following the direction indicated by their looks, I noted a peculiar flickering among the trees to the left, and the next moment saw that three men were walking along the trail in Indian file.

If they continued their course they would pass within fifty feet of the blind, and near enough to bring them within deadly range of the rifles, and sufficiently near for me to shoot any one of the three with my Smith & Wesson. While my friends each had a repeating rifle, the slight pause between the shots, brief as it was, was so great a disadvantage that it was all important I should join my companions in firing.

"I'll take the first," said Vic Hawkins in an eager undertone, "Jake the second, and I s'pose you can manage the third with your pistol?"

"There's no doubt of it, but I'm not the dog to take any part in this game; don't count on me to help you."

This was the second time I had insulted Hawkins, and he was enraged. With a muttered imprecation, he demanded in an undertone, tremulous with passion:

"What sort of a thing have you fetched with you, Jake?"

"Shet up your blamed clack! Don't you see we've got no time to fight among ourselves? They'll be in range in a minute. We can 'tend to 'em ourselves."

The imminence of the crisis averted a collision between Hawkins and me. Instant attention must be given to our three victims drawing steadily near their doom.

All three of us were lying on our faces, my two companions with the muzzles of their rifles shoved through the mass of leaves, which where slightly parted with their left hands, so as to permit them to look out. I also made a little opening in the same manner, and fixed my eyes upon the approaching party.

The first glance revealed the startling fact that the leader was Zach Peters.

Here was a test of Jake Auckland's sincerity, and I turned my head and looked into his freckled face. He was at my elbow and read the meaning of that look. He compressed his lips and shook his head.

"The truce'll have to wait till we've played this hand."

There was no time for protest, and I said nothing, but I inwardly swore not to remain idle while this hideous crime was perpetrated before my eyes. If the trio did not discover their peril, I would

contrive in some way to warn them, though it would inevitably precipitate a fight between Hawkins and myself that would be to the finish.

Fortunately my interference was not needed, for Zach Peters and his followers were yet several rods distant from the "dead line," when presto! in a twinkling they vanished, with the same amazing dexterity shown a few minutes before by Hawkins himself.

The three who were approaching were as skilled in woodcraft as those lying in wait for them. They had discovered the blind, and in a flash leaped behind the shelter of the tree trunks, thus making the relative advantage of the two parties the same, for every man was screened, and each knew not only the intention, but the locality of the other.

I happened to be looking toward the party when this lightning change was effected, and my eyes were directly upon Zach Peters, who at a single bound placed himself behind the trunk of what seemed to be an ash, fully two feet in diameter.

I had hardly recovered from the thrill of the sight, when Zach fired right into the blind on the chances of hitting some of those who he knew were crouching behind it.

And, by heavens! he came mighty near doing execution. A peculiar jar of my hat led me to snatch it off and look at it, as a man will sometimes turn aside in the moment of extreme peril to gratify a childish curiosity. The bullet had clipped its way through the crown of my derby, and a half inch lower in its course would have perforated my skull.

The next moment a Winchester flashed from another quarter of the wood, followed almost instantly by a third shot from an opposite point, and it looked to me as if the three had caught us foul; but Vic Hawkins was not so forgetful as to overlook such a possible turning of the tables.

Across the base of the blind and parallel to it he had rolled a log. It was a foot in diameter, and we had only to hitch forward until close against it, when we were protected by an impenetrable shield from our enemies in front.

The urgency of such need was proven within the following five minutes by the perceptible thud of two bullets against the log. Zach Peters and his companions were doing some mighty good shooting, and making matters interesting for us.

And the mischief of it was there was no way of our turning the tables on them. In truth, they were as securely protected by the trees as we were behind the screen. Like trained Indian fighters, they knew how to use their advantage to the utmost, and it was impossible for us to gain a shot at the fellows.

Jake Auckland tried it, and it was a curious commentary on our previous night's conversation, that he aimed at Zach Peters, who, to say the most, was no more exposed than either of his companions. The bullet chipped off the bark beside the mountaineer's face, but did not harm him. He called back tantalizingly:

"Try it agin! We've got you fellers dead to rights!"

"By heavens! do you see *that?*"

It was Vic Hawkins who uttered the excited exclamation, and Jake and I knew the cause of it. Peters, who was the furthest to the right, suddenly ran twenty paces in that direction before he leaped behind a second tree.

Almost at the same moment, his companion, who was far to the left, did the same in that direction, though he sped only half the distance before availing himself of one of the screens all about him. The third man held his position, though it was impossible exactly to locate him.

The alarming meaning of this action was apparent to us all: our enemies were aiming to get behind the screen, just as it had been approached by Jake Auckland and myself, and the worst of

it was it looked as if there was no means of preventing them.

It has been shown that the rear of the blind was as open to attack as a stretch of prairie. The most that we could do was to fling ourselves on the opposite side of the log, now serving as a sort of fortification, but, by holding widely separated positions, the Howard men could reach each side of the prostrate tree without the slightest difficulty.

The only possible way of preventing this was by taking our men "on the fly," as they darted from tree to tree, and that was a feat beyond the accomplishment of my two companions, for Zach Peters and his friends displayed wonderful woodcraft.

After the first run of the two, they cut down their spurts to half the distance, and they moved with such remarkable quickness that the run was completed before any aim could be secured.

But Jake Auckland made the attempt, and, as before, he drew bead on Zach Peters, but missed him.

"*Damn* him!" muttered the chagrined youth; "he's a keen one!"

I, who did nothing but peer over the log and through the leaves of the blind, was filled with admiration by another interesting discovery made at this moment. In making their run from tree to tree the two moved backward as well as to one side. By placing a greater interval between them and us, they interposed more undergrowth, and consequently gained greater protection.

Moreover, the shrewd fellows adopted a still more effective artifice. After securing the screen of the bushes, they crept from tree to tree, where it was impossible for us to catch a glimpse of them. When they had done this for a little way, they would rise to their feet and, in pure bravado, make the run in plain sight, calling to us to know why we didn't learn to shoot.

Vic Hawkins was so exasperated by these taunts that he fired twice, with the result only of bringing more ridicule upon his head.

A brief experience of this work established one fact: our enemies were determined to get to the rear of the blind despite everything we could do, and, when that was accomplished, the tables would be turned on us with a vengeance.

The infernal cleverness of those Howard men was unsurpassable. While the two to whom I have referred were moving further apart and steadily working to our rear, the third held his position in front.

We knew he was there somewhere, Winchester in hand, watchful, alert, vigilant, ready to fire on the first opening, and faithfully guarding that side, while his companions forced their way to the most vulnerable approach of our primitive fortification.

It will be seen that our situation was fast becoming desperate. Our enemies had ceased firing, preferring to wait until they had a sure thing of it.

"We must each run for a tree," I said to my companions, wondering why they delayed in doing so.

"You're right, pardner——"

Vic Hawkins muttered something, rose partly to his feet, and separating the branches with his left hand, thrust his face forward and peered through. That third man, who was on the watch, and much nearer to us than either of the others, must have caught sight of the swarthy countenance, framed with leaves, for almost at the same moment there was a puff of smoke and a ringing report from a point seemingly less than a hundred feet in front, and Hawkins, with a gasp, flung up his arms, dropped his Winchester, and tumbled over on his back, like a statue of putty.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM.

A SINGLE glance at Vic Hawkins showed that he was as dead as dead could be. Whoever fired from the

front had made the most fearful of bullseyes.

Jake Auckland raised his head a little, and with an exclamation of dismay looked at the figure, lying flat on its back, with the sightless eyes turned toward the pitying heavens.

"This is getting too hot for me!" he added, and facing to the rear, where the way was still open, he bent his head, carrying his Winchester in a trailing position and ran like a deer.

The action was as unexpected to Zach Peters and his friends as to me, and they were not prepared for it, though had it been delayed a few minutes, they would have made good their boast of "having him dead to rights." Thus he gained several rods before his flight was noticed.

Then the whole three joined in the chase, firing as they ran and shouting opprobrius epithets at him. Crack, crack, spat the Winchester on both sides of me, and I heard the sound of running men as they threshed through the undergrowth; but Jake Auckland, tall, lank, muscular and young, was fleet of foot, and, surely if ever a man was running for a prize, it was he.

Some of the bullets must have whistled close to him, but from what has already been stated, it will be seen that he had many advantages on his side. and these grew greater the longer he ran. The last glimpse I had of him, he was still running, and I saw no evidence that he had been wounded.

But it was high time I was thinking of myself, for I cannot conceive of a more desperate situation than mine. Three of us had taken position in the blind, which was the most dastardly ambush conceivable. However innocent my purpose, no human being would acquit me of a guilt as great as that of my companions. One of these was already killed, and the other had been put to ignominious flight.

The truce of which I had formed high hopes the evening before was a myth. Jake Auckland had done his best to shoot Zach Peters and the latter had fired repeatedly at Jake. He may not have known his identity, when he lay behind the blind, but he knew it when he was a fugitive, and none pursued more vigorously than he nor strove harder to wing the fellow as he dodged in and out among the trees.

And what would be Zach's disposition toward me? It was too much to expect him to pardon my action, or to accept the fact of my having only a revolver, as evidence that I wished no harm to him or his. No; we were unrelenting enemies, between whom there could be no truce.

A man must think and decide quickly at such times. My first impulse was to leap to my feet and run as Jake had done, but the situation was unfavorable. I could not gain the start that was his and would be shot down before going twenty paces.

What I did was purely instinctive. I crept over the log in a twinkling, and lay flat on the ground on the other side. It will be noted that by this action, I placed the trunk between me and my three enemies, for they had come around from their former position in front of the blind and were now at the rear. The diameter of the log was sufficient to hide me from their sight, provided they did not approach the ambuscade to make investigation. If, however, any one of them came near, discovery was inevitable.

All my hope, therefore, depended upon their keeping a moderate distance from the spot.

It struck me as a reasonable assumption that they would conclude that only two men were behind the blind, for what was more natural than that when one was killed, the survivor should take to his heels?

This unquestionably was theorizing to a fine point. I repeat that no credit was mine for doing what some might claim to be a clever thing. I did it, because there seemed nothing else possible for me to do.

The gruesomeness of my situation would have been awesome, but for its frightful peril. Only the diameter of a foot log separated me from a dead man. By reaching over the trunk I could grasp the stiffened fingers of one of the outstretched hands, for in falling he had assumed in some strange way, a posture almost parallel to the log, and a part of the Winchester itself touched the wood.

One of the easiest things possible would have been for me to secure the rifle which had a number of charges in the magazine. From my coign of vantage, and remembering my revolver, I ought to be able to put up a good defense.

But I had no wish to attempt it—at least in that form, for the three men could easily assume positions that would render the log no defense at all. If worst should come to worst, I preferred to rely upon my chosen weapon. With my three enemies within aim's reach, I could do better lightning-like work than the three with their more clumsy Winchesters.

If there was any one thing which it was important above all things to do it was to remain motionless and quiescent, and I am ashamed to confess that that is precisely what I did not do.

For several minutes I lay on my face, hugging the earth like a brother, and wondering whether it was possible that any part of my clothing showed.

All that time, the only thing I heard was the tumultuous thumping of my own heart. Then a squirrel that was abroad early for the season, chirped somewhere overhead and looking up sideways, I caught a glimpse of a gray streak of light as it flashed along a branching limb and vanished. Some bird which I could not identify twittered for a moment and was satisfied. Spring was as far advanced in that section as it would be a month later in the North.

But not the "shadow of a sound" came to me from the three men. I listened intently and failed to catch the faintest murmur of voices. Recalling the legends of Indian acumen under similar circumstances, I pressed my ear flat against the ground.

At first I was startled into the belief that I had heard a footfall near me, but it was the rustling of a leaf, magnified grotesquely because it touched the lobe of my ear.

Profound silence on every hand, except for that faint, almost inaudible murmur, always noticeable in a great forest and resembling the low, soft boom of the ocean many a long mile away.

The passing of every fraction of a minute added to my hopes. If Zach Peters and his friends meant to investigate closer, surely there was no reason for tarrying. They could have no wish to examine the stark figure, the victim of their superior woodcraft.

It was the usual custom during the feuds referred to for a party, after shooting a member of the opposing clan, to leave his body where it fell for his friends to look after. What reason was there for following a different rule in the present situation? "None," I was rash enough to say to myself.

It was at this juncture that a shiver of terror passed through me at the recollection that when I clambered over the log, I had forgotten my traveling bag, which lay on the other side in full view of my enemies. The sight of it would tell the mountaineers that none of their kind ever owned such an article and they must therefore suspect the truth.

I knew the exact spot where it lay, and yielding to a nervous impulse, I hitched a little way along the log, reached over and seizing the grip by one end, snatched it over to me. The encouraging feature of the situation was that, although it had lain in plain view so long, it had drawn no one to the spot. In this fact lay the warrant for believing Zach Peters and his companions had departed.

It is at such times that one is unable to note accurately the passage of the minutes. I had not thought of looking at my watch, but it seemed to me fully a third of an hour had passed since the last shot was fired at the fleeing Jake Auckland, when, as I am now convinced, the actual time was not half of that.

Slowly and cautiously, after removing my hat, I raised my head, until my eyes were high enough to peer over the log and look out upon the wood which had been the scene of the stirring incident described.

Fifty feet away stood the three men close together, and apparently consulting. Their words must have been uttered in whispers, since not the slightest sound had reached me.

Bill Harbridge and Jim Sawyer's positions (as I judged the men to be) may be described as diagonal to me, since their faces were partly turned away, and neither could see me without looking over his shoulder.

But Zach Peters himself was gazing as straight as an arrow not only at the blind, but at me, and our eyes met fairly!

My head dropped as if struck by a minie ball, but the mischief had been done and was irreparable. One of that dreaded trio knew that a member of the bushwhackers was still in the blind and at their mercy.

True, I might have seized the Winchester of the dead man and made a fight, but the chances were overwhelmingly against me, and I determined to rely for the present upon my revolver alone. I drew it from my pocket and grasped it, ready to meet the final crisis unflinchingly.

Now, for the first time, rose the murmur of voices, but not a word was distinguishable. Then it ceased for a moment, soon to be renewed, but the subtle power of my senses told me that only two men were talking.

Where was the third?

Stealing toward me, was my conclusion and I was right, though far from suspecting the whole truth.

I have remarked that Zach Peters was a master of woodcraft, and he now gave me another proof of it.

Having seen him so near and in a certain position, it did not occur to me that he might approach from any other point of the compass, and therein I made another of the many mistakes committed while in the mountain regions of Eastern Kentucky.

Peters moved around one end of the blind, doubtless with his eyes fixed upon it, and when he drew near, Winchester ready for instant use, it was as noiselessly as a Sioux Indian stealing into the camp of an enemy.

I need hardly say what line of action I had fixed upon. It was to lie where I was until one of the men was directly over me, as may be said, and then drop him with a shot from my revolver. If both or either of the others was within range, I would give lightning-like attention to them. If not, I would grasp the dead man's rifle and have it out as best I could.

I was listening and waiting with my nerves keyed to the highest point, when I heard the softest audible rustling, such as would be made by a falling leaf, but the terror of the thing was that it came from behind me, where, it will be remembered, were the sloping branches which composed the blind.

A hand had partly separated some of these, and through the interstices, imperfectly revealed, I made out the form of a man, in a stooping posture, and peering at me. He saw he was discovered before I could use my weapon, and without shifting his position, he said in a hurried undertone that could not have been heard ten feet distant:

"You infarnal fool! keep your head down!"

Then his withdrawal caused the leaves to close behind him and shut him from sight, and I could hear his careless step, as he circled about on his way to his former position.

Of course, there was but one person who could address me thus. Chance had given Zach Peters the settlement of my fate, and he had reciprocated my favor of the previous night.

"And I have played the fool," was my humiliating conclusion, "and, if I ever do get out of this scrape no credit will be mine."

How Zach Peters managed so as to lull the suspicions of his companions was beyond my comprehension, but manage it he did. I suspect his was the dominant spirit of the three, and being beyond suspicion himself, his assertion that they had been fighting only two native mountaineers like themselves was accepted without question, whereas, had they been alone, they would have pushed an investigation that must have brought out the truth.

If this theory was correct, it followed they had failed to notice my traveling bag, despite the fact that it lay in plain sight.

There being no cause for distrust on the part of Zach Peters, he rejoined his friends a few minutes later and doubtless made his report, the nature of which it was easy to surmise.

The mountaineer played his rôle to perfection, when he resumed conversation with his companions, it was in a voice which made every word audible.

"Leave him lay where he dropped," he said, referring to the form on the other side of the log near me; "Vic Hawkins won't shoot down any more of our boys."

"That's a good gun he had," replied one of the others regretfully, as if he longed to get possession of it.

"No better than each of yours. Let his friends see we don't care how many shooting irons they have, we ain't afeard of 'em."

Since silence followed these words, it was a fair assumption that the three had departed; but, remembering Zach Peters' orders to keep my head down, I did not move hand or foot for a full half hour, and then when I once raised my head, not a living person was in sight. The party had gone long before, and were probably the better part of a mile distant.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE INTERFERENCE.

I ROSE from my position behind the log with a feeling of inexpressible relief. For the present I was safe, but only Heaven could say how long it would last.

It was early in the day, and the important question faced me as to what should be my next step. First of all, however, I moved further into the wood until beyond sight of the blind that had been the cause of the tragedy. It was likely to receive further attention, and some of Vic Hawkins' friends were certain to learn of his fate and soon return for the remains, in which case a meeting between them and me was liable to bring about unpleasant complications.

It will be recalled that I had almost reached the base of Rattlesnake Ridge when turned aside by the incidents described. Jake Auckland, upon whom I placed all my reliance to unearth the knowledge we were seeking, had been switched off, and was not likely to be seen again.

Perhaps, if I went to his home, he could be induced to resume the duties of guide, but his last performance so lessened my regard for him that my inclination was to do nothing of the kind.

Unfortunately, he had told me nothing of his plan, and I was therefore all at sea as to the right course to pursue. Still it was upon Rattlesnake Ridge that he hoped to pick up the information, and it was there I determined to seek it, with little or no idea of how it was to be done.

"There must be some family or persons there who can tell me, if so disposed," I reflected, and to them I determined to appeal.

My great hope, however, was placed upon Zach Peters. He had proved his good will too decisively for it to be doubted. If I could manage to meet him alone there would be a fair prospect of accomplishing something. Perhaps he was disposed to assist in bringing about such a meeting. The near future would decide.

Having penetrated to what seemed a safe distance in the wood, I sat down on a large boulder, among the undergrowth, to think over the situation, and formulate the best plan of procedure.

"There's nothing to do but to press ahead, and, Heaven helping me, I'll do it."

"*Hands up, stranger!*"

As before, the danger had approached me unawares from the rear. The summons was too peremptory to be disregarded, and my hands went upward like a flash, as I turned to confront my new danger.

There it was, not a dozen paces distant, in the shape of Bill Harbridge with his Winchester leveled at me. At his side, and a little further back, stood the grinning Jim Sawyer, with his rifle resting on his shoulder.

The identity of the two mountaineers, of course, was learned afterward. To my keen disappointment, Zach Peters was invisible.

"Well, my friend, you've got the drop," I replied with a cheerfulness that was anything but genuine; "what is your pleasure?"

"I obsarve that you've a barker in your hip pocket; you may help hold up the clouds till my pardner takes charge of the same. Jim!"

The individual thus addressed stepped forward and deftly relieved me of my revolver. Since no Winchester was in sight, they took it for granted that I was unarmed, which of course was the case.

"Now you can lower your hands; who mought you be, stranger?"

I gave my right name (since it was a matter of indifference), and announced my pretended business of a mineral prospector in that section. It was plain that neither of the couple placed the least credence in the statement.

Harbridge, who had rested the stock of his rifle on the ground, shook his head. He was good looking, but his countenance was a hard one, and the smile that showed beneath his mustache was a sneer.

"'Twon't work, stranger; you're lying."

"Perhaps if you know who I am not, you may be able to tell who I am."

"I reckon we kin; we've heard of you; you're one of them damned newspaper men that we don't allow in these parts."

For the moment I was thoroughly angered, and lost control of myself.

"It is none of your business who I am; I have as much right in Kentucky as you, and I'll go and come as I choose; you are a couple of cowards, who first steal my only weapon and then insult me. Give me back my pistol and I'll fight you both."

"Shall we do it?" asked the sardonic Harbridge, turning to his companion, who was on the point of accepting my suggestion, when he shook his head and growled:

"What's the use? There's only one thing for such as him."

"And that's the witch's parole," I said, aflame with rage, "what you gave the poor fellow some months ago, without letting him have a chance for life. Such cowards as you only fight from behind blinds and shoot prisoners down, after taking their weapons from them."

The strange feature of the situation was that the two mountaineers did not show the least resentment at my words. They were cool and collected, while I was beside myself with rage. The response of Jim Sawyer revealed the fact that neither of the two had any suspicion of the part I had played in the matter of the ambush.

I had been hopeful that my reference to Dick Montgomery would bring out some information concerning him, but it was ignored. And what difference also could *that* make, when the murderous intentions of the miscreants concerning myself were unmistakable?

Matters had gone thus far when I awoke to the fact that I was making a fool of myself. Still I was in that desperate mood that I determined to force the issue.

"Since you two are afraid to fight me alone, what are you waiting for?"

"I don't see no use of waiting, Bill," said Sawyer, the bigger coward of the two; "let's start him on his run."

"You won't start me on *any* run! I stand right here, and if you want to shoot me down in cold blood, do so!"

Folding my arms, I compressed my lips, and, with flashing eyes, confronted the two. My pose was beautiful, and I looked very much like a hero, but candor compels me to admit I was a bogus one.

I was scared, and would have shaken in my shoes but for the fact that an instant before I opened my lofty speech I saw over the shoulder of Harbridge, and only a short distance off, the figure of a man coming towards us, and that man was Zach Peters.

"It is high time you came," I thought to myself, "for, if ever a poor wretch needed a friend, the name of that wretch is Joseph McIntyre."

"Helloa, boys, what have you got there?" called Zach while still approaching.

"Another of them damned newspaper men!" replied Harbridge, turning his head, "and we was just about to give him the witch's parole as you came up."

Zach looked fixedly at me, as if I were some wild animal on exhibition. There was not the slightest sign of recognition in his face, and, of course, I was too prudent to betray our acquaintance. I fancied there was an expression of disgust behind his beard, as if he had grown tired of helping me out of scrapes.

"Stranger," he said in the hardest of voices, "hain't you ever heerd how we treat such chaps as you?"

"Yes; I know you gave a friend of mine the witch's parole some weeks ago."

"Correct; that's our style of doing business; the papers have been giving the Baker gang the best of the deal, and we won't stand it."

"And the Bakers complain that the papers have shown all the favors to the Whites and Howards. That's proof they have been fair and treated both sides squarely. If they call you all a set of murderers they speak the truth."

No more foolish remark ever was made. I had taken it for granted that Peters was my friend, when, in truth, circumstances had rendered him an uncertain quantity. I forgot that he harbored an intense enmity toward the members of my craft, as I ought to have remembered from the part he played in the taking off of Dick Montgomery.

True, he had done me a great favor a short time before, but it involved no risk to himself. It was impossible to repeat it now without risk. What I ought to have done was to insist upon my assumed personality, trusting to the shrewdness of Zach to help me through, but such a thing being the one I ought to have done, was the very one I did not, and not only that, but I had shut off the possibility of returning to this course.

The action and manner of Zach Peters were those of a man who resented the ugly words I had just uttered. My first thought was that this was pretense on his part, but I soon began to suspect it was real. After such an outburst as mine, what pretense had he for interceding in my interests?

"Wal, stranger," he drawled in his taunting voice, "instead of them paper men being right in what they say about the Howards and Bakers, they lie about

us all, which is why both parties draw bead on 'em when the chance comes along. Then, as I take it, you don't deny you're one of them fellers?"

"I haven't admitted it, and I don't propose to be questioned by you."

"It don't make no difference what you propose and what you don't propose. Eh, Bill and Jim?"

"Correct," replied Harbridge, while Sawyer nodded and grunted, both pleased with the words of their leader. The conviction came to me that it was time to hedge.

"I am in your power; do with me as you choose; these two men robbed me of my pistol, and now you three are not much afraid of my hurting you; I offered to fight them both if they would return my revolver, and I now offer to fight all three if that coward there will let me have my weapon."

"Humph!" sneered Peters; "we're ready to fight when there's need of it, but there ain't no need of it with *you*."

It will always remain a mystery as to what the real feelings of Zach Peters were. It will certainly be admitted that there was nothing in the words themselves upon which an ounce of hope could be builded, nor could my study of his face and manner add to confidence in him.

True, he had shown his good will, but it would be like him to consider the account square, and that the relative position between us was the same as before. In other words, his disposition was as murderous as that of his two companions, and yet it is possible I was wrong and he was ready to use any reasonable pretense in my behalf.

Be that as it may, I was pretty well frightened, and made another attempt to hedge.

"There's no need, as you say, of any one or all of you fighting me; I am in this part of Kentucky to look for a missing friend; when I learn whether he is alive or dead, I'm ready to go home; but perhaps it may be well to remind you that a good many men high in authority know where I am, and if *I* am missed, they will have a settling with those who had a hand in my taking off. Governor Bradley has lost patience, and intends to send the State guard into these parts."

Peters, Harbridge, and Sawyer looked into one another's faces, and then broke into laughter that echoed among the trees. It was a good joke. The fancy that they could be scared by any threats of a visit from the militia was rich.

Their merriment, perhaps, was justified, for we all know the threat was repeated many times, and even after it was carried out, did little really effective work in suppressing disorder in the mountainous regions.

"S'pose we tell you what happened to that chap you've been talking 'bout," said Peters; "will you be ready to git out of this part of the country and *stay out?*"

I shrugged my shoulders and replied with a smile:

"Inasmuch as this climate doesn't seem to agree with me, I can safely say I shall be in no danger of coming back after placing it behind me."

Harbridge and Sawyer glared at their leader, dismayed and angered, and the former said in words whose threatening earnestness could not be mistaken:

"None of *that*, Zach!"

"Not much," added Sawyer, with equal ugliness.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Peters as savagely in return. "I'm running this business."

"So you be, as long as *you run it right*, but we don't want no more of that other tomfoolery."

"Who's giving it to you?"

"What's the meaning of them words you spoke a minute ago?"

"If you'll hold you jaw a bit, you'll find out."

"Wal, what *was* its meaning?"

"I jest wanted to know——"

Peters abruptly checked himself, staggered back a couple of paces,

turned pale, and, pointing among the trees, exclaimed:

"My God! see there!"

Then, whirling on his heel, he dashed headlong through the woods. His companions, with a single affrighted glance over their shoulders, plunged after him, and thus in a twinkling I was left alone.

Mystified and dazed, I looked, too, toward the terrible spot, and my eyes rested on a strange, uncanny form that was drawing near, but strange and uncanny as it was, the face, as sure as the heavens above me, was that of Dick Montgomery!

CHAPTER XIII.

A WINK OF THE EYE.

It was the figure of a tall man, dressed in a dark business suit and a derby hat, all similar to my own, but the worse for wear, who stood beside the trunk of a large pine, as if he had just stepped from behind it. He was as motionless as the trunk itself, and stared fixedly at me.

The sight of his face sent an involuntary shiver over me. It was as pale as death, made the more ghastly by its vivid contrast with the heavy mustache, the scraggly beard and hair, and the eyes that were of midnight blackness. These eyes were large and gleamed with a power impossible to describe.

I am as free from superstition as any one, but there is no use of denying that I was startled, and for the moment terrified. The panic of Zach Peters and his companions was natural, and my impulse to dash off at headlong speed was almost irresistible.

I have said that this apparition or man was the missing Dick Montgomery, but there were several minutes in which I doubted, and then when the question was solved it was through one of the most grotesque occurrences conceivable.

Without uttering a word, the figure took two strides forward, which brought him into a small open space, and then with fierce vigor he began dancing a negro breakdown. It was an extraordinary performance, and in its way as artistic an exhibition as I ever saw.

At the amateur minstrel entertainments which we occasionally gave in college, Dick Montgomery always figured as a jig dancer, and there was not a student that could approach him in that respect. We all admired and applauded his skill, and the exhibition which he now gave in the Kentucky wilderness was exactly what I had witnessed before, perfect in those minute mannerisms that one learns quickly to recognize.

The most impressive feature of this woodland performance was the supernatural solemnity which accompanied it. That countenance, whose rollicking jollity and infectious laugh used to throw the spectators into irrestrainable merriment, was white and as grave as death itself. The round, black, piercing eyes were never removed from my face, not even when one of the long legs made the final kick upward, which carried the toe of his foot considerably above his head, and with amazing suddenness—the most comical part of his college exhibitions—legs and arms became as rigid as iron.

I clapped my hands, and broke into laughter, which was partly assumed.

"Good, Dick! you never did better! I'm glad you've kept up your practice!"

Like a statue he stood, with his arms akimbo, staring straight at me, with the same immovable, supernatural gravity on his pallid features. Not a word did he speak in response to my effusive compliment, and something of the old creepy feeling came over me again, but I determined to force matters through.

"How does your outing agree with you, old boy? You don't look as well as you should."

But he remained mute, and the suspicion could no longer be put aside.

The poor fellow was clean daft, and had not the slightest conception of my identity. So far as I could see, he was unarmed.

"I say, Dick, don't you remember 'Shorty McIntyre'?" I asked, alluding to my nickname in college; "we have had many lively times together, and I'm sure you can't have forgotten them."

The answer to this was as unexpected as startling. Flinging his arms aloft, as if driving a lot of fowl before him, he strode toward me, and apparently aflame with rage, commanded:

"Go! go! Go to the house!"

No one could have obeyed more promptly than I, for it didn't look safe to dally or hesitate. An extended, bony finger indicated the direction, and certainly Dick Montgomery, lunatic, had no grounds to be dissatisfied with my ready obedience.

All the same, he *was* dissatisfied, and quickly showed it.

"Walk faster—walk faster!"

"Shall I run?" I asked, looking over my shoulder and catching sight of the tall figure with its extended arms waving like those of a windmill.

"No—no—no; turn to the left. Oh, you fool!"

In my flurry, I struck my toe against a stone, my hat flew off, and I pitched forward on my hands and knees. I laughed at my own discomfiture, and, as I snatched up my derby and scrambled to my feet, I glanced around, half expecting to see the old familiar smile and to hear the merry laughter, but a ghost could not have been more serious.

I noticed that the ground was gradually becoming more inclined, showing that we had reached the base of Rattlesnake Ridge, and were beginning to ascend it. The blind had been left out of sight, and of course the three men who had their arrangements ready for an exhibition of their favorite pastime of the witch's parole, had long since disappeared from sight. The wood became comparatively free from shrubbery and undergrowth, but there were plenty of rocks and boulders which compelled me to make many short detours around them.

The increasing steepness, and my hurried pace, tired me, though it produced no visible effect upon my master, whose relentless tramp almost brought him on my heels. The time soon came when I was pretty well used up, and a broad, flat rock offering an inviting rest, I sat down on it and began fanning my face with my hat.

"Dick, I don't find much fun in this; let's take a breathing spell."

Had the stone been red hot, I couldn't have leaped more suddenly from it, for my old friend, as furious as a jungle tiger, looked as if gathering himself to spring upon me. Although with my rugged health and fine condition I could have mastered him, I had an unspeakable horror of feeling those bony fingers clutching at my throat.

My hope was of establishing some sort of a friendly relation with the lunatic, who seemed to view me with peculiar hatred. Indeed, I was in constant fear of his springing like a panther upon my shoulders from the rear, and I kept almost as close watch of him as he did of me.

"I hope that confounded cabin isn't much further off," I muttered to myself, as I obeyed another order to turn to one side—"helloa! here we are!"

We had come upon a twin brother of the Auckland home, and had I caught sight of it under any other circumstances, I should have sworn it was the same. It stood on a gently sloping incline of Rattlesnake Ridge, in the midst of a clearing, about an acre in extent, and was surrounded on all sides by mountainous woods. There must have been a path connecting it with the outside world, but I did not see it, our own route leading through the unbroken wilderness.

I hesitated, noticing which Montgomery walked around me to the front,

saying in a tone of deadly earnestness as he did so:

"If you don't follow me, I'll kill you!"

"Don't you fear, Dick; I'm with you to the finish."

He drew the latchstring of the side door and stepped within, and I not more than a couple of paces behind him.

I may as well explain at this point that the cabin was the home of Widow Wickliffe and her daughter Meg, not quite twenty years of age. That they were unconquerable partisans of the Howard clan was proven by the fact that Wash Wickliffe, husband of the woman, was killed the previous year in a scrap with the Baker party, and the son, also named Wash, was in the county jail, under charge of murder for shooting one of the Baker men, from a blind where the youth had been lying in wait for a fortnight, at the pay of one dollar a day and "found."

Matters with the Wickliffe family were rather trying, because of the enforced absence of the son, but the mother was confident he would soon be set free and return to her, and, I may as well add, that she was not disappointed.

Meg was a fine, strong girl, industrious and high spirited and quite comely, but with the scantiest amount of book education. It was easy for me to see, from what had already occurred, that the insane Dick Montgomery was a patient in this household, but how the surprising condition of affairs was brought about was a mystery that remained to be solved.

The forenoon was so far along when we reached the cabin that mother and daughter were preparing the noonday meal. As my guide threw open the door, he introduced me in original fashion:

"Mrs. and Miss Wickliffe, this is my grandfather, the Duke of Eversham, and son of George Washington and Queen Isabella of Spain!"

They both paused in their passage across the room, and their looks of surprise changed to amused interest, as they nodded their heads. I bowed gravely, placed my traveling bag on a chair at the side of the door, and said:

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, ladies." Then I seated myself near my property, while Montgomery took a chair at the further side of the room.

"You see," explained my friend, showing for the first time something approaching pleasantry of manner, "the gentleman is a little off here," tapping his forehead significantly, "and you'll have to humor him or he may become violent."

The daughter at that moment had her back toward Montgomery and was leaning over a boiling kettle, hung in the fireplace. As she looked sideways at me, our eyes met, and we smiled, she revealing a set of teeth that a princess might have envied.

I liked her and we understood each other. The mother gave no attention to the remark.

"What are you going to have for dinner?" abruptly asked Montgomery, rising from his chair, walking to the fire, and peering into the kettles and the frying pan. The latter contained several sizzling slices of bacon, into which, at the moment, the widow broke several eggs.

"That's good," added the crazy fellow with a sniff of satisfaction; "I like eggs, and it is two years and a half since we have had any."

"Why, king," replied the daughter, "you ate four this morning for breakfast."

"Slave, dare you dispute me?" he demanded, glaring savagely at her; "it was winter before last that I honored you by tasting of your stale hen fruit."

He assumed a fierce pose, as if challenging her to dispute him. She meekly replied:

"Very well, king, have it as you will."

Suddenly he collapsed. He staggered backward and would have fainted had not the watchful girl sprang to his assistance and eased him down into his chair. She smoothed the hair away from his forehead, spoke soothingly, and he quickly rallied.

"Thanks, countess, I shall soon be myself. Attend to thy duties at court."

Remembering his pallid face and emaciated frame, the wonder to me was how he had stood that laborious tramp up the mountainside, so much better than I, who was in perfect health, but the reaction had seized him.

I was touched with sympathy and would have done anything to help him, but really there was nothing I could do.

His recovery was as speedy as the coming of his sinking spell, and he became loquacious.

"Where are my caitiffs, Harbridge, Sawyer, and Peters?"

The mother left the task of replying to her daughter, and gave her whole attention to her culinary duties.

"We have seen nothing of them today," answered the girl.

"The caitiff Peters lives but a bowshot from us in the direction of the rising sun; the yeomen, Harbridge and Sawyer, dwell further from the king's palace. I met them but a brief while since, and they fled like hounds before the beagle. It was well they did so, for they had cause to fear the anger of their king."

"I do not think they expected to see you abroad, king," said Meg gently; "for when Harbridge called yesterday and saw you sleeping on your blanket, he looked into your face and said you could not live many days."

"The villain!" exclaimed the incensed potentate; "he dared to look upon me when my eyes were closed! 'Twas an unpardonable crime, and he shall be hamstrung for his presumption."

I could not refrain from saying:

"Have you not heard that a cat may look at a king?"

"Who gave *you* permission to speak?" he thundered, turning furiously upon me.

"I crave your royal forgiveness," I replied meekly, bowing my head; "I shall not offend again, if I may be restored to your majesty's favor."

"My pardon is granted," he said loftily; "offend no more."

Similar scenes continued throughout the meal, Montgomery keeping up a stream of talk and continually issuing his royal commands, to which we all showed due deference. When the dinner was concluded, the widow donned her bonnet, and said she would run over to her neighbors', the Peters, to make a call, leaving the household duties in charge of her daughter.

I did not like this action, for it presaged trouble, but there was no help for it. She had been gone but a few minutes, when the "king" said in his most peremptory manner:

"Countess, go to the mountain trail, and see whether any strangers approach our gates."

Without reply or pausing for headgear, the girl passed out of the door, closed it behind her, and vanished.

Dick Montgomery and I were left alone, seated on opposite sides of the room. Instinctively we looked in each other's faces. Suddenly he broke into silent and hearty laughter, and then, when his countenance had become straightened, he solemnly winked his eye and said:

"Joe, I ain't any more crazy than you, but my life, and yours, too, depends upon my keeping it up a little while longer."

CHAPTER XIV.

NOW OR NEVER.

I WAS not taken wholly unprepared by the astounding words at the close of the preceding chapter. More than once I had caught a twinkle of those black eyes, and noted my friend's ef-

forts to restrain a disposition to laugh, which raised the suspicion, if they did not bring the conviction that Montgomery was playing a part.

"You did it well, Dick; you would have deceived the elect, but what the mischief led you to keep it up so long? Why didn't you give me the cue when we were alone in the wood?"

"The trouble was, I couldn't be certain we were alone; I had a horrible suspicion that one of those devils, Peters, Harbridge or Sawyer, would sneak back, and the least slip on our part would have been death to both of us. As it is, I think Peters is becoming suspicious and he won't let this farce go on much longer. Are you here for *The Pioneer?*"

"Yes, but my main business upon which Forsythe sent me is to find out what became of you, for you're considerably behindhand in your copy."

"But how I'll make up for it, if I ever get back to the office! I've been waiting for the first good chance to give you the tip."

"How did this all come about?"

"It is too long a story to tell now; curb your impatience for a little while, and you shall help me write it up for *The Pioneer.* Meg will be back in a few minutes, and we must take no chances; these scoundrels are watching me all the time, and, as I just said, one slip on my part and my goose is cooked, and yours too."

"What does that call of Mrs. Wickliffe on the Peters family mean?"

"It means trouble—the worst kind of trouble; it means death to us both, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"We get out of here."

"What's to prevent our getting out? Why can't we start at once?"

"No, no," he replied, speaking rapidly and in guarded tones, continually glancing about and listening for the sound of returning footsteps; "I haven't got a firearm and can't get any; how about you?"

"Jim Sawyer has my revolver; I am as unarmed as you."

"That's the worst of it; old Wickliffe was robbed of his Winchester before he was done kicking, and his son took his to jail with him; there isn't a gun in the house, I can't get my hand on one and I daren't make a start without a weapon. Besides, I haven't fully recovered from my illness."

"You seemed to have pretty well recovered when you were driving me up the mountainside," I said grimly.

"It was the excitement I was under; you saw me go to pieces while playing the fool with Meg."

"You rallied quickly."

"I am improving fast—am better today than I have been for weeks—but, Joe, I repeat, if we don't get out of here before sun up tomorrow, we're dead men."

"And I repeat," I said impatiently; "we'll get out."

"Yes; if *we are given the chance.*"

"You haven't told me the meaning of the widow's call on Zach Peters."

"She went to tell him you are here."

"But he knows it already, or at least suspects it."

"Perhaps; the Howards haven't a bitterer partisan in Kentucky than the widow—and she has become a wild cat since they put her son in jail; *that* hurt her more than the death of her husband."

"But we are not partisans of the Bakers, any more than of the Howards."

"It makes no difference; in the present excited state of feeling these people class all strangers as enemies. I think she would have been able to stand me a little longer, but it was the last feather when I brought you in. It was a mistake; I ought to have told you to make a run for it when in the woods, even at the risk of our being watched."

"I wouldn't have run, Dick, until you could run with me."

"Well, we'll make a break tonight, if we live that long."

"Why not make the break now, when we can gain a start?"

He shook his head almost angrily.

"This cabin is under surveillance every hour of the day."

"How was it, when the three precious scoundrels were about to give me the witch's parole? You certainly had left the house then?"

"Only for a short distance, and, if I had stayed away much longer, the widow would have signaled it in some way, and the hounds would have been on my track."

"How about the daughter?"

"It is different perhaps with her—I think—that is I suspect Meg has formed some slight regard for me."

It was odd to see a flush show on Dick's face as he uttered these words.

"But why in the name of the seven wonders did those three men show such a panic when you appeared on the scene today?"

"There's an explanation, but let it wait till we have the time; there are more important matters to occupy us."

"Dick," I said impulsively, "I have some reason to believe Zach Peters is friendly so far as I am concerned."

He turned those piercing black eyes on me and smiled.

"There's no call, shorty, for *your* playing crazy."

"I am not; I am in earnest and I have reason for my words."

"What is it?"

"I am afraid time is too precious to permit its telling; it is quite a story."

"But it is important I should know —*Sh!*"

Dick's fine sense of hearing, trained to the acutest point by his illness and apprehension, detected the sound of the young woman's returning footsteps. He bounded from his chair, strode to the door and hastily drew it open. As he did so, he stood face to face with Meg Wickliffe.

"Ah, ha, countess, hast thou seen aught of any strangers approaching the king's gates?"

"None, O King," she replied, humoring his fancy.

"Didst thou look to the north and to the south, countess?"

"I did, but saw no one."

"Didst thou climb the rock beyond the path and turn thy lovely eyes to all points of the compass?"

"No; I didn't know you wished me to do that."

"'Twas an oversight, countess, for which I will pardon thee, if thou wilt make haste to repair thy neglect. I am expecting a visit of some princess and potentates from beyond Ethiopia. Mayhaps among them may be a gallant knight who will be smitten with thy graces. 'Twould not be strange."

And he reached out and chucked the mountain maiden under the chin. Since he faced her his back was toward me. Once again, looking along the side of the young man the eyes of the girl and mine met. I dared to laugh quite heartily, though silently.

"I will make haste to do as you wish, O King," said Meg, as much to escape my stare as to obey him. He looked after her until she had taken a few steps, when he closed the door, and, all alertness and restrained excitement, hurried back to me.

"There, we are safe for a few minutes. She will do her work thoroughly and will not hasten back; now let me hear that wonderful yarn of yours."

I gave the story as succinctly as I could. During the rapid narration, my friend did not once remove his piercing gaze from my face. He was absorbingly interested, but not convinced.

"How do you explain that witch's parole he had arranged with you as the star performer?"

"I cannot fully explain it, but it may be he had some scheme in mind for getting me out of the scrape at the last moment."

Dick shook his head.

"Nothing of the kind; he is your deadliest enemy."

"That fright at sight of you may have been pretended for my benefit," I suggested, uttering the thought that had occurred more than once to me.

But Dick would not admit it. Evidently he could not see any explanation of the recent incident in the wood except the most sinister one.

"Suppose the widow finds Peters at home and one or both of the others with him?"

My friend shuddered, for he was in a highly nervous state.

"It all depends upon their not being at home; each one is in the service of the Howards and Whites who do not pay their men for loafing; there is a fair chance that they won't return before night; if they do, the jig is up, for neither of us has a weapon with which to put up a fight——"

"Dick," I said in an undertone, "there is some one listening outside the door;" I had caught the flicker of a bonnet at the window close to the entrance.

Montgomery caught on like a flash.

"Kneel, slave!" he commanded in a loud voice, "that I may knight thee!"

I dropped forward on one knee and bowed my head. With the palm of his hand he struck me a blow that made me see stars.

"Rise, Knight of the Star Spangled Banner, and hereafter be known as Sir Pauncefrittz Wachenhopser!"

Only the gravity of the situation prevented me from laughing outright. Dick with his back toward the door, added in a low voice:

"How is that for an ear stunner? How long has she been there?"

"I caught a glimpse of her bonnet near the window."

"By heavens! it's the old woman then, for Meg wore no bonnet; I forgot about the widow; she's foxy."

While my comrade was giving expression to more highfalutin nonsense, the door opened and the mother stepped inside closing the door behind her. Without speaking and with only a single glance at us, she immediately began bustling about her household duties.

I looked narrowly at her countenance. It was one of the hardest I ever saw, thin, seamed with wrinkles, the mouth compressed and the eyes a steely gray. As Dick had said, she may have been able to stand him for a time, but the bringing of me into the cabin was intolerable.

If she had seen any one of the Howard clan, the crisis was at hand; otherwise, it might be deferred until nightfall.

What had been the result of her playing the eavesdropper? Not so serious, I believed, as it seemed at first. Our conversation was carried on in such guarded undertones that not a word could have been heard outside, when the door was closed. The hum of our voices may have led her to suspect the truth, but she could not have known it of a certainty.

A few minutes later, the daughter entered.

"Saw thou any strangers approaching the gates, countess? And if so do they come from the north or the south or the east or the west?" demanded his majesty.

"I saw none, O King."

"'Tis well; thou wilt resume thy duties at court, countess."

The hours which succeeded were the most trying of my life, for they moved with leaden feet, and the eternal dread was nerve wrenching.

The theory of Dick and myself was that as soon as any one of our enemies learned of my presence, he would hasten to the cabin and shoot me, probably, without waiting to take me outside. It was not unlikely that the same course would be followed with Montgomery.

"Why, then," I asked myself in desperation, "should we stay here like a couple of senseless calves and meekly await the knife of the butcher?"

I was determined not to do so, and managed, while it was still early in the afternoon, to make my resolution known to Dick, whereupon he did a clever thing.

"Know, Knight of the Star Spangled Banner," he said, "that the King feels ill; he needs the medicine that is found in the root of the *Sassafrannic spegaloris;* take thy receiving vessel and go into the forest and make search for it, and see that thou dost not delay too long, or I shall visit dire punishment upon thy head."

"It shall be done as thou commandest, O King," I replied, donning my hat, catching up my traveling bag, and moving toward the door, thrilled by the prospect of something being done.

The women looked wonderingly at us. There was no suspicion on the face of the daughter, but there was on that of the grim, silent mother, who was seated near one of the windows, mending a pair of corduroy trousers that belonged to the son pining in jail.

I drew the door open and stepped across the threshold. Just beyond range of the women I looked back significantly at Dick. There was no full understanding between us, and it was necessary there should be.

He knew it as well as I and was equal to the occasion.

"Halt, Sir Knight," he called in his most peremptory manner, striding angrily after me; "halt until thou receivest the instructions of thy king."

"I await the orders of your majesty," I replied, pausing a single step beyond the doorstep.

"Go to the highway," he added in the same loud tones, "and on the northern side of the rock which the countess ascended that she might learn what strangers were approaching our gates, and there thou shalt find the medicinal herbs I named to thee."

This pompous command was no sooner out of his mouth than he dropped his voice and spoke rapidly:

"*Don't do any such thing; take that path to the left and follow it to the spring; hide in the bushes and wait for me; it's now or never!*"

Without an apparent break in his utterance, he added in the same loud voice as at first:

"Didst thou hear my commands, Sir Knight?"

"I did, O King."

"Then, why dost thou stand there gaping like a thick skulled dolt, instead of making haste to obey them?"

"I crave thy pardon, O King, and hurry from thy majesty's presence."

"And seest that thou dost not tarry, or I shall hasten after thee and chop thy pate from thy shoulders."

Fearing that the widow or daughter would peep from the window and detect the artifice, I bent my steps toward the trail which his majesty had dignified with the name of "highway," waiting until it was safe to circle about and approach the other path that I had observed from the door of the cabin.

This path was another reminder of Tom Auckland's home, for it wound from the clearing into the wood just as his did, though it was more lengthy, and the water bubbled from under a black, mossy rock. The spring was surrounded by dense undergrowth, which offered the best possible concealment.

Carefully parting the shrubbery, I picked my way forward until beyond danger of detection of any one in the trail which I had followed, when I sat down, using my bag for a cushion, to await the coming of Dick Montgomery.

His experience was more trying but briefer than mine, for he was in a fever of misgiving and was beginning to feel the effect of the continuous strain, but it was all important that he should play his part out to the end.

He strode up and down the floor, feigning a growing impatience with each passing minute. His anger was so well assumed and became so violent

that it frightened the mother and daughter.

"The caitiff! the vassal! the slave!" he finally exclaimed, his rage passing all control; "he dares to loiter by the wayside; I will carry out my threat and with one sweep of my two handed sword cleave his base head from his shoulders!"

The next moment, he jerked the door inward and stalked out in high dudgeon, breathing threatenings and slaughter.

It need not be said that he remembered the simple precaution that I had adopted, and when he circled around and entered the path leading to the spring, neither the widow Wickliffe nor her daughter Meg was aware of the trick played upon them.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE EXPERIENCE.

ENOUGH has been told in the course of this veracious narrative to make clear how it was Dick Montgomery disappeared as utterly from all knowledge of his friends as if the earth had opened and swallowed him in proverbial fashion.

When he went into that portion of mountainous Kentucky he failed to display the tact to be expected from a newspaper man of his experience.

"I thought," he explained, "that I would make all parties fear me, or rather *The Pioneer*, and thus help compel them to behave themselves. I was, therefore, unsparing in my denunciations, called the ringleaders by name and roasted them unmercifully. I signed my initials to my despatches, had an extra number of *Pioneers* sent to Manchester, London, and other hotbeds, and let it be known, not only that I was the author, but that I intended to follow them up with still more blistering *exposés* until every scoundrel was brought to justice. It was the greatest mistake of my life, for it arrayed both clans against me, and they resolved to stop my work by shooting me down. I received many warnings, and friends urged me to leave the country while there was a chance of doing so, but I laughed at the threats and announced on the porch of the principal Manchester hotel, in the presence of more than twenty armed mountaineers, that I intended to fight it out on that line, if it took all summer. The words sounded brave, but in a certain sense they sealed my doom."

As a matter of course, Montgomery always went armed, and he let the fact be known. One day he received a tip that by going to McVeyville he could score a beat on all other journals that had representatives in that region, and make a scoop that would render him famous and be a vast benefit to *The Pioneer*. He quickly completed his preparations, and, mounting a fleet horse, galloped off in high spirits for McVeyville.

It was a trap, and Montgomery rode as straight into it as a man blindfolded. He was picking his way over the rough mountain road, near Rattlesnake Ridge, when he received a volley from the bushes, which killed his horse, though the miscreants who fired it purposely missed him, because they considered instant death too merciful for such as he.

The volley came from the Winchesters of Zach Peters, Bill Harbridge, and Jim Sawyer, who had been selected by others to do the congenial work. Before Dick could disentangle himself from his fallen horse and draw his revolver, the trio pounced upon him, took away his pistol, and made him prisoner.

That their intention was to give him the famous "witch's parole" is certain, but an unexpected obstacle prevented the immediate carrying out of this purpose. The star performer in that piece of deviltry must possess the free use of his legs, and one of Dick's was so wrenched and bruised that he was scarcely able to stand.

Harbridge and Sawyer advocated shooting the prisoner at once and ending the bother, but it so happened that the last copy of *The Pioneer*, which Zach Peters had seen, contained a lot of terrific abuse of himself, mentioned by name. He was so incensed that he would consent to nothing less than the punishment named—a fate which he swore should be that of every newspaper man upon whom he could lay hands.

Accordingly, the captive was helped to the cabin of Widow Wickliffe, not far off, and placed in charge of her and her daughter. It has been shown that Kentucky contained no more merciless partisans of the respective feuds than the women, and none was bitterer in her hatred than the widow, who, it will be admitted, had good grounds for her animosity.

The agreement with Widow Wickliffe was that she was to take care of the newspaper man until he recovered sufficiently to play the important rôle assigned to him. There seemed little danger of his running away, hobbled as he was by his severe lameness, but his captors took no chances, and the cabin was kept under almost continuous surveillance.

Dick's situation was most peculiar. He suffered greatly from his injury, and naturally ought to have been anxious to get well, but his anxiety was tempered by the knowledge that his recovery meant a cruel death. Accordingly, he affected a greater lameness than was the fact, well aware, however, that there was a point beyond which the pretense could not be carried.

Several guarded "soundings" of the widow convinced him that it was useless to appeal to her pity or to attempt to bribe her. She was as immovable as rock. Timid advances to the daughter showed that while she might be well disposed, she dared not take the first step through dread of her parent and the mountaineers, who did not discriminate in their punishments between the sexes.

As illustrating the rigidity of the surveillance, Dick was compelled to sleep on the upper floor, while the women made their couch below stairs, in front of the door. Not a day passed on which some of the men did not call to learn how he was getting on, and the murmur of voices often told him that consultations were held at night. Could he have found some way of communicating with the outside world, he would quickly have brought friends to his rescue, but no such way presented itself.

Dick had been a prisoner about two weeks, when, as he lay awake one night, the scheme of pretending he was insane flashed upon him. It was really caused by something he had learned from a conversation between the widow and her daughter.

Zach Peters had an aged mother who had been demented ever since his boyhood. He was one of the most superstitious of men, and looked with special awe upon those whose brains were askew.

"It looked as if it would prove a howling success," said Dick, "for I worked it artistically. I began by little eccentricities of words and manner, which at first were not understood by the women, but by and by they laid them to the cause I intended.

"That night, when I noticed talking down stairs, I crept noiselessly to the head of the ladder and listened. I recognized the voice of Peters, and heard him declare in commenting on what they told him that I was crazy, and that he would come around on the morrow and have a look at me. I was thrilled with the hope that they would have to wait till I got well before giving me the witch's parole, though I wasn't absolutely sure whether he referred to my brain or body."

When Zach Peters presented himself on the morrow, the prisoner was ready for him. With a whoop, he leaped into the middle of the floor, and with the

solemnity of an owl and the vigor of a young giant, he executed with some lameness the astonishing jig which I have described.

There was no mistake about it, Dick had made a " sensation," and his life was safe for a few days. Though his leg was almost well, his mind was desperately ill.

But if he and the women were impressed, Harbridge and Sawyer were not. They sniffed with disgust, and declared the whole thing a sham. The most that they would agree to was to wait until the prisoner had fully recovered the use of his injured limb.

Dick would have been glad to delay, so far as appearances went, the mending of his leg, but that would have caused suspicion, and probably defeated his pet scheme. He was compelled to let the injury grow better until the time came when he showed scarcely a limp as he walked.

But as the body improved, the mind grew worse, until even Harbridge and Sawyer displayed a reluctance to enter into his presence, and the widow looked askance at him.

Now, nothing was more apparent than that this state of affairs must soon end. Whatever superstitious feelings restrained Zach Peters did not extend to his associates, who were liable at any moment to lose their patience and peremptorily close the incident, as they had advocated doing upon first learning of the injury the prisoner had received.

Amid the rasping perplexity, one impressive fact forced itself upon Dick Montgomery. It was within his power to make one single attempt at escape, and only one. Failing in that, his enemies would never give him a chance to repeat it.

It was this truth which made him unduly timid about taking chances. Once, late at night, he essayed to steal down the ladder, and step over the sleeping bodies, and pass into the outer darkness. The windows were too narrow to allow the passage of his body, and the door was the only avenue.

The widow was awake on the instant, and the " king " had to make the best explanation he could and return to his couch, too much terrified to repeat the attempt. However obedient and respectful the woman might be to his majesty during the day time, the widow showed little of it at night, and when there was a probability of tempting the prisoner to run away.

The absence of anything like fear on her part was shown when she donned her bonnet and hurried off to call upon Peters without thinking of the captive's wishes. Dick would have been glad to detain her, but the uselessness of trying to do so prevented the effort.

One reason of his highly nervous condition, when, in obedience to his order, I set out to hunt for the medicinal herbs, was his dread that the woman would signal to some of the men in the neighborhood. He could not have prevented it, had she set out to do so.

Previous to my intrusion upon the scene, he gained one important concession, the reason for which he never fully understood. The first time he sauntered forth unquestioned, the impulse to make a break for freedom was almost irrestrainable. The attempt would have been made had he not accidentally caught a glimpse of one of his enemies stealthily following him.

Montgomery gave no evidence of this discovery, but after a little more aimless wandering, he returned to the cabin, as if his jaunt had been for no other purpose than to gain a few swallows of fresh air.

Only at intervals did he venture in the wood, and never did he go far from home, for he was in terror of drawing a shot. In truth, the wonder is that he did not do so as it was, and he explained the circumstance on the theory that a definite date had been fixed upon for his taking off.

Finally he became so desperate that he determined to drive matters to an

issue. He pretended to be seized with a well nigh fatal illness. By refraining from food, he became pallid and apparently much feebler than was the case, while his delusions increased. He convinced his jailers he was close to death, and such was the belief of both women, who offered no objection when he tottered forth from the cabin, to appear shortly after, just in time to save me from the witch's parole, and to send Peters, Sawyer, and Harbridge flying through the woods in a panic.

And all this being as I have stated, the question comes up again as to whether the fright of Zach Peters was real or pretended. Dick Montgomery maintained it was real, while I prefer to give the rascal the benefit of the doubt, though to do so raises the no less interesting question as to how he would have shown his good will toward me, but for the timely arrival of Montgomery.

CHAPTER XVI.

A ROCKY ROAD.

ENOUGH has now been told to bring events down to the minutes that I spent hidden in the undergrowth near the spring, impatiently awaiting the coming of Dick Montgomery.

Fortunately for my peace of mind, I was not kept long in suspense. I did not hear his footfall, but a guarded whistle caused me to rise to my feet, cautiously advance several paces toward the spring, and then peer through the vegetation.

There Dick stood, looking on all sides of him, and wondering what had become of me. I noticed his ghastly paleness, and dreaded that, despite the two good meals he had eaten that day, he would break down before we could get far from the cabin. He was keyed up by his excitement, but how long could he stand it?

"Here, Dick!" I called in a guarded voice, and, hearing me, he hurried through the bushes to my side. I noticed that he was aquiver with excitement.

"I tell you, Shorty," he repeated, "it's now or never; we'll not get another chance."

"Why do we want another, when this is to be decisive? What's the next step?"

"I'm blessed if I know, except to get as far from this infernal place as fast as we can; I've got enough of the mountainous section of Kentucky, and, if I once see home again, I'll leave these feuds to some one else—to *you*, if you want them."

"Let that motion lie on the table for the present; just now I am as anxious as you to leave Rattlesnake Ridge out of sight."

We pushed further in among the undergrowth and trees, and then stopped to agree upon some definite course.

"There's one big advantage on our side," said Dick; "these people haven't got any dogs with which to trail us."

I recalled that canines were almost unknown in that section, so far as my observation went, and I scored one to the credit of the Kentucky mountaineers.

"They may have the Indian's skill that enables them to trace one's footsteps through the forest, and so do not need the help of hounds."

"Bah! that will do for story books, but we haven't anything to fear from such impossible woodcraft. There's another advantage," added Dick, with childish eagerness; "the afternoon is half gone, and they're not likely to try to follow us until dark; they won't be able to do anything before daylight, by which time we ought to be out of the woods."

The weather was chilly and the sky overcast, with the promise of a cold storm still impending. Carefully comparing views, we found that we agreed upon the points of the compass, which was good reason to believe we were right.

Six miles or more away, across the valley, was the home of Tom Auckland, which we ought to reach by night. There, under the guidance of Jake, and by using my pony Jack between us, we could readily get to McVeyville, and by the time we boarded the train, we would consider all our troubles ended; or, we might wait until daylight before leaving the mountaineer's cabin, for his house would be quite safe from invasion, since he belonged to the other faction.

"You don't forget one great disadvantage, Dick," I said in enumerating the advantages.

"What is that?"

"The walk across the valley and to the Aucklands' would be of the easiest nature if we stuck to the trail, but that's the very thing we can't do."

The exasperating feature of the business was that my companion and I, as the reader will recall, were totally unarmed. In case of discovery, therefore, by any one of our enemies we would be wholly at his mercy. The question of our success in getting out of the dangerous neighborhood depended entirely upon our being able to avoid discovery while on the way.

Just as soon as our enemies learned of our flight, they would be after us hot footed, and the trail leading across the valley to the other mountain was the one they would naturally expect us to follow, and which consequently we must not follow. Laborious as was the work, we must "blaze" a new track through the wilderness.

We had no doubt of our ability to keep the right direction, for there were abundant landmarks to guide us. It would be more difficult at night, but we could then use the trail itself, which was so distinctly marked that it would be comparatively easy to follow.

"It is only a short distance off," I said; "why not remain where we are until dark?"

"I can't do it," replied Dick; "I am too nervous—too impatient; if this thing keeps up much longer my insanity will cease to be pretended."

"Very well; you are familiar with your surroundings; lead the way and I will follow."

Before starting, we stood several minutes intently listening. My friend's belief was that the Widow Wickliffe would soon awake to the fact that we had fled, and would issue some sort of signal to summon the party we held in so much dread.

But the stillness was as profound as at "creation's morn." Dick took the lead, and the next minute we were picking our way around boulders, rocks, through undergrowth, and between trees, keeping steadily to the westward, which was in the direction of the cabin of Tom Auckland.

It need not be said that we used every precaution, and as a consequence our progress was slow. Every now and then we halted and listened. The chirruping of a bird or the chattering of a squirrel darting along the limbs overhead was all the sound that came to us, and when we had progressed something like a half mile, both were greatly encouraged. I felt some misgiving lest Dick's strength should prove unequal to the strain, but there is no tonic like hope, and he really showed less evidence of fatigue than myself.

We had sat down on one of the boulders that were almost everywhere, and though the day was chilly, I used my hat as a fan, and found it a relief.

"Do you see *that?*" asked Dick, pointing to the ground immediately in front of us.

"I see nothing unusual," I replied.

"Look again," he added with a smile.

"By gracious!" I exclaimed, "it is the trail."

"Of course; that's why I stopped here."

There was the plainly marked path hardly ten feet away from us. It was a startling discovery, and, springing to my feet, I glanced up and down it,

half expecting to see the dreaded mountaineers loping towards us.

"This will never do; we must get further away."

He humored my whim, and, withdrawing to a safe distance, we again sat down.

"Shorty," said he, "when you told me about the shooting of that fellow at the blind, you said the body was left lying there."

"Yes."

"And his Winchester was not disturbed?"

"It was there when I left."

"From your account, we are near the spot; let's go there and get the rifle and cartridge belt; then, if worst comes to worst, we can put up a decent fight."

"Strange I did not think of that before!" I exclaimed admiringly; "it is a happy thought, if the gun has not been confiscated."

"We must take our chances on that, but it has not been long since the occurrence. While I cannot be sure whether the blind is behind or in front, let's take it for granted it is in front."

Neither referred to the fact that we were violating the law we had laid down in thus using the trail, while daylight lasted, but we did not forget the fact. I now had the lead, and advanced cautiously, while my comrade was equally vigilant at the rear.

We had not gone far, when I recognized an oddly spotted rock which projected over the path, and which I remembered was passed by Jake Auckland and me before we reached the blind which was the scene of our memorable adventure. I halted.

"It is behind us, Dick; we have come further than I supposed, and must turn back."

"I doubt whether that is wise," he said with a shake of his head; "I can't bear the thought of decreasing the distance between us and that infernal cabin. No; let's push on; we have put several miles behind us, and night isn't far off."

"But we must leave the trail, for I have been in a shiver of dread all the time we were on it."

"We can afford to sit down and wait until darkness."

"And we'll do it," I said, leading the way to a safe distance in the wood, where once more we seated ourselves, this time on the bare ground.

"I judge we have come fully half way——"

I gripped my companion's arm with a gasp of affright, and pointed toward the trail, where the slouched hat of one of the mountaineers was moving as silently as a shadow in the direction we had been following. Neither of us spoke, but crouched lower, for we were in danger of discovery. We dared not change our position through fear that the inevitable rustling would betray us.

At a point exactly opposite, the man halted and looked to his right, which was away from us, so that only the back of his head showed. Suddenly, like an automaton, he whisked around, and the suspicion we had both formed was confirmed. He was Zach Peters.

Despite our caution in following the trail, he had discovered and kept us in sight all the time, though Dick was unaware of it. Our rashness had brought its penalty.

That rashness was supplemented by another equally unpardonable, when we sat down in sight of the trail.

The moment Zach Peters looked around his keen eyes recognized the two crouching figures, and with something like a chuckle, he came straight toward us.

"If he's alone, we'll make a fight," I said in a low voice.

"We'll do it any way; there must be no surrender; let's sit still till he is within reach, when we'll jump up and tackle him!"

As the mountaineer came more fully into view, I saw he was carrying a Winchester in each hand. The thought flashed upon me that one of them had belonged to the victim of the blind.

Zach did not come quite as close as we expected, but halting just beyond the "dead line" I had fixed in my mind, and resting the stocks of the two rifles on the ground, with a huge hand grasping each, he fixed those penetrating eyes upon us.

The twitching of the beard, and a repetition of the peculiar chuckle, left no doubt that he was exulting over our discomfiture.

We did not speak. I felt Dick move as if about to leap up and bound at his throat.

"*Not yet!*" I interposed, touching his arm.

"Wal, if you ain't the two infarnalist fools in old Kentuck!" were the astounding words of the mountaineer; "why didn't you keep off the trail, being as you hadn't any weppons? Didn't you know we'd be sartin to find you? Now, creep further back where nobody can't see you, for Bill and Jim ain't fur off, and they mustn't know I'm playing the fool, too.

"Keep hid till dark, and then stick to the trail and travel like a steam ingine, and keep going till you're seventeen thousand miles from Kentucky, and don't never set foot in these parts agin!

"And being as you hain't got any shooting irons, you may as well take Vic Hawkins' Winchester with you; he was another fool; you don't need the belt, for the magazine is chock full of cartridges."

CHAPTER XVII.

CONTAINS THE REJECTION OF AN OFFER THAT WAS NEVER MADE.

As Zach Peters finished his extraordinary declaration, he stepped forward and handed me the Winchester that had once belonged to Victor Hawkins. Amazed beyond description, I rose to my feet and took the weapon.

"Zach, I don't know how——"

"Then don't try," he interrupted; "take care of that chap, for if he warnt as crazy as a bedbug, I'd never let him get out of these parts."

Dick did not speak, but thought best to assume the wildest expression he could. Without another word, the mountaineer tramped back to the trail and quickly passed from sight, taking the course toward Rattlesnake Ridge.

"Which brings up the question again," I said, as we sought more secluded quarters, "whether Zach was not my friend on the eve of giving me the witch's parole. I cannot help believing after this that he was."

"How could he have saved you?"

"I cannot tell."

"Nor can any one else, and he *wouldn't* have saved you; one reason was because he hadn't the chance, which he had just now."

"At any rate, he believes in the rôle you have been playing."

"And so did *you*, until I enlightened you."

"You had been practising so long that it ought to have become realistic."

Thus we sat, talking in low tones and occasionally listening until the twilight deepened into darkness. Once we heard the rapid tramp of some person passing along the trail, but did not peep out, being content to leave him alone, so long as he did not molest us.

The night like the preceding one was moonless and starless. I feared that my companion was suffering from reaction, but he would not confess it and sturdily held to the pace. Since he had no knowledge of the section, and I retained the Winchester, it devolved upon me to act as guide.

The darkness was profound, and despite the distinctness of the path, we had much difficulty in keeping to it. I stumbled over roots and stones, nearly broke a leg in one of the unseen hollows, banged into the tree trunks and once was almost lifted off my feet by a projecting limb which caught me under the chin.

I repeatedly strayed from the trail

despite all the care that could be used. These slips would have been more numerous, but for Dick, whose eyes seemed able to penetrate the gloom and discern objects which escaped my vision altogether. When the roughness of the way warned me I was off the track, I paused and ignited several matches, one after the other, and by their flickering flame retraced my steps.

One fact did much to buoy us up. We were on the right course, and had but to continue it a little while longer to reach the mountaineer's cabin, upon which for the present all our hopes were centered.

Naturally our hopes rose as we advanced, but we did not relax our vigilance, for the homely adage is true that it is never wise to crow until you are out of the woods. The facility with which Zach Peters had located us, at the very time we felt secure against detection, warned us to be always on the alert.

It was wonderful the way Dick kept up, but no one knows what strain his system can withstand until the actual test is made. Every few minutes, he would utter his low, soft "*Sh!*" when we both came to a halt and listened. This occurred fully a half dozen times, without our detecting the slightest sound to cause misgiving. Finally, I felt we were losing time.

"What's the use, Dick?" I asked in a guarded voice, as I once more paused in obedience to his signal; "we have no cause to fear."

"We haven't, eh? There's a man following us."

"Impossible! It cannot be."

"Let me have your rifle for a minute."

The shadows were too dense for me to recognize my comrade, but as he spoke he reached out and grasped my Winchester which I allowed him to take from me. Truth to tell, I was uneasy over Dick's condition and did not think it wise to thwart him.

But unseen in the gloom, he brought his weapon to his shoulder and pointing back over the trail, pulled the trigger. To my consternation, a rasping howl followed, succeeded in the same instant by the thump of a heavy body.

"There! confound you," exclaimed Dick, "*you* won't sneak up behind any more men better than you to strike them in the back! Lead on, Shorty; I'll keep the gun, for you don't seem to be able to see and hear tonight."

Dick was mistaken. My eyes and ears were all right, but in his state of exaltation, those organs with him were abnormally acute. It was an amazing achievement on his part thus to detect and locate an enemy, in what ordinarily was impenetrable gloom, but he did it, and without a word, I resumed my stealthy advance, content for the time to allow him to play the part of leader and master.

Thank Heaven, there was no repetition of the incident described. Who the miscreant was that was dogging us, on the alert to strike us down in the dark, I never learned, but that he richly deserved his fate cannot for a moment be questioned. Dick's footsteps were as steady and apparently tireless as at first, and, since our tramp was almost completed, I knew he would not succumb while on the road.

It was comparatively early in the evening, when I pulled the latch string of the mountain home, and we unhesitatingly stepped across the threshold.

Tom, his son Jake, and his wife were there, and, as may be supposed our arrival was a surprise. I cannot say that it was an unalloyed pleasure to any one except Jake, who had formed a genuine attachment to me; but the honors were hospitably done, the tall, grim housewife even insisting upon providing a meal for us.

It was as pleasing as surprising to note that Dick ate heartily. The hope that buoyed him up, and the prolonged labor of the journey thither had brought something resembling a glow-

ing flush to that fearfully pallid countenance. I complimented him on his improved appearance, and he replied with the belief that he would soon be entirely recovered.

The distribution of liberal payment, before we lay down for the night, did much to win the good will of man and wife, and when we made our start on the morrow, Dick riding the pony Jack, both father and son offered to accompany us, but we declined with thanks, and with my traveling bag strapped behind the saddle, and Vic Hawkins' Winchester resting over my shoulder, we set out for McVeyville where we arrived an hour before meridian.

Another piece of good fortune awaited us here, for Dick had just time to board the train on his way to Louisville. Wishing each other good fortune we separated; for, although I had been wonderfully successful in restoring my old friend to liberty and safety, I by no means considered my obligations to *The Pioneer* at an end. The experience of each of us was invaluable, and without claiming an undue amount of credit, I may say that I did satisfactory work for my employers while avoiding dangerous complications with the men of whom I was obliged to speak in severe terms.

I was in Manchester, and saw Tom Baker shot while in the custody of the State Guard, after which, as the reader will recall, there came a lull in the feud. My final dispatches to *The Pioneer* were of so lurid a character, that I knew it would not do to remain in the section, where I had long been under suspicion. Accordingly, when the paper, with my scorching *exposé*, arrived in Manchester and the adjacent towns, I was beyond reach of all harm.

It hardly need be added that I had won the hearty good will of Editor Forsythe and made myself solid with *The Pioneer*, the grateful Dick Montgomery giving me much assistance in attaining so coveted a position.

When Dick reached Louisville, he was obliged to leave the train and go to the hospital; but his condition at no time was serious and he rapidly mended.

During his convalescence, he wrote a long letter to Meg Wickliffe, addressing it to the care of Tom Auckland at McVeyville. I suspect Dick became somewhat sentimental, and magnified the services of the young woman, which really amounted to nothing, although he denies the charge. It was not until he had fully recovered and returned to his duties on *The Pioneer*, that the long delayed reply reached him.

" I wrote," he said, " to the young woman, because gratitude and duty required it. I frankly told her the whole story, knowing she would spread it through the neighborhood. I told her my insanity was a pretense and but for it I never should have escaped the bloodthirsty wretches who had rendered accursed one of the most beautiful regions of Kentucky. I thanked her for what she had done for me, though, under the circumstances, that was hardly a wise thing to do.

" Then I sprang the little scheme that had gradually taken shape in my brain. It was that she should go to the Harrow School at Cumberland Gap and spend two years in perfecting her education (you see, I did not intimate that she was not already educated up to a certain point). I offered to pay all her expenses, and dwelt in glowing terms upon the good she could do in a community so sorely in need of missionary effort. That was another of my numerous blunders, for the charge touched her pride and she resented it. Here is her reply: "

The letter was written on a soiled sheet of foolscap in a scrawling hand that was almost unintelligible. The following was the body of the missive:

I deklin ure ofer of marridge, for thats what ure adriving at. I doant bleve u purtended to be crazy, for ure crazy now. U'd better save ure mishunarys for ure oan folks, for

theyre in more need of 'em than we am. I didnt help u git away by lying but I felt kinder sorrer for u sometimes wen I seen how crazy you was. That bein so, I'll say that though I can't be your wife, I'm willing to be a sister to u.

Ures respectively,
MIS MEG WICKLIFFE.

"Her attempt to soften the refusal of an offer which was never made," remarked Dick Montgomery, "by expressing her willingness to become my sister proves that that peculiarity is one of the most delightful attributes of her sex; that it is not a matter of education or environment, but is the common property of women in every part of this great universe—God bless 'em!"

THE END.

THE CAPTIVES OF THE TEMPLE.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A tale of strange adventure in South American wilds. The sequel to a quest for the Great Royal Orchid, involving an escape from one foe only to fall into the hands of another still more relentless.

CHAPTER I.

A DIABOLICAL SCHEME.

MY father, John Keyburn, was the oldest member of the firm of Keyburn & Company, ship owners and importers. The Wing was the oldest and slowest ship owned by Keyburn & Company.

Having graduated from college, I took a position with the firm, first in the office, and then, my health failing, as a sort of commissioner, or ever ready agent, to go hither and yon as my father or his partners ordered me.

I was quite a lover of the sea, and my business trips for Keyburn & Company were frequently made on their own ships.

At the time of which I write, my father had been visited by a very wealthy gentleman of New York and his architect, and after considerable talk and planning it had been arranged that the next trip of the Wing should be to the upper Amazon for certain beautiful and costly woods found only in that region, to be used in the interior decoration of the magnate's new mansion.

Keyburn & Company, through my father, commissioned me to sail on the Wing and gave me full instructions as to the purchase and shipment of the precious woods in question.

It was a business enterprise quite to my liking, and I accepted with eagerness.

I had a friend, who was a few years older than I, William Desklit, who had partly promised to accompany me on my next visit to the Amazon, he being an enthusiastic botanist and geologist. I at once notified Desklit, and he signified his delight at the opportunity.

The Wing had been to Rio de Janeiro, and reached port just a few days after the arrangements had been made. I went to the wharf on business while she was unloading, and stood leaning against a pile of cordage smoking a cigar when I saw a great hulking negro sailor coming toward me.

It had long been a rule of the house of Keyburn & Company that no complaints of seamen or officers should be heard. Each captain was supposed to reign supreme on his ship. This rule worked no hardship save in one or two instances, where a brutal captain took advantage of it to misuse his men.

But I will do justice to Keyburn &

Company by saying that whenever they knew of a flagrant abuse of power at sea they at once dismissed the offending officer from their service.

There was something in the face of the black sailor as he rolled in my direction that warned me that a story of ill treatment was coming.

The captain of the Wing was named Pence. I had never liked him, for, since I had first visited my father's office as a boy, I could remember Pence swaggering and cursing round the place like a drunken pirate.

It is due Pence, however, to state that he was an able seaman and an excellent navigator. Of late he had become addicted to drink, but the fact had not yet been brought to the notice of the firm.

"Is you Senor Keybu'n?" asked the negro sailor, stopping in front of me.

I was struck at once, not only with his humility, but by his Spanish mode of address. His words were like those an American born uneducated negro might use, but his accent was strange.

"I am Oliver Keyburn," I replied. "If you want the senior member of the firm, I am not he. That is my father."

"No," he said dolefully. "I no want de ole man. I want see you. My name Pedro Gapo. I'm seaman on de Wing. I ship las' voyage an' wan' tell you somepin."

"Well, Pedro," I said, feeling a peculiar interest in the hideous but honest face, "what can I do for you?"

"I un'stan', senor, dat you often takes de pa't of many a pore sailorman when de captain dey put onto 'em, fur de ole man—'scuse me, senor—you fadder—he no han' in'fere. How dat is I don' know, but I jes' know what I hear 'bout you, an' I say to myself I jes' tell dat Senor Oliver de nex' time de Wing reach dis yere port."

"Well, what is it?" I asked.

It was true that once or twice I had made it my business to have wrongs righted.

"Hit's dat Captin Pence," said the negro. "Dat man kin kill a nigger sooner dan anybody else on de sea. Hit's awful, Senor Oliver, de way dat man 'buses black folks. I ain't no saint, so I say myself. But den I ain't no beast fur to be knocked aroun' an' kicked by a old brute like Pence."

"Come," I said testily. "We are wasting words. If you wish to tell me anything, out with it. What has the captain done to you?"

"He knock me down wid a iron bar an' t'rowed me in a cabin an' lock me in. I do not'in' to him. I jes' ten' my business like de oder sailormans. But he don' use me like dey because I'se black an' f'om Brazil. 'Cuss you, you black Spaniard!' so he say to me. An' den he knock me down. Well, I is black, can't you see?"

He was black—very, very black, but with all his blackness and his ugliness, there was an honest simplicity about him that was unmistakable.

"Yes," I said. "You are not exactly white. But tell me the story."

"Hit jes' like dis, Senor Oliver. Comin' up de coas' I was sick. A black man kin be sick like any oder man. But de captain, he say he take no 'count of dat. He make niggers work all de time, sick or well. I tell him I too sick, an' he up an' knock me down wid de capstan bar, an' kick me. Yas, he did dat, senor. An' den he lock me up an' say when de Wing come to port he goin' to discharge me wid a bad name. What I done I like to know why dat man take away my good name. He discharge me an' I can't get no more good ships. I never get any more berth like dis berth."

I rubbed my chin reflectively. It was just like Pence to knock a man down for being sick. Yet I did not doubt that the sailor had said or done something to bring about the added punishment of being locked up.

"What did you say to the captain to exasperate him?" I asked.

"Say! I say nothin'. I jes' be sick dat all. Ask any of de men."

"Well, admitting the truth of what you say, what do you wish me to do in the matter?"

"I jes' wan' you to speak you fadder an' not let de captin discha'ge me. I kin go on anoder ship an' not be wid Pence."

The black had interested me and I made some further inquiries among the crew. I learned that his story was substantially correct. Pence had drunk heavily during the voyage, and his temper had become very violent.

Pedro Gapo, so I learned, was a Brazilian negro, which fact accounted for his Spanish mode of speaking and his peculiar accent. How long he had been in the United States I could not learn. Nor from what part of Brazil he originally came. Beyond the fact that he was a Brazilian, his shipmates knew nothing about him.

While I was familiar with the rule of the house, I believed this to be a case calling for interference.

"You come with me," I said to Pedro.

He followed me to the office, and into my father's presence.

We found Pence and Huskway, the first officer of the Wing, there before us. They were rehearsing to my father a full report of their journey and receiving orders for the new one to the Amazon.

Their eyes opened when they saw me enter with the negro. I plunged at once into the subject and accused Pence of extreme cruelty and drunkenness.

"This negro," I said, "so far as I can learn, is a simple, but an honest and industrious man. He is a good sailor, but Pence has taken a violent dislike to him on account of his color. He knocked him down and kicked him for no other offense than being ill. Then he locked him up and now has discharged him and put his name on the black list."

Pence grew white with rage. His fists clenched and he darted murderous looks toward myself as well as the negro.

"Well, Oliver, my boy," said my father, "you know the rule of this firm. But as you seem to think this is an extraordinary case, I will look into it. Pence, what have you to say?"

"That damned black dog is a lying hound!" burst out Pence, bending forward and speaking with bitter emphasis. "He lies when he says I knocked him down, and he lies when he says he was sick. I did lock him up for inciting the men to mutiny in the West Indies. Black scoundrel! I ought to have shot him."

"Hush, now, hush!" said my father. "You are certainly a violent man. We always knew that of you, but never before heard anything like this. You are aware that we want our seamen treated like men."

"I treat them like men. I treat them a hanged sight better than they deserve."

"Enough! Enough! I will investigate before the Wing sails. It may interest you to know that my son and a scientific friend will go with you to the Amazon, and my son will have charge of the business."

"Am I to be superseded in command by a landsman?"

"No, I said nothing of any command. I say he will have charge of the business when you reach Santerem. He represents the firm, and will select and purchase the woods desired."

"Very well," replied Pence in a surly way.

That day my father did really investigate the case, and sent for Pence and me.

"I find," said he, "that there is much truth in the negro's story. Now, Pence, this must end at once. I don't know but what I would dismiss you from the service of the firm, were it not that Mr. Vandergrift is in a hurry for this wood. We are short of skilful navigators, and you will have this chance to redeem yourself. Stop drinking,

and keep your temper better under control."

To me he said:

"Oliver, this black protégé of yours will sail again in the Wing. With you to watch over him, he need not fear persecution. And, being on board with the same men as were on her before, you will have an opportunity to judge of the situation. And on your report when you return will depend my future action."

The captain's face was black when we left the office, and I felt a little uneasiness over the outcome of the affair. Had I been going alone I think I would have asked for a change of captains. But with Desklit as a companion, I felt that I need not fear the treachery of Captain Pence.

In a few days the Wing was unloaded and provisioned for the cruise. There was no time to take on a cargo for the outward trip, for there was none to be had within a week for any place at which we could stop without causing a delay beyond the time in which my father had agreed to have the wood in New York.

Desklit came on board with a suitable outfit of clothing for the climate to which we were going, a rifle and fowling piece, and the ammunition for each, and another outfit of scientific implements and drugs and chemicals with which to prosecute his studies, while I prepared to attend to the business of employing natives, felling trees, and loading.

None but the finest trees were to be taken, and the work of selecting them and getting them down to the shore and on board the Wing was going to occupy some little time.

Pence was polite in a surly way, and Huskway kept out of my sight as much as possible.

But Desklit and I were good enough company for each other, and cared nothing what Pence and Huskway did so long as they sailed the ship properly.

The Wing got under way as usual, and Desklit and I enjoyed the trip down the Atlantic.

In the equatorial region we donned our gray duck and canvas clothing, and made ourselves as cool and comfortable as possible. By that time Pence and Huskway had overcome their aversion in some measure, and we ate at the captain's table with more or less sociability.

Pence had curbed his temper to some purpose, and not once had we seen any of the persecution of the men reported by the sailors.

We saw little of Pedro Gapo, and had almost convinced ourselves that the black fellow had stretched the truth a little in his complaint.

"Nevertheless," said Desklit, when we were talking the matter over, "I don't like your captain overmuch. There is a sneaking look in his face that bodes some one ill. I can't say just how it does strike me, but watch him after we get into the Amazon—that's all."

These words of Desklit were not without their effect, and I did watch Pence.

We entered the Amazon a few days before the period of high tides in the spring, and just before the full moon.

We had gone some hundreds of miles up the great river, and I had watched Pence till I got tired of it.

"I don't believe the fellow is up to anything," I told Desklit. "If he was he wouldn't wait so long."

"Well, you know him better than I do," was the reply. "I don't like him—that's all."

It had never been a practice with me to lock my stateroom door at night. I feared no one on board, and when disaster overtakes a ship at sea the less one has to do with locks the better. So I slept with my door unlocked.

Desklit's stateroom was separated from mine by a bulkhead supposed to be air tight and water tight, but anything but sound tight.

One night after I had been asleep some time I was awakened by the sound of cursing and scuffling in his room. I flung myself from my berth and was about to rush out to see what was up when my own door was thrown violently open and Pence and Huskway entered.

"What does this mean?" I demanded.

Without replying they flung themselves upon me. Huskway was a very powerful man, and with Pence to aid him, could handle me with ease.

I was but partly dressed, and therefore at a disadvantage. Pence had a rope in his hand and with that they bound my arms behind me and flung me down on the bed I had just vacated.

"Now, you lying tale bearing pup!" said Pence, "how do you like the new order of things?"

"What does this outrage mean? What are you doing with me, and what have you done to Desklit?" I demanded.

"Well, we haven't done much to you yet, nor to him. He is on his berth tied up like a sheep to be killed, the same as you are. And if you keep your mouths shut perhaps that will be all that will happen to you for a while. But if you try any monkey tricks I'll cut your throats and give you to the crocodiles. Do you hear?"

"I hear, but I will not be still, Captain Pence. The crime you have just committed is enough to send you to prison, and I'll send you there unless you at once release Desklit and myself."

A loud and gross laugh came from both Pence and Huskway.

"My negro protecting friend," said Pence, "you will be a good deal older than you are now when you get back to any place where you can have us put in jail. And perhaps you will never get there. It all depends on the grace of the crocodiles."

"But what is your object? How can you expect to escape? When you return to New York with the wood what will you say?"

Another laugh, louder and more gleeful than the first, greeted this speech.

"New York! Wood! Ho! Ho!" roared Pence. "And do you think, my fine cub, that after getting such a laying out, and with prospects of a discharge at the end of the voyage, we are going to bother about *wood?* Not if we know it, and we think we know something. Ho! Ho! I'll show that old fool of a father of yours that Captain Jacob Pence can't be treated like a dog with impunity. He'll never see his old tub of a ship again, and like as not he'll never see his long tongued son again, either."

"Well," I replied, striving to remain calm, "what are you going to do? You talk big, but what is there in it?"

"I'll tell you what's in it, young man!" he answered. "There's a million or two in it for me, and another million or two for Huskway, and wealth for every man of the crew who sticks to us. And they will all stick, for they have said so."

"Is it so easy to pick up millions in South America?" I asked incredulously.

"It is if you go to the right place for them. I'll tell you now, since you are decent enough to ask questions, just what we are going to do. Up near the Tapajos river there is an island that sticks high up out of the water, with steep and rocky sides. I am going to put you and your scientific friend on that island. Then we are going as far up the Tapajos as the ship can go, and leave her there. We will go on to the Devil's Ring by way of the forest trails.

"Have you ever heard of the Devil's Ring? Well, I'll tell you what it is. The Devil's Ring is a circular chain of very high and impassable mountains, inclosing a piece of country at least twenty miles in diameter. In that country, so the story goes, lives a race

of strange people who never leave it, and who never allow any intruder to leave it if they can help it. These people have temples and other buildings of stone, and the temples are adorned with golden ornaments and diamonds. There is treasure enough there to pay off the national debt.

"We are going to get some of this treasure. We will find the gateway into that mysterious place, and enter as friends. Our party will number about sixty, and being armed, we can undoubtedly get what we want."

I looked at the man with amazement. Surely, I said to myself, he is daft. I had heard of the Devil's Ring, but had never heard any story of a mysterious people connected with it.

I was in the hands of a madman—so I told myself—and felt that I had good reason for saying it.

A crew of sixty commanded by a madman in whom they believed!

The Wing kept on her course for a short time, and then I knew she was coming to anchor. I heard the rattling of chains and felt the jarring of the vessel and the different motion as she swung to her moorings.

Pence and Huskway, with about a dozen of the crew, all grinning as they saw our plight—the very crew for whom I had gone before my father and pleaded—came to us, and Desklit and I were carried on deck.

Before us rose a great rock island straight out of the water, towering at least a hundred feet in the air. Its sides were almost precipitous, the rocks affording slight foothold to the hardy climber.

"There is your home, my friend," said Pence with a guffaw.

Suddenly we all heard a roar down the river, and many faces were turned that way.

"My God! We are lost!" shouted Huskway. "It is the pororoca!"

"The bore! The bore!" burst from twenty pairs of paling lips.

A wall of water at least fourteen feet high, and reaching across the Amazon, was coming toward us with a power and thunder that was appalling. The Wing was anchored right under the island, and there was no time to get her away. Even had this been possible there was no escape from that awful flood that rushes up the river at certain periods and destroys everything it finds in its path.

With blanching faces and frenzied cries the crew of the Wing stood watching the approach of the destroying monster.

"Clear away the boats!" shouted Pence. "If it passes and leaves any of us alive we can get away from the wreck."

With hope, born of his words, in their hearts, they sprang to obey him. On, on, came the great pororoca, its thunder increasing as it advanced, and its height apparently growing greater.

Desklit and I, still bound hand and foot, for the discovery of the bore had interrupted the process of releasing us on the island, looked our farewells into each other's eyes.

Suddenly the thunder of the waters increased a hundredfold. The poor old Wing was struck as if by a sledge hammer in the hand of a giant; she was hurled up against the rocky wall of the island, and fell upon the ragged ledges at the bottom wrecked, splintered, a thing of death.

CHAPTER II.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

Of the crew of sixty odd on board the Wing at least twenty were killed outright by the crash or swept into the rushing tide and drowned. It was an unfortunate result of chance that the forty or more left alive embraced the worst element of the lot, including both Pence and his kindred scoundrel Huskway.

The poor old ship had been actually broken in halves on the jagged rocks,

and the after half plunged into the river and sank. The forward half hung on a ledge ready at any moment to be swept off by another high tide or storm.

The ship had struck on the port side, and all the boats on that side were smashed into splinters. Two of the starboard boats were uninjured, and I could hear the loud voice of Pence bawling out orders to the few men he had left to clear them away.

Fortunately for Desklit and myself our position before the bore struck us had been on the starboard side. We had been lying there bound, and the shock had hurled us across the deck. Desklit had vanished from my sight, and I feared he had been thrown into the water or dashed to death against the rocks.

My own condition was bad enough. I was bruised and half stunned and my face was bleeding from a wound made by a flying piece of wood. I lay on my side in a débris of smashed planking and deckhouse, and in such a position that I could see little of what was going on about me. A spar had fallen across my legs, and pinioned me to the ruined deck.

I heard the voices of the men and the rush and scuffle of their feet as they hurried to escape from the doomed wreck.

One boat splashed into the water, and then another. Then I heard them passing from the wreck to the boats such articles of food as could be found.

I was very weak, and was rapidly losing what strength I had. I raised my voice and called Pence, but the captain paid no attention to my call.

Surely, I said to myself, Pence is not so cruel a scoundrel as to leave me in such a condition to starve to death. I could do nothing to extricate myself from my painful and dangerous position. If the men deserted me, there was nothing left for me to do but to die of starvation, unless by the more merciful method of being swept into the river with the forward part of the ship and drowned.

I heard the last commands of the rascal captain, and heard the men clambering into the boats.

"All away!" came the voice of Pence, and all on the wreck was as still as death.

I closed my eyes to ponder upon the horrible situation. I tried to writhe and twist myself free, but to no purpose. I called the name of Desklit, but received no answer.

"I am alone!" I murmured. "Alone to die."

I think I must have swooned, for one could scarcely have gone to sleep under such circumstances. At any rate I lost myself for a time and was roused as from a dream by the sound of my own name.

I opened my eyes and beheld the grinning and ugly face of the negro, Pedro Gapo, looking down at me.

"T'ank de good Lord, Senor Keybu'n, you is alive," he said. "I jest natcherly hoped de good God would presu've de life of a good man like you. Now jes' hol' still a minute while I see what kin be done 'bout dis spar. Hit am a heavy one, an' hit lay right across your legs."

"How is it you are here, Pedro?" I asked him. "I thought all the men went with Pence."

"Dem scund'els t'ink not'in' only of dey own safety," growled the negro as he fumbled and tugged at the spar. "But I 'membered how you stood by me, Senor Keybu'n, when dat rascal captin him go fur 'buse me. I say to myself what fur I go an' leave Senor Keybu'n an' take up wid a lot of rascals. So I hide an' let dem t'ink I dead, an' when dey gone I come to you. But how I goin' to git dis off I like fur to know."

"Perhaps, Pedro," I said, "if you cut these cords and set my arms free I can help you."

"Yas, so I t'ink myse'f. I cut dem cords away quick now."

He whipped out a knife, and once more I had the free use of my arms, cramped and sore though they were.

"Now, Pedro," I said, "you try to lift one end off the deck and I will roll it off my legs."

The powerful negro bent to the work, and in less than two minutes my legs were free of the load. He then cut away the cords that bound them and helped me to my feet.

"Have you seen the doctor?" I asked.

"No, senor. I no hab any time fur t'ink of no doctormans. I saw you, senor, an' jes' kim where you was. Now we go look fur dat doctormans an' I know we fin' him some place. Fur w'y, if you no git t'rowed furder dan dis, den how he goin' to git much furder?"

"But the spar stopped me. He may have gone overboard and sunk."

"Das so, but we kin look, senor."

We began our search, and found Desklit wedged in a narrow crevice of the rock where he had been thrown by the awful power of the pororoca. He was unconscious, and had been severely cut by the jagged points and edges.

We extricated him, freed his arms and legs of the cords, and found a little level shelf of rock where we laid him down.

"He seems to be badly hurt, Pedro," I said. "We have nothing to succor him with. I wonder if we could get to his stateroom. He has plenty of remedies there."

"Dat might be jes' possible, senor," replied the negro. "De port side git smashed in, but de doctormans room on de sta'boa'd an' maybe dat ain't hu'ted."

"Well, you stay here and see that he doesn't fall off this ledge, and I will try to get to his room."

"But dat's dangerous job, Senor Keybu'n. You stay here wid him an' I go. I no let you git hu'ted any more now. I ain't sailorman no more, 'cause dey no more ship. I jes' your servant now, only you don' pay not'in'."

I was touched by the gratitude of the powerful black, and gave him a friendly grasp of the hand.

"I thank you, Pedro," I said. "It does a man good to find a bit of gratitude in the world."

"I don' hab no such t'ing like dat, Senor Keybu'n, but I do feel mos' t'ankful fur you w'en you took my pa't. Wait now, I see what I kin do."

He scrambled aboard the wreck again and I saw his great kinky head going down, down, as he slowly made his way through the misshapen and broken companionway. After a time I saw him reappearing with his arms full of things he had found.

"I don' know jes' what you want, so I bring all I kin carry. Dat room jes' knocked upside down. How I put dese?"

"Put them down here. This is what I want. Let me have this bag."

I found Desklit's medicine case, and also a bottle of cognac. I poured a little of this down his throat, and felt a slight increase of pulse. I had but little knowledge of drugs, but recognized the names of several simple and well known remedies in the leather case. I gave Desklit a dose and after a time had the satisfaction of seeing his eyes open and assume an intelligent expression.

"Why—where—am I?" he asked, his glance roving from my face to that of the negro, and then to the steep rocks.

"Don't you remember the crash, old chap?" I asked him.

"Oh, yes. They said the bore was coming. Well, it evidently came, Keyburn."

"I should say it did. But never mind, it left us both alive. Can you walk?"

We lifted him to his feet, but with his face twisted with an expression of pain he sank back.

" My ankle is broken, I think, or at least wrenched badly. Let me rest a while."

" Dis no place to res', senor doctor," said Pedro. " But what kin we do? I tell you, Senor Keybu'n. You stay wid de doctorman an' I try fur scale de cliff an' see what kin' of place dis is. I seen it many time before, but nebber went on de top. If we stay here we mus' git to de top."

" But we shall never get down again, Pedro."

" Why? If we kin git up we kin git down. Wait till I come."

" Oh, I'll wait, Pedro. It would be difficult to do anything else."

With a grin the negro went again to the wreck and I saw him carefully examining the side of the mountain. His black head would shake dolefully as he saw the impossibility of ascending. With a look of disappointment on his face he returned.

" No use, Senor Keybu'n, less we kin fly. Dat ole islan' was made fur de birds, an' not fur mans. We can no git fur up dere. Now what I wan' fur know is whar we is goin' fur to live?"

" It looks to me, Pedro, as if we were not going to live anywhere. My opinion is that we are going to die right here."

" But dat no nice. What fur mus' we die when dat scundel captin git away? But maybe we don' die yit. We mus' tink a little."

" This confounded ankle of mine puts me out of it," said Desklit, " but if I could do my share I would suggest making a raft out of what stuff there is to be had on the wreck, and taking our chances on the river. We can rig up a sail and make some kind of a port."

" Dat jes' de berry t'ing! Now see how dat mans kin t'ink! Why, de planks an' deckhouse an' casks kin make a fin' ole raft fur carry us to shoah. Good luck come of dat idea. If de ole Wing jes' lay still long 'nough fur to make er raft."

" Well, let's get at it. We had better leave the doctor here until we are ready to launch the craft. If the ship begins to slide off that ledge we might not be able to get him back."

" Das so. Now de doctormans git well fur he know he goin' to lan'. He kin doctor hisse'f while we make de raft."

" Pedro, you are a philosopher," said Desklit.

" Oh, I only a Brazil negro," rejoined Pedro with a grin.

I left Desklit sitting on the rock bathing his ankle with a mixture he prepared from some of his drugs and sea water, and went on board with the negro.

I was fairly astonished at the resourceful mind of Pedro Gapo. When it came to choosing pieces for a raft and placing each piece where it would do the most good, Pedro exhibited a skill far ahead of anything I could offer.

He began dragging the loosened planking to the starboard side and carrying empty casks up from below.

Ropes and wooden pins as well as nails were used, and Pedro fell naturally into the position of boss of the job.

He worked like a man with the energy and strength of three. It was amazing how rapidly the raft began to take shape.

A cheering note came from the rock when Desklit shouted that his ankle was merely sprained.

" I'll be all right in a day or so," he said.

Hour after hour Pedro and I worked at the raft. We never stopped to think of food.

It was evening when the raft was declared finished. A mast had been set up, and a small spread of canvas erected to carry us with the wind, and a rude tiller and rudder provided.

" Now the question is," I said, " whether to embark at once, or wait till morning."

" Better start right away," suggested

Desklit. " If the raft will carry us in the daytime it will at night. The sooner we get to land the better."

" Like you say, so we do," said Pedro. " But what I wan' fur say is dis. Dis river swarm wid de crocodile. In de night time dey steal on de raft an' eat us. In de daytime we kin fight 'em off."

" Something in that," I answered. " But suppose a storm or wave carries the wreck off the rock during the night."

" Let him go. I no say leave de raft on boa'd. Put him in de water an' fasten to de rock."

" Pedro is right, after all," said Desklit. " We can moor the raft to the rock and in the morning set out with a full day before us."

There was plenty of room on the ledge for us all to sleep. I fell in at once with the ideas of Desklit, and Pedro and I began to get the raft into the water.

We managed this after much work, and fastened it to the rock with a long rope, so that it swept clear of the wreck and had plenty of rise and fall with the tide.

Pedro Gapo now discovered that he was hungry, and believed that we must be.

" You jes' go up wid de doctor," he said to me, " an' I go below an' see what I kin fin'. We mus' have de grub to keep up our strength."

I saw him disappear on board the wreck and then the gleam of a lantern showed through various apertures. He rummaged round for a while and then joined us. He carried in his arms enough food for two or three days.

" One t'ing 'bout dat ole Wing," he said. " De galley was in de forard pa't an' dat what saves our lives. I fin' some biscuits, some tea an' some coffee an' some canned beef. What more kin wrecked sailormens want? Course, we drink no coffee here 'less we make a fire. Plenty wood on de wreck for de fire if you want de coffee."

" I believe a drink of coffee would do us good," said Desklit.

Pedro needed no more than the suggestion. He at once brought splinters from the wreck and made a fire on the ledge, and swung a tin over it to boil the water.

We made a weird group, perched on the ledge, which was about six feet wide and ten long, with the red gleam of the fire making our shadows dance on the rock or on the roaring waters.

Dangerous as was our predicament, we enjoyed that meal. Pedro and I had worked so hard at the raft making that we had a magnificent appetite. Desklit was less ready, but the coffee put new vigor into him.

After we had eaten our supper we sat a while talking over the events of the day, and then, wearied with excitement and exertion, stretched ourselves on the rock to sleep.

The night passed without incident until about four in the morning. Then we were all awakened by a sound of grinding and crunching, and sat up just in time to see the last of the old Wing dive to her final resting place beneath the rushing waters.

In the morning the water was calmer, and after a hearty breakfast we embarked on our raft.

Pedro Gapo had evidently made rafts before, for this one was perfection in its way. It stood a foot or more out of the water, and kept us dry. The sail was large enough to give good headway, and with the black man's powerful arm to steer it could be kept steady with the wind.

We could not see either shore, and as the choice of a landing place was all a matter of chance we left it to Pedro.

We made but slow progress, and as the wind was down river we did not approach either shore. But we knew the wind would change, and probably before night.

After we had been on the raft perhaps six hours, and had not yet caught a glimpse of any land save the island

we had left, we espied a small steam vessel coming up the river toward us.

"That looks like a yacht," said Desklit. "It is a yacht, as I'm alive. Well, we are in for a rescue, anyhow. What flag do you make out?"

"I can't see it well enough to tell," I answered. "I am sure, however, that it is not our own."

"No," said Pedro, "dat am de English flag."

The yacht bore down on us and we admired her graceful lines. At last she came near enough for us to make out the figures of a man and woman standing on the bridge.

"Who are you?" came a shout from the deck of the handsome vessel.

"Three men shipwrecked from an American vessel!" I answered.

"Haul down your sail! We'll pick you up!"

Pedro hauled down the sail, and we saw a boat put out from the yacht. It drew alongside our clumsy craft, and we gladly stepped into it.

"What yacht is that?" I asked the officer in charge of the boat.

"The Flora, belonging to the Royal Botanical Society," was the reply. "It is now in charge of Professor Theophilus Wisdom."

"Whither bound?"

"To the headwaters of the Tapajos."

"For what?"

"I don't know. You will have to ask the professor that."

In a short time we stood on the deck of the Flora and were greeted by a spectacled old gentleman and a very lovely girl about nineteen years of age.

"Welcome, gentlemen, welcome," said the professor. "To be shipwrecked on the Amazon is something, but to be shipwrecked on the Amazon and rescued by the Flora, is luck indeed."

"Truth, nothing but the truth," answered Desklit, looking into the fine blue eyes of the professor's niece, Miss Lottie Wisdom.

Other spectacled old gentlemen came on deck, and we were introduced all around.

"Professor," I said, "you are in charge of this expedition, and I wish to thank you for rescuing us. We do not wish to intrude upon you any longer than is necessary, and will be obliged if you will put us ashore at any village such as Santerem, from which we can get passage down the river."

"My dear young friend," said Professor Wisdom, "this yacht would not go into Santerem for emperor, king, or president. We are traveling with all possible speed to reach the region at the head of the Tapajos, before the flowering season of the Great Royal Orchid is passed. This orchid is known to exist, but it has been seen by only one white man. The flower is about three feet in diameter and contains all the colors of the rainbow. The Royal Botanical Society of London has commissioned me to find some of these orchids, preserve a few of the blossoms, and bring home one hundred of the plants. The flowering season is believed to end in June, and now it is May. We are rejoiced that we had the opportunity to save your lives, and, now that you are our guests, you must remain so till the Flora returns from her quest."

"Keyburn," remarked Desklit, an hour later as he and I stood alone on the Flora's deck, "something tells me that we are going to see some fun. This trip on the Flora takes us right into the heart of the country to which Pence and his men are going, and we shall likely meet them. I am glad we are to remain on board. And, by the way, what do you think of the professor's niece?"

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS FOE.

Now, as a matter of fact, I was much more concerned over the loss of the

Wing than I was with the professor's niece. She was a very pretty girl—that went without argument. Just at that time, however, pretty girls found little place in my mind. But it was astonishing how soon Desklit managed to get himself into the good graces of the old professor.

Desklit was a botanist and I was not. I would not have walked three blocks in New York to see the rarest orchid that ever bloomed. But Desklit loved these things, and it did not take the professor and his companions long to find it out. They conversed long and earnestly on their favorite topic, leaving me much to my own resources.

I soon set Professor Wisdom down as a mild sort of crank. And to tell the truth there were moments when I saw the villages on the distant shore fade past us that I thought he wasn't such a mild sort either.

I wanted to land, engage passage to the coast, and report the accident and the treachery of Pence to my father. But here this obdurate old crank refused absolutely to delay the progress of the Flora long enough to put me ashore. I wondered that he had even paused in his rush after a blooming orchid to rescue us from a watery grave.

But fret and fume as I might, the Flora went on, and Desklit enjoyed the thing immensely. He liked the professor and his chatter about Brazilian plants, and he liked the niece even better.

There was nothing for me to do but resign myself to fate and accompany the crank expedition.

We entered the Tapajos and I saw with regret the city of Santerem fade away in the distance as the swift white yacht glided on.

There were four spectacled cranks in the party, including Professor Wisdom. There was Professor Turnbell, of the Royal College of Science, Twinkle of the London Geographical Society, and Mr. George Hebard, a gentleman of wealth, just then interested in the pursuit of happiness and orchids at one and the same time.

I wondered how the young lady had happened to join the party, but soon learned that she was the professor's ward and only living relative, and accompanied him on all his scientific journeys.

Well, to tell the truth the trip up the Tapajos was very enjoyable. The Englishmen were exceedingly hospitable, and, save for their obstinate insistence upon haste, were accommodating and kind.

It was a queer lot to tackle the wilds of Brazil, for not one of the four had ever fired a rifle, and were blind to all sense of danger in their ridiculous undertaking.

My closest companion on the journey was Mr. Hebard, who proved to be an amiable gentleman, learned on most things, but clean gone on the subject of the Great Royal Orchid, as were all his companions.

"You see," he said one day as he and I sat on deck smoking, while Desklit and Miss Wisdom lolled under a canopy a short distance away, "we never knew that this magnificent flower existed until about two months ago. An English explorer returned from Brazil with stories of a handsome flower he had seen near the headwaters of the Tapajos, but not being a botanist he did not give it a name. The subject was brought up at a meeting of the Royal Botanical Society, and the flower was named from his description. An expedition was at once fitted out to obtain some of these plants, for the value of one, if transported safely to London, would be simply enormous.

"The explorer unfortunately died of fever contracted in Para, and could not therefore accompany us. But he managed, before he died, to draw a rude map of the region, by the aid of which we expect to find the spot. There is some peculiarity of the soil there which produces a magnificent growth."

"It is all new to me," I replied. "I

never supposed men went to such trouble and expense for a mere flower."

He looked at me mournfully a moment and then branched off to another subject.

But the next time I sat with him he returned naturally to his favorite topic, and took a folded paper from his pocket.

" I borrowed the map from the professor to show you," he said.

I examined the map. It was a rudely drawn chart of a region into which I had never penetrated, and therefore the accuracy of it was beyond my judgment. But it seemed to have been drawn by a man who knew the place.

There was the source of the Tapajos, marked in small letters. Mountains were shaped, forests indicated by pictures of trees, small streams outlined, and in one spot a great black ring showed where the Great Royal Orchids might be found.

I handed the map to Mr. Hebard, thanking him. In fact it told me nothing.

When we had reached the head of navigation on the Tapajos, where the river narrowed perceptibly, and our progress was interrupted by a fall, the yacht was anchored. And here the completeness of the outfit became apparent.

Among the boats carried by the Flora was a launch about twenty five feet in length, driven by a four horse power gasoline engine. The tank containing the gasoline was inside the bow, and Mr. Hebard assured me that she carried fuel enough for a run of two thousand miles. The four horse power engine consumed only four pints of gasoline an hour.

The launch was floated to the shore and taken from the water by the crew of the Flora. It was carried above the fall and again placed in its natural element. The crew returned to the yacht, all save two men who were to operate the launch.

A great store of food stuffs was placed aboard, and the four spectacled gentlemen took their places. Not one of them carried a gun.

" But look here," I said to Hebard, " you surely are not going to venture into a savage country without firearms! "

" We are not sure that it is a savage country," he replied. " The explorer saw Indians, but did not say they were savages."

" But there are surely wild beasts, if not wild men," I said. " Have you no guns on board the Flora? "

" Oh, yes, plenty, but we are not expert in the use of them. They were more for the use of the crew in defending the yacht from attack."

" Well, there are two men here who can shoot, and Desklit and I make two more. Suppose we take four rifles with the necessary ammunition."

" Very well, I think myself, it is not a bad plan."

So four rifles were secured from the yacht. Unfortunately the guns brought from New York by Desklit and myself had either gone down in the Wing, or had been stolen by Pence and his gang.

Having armed ourselves, we set out in the launch.

We journeyed about eighty miles that day in the launch, and camped at night in a thick woods near the shore. Nothing disturbed our rest, though we heard the howls of jaguars in the forest.

The next day we proceeded for a hundred miles and then came to the end of all navigation. The expedition must now proceed on foot.

With the map to guide them the orchid hunters set out in a northwesterly direction, happily chancing upon a path through the jungle, thus making progress easy.

We had several small adventures on that trip. A huge tiger cat was quietly resting in a tree as we passed under and disturbed her. With a growl she reached down with her right paw and tore Miss Wisdom's hat from her head.

The young lady screamed a bit, but Desklit shot the beast, thereby winning the professor's gratitude and sweet smiles from his ward. Another time a great serpent blocked our way, and Desklit again showed his prowress and killed it with an axe.

Thus it happened that before we had gone many miles Miss Wisdom and Desklit were on a more friendly footing than ever.

Toward night we came upon a spring from which a clear stream wound around through the forest toward the Tapajos. Here we decided to camp.

The men of the party slept without shelter, but for Miss Wisdom a canvas was carried which was each night set up in the shape of a small rude tent.

Of course, some one stood guard for a few hours, and was then relieved by another, and he by another, thus making the task easy.

From midnight to three o'clock it was my watch.

Around the spring there was a clear space of about a hundred feet in diameter. Rich grasses made a soft carpet, and the men of the party found no difficulty in sleeping on so soft a bed.

Miss Wisdom's canvas was stretched between two trees near the edge of the clear patch, and Desklit, who had preceded me on guard duty told me to keep near the tent, as Miss Wisdom needed protection more than any other of the party.

I was rather drowsy that night, and did not dare sit down. I kept walking about, wondering at the absolute stillness of the wood, it being so unlike other Brazilian forests in which the birds and animals, kept in cover by the heat all day, come forth at night to sing or howl, and seek their food.

I had been on duty perhaps an hour, and had neither seen nor heard anything to cause any alarm. This, however, did not cause me to relax my vigilance, for I knew that in a Brazilian forest surprises come very suddenly.

While making a detour near the tent of Miss Wisdom, I fancied I heard a rustling in the trees just beyond her canvas. I strode into the thicket, holding my rifle ready.

The nearest man to me was Pedro Gapo, who was sprawling on the ground snoring, about fifty feet away.

I went cautiously in, listening intently, but not hearing any more of the alarming sound, I began to think I had been mistaken. I turned, and was about to make my way back to the clearing, when suddenly something leaped upon me, a hand was placed over my mouth, and I found myself silent and powerless in a grip of steel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REALITY OF A SEEMING ENCHANTMENT.

I KNEW from the absence of noise and the touch of the palm on my face that my assailant was a man, but I could not see him. A faint odor came to my nostrils, and I felt myself growing drowsy and stupid.

I no longer had the desire to cry out and warn the camp. My senses were lulled into a delicious repose, and sweet dreams came to me even while I knew I was awake.

I thought I heard a scream, but it carried no sense of alarm with it. I had no knowledge of time, and do not know how long I remained in that state of semi wakefulness. At last I lost all consciousness.

There are surprises in every life which stand out in the memory as long as life lasts. I have had some of these, and the attack in the forest was one. But no other surprise of my life was equal to that which I felt when I awoke from that calm sleep.

I was lying on a comfortable bed in a room of barbaric splendor. It was a large room, the structure seeming to be of stone, but the effect of this was softened by rude paintings and oddly

fashioned hangings of beautiful antique cloths.

I rubbed my eyes and sat up in bed, scarcely realizing that I was not still in the land of dreams. I looked in wonder at the walls, and at the richly carved mahogany bedstead.

"It is clear," I said to myself aloud, "that I have been ill a long time and have been brought to Para, for that is the nearest place to the Tapajos where one could find a room like this."

"Did the senor speak?" asked a soft voice in what seemed to be Spanish, yet was evidently a language formed of a mixture of that and a less cultivated language. I likened it to the Spanish of the Amazonian towns, which was a mixture of old Spanish and Indian.

I turned in increasing astonishment as a young negro came toward me from some recess where he had been quietly awaiting my return to consciousness.

"I spoke to myself," I answered, using the Spanish tongue, with which I was more or less familiar. "I want to know where I am."

"You are in the house of Padre Jadispiato, the chief priest of the temple," was the astounding reply.

I lay down on the pillow and shut my eyes.

"I am not in Para," I said to myself; "I am in delirium."

"Will the senor have food?" again spoke the soft voice.

I sat up again.

"Who are you? What is your name?" I asked.

"I am Tanno. I am the slave of the padre," was the reply.

There was not a smile on his even featured face as he spoke. His answer sounded like the extravagant talk of a character in a farce comedy. But his demeanor was as solemn as that of a bishop.

"Why am I here?" I asked.

"I do not know, senor. I suppose you are the guest of the holy padre."

"And who the deuce is the holy padre?"

"He whom I have mentioned. Padre Jadispiato, of the Temple."

"Where is the padre now?"

"In the temple."

I became more and more bewildered.

"What is the name of this place, anyhow?" I asked.

"I am not permitted to talk, senor, but to serve. I have my orders. Will the senor have food?"

"Yes," I said with something like a feeling of involuntary exhilaration; "since there is nothing else to do, I will eat."

The black bowed low and disappeared. He had scarcely gone from my sight before another, equally handsome, and equally black, appeared.

"Will the senor dress before eating?"

The fact that my clothes had been removed had not occurred to me.

"Yes," I replied.

He at once brought my clothing, and helped me put it on.

When I was dressed, two more blacks appeared in the room. One carried a basin filled with water, and the other a dish of perfumed soap and a soft towel.

"One thing is certain," I remarked. "This padre, whoever he is, comes from civilization, and keeps in touch with it."

Neither of the blacks answered.

My ablutions finished, the blacks disappeared. But in another moment they returned with several others.

The first one carried a table richly carved and ornamented. This was placed in the center of the room and a white cloth was spread. Upon this sundry dishes containing savory food were placed by the procession of blacks, and then they all withdrew save the first who had entered.

"I would like to know where I am and why I am here," I said. "I went to sleep in a forest, and woke up in a palace. Is this an enchanted place?"

"I am not permitted to talk, senor, but to serve."

I ate my meal in silence.

Under ordinary circumstances I believed I could be as cool as any man under the sun. But I confess to a feeling of uneasiness at that time.

I knew I must still be on the earth, though there was little about to prove that I was not in Mars or some other equally mysterious place. I wondered where my companions were, and if they had met with the same strange adventure that had befallen me.

I wondered if Desklit was at that moment in another portion of the padre's palace. And, more than all else, I wondered if Miss Wisdom had been brought there, and what the ultimate fate in store for all of us might be.

When I had finished my repast the table was carried away.

"Now," I said to my black attendant, "I should like to take a stroll and see what sort of place this is."

He looked at me with fright in his eyes.

"Oh, senor! I cannot permit that. You are not to be allowed to leave the room."

"But surely," I said with surprise, "the padre did not expect you to prevent it. Why, I could strangle you with little effort and walk out."

"Scarcely, senor. It is true, I would be as nothing in your hands. You could kill me, but you could not walk out. Slaves are often killed, but prisoners never escape."

"Heavens! I thought I was a guest! Then I am a prisoner."

"It amounts to that at this moment, senor, though afterwards the padre may be a friend. I know nothing of these things. But look, see the guards at your door, and then tell me if you will kill me and walk out."

He led me to the door, in which hung a heavy curtain. He drew this aside and pointed into the narrow passage into which the doorway led.

I looked out, and recoiled with a cry of terror. Just outside the door, fastened on either side, with chains enabling them to roam entirely across the passage, were two immense Brazilian cats of the most ferocious type.

When they saw me their jaws opened, they uttered low growls and sprang toward the door.

"You might kill me, senor," repeated the black, "but you could not escape."

I sat down in a chair overcome with the discovery.

After a time I heard footsteps, and the black showed signs of interest.

"It is the padre," he said.

I heard the chains rattling as the cats were taken away. I heard a heavy voice speaking in Spanish, caressingly addressing the beasts. Then a tall form entered the room.

Truly, had I not seen the cats first, I should have looked with admiration upon the figure that stood before me. But fear was now the parent of all my emotions, and I gazed with dread upon the priest.

He was above the ordinary stature, well proportioned, with a skin as white as alabaster, a long white beard, and a keen stern eye. He looked at me with no friendly glance as I rose before him.

But it was his garb that seemed most strange. He wore a white gown of fine texture, over which a mantel of purple was carelessly thrown. His feet were clad in cloth shoes.

"Are you Padre Jadispiato?" I demanded.

"I am he," was the reply, given in a low and I thought threatening voice.

"Then I am a prisoner in your house, and I demand an explanation. What is this place, and why was I brought here?"

The priest's sharp and unfriendly eyes searched me for a moment and then he replied:

"The place is called Ameza, and you were brought here to die."

(To be continued.)

FRANK WINTER'S CHRISTMAS ASSIGNMENT.

BY MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

The strange piece of luck that befell a reporter in covering a particular bit of work in which he had little heart, and which goes to show that jumping at conclusions isn't always as disastrous as it is reputed to be.

"IT'S the most exasperating happening. Just going to spoil my whole Christmas."

Frank Winter slammed his derby down on the table with an emphasis that did not require the addition of speech to show that he was in anything but a holiday frame of mind.

"Hallo, Francis, what's the matter?" exclaimed his room mate, Joe Craig, turning away for an instant from the bureau mirror before which he was shaving. "I expected to have you come home tonight in an ecstasy only a little short of that you will be in tomorrow when you start for Westville."

"Westville!" rejoined Frank. "That's the whole mischief of it. I wish I'd never been invited there now."

"Great Scott!" cried Joe, almost cutting himself in his surprise. "I thought your heart was set on this visit above all other things."

"So it was, and that's what makes me feel all the worse because I can't go."

"Can't go! Why—how—what?"

"Oh, it's Kimberley, the city editor. You know he gave me leave of absence from the afternoon of the 24th to the morning of the 26th. Now he comes to me with an assignment for tomorrow night—Christmas Eve, just think of it, when the Peytons are to have their best fun."

"But didn't you remind him that you weren't to be here?"

"No, there wasn't any need to. He began by saying that he knew he had given me off, but that then he couldn't foresee that Professor Foufou would resign his chair at Harward College because, according to his story, the president insulted him. They had tried to get an interview with him in Boston, but he couldn't be found. He was coming to New York, somebody said; would arrive tomorrow night to spend Christmas with his sister, a Mrs. Smith, in a flat up town. And because I know a little French Kimberley saddled me with the assignment.

"'You can go as soon as you turn in your copy of the interview!' he said. But what good will that do me? The last train for Westville leaves at four o'clock, I can't get out there till ten the next morning, and most of the fun is to be on Christmas Eve. I've half a mind to throw over the whole thing."

"What, give up your position on the *Universe* just because a little pleasure trip is interfered with!"

There was a whole lexicon of horror in Joe Craig's tones.

"Well, that's what I feel like doing now," retorted Frank. "What will the Peytons think? I've accepted their invitation and I know they've counted on me for some of the games tomorrow night. I'm afraid it's going to make it awkward for them as well as mighty disappointing for me. I don't know as I care about going at all if I can't get away tomorrow."

"But the Peyton's will understand it when you explain that the exigencies of getting out a great metropolitan daily compel you to remain in town

overnight. Indeed, they will be impressed with your importance."

"Bosh! That isn't going to make it any easier for me to wake up Christmas morning in this dismal hole all alone. You'll be away, enjoying yourself at home, and all that will be left for me to do will be to think over the good times I have missed."

"Not a bit of it. You'll have to hustle so, to catch that early train to Westville, that you won't have any time to waste in regrets over the past. Cheer up, old fellow! Think how much worse things might have been. You might never have been invited to visit the Peytons at all."

This view of the case was instrumental in sending Frank's spirits up a few degrees, but it took him a long while to compose the letter to Daisy Peyton, explaining why he would not be able to stick to the letter of his engagement for Christmas.

But the next morning when he bade Joe good by after breakfast and wished him a merry Christmas there wasn't much heartiness in his tones. And in the afternoon, when he passed so many happy faced people on the streets with satchels in their hands, his own lot seemed harder to bear than ever.

He had made a last desperate effort that morning to secure the evening for himself by inquiring if there wasn't a possibility of finding the professor in before night. But Mr. Kimberley's response was decidedly snappish.

"Don't I tell you that he won't arrive here till this evening? Here is his sister's address. You had better call there about eight, and give us half a column."

Frank had never felt so lonesome in his life as he did at his boarding house that night at dinner. Joe Craig had gone; so had almost everybody else. There were no children in the house and on this Christmas Eve the air of the place was particularly depressing.

Frank got out of it as soon as he could and started for Harlem to find the Mrs. Smith, whose address had been given to him. He arrived at the apartment house the number called for about eight o'clock and began to examine the cards under the various bell pulls.

But it was dark in the entranceway, and as Frank did not smoke, he had no means of making a light.

"I s'pose I'll have to pull one of these at random," he said to himself; "get into the house that way, and then go from floor to floor till I find my man."

So he rang one of the bells, and when the door swung open walked into the hall. Application at the left hand side on this floor resulted in the direction, "Up stairs."

Frank wanted to inquire how many flights, but the maid had evidently been bothered this way on many previous occasions, for she shut the door almost in his face.

"She must be in something of the same frame of mind as myself," mused Frank. "She ought to have waited till I could shake hands with her."

At his next stopping place, a sweet faced lady, with hair slightly gray, opened the door for him.

"Does Mrs. Smith live here?" Frank inquired.

"I am Mrs. Smith," replied the lady in a voice that matched her face.

"Then it's your brother I want to see—Pro——"

But the lady didn't wait to hear any more.

"Come right in," she exclaimed heartily. "He will be delighted to see you."

"Guess he wants to set himself right with the public," thought Frank, "if he's so eager to receive the press. Well, that'll make my task the easier. His sister doesn't seem much like a French woman, though."

"Right this way," said Mrs. Smith, and she opened the door into a room, flooded with light and furnished in handsome style.

"He's come, brother," she added, and motioned for Frank to go forward and take a chair drawn up to the table opposite that occupied by a man in a black and white blazer, with a shade above his eyes and a crutch by his side.

"Well, well," he exclaimed, stretching out his hands to Frank, "I'm awfully glad to see you, my dear boy."

Frank was so amazed to find that the professor spoke without the trace of a foreign accent that he forgot to be surprised by the cordial greeting. Mechanically he sank back into the chair behind him till he could gather his thoughts.

"I suppose you want to hear my story," began the man in the blazer. "I declare, I feel as if I had been back for weeks instead of only half a day, and the joke of it is nobody knows I'm home but yourself. As long as I couldn't have my old chum to welcome me back, I said to myself, 'John Waring, my boy, send for the son. That will be the next best thing!' And here you are. I wasn't at all sure that you were in the city, but I had the address, and determined to risk it. And to think that not even the newspapers know I've got back. I traveled incog, you see."

The speaker paused to light a cigar and Frank drew in a long breath.

John Waring! Why, that was the author of a novel that had an immense sale the year before. But after the work had been on the market six months, Waring had mysteriously disappeared. All efforts to trace him were futile, but it was generally supposed that he had shut himself up somewhere to write a second book.

And now Frank sat opposite him, on the verge of hearing from his own lips the story of what had befallen him during his months of seclusion from the knowledge of men. The young reporter's brain fairly swam as he thought of the "beat" he could give the *Universe*.

But was he not obtaining it under false pretenses? Mr. John Waring evidently took him for somebody else, who might appear at any moment. This would be very awkward.

"Mr. Waring," Frank began, "there's a mistake somewhere. I am a reporter from the *Universe*, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha," broke in the other, leaning forward to slap Frank on the knee, "that's a good one. Run right into the trap, didn't I? Well, no matter; you can make your story out of it all the same. I couldn't keep it dark beyond tomorrow, any way. Well, then, I've been to the tip end of South America. My new novel deals with life there, and I think, if I do say it myself, it's going to make a stir. I've had plenty of personal adventures to furnish incidents for the story. This," and he touched the crutch by his side, "was made necessary by a scrap with the natives."

Thereupon he launched forth on a narrative so thrilling that Frank forgot the explanation he had meant to make, and listened with all his ears.

"As for my book," the author added in conclusion, "that is almost finished. I may write the last words tomorrow—Christmas Day. You see, I am at work on it now."

Frank rose. There was Professor Foufou to be seen yet. But he felt he could not leave Mr. Waring under a misapprehension.

"Going so soon?" exclaimed the latter. "Well, I suppose you want to get down to the office with your story in good season. With what paper did you say you were connected, Bob?"

"With the *Universe*; but my name isn't Bob. I tried to tell you before that there was some mistake."

"You're not Bob Reckford!" exclaimed the other. "The son of my old chum, the missionary, whose boy was sent home after I went away from New York?"

"No; I'm Frank Winter. I came

here tonight much against my will to interview a French professor who's been having some trouble at Harward. I guess it was because your sister's name was Smith that I got into the wrong apartment."

John Waring had taken Frank's hand to bid him good by. He now retained his hold on it and looked the young reporter straight in the eye.

"You're an honest fellow," he said. "Some men would not have scrupled to explain matters. I suppose you would like to use the story you have heard tonight, and get a 'beat' on the other papers?"

"Yes, sir, I would very much, but if you don't——"

John Waring cut him short with a gesture.

"Tell me what you meant," he interrupted, "by saying a few minutes ago that you came here tonight much against your will."

Frank flushed a little.

"You see it is Christmas Eve," he replied, "and I had made an engagement to go out and visit some friends in the country. But if you would only give me permission to print what I have heard tonight I shall think this Christmas assignment the luckiest one I ever had."

"Certainly you may print it. It was hard lines if you had to give up a good time already arranged for. Come and see me again, won't you? I begin to think now that Bob Reckford has left the city. Hold on a minute. Maybe this is he," as a ring at the door bell was heard.

A moment or two later Mrs. Smith appeared, amazement and mirth struggling for the mastery in her countenance.

"Here is Bob Reckford, John," she said, with a glance of perplexity at Frank.

Then she stepped aside, and there walked into the room a colored nurse bearing in her arms a bouncing baby boy of some two years.

"Bless my stars!" exclaimed John Waring. "Because old Bob had been away from me so many years I thought young Bob must be at least in his teens. Well, well, but you've kept the appointment, haven't you?" he added, as he chucked the baby under the chin.

Frank thought this a good time for him to be going.

"Good by, Mr, Waring," he said. "I'm ever so many times obliged to you."

"Don't mention it; only come to see me again and let me know what your beat of tonight does for you."

"Thank you. I will."

Frank hurried off in such a state of excitement that he came near forgetting Professor Foufou. But it wouldn't have made much matter if he had.

The latter proved to be in an exceedingly grumpy frame of mind, and although Frank tried to persuade him with his best French, would say absolutely nothing for "ze confound papers."

However, Frank felt sure that Mr. Kimberley would not chide him for not getting more out of the professor when he found what he did have.

He wrote out his story in his most careful style, and felt that he could have had no more valuable Christmas present than editor Kimberley's excited exclamation when he handed it to him, just as the church clocks were ushering in the day of days: "By George, Winter, this is a plum and no mistake!"

On his way out to the Peytons' the next morning Frank feasted his eyes on the scare heads that had been placed over his contribution to the Christmas *Universe*. He forgot all about the joys he had missed by not being able to take this trip the previous afternoon, so busy was he building air castles for the future on the foundation stones supplied by his interview with the famous novelist.

"What if I had thrown up my position and kept my appointment with the

Peytons at any cost?" he asked himself.

Well, if he had, he would not have been the important member of the *Universe* staff he is today, nor would he rejoice in the friendship of John Waring, who prophesies great things of the "honest young fellow" he met that Christmas Eve under such peculiar circumstances.

THE AMERICAN SYNDICATE.*

BY FREDERICK R. BURTON.

A sturdy fight against heavy odds. A narrative setting forth the devices resorted to by an enterprising New Yorker who goes into Porto Rico with grit, thirty three odd dollars, and a sign board.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JOE BARBER, down on his luck in New York, borrows two hundred dollars from a friend, and armed with a signboard reading "The American Syndicate, J. A. Barber, Manager" sets out to Porto Rico to make his fortune by his wits. Customs dues on the signboard reduce his capital on arrival to thirty three dollars after paying his passage, but Joe puts on a bold front. By his assurance of manner he succeeds in hiring an imposing office, and chance brings him the acquaintance of a native, Don Octavio Valla del Rey, the chance in question being the precipitation into his arms of the don's beautiful daughter, owing to an accident to her carriage. Joe talks trolley line investments with the don and hires for his office assistant a young man of the don's recommendation, who announces his name as Miguelo Marto but whom Joe decides to call Mike, which, he adds, is all the English he wishes the fellow to know.

After looking over the field, Joe elects to get up a corner in the ice cream freezer market, and begins by buying up the entire stock of a restaurant keeper, giving him the privilege of using them for a week longer. Meantime he arranges by wire with Seeborg & Company, St. Thomas, the nearest point where freezers are obtainable, to purchase the thirty seven they have on hand at their own terms.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETY.

JOE was rather surprised to find himself so susceptible to nervous excitement over his deal. He had thought that he should be able to carry off any operation, large or small, without turning a hair, but the little back room served him the good purpose of enabling him to recover quickly, and in a few minutes, therefore, he was again in the main office with his secretary.

"Mike," he said, "I think I noticed a large shop with closed doors on the east side of the Plaza."

"Yes, senor," the secretary responded; "that is a shop that was abandoned by a man whose Spanish sympathies were so strong that he would not venture to remain in Ponce after its occupation by the American army."

"Do you suppose that shop could be rented?"

"Undoubtedly, senor, for the former proprietor has left the island."

"Do you know the owner of the premises?"

"Surely, senor."

"Then take one of my cards, Mike, hunt him up, and tell him I want to hire that shop, and ask him to come down here to make arrangements. How long will it take you?"

"A half hour, perhaps, senor."

"Well," said Joe, looking at his watch, "I am too busy to wait so much as a half hour. Tell the landlord to call

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here at two this afternoon, and if he cannot come then, to name some definite hour after that."

"I understand, senor."

They left the office together, the secretary to look up the landlord of the unused shop, and Joe to invade one café after another, where he offered in each instance to buy all the ice cream freezers in the place at double the market price, and allow the owners free use of them for one week.

The proposition was so extraordinary that many a caterer hesitated before committing himself to it, but the calm assurance of the manager of the American Syndicate, and the apparent prospect of making a profit out of nothing, convinced all of them save one or two, whose stock of freezers was so small that the profit in the transaction would hardly cover the expense of the journey to St. Thomas.

To such men Joe simply offered treble the cost of their freezers, and he did not cease his negotiations until he had prospectively under his control every ice cream freezer in Ponce that he could hear of.

"There may be some in the suburban districts, if they have any such things as roadside taverns here," he thought, "and if there is time after engaging the shop on the Plaza, I must take a run into the country and investigate."

His negotiations with the various café proprietors carried him well past the usual luncheon hour, and he had to hurry his midday meal in order to be at his office again at two o'clock.

Mike had accomplished his mission successfully, and shortly after Joe's return, the owner of the building in which the unused shop was located, called. He, also, appeared to be properly impressed with the magnificence of the syndicate's office. One evidence of his impression lay in his attempt to fix an absurdly high price for rent.

Joe was equal to this emergency, and in short order had reduced the landlord to subjection. A satisfactory arrangement was made, therefore, according to which the landlord agreed to have the premises put in readiness for the new occupant well within a week from the date of signing the lease. He was too highly pleased at the prospect of having such a tenant as the great American Syndicate to think of demanding a month's rent in advance, or even so much as a deposit.

The incurring of this new obligation, to meet which there was no money whatever in sight, did not drive Joe to his back room. He was getting used to it. The plunge was now so deep that it seemed a sheer waste of emotional force to consider the affair in any other aspect than that of an undertaking assured of success.

After the landlord had gone, it proved to be necessary for Joe to remain in the office to receive the various petty dealers with whom he had made verbal contracts for the purchase of freezers. They came one after another to sign and carry away their contracts, and before the last had gone, the business day was at an end.

It was altogether too late to think of a trip of exploration to the suburbs. Moreover, Joe felt that it would be advisable to rest until evening, for he foresaw the necessity of calling upon all of his nervous force when he should meet the friends of Don Octavio.

The don himself had called for a moment during the afternoon, apparently for the mere courteous purpose of reminding Joe of his engagement, and of assuring him that the proper parties would be present during the evening. At the time of his call Joe was deep in his negotiations with one café proprietor, while another sat waiting his turn in a corner.

Joe wondered whether the don knew the men. It didn't matter, one way or the other, for the don was too polite to inquire what business the American Syndicate had with café proprietors, and the general aspect of the scene was one of energetic industry.

As a matter of fact, the don made some complimentary remark with regard to the American's promptness in getting his affairs under way, and Joe was at considerable pains to treat the don with that perfect courtesy which implies condescension to a man of importance, but which also tells, as plainly as possible, that every minute thus granted is really taken from exacting business duties.

The fussy little don bowed himself out with voluble apologies for his interruption, and Joe, with a certain solemn restraint, assured him that there had been no interruption, and that he should be pleased to have him remain for a time. Of course the don knew that this was a fiction, but he accepted it as the proper thing to be said by one man of affairs to another, and he went away with the profoundest sort of impression concerning Senor Barber's business energy and ability.

It came time for dinner at length, and Joe presented himself at the don's house in all the glory of evening dress. Of course he went in a carriage. He had engaged it at the hotel, ordering the charge to be entered against his account.

That expedient, however, did not prevent the necessity of dipping into his rapidly vanishing cash reserve for the customary tip to the driver, and the tip was a generous one, too.

As the vehicle approached the don's residence, the memory of the adventure that had taken place there occurred to Joe, and brought an amused smile to his face. He saw, again, the half frightened, half quizzical, but wonderfully brilliant eyes of the senorita, and he seemed to hear again that remarkable torrent of profanity which had aroused his ire against "that rascal Pedro."

"Funny how things happen," thought Joe, recalling not at all the rather romantic feature of the episode, but the fact that this had brought about his first meeting with the Porto Rican capitalist upon whose gullibility the success of the American Syndicate depended.

It was therefore with thoughts commercial, and as far as possible removed from the romantic, that Joe gave his card to the porter at Don Octavio's door. He was there to win a man, three or four of them, perhaps, and not the faintest shadow of a thought crossed his mind with regard to making any special impression upon the lady of the family.

Most dwellings of the wealthy in Spanish American cities are built upon the same pattern, and Don Octavio's house was no exception. It was constructed upon the four sides of a courtyard, called the *patio*. In the very center of the street side was an entrance so wide that a carriage could have been driven through it. One of the rooms opening upon this entrance on the ground floor was the porter's lodge, and in front of the door the porter sat throughout all the hours of the day, rolling cigarettes at a little table when he was not called upon to announce the arrival of guests.

In addition to the balcony overhanging the street there was another balcony, built upon three of the inner walls of the house, and overlooking the *patio*. A stairway led from the *patio* pavement to this balcony, the stairway itself constructed in the open air. All the living rooms of the family proper were upon the second story, the rooms on the ground floor being devoted to servants' quarters, and in some instances to stables.

Joe alighted without the entrance, and gave his card to the porter, who ceased his occupation of rolling cigarettes and struck a gong that was suspended above him. In response to this signal a servant came down the *patio* stairway.

"You are expected, Senor Barber," he said, taking the card and standing aside to indicate that Joe was to precede him up the stairs.

This Joe did, observing as he went

that the pavement of the *patio* was covered with great tubs in which grew luxuriant tropical plants in full bloom. It was one of the many evidences of wealth and refinement which marked the home of the don.

At the top of the stairs Don Octavio stood upon the balcony to receive his guest. This was a mark of especial distinction which Joe was not slow to recognize. Ordinarily, the servant would have conducted him across the balcony, and probably through a high French window into the lofty reception room.

"Charmed, charmed, Senor Barber," exclaimed the don, bowing and scrapping, and holding out both hands in welcome.

In all that he did then and thereafter, Don Octavio mingled excessive formality with an attempt at cordiality which was well calculated to manifest his high consideration of the importance of his American guest.

Joe, of course, responded in kind, and was, throughout, a dignified, well nigh impassive man of great affairs. One might have readily mistaken him for a diplomat of high rank, certainly not less than a Peace Commissioner, and it would have passed all bounds of fancy to think of him as considering for one moment the possibilities of profit in the ice cream business.

"Permit me," said the don, offering his arm.

Thus convoyed, Joe entered the reception room.

In the elegance of its furnishing and its spacious extent, this would have done justice to the home of any Fifth Avenue millionaire. The walls presented an unfamiliar appearance, in that they were almost wholly devoid of such cheerful ornaments in the way of pictures as Americans are accustomed to, but the atmosphere of splendor was more than made up by a plentiful display of gilt on cornices and pillars.

And there were long mirrors, in [illegible]h [illegible] manager of the American Syndicate could look himself over at any time and be reminded that he must keep all anxiety from showing itself on that marble face which he assumed whenever matters of critical moment were under discussion.

Joe was the last guest to arrive, and there was an ordeal of introductions to undergo. First came a formal presentation to the Senorita Sylvia, who smiled divinely as she gave him her hand in American fashion, and bade him welcome.

"I should have suffered eternal regrets, Senor Barber," she said, "if an unkind fate had decreed that I must pass my life without knowing who it was that came so gallantly to my rescue."

"And I should have regarded fate as equally unkind," Joe responded with ready gallantry, "if I had not been permitted once again to meet the heroine of that interesting adventure."

Ice cream freezers and trolley lines were buzzing together in Joe's cranium, but they did not cause such an overwhelming whirl there as entirely to prevent the formation of a distinct impression with regard to the senorita.

"She is certainly a stunner," was the unpolished form in which the impression took shape in Joe's mind.

There was but a moment's pause, when he was led to the only other lady in the company. This was a portly, good humored looking dame, whose indolent manner plainly unfitted her for the duties of a severe duenna.

"My beloved sister, the Donna Anna, Senor Barber," said the don.

"The charming interest of Don Octavio's household increases at every step," remarked the American capitalist, suavely. "Entranced at the privilege of greeting you, Donna Anna."

A faint flush crept to the puffy checks of the duenna, and into her indolent eyes there came a feeble gleam of interest. Possibly she was afflicted with vanity enough to take the American's extravagance seriously. Maybe it sim-

ply recalled what might have been said to her by the blades of her not distant youth.

At all events, she could not but glow with a semblance of pleasure, and although her response was not as frank and hearty as that of the senorita's, there was no doubting that Joe had made as favorable an impression as the circumstances demanded upon the ladies of the household.

Then there were presentations to three pompous elderly men, and one extremely pompous young man, who made up the rest of the party. There was Antonio Vasquez, introduced as one of the leading coffee growers of Porto Rico; Porfirio Hernandez, announced as the owner of an immense banana plantation; Pablo Vilamil, said to be a retired merchant.

These evidently were the friends of the don's in whom there might be aroused an interest in the trolley line and other enterprises for public improvement and private gain. The young man aforesaid was evidently not an element in the business situation, for he was introduced simply as "my dear nephew, Victor."

The "dear nephew" acknowledged the presentation with the utmost stiffness. There was a barely perceptible inclination of the head, something incomprehensible mumbled, and while he kept his hands at his sides, a message went from his dark eyes that betokened anything but a cordial welcome to the American.

Joe, not in the least nonplussed by the young man's frigidity, was as charmed to meet him as any of the others, but it seemed the part of good diplomacy to take the cue from the don, and regard Victor as of no moment, save as a worthy, if inconspicuous, member of the household.

A few minutes were spent in the exchange of complimentary remarks, incipient discussions of the peace proposals, with light touches on other easy topics, not excepting that good old stand by, the weather, and then dinner was announced.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUSINESS AND SONG.

THERE is no occasion to describe the don's dinner. It was a long, formal, and bountiful repast, just such as any gentleman of great wealth might be expected to set before distinguished guests.

Between courses the conversation ran along just such lines as it had occupied in the preliminary chat. There was never a hint of the trolley road, though occasionally one or other of the gentlemen betrayed the fact that business absorbed his attention by some remark upon the general mission of Senor Barber in Porto Rico.

Joe was well content. It appeared to him that the time was fast ripening for the winning stroke. There could be no doubt that these gentlemen had anticipated a revival of business incident to American occupation, and that in reality they were as eager to go ahead as he was.

Naturally they would be cautious, and on both sides it would be the part of good business diplomacy not to appear to hurry matters. In this lay by far the greatest danger that Joe anticipated. He *must* hurry. The ice cream situation demanded that, to say nothing of the yawning condition of his purse.

It must, therefore, be the aim of his maneuvering to bring the situation to a head with all possible speed, while appearing to be as slow and cautious about it as the most conservative investor.

At the conclusion of the dinner, the ladies and nephew Victor withdrew to the street balcony. Cigars, coffee and cognac were passed to those that remained, and the don, squaring himself in his chair, lit a cigarette and uttered a loud "Ahem!"

The others glanced from him to Joe, expectantly. The American, calmly occupied with his cigar, was to all appearances unconscious that their interest was focused upon him.

" It is a genuine pleasure, Don Octavio," he said, " to indulge in wine and tobacco upon its native soil."

" Yes, yes, doubtless," returned the don, fidgeting; " we think down here that the flavor of our native wine is excellent, and we have no question as to the quality of our cigars."

" There certainly can be none," said Joe, puffing away with the utmost content.

" Hem! Hem! Ha!" coughed the don awkwardly, " you were going to tell us something about your ideas of a street car line, I believe, Senor Barber."

" My mind shall be an open book to you, gentlemen," Joe responded, " but it is little more than a blank page. In fact, I can hardly see more than one line written across it."

" That one line," suggested the don, " might speak volumes to us."

" Well, then, you shall have it. It is simply this: There should be a trolley line between Ponce and the port."

" Are you quite decided, then, that that would be a sound investment?" asked Hernandez.

" There," answered Joe, " you step beyond the bounds of what is written on the page of my mind. I am a stranger here, and not as well qualified as you gentlemen to estimate the pecuniary advantages of the investment. I can see in it a great public utility, but further than that I am not prepared to go without more thought on it."

" Then," said Vasquez, " you would be prepared to advocate it as a public improvement?"

" Oh, yes, but I should not then care to take a personal interest in it."

" In a matter of this kind," said Vilamil, " much depends upon the first cost. Doubtless Senor Barber can give us some figures as a basis for discussion."

Of course Senor Barber could do just that, and it was the opportunity to present such figures gracefully that he had been waiting for. The discussion was thus started in earnest, and it continued for a long time.

The Porto Ricans had a great many questions to ask, and Joe answered them with promptness, if not always with definiteness. It was not altogether guess work for him. He did know something about the construction and management of trolley lines, and better than that, he knew just what concern in the United States to turn to for developing the business possibility that he foresaw.

He had no sooner observed the crying demand for better transportation between the port and the city than the name of this concern had occurred to him, and he was even then half determined to write at once to New York and get a representative of the concern to come to Ponce by the next steamer. That he had not done so was because of his more fixed determination to keep the American end of it in his own hands.

You may be very sure that Joe did not confess as much as this to his Porto Rican acquaintances. His talk seemed to them to be of a sternly practical nature, and rather that of a man who was reluctantly affording them an opportunity to make a good investment than that of one who was frantically eager to get his grip upon their purses.

Some questions were asked relative to the arrangements that could be made by Porto Ricans for sharing in the enterprise. Joe responded with an immense assumption of guardedness. It took all his self control to keep from offering them an option in the proposed company for a small sum, spot cash. Two or three times it did seem as if such an offer would have been accepted, but Joe's prudence prevailed over his crying need, and at the end of the conversation the assembled capitalists knew no more than that a scheme for a

big enterprise was afoot in which, perhaps, they might be permitted to take shares.

What the nature of the option might be, or how much it would cost them as a preliminary investment, they presumably could not guess. A little more coaxing on their part, and Joe would have made them a flat proposition, but before it had come to this point, the don arose and suggested that they had taken enough of the evening for commercial talk.

" We look upon this time of the day as our period of recreation, Senor Barber," he said, " and I cannot think of letting an evening in my house, especially your first here, pass with nothing but the details of business to occupy your mind. The mind, senor, needs refreshment, quite as much as does the body. We have catered to the body. Let us now summon the ladies, and do what we can in our modest way to give refreshment to the mind. Do you enjoy music, senor? "

" Indeed I do," Joe replied; " I am not proficient in the art, and have no real knowledge of it, but I take a healthy man's pleasure in it, and should be delighted to hear some."

" I think my daughter will favor us," and the don went to the balcony to summon the ladies and nephew Victor.

They came in at once, and Senorita Sylvia, quite like an American girl, said prettily: " Is it possible, Senor Barber, that you have been able to finish business talk so soon? "

" Not at all," replied Joe; " the talk is but just begun. We adjourn it simply for the sake of something much better."

" Oh, fie! " she exclaimed, with a toss of her head, and a sparkling glance from her dark eyes. " Anything better than business to an American? I cannot believe it."

" Sylvia, heart's darling," suggested the don, in a mildly reproving tone, " I fear Senor Barber may not understand your light hearted wit."

" Have no fear, Don Octavio," interposed Joe; " raillery like that reminds me of home, I assure you. I understand," and he turned now to the senorita, " that you may be induced to let me hear some music. I am all impatience for you to begin."

The senorita smiled coquettishly, and without any affectation of unwillingness, went to a table and took from it a gold mounted mandolin. The others seated themselves in groups about the apartment, while Sylvia remained standing near the table.

While she was tuning the instrument, Joe's glance happened to rest upon nephew Victor. That frigid young man was now a very statue of austerity. He sat stiffly in a stiff backed chair, looking at the senorita, his brows knit, and his lips compressed with an expression of solemn displeasure.

" What's the matter with him?" thought Joe. " I don't believe I could look at that girl without being warmed into a smile. I presume he has some trouble with his digestion."

Presently, the tuning being completed, the senorita played a brief prelude of chords, and, without raising her eyes from the instrument, began to sing. Familiar though he was with Spanish, Joe could not wholly understand her words. She was evidently singing a folk song in some dialect of the people. The melody, too, was as quaintly strange as the words she used.

Sufficient of the latter were clear to the American to make him certain that it was a love song she had chosen, and if he had not understood the words, the luscious, melting quality of her voice, as it rang through the quaint phrases of the air, would have told him the same. Her voice, low at the beginning, increased in volume as she progressed, and presently she raised her eyes, too, and glanced towards Victor.

On the instant, Joe, who was watching her intently, observed a change in her expression. A slight flush deepened the color upon her cheeks, and a

gleam of infinite mischief shot from her eyes, which she turned forthwith full upon the American.

It was so unmistakably the act of a finished coquette, and it told so clearly the story of nephew Victor's real relations to the household, that Joe could not for the life of him repress an answering twinkle of intelligence and amusement in his own eyes. His lips twitched, too, but he kept the smile back, although it seemed certain that Senorita Sylvia observed the movement.

From then until the end of her song she directed her melody straight at the American, and Joe felt hugely tickled to think that the insanely jealous Victor, glum and irresponsive in his corner, was imagining that the words also were directed that way.

So at the end, Joe, stirred somewhat by the same spirit of mischief that seemed to animate the senorita, applauded heartily, and, his tongue running over with compliments, asked for another song. The senorita flashed him a glance that seemed like a challenge, almost, and after a little hesitation, sang again.

This time it was in pure Spanish, and again a song of love, although the words were neither good literature nor particularly good sense. It would have taken a man of extremely jealous nature to infuse a definite meaning into the lines, but there was hardly any doubt that Victor was equal to it, for the scowl on his face deepened, and he was actually so disturbed as to fidget restlessly in his chair.

Joe could not help enjoying the situation, but with business ever uppermost in his mind, he feared to provoke the slightest atmosphere of discord in the don's household. Accordingly he was rather chary of commendation after the second song, and so far as he could, he avoided the lightning-like glances that the senorita shot at him from time to time.

T mendation that Joe reserved was amply given by the elder gentlemen, with the result that there was more music. The Donna Anna herself sang for them, and eventually the austere Victor somewhat ungraciously yielded to the senorita's pleadings and joined the ladies in a trio.

And so at length the party broke up with numerous expressions of good will and assurances of enjoyment.

Joe went to his hotel with the problem relative to meeting payments for ice cream freezers still unsettled; and if there was something else unsettled with respect to Joseph A. Barber, the manager of the American Syndicate was wholly unconscious of it, although he hummed and whistled such fragments of the Senorita Sylvia's songs as clung to his memory.

CHAPTER IX.

GOSSIP.

SOMETHING like a revulsion of feeling affected Joe next morning. His breakfast was not palatable, the atmosphere seemed depressing; the Porto Rico buildings and streets looked squalid and uninteresting.

This was not right, and Joe knew it. He wondered if he were coming down with fever. That was altogether unlikely, for he was then, as always, in a condition of aggressive good health. Moreover, there were his compatriots, the soldiers, whom he saw about him every day and at every turn.

They were men who had rushed from peaceful pursuits to the hardships and the privations of military life, and, quite unlike their comrades in the Cuban army of invasion, they were almost wholly free from sickness. It was hot in Ponce, but still, no hotter than many a day in New York. No, this feeling of discontent could not be attributed to the weather.

The manager of the syndicate tried to shake off his depression as he went to his office, but without success. His

secretary, who seemed to be a very model of faithfulness, was there ahead of him.

Joe bade him good morning and asked if there were any mail, quite as if he had been established in business for a year, and were in the habit of receiving a dozen letters a day. Of course there was no mail, and after fussing over the papers on his desk for a moment, Joe sought the seclusion of the back room. In that safe solitude, he asked himself with unreserved frankness why he was burdening himself with all these fearful business risks.

"What are you doing it for, Joe?" was his silent question. "Are you taking the chances of a terrific fall, simply because you have become a positive glutton as regards money? What will the successful overreaching of these ice cream dealers amount to? Money, of course, but is that enough? What is money for?"

Preliminary to an answer to this question, Joe gave himself a raking comparison with other young men who had started upon the struggle of life at the same time he did.

Hardly one could he recall who was not animated by a desire for something more than the mere possession of wealth. One or two of them had artistic tastes to subserve. Others secretly nourished ambitions for political preferment which they believed would be attained more readily from the vantage ground of material possessions than without them.

Some of the fellows had acquired a college education at the expense of indebtedness which they were honorably bound to discharge as soon as possible.

It was in this order that Joe thought of the reasons that incited his former companions to business activity. That is, it was an inverse order relative to the importance of the incentive. For last in the list, as Joe thought it over, came the most powerful incentive of all, the desire to be established in a comfortable home.

"That's it," said Joe to himself sternly, after he had dodged the issue for several minutes, "nine out of ten of the fellows were engaged to be married, or if they hadn't got so far as an engagement, they wanted to be, which is much the same thing."

Then across his memory came the vague visions he had himself once cherished as to what his home should be.

It was nothing short of a palace; in fact, very early in his career Joe had recognized that the surroundings that he wanted for himself were so extravagantly luxurious as to be substantially out of reach, even to his hopeful imagination. The contentment of a cottage had never occurred to him as a possibility, and what he must have in his home was so far beyond the bounds of reasonable expectations that he had never felt the influence of such a consummation upon his endeavors.

"What should I want of a home, any way?" he asked himself, with stubborn unwillingness to admit that a new element was knocking at the door of his life. "Isn't the best that a civilized hotel can offer good enough for me? With the money that I expect to make, can't I get membership in the best appointed clubs? What is money for, then? Why! for the power that it gives."

For a moment that answer satisfied him, and he felt a little glow of energy as an indication that he was triumphing over his depression. Then, shut his eyes to it though he would, there came before him a vision of lustrous eyes flashing messages of mischievous import, and across his stubborn dreams of wealth there floated the strains of a quaint song.

What had become of the power of this back room to restore his equanimity? Was it impossible for him to keep his mind set upon the problems he had undertaken?

Of course it was not. Mechanically his hand sought his cigar case, and, as was his habit when meeting a stagger-

ing emergency in the presence of some business adversary, he put his cigar between his teeth, lit it, and stalked into the main office.

"Mike," he said savagely.

"Si, senor?" responded the secretary, looking up with an air of expectant docility.

Joe thrust his hands into his trousers' pocket, stood before his wondering secretary, and addressed him in English:

"Mike," he said, "I never came so near to becoming an idiot in my life. It's a most extraordinary situation, Mike, and if you are wise you will take an example of your employer, and never get into anything like it. As you value your success in life, Mike, my boy, keep your eyes open when business men are around, and shut them as tight as an oyster when anybody else is looking at you, and, Mike, one other thing, eschew music. You hear me? It's a dangerous article. If you want to succeed in business, you keep as far away from music as you can. If you will let yourself be dragged into society, Mike, stuff your ears with cotton. Understand?"

"Si, senor," answered Mike, uncomfortably.

There was a look something like fear in his eyes, and he shifted uneasily in his chair, as if he were inclined to run away.

Joe laughed.

"It's all right, my friend," he said, reverting to Spanish, "I was simply easing my mind a bit. I want you to tell me something."

"Si, senor," and this time there was unmistakable relief in the secretary's tone.

"Aren't you related to Don Octavio?" asked Joe abruptly.

The secretary's face flushed and his look of embarrassment returned.

"Why, it's all right if you are," exclaimed Joe. "I'm glad of it. I only asked out of curiosity. How close is the relationship, any way?"

"I am second cousin to the don," was the stammering reply.

"Well, that's not close enough to count very much, I should think, but still, it puts you in touch with the family, I suppose."

"My mother and I are invited to dine there once a year," said Mike, in a low tone.

"Humph!" muttered Joe, looking sharply at his secretary, who cast his eyes down.

Joe's curiosity was aroused, but he thought it best not to pursue his inquiry in that direction any further at the present. It amused him a little that the don should have foisted a relative upon him, and he wondered if it were a deliberate bit of Spanish shrewdness. It mattered little whether it was or not, for Joe felt not only confident that he would be equal to any exigency arising from such a situation, but that, with his secretary's ignorance of English, it would be mere child's play to keep the fatal secrets of the syndicate where they belonged.

"I spent last evening there," went on Joe, "and met a young man whose name was Victor something."

"I know him," said the secretary. "He has the same family name as Don Octavio. He is the affianced husband of Senorita Sylvia."

"That means that he is engaged to be married to her, doesn't it?"

"Certainly, senor."

"Is it a love match?"

"How should I know, senor?" and the secretary looked his mild astonishment at the question. "Such matters are arranged by the parents in Porto Rico, you know."

"I had forgotten it," said Joe dryly. "Now, Mike," and he suddenly became the brisk business man again, "I have been wasting valuable time gossiping. We must get to work."

"Si, senor," said the secretary, rising and reaching for his hat.

"That's right," observed Joe, approvingly. "I'll tell you what I want

you to do. I want you to find somebody among your acquaintances in Porto Rico who is honest, and would like to get into business. I'm going to put a lot of tables in that shop that I have hired on the Plaza, and I am going to make ice cream there, or have it made, to beat the band. Probably you don't know what that means, but it doesn't matter. I am going to be the only ice cream dealer in Ponce after one week from today. This you will keep to yourself, Mike, for I don't propose that anybody shall know that I am back of the business if I can help it. It may not be possible to keep it a secret, but you and I won't let it out."

"I understand, senor."

"I hope you do. I'd put you in charge of that shop, except that I think I shall want you for more important uses. Do you suppose that you can find somebody who can be trusted to take in the money and account for it honestly?"

An intensely eager expression came upon the secretary's face.

"Senor Barber," he stammered, "if I might dare to suggest that——"

"Why, go ahead, my boy; that's just what I want you to do," exclaimed Joe.

"My mother, senor."

"Your mother?"

"Yes, senor; we are very poor. I do not quite know how to tell you, but it would be a godsend to us, if you could let my mother take charge of the establishment. It is not exactly a woman's work, I suppose, and some people in Ponce might think it very strange, but it would be honest employment, and the customers, I suppose, would be mainly American soldiers, so that my mother would be free from any humiliation. She would slave for you, senor, if you would but give her the chance, or let me leave the office and undertake the management with her."

The young man spoke in a subdued tone, and his voice quivered with earnestness.

"See here, Mike," said Joe, laying his hand kindly on the secretary's shoulder, "I don't want to pry into your domestic affairs, and you need not tell me anything you don't want to, but at the same time, I shall feel greatly obliged if you will let me know a little more about the situation. You see, it's a bit hard for me to understand how a relative of the wealthy Don Octavio——"

"Yes," interrupted the secretary, "that is what makes it so hard. The don is rich, and we have always been poor. Moreover, my father died leaving heavy debts that my mother has found it hard to liquidate. We both feel bound to meet those obligations, senor, and hence we will make any sacrifices within reason. The don is—very stern to us. I do not mean to say that he is unfair, or cruel, but he did not approve of my father's course in business, and so even if we were minded to accept help from Don Octavio, we could not get it, and just now, senor, it is a question with us whether we can retain our little home. This very day, in fact—but I am afraid I should not tell you these dismal things about ourselves. You cannot be interested in them."

"You go right on," said Joe, decisively, "I am intensely interested."

"I was about to say, then," continued the secretary, "that this very day, unless we can make a small payment to our landlord, we shall be evicted."

There was such manifest sincerity and sorrow in the young man's tone and manner that Joe was quite disturbed. Instinctively his hand sought his pocket, where he felt the remnants of his cash capital.

"How much do you need?" he asked.

"Twenty five *pesetas* would do," answered the secretary, "and we have absolutely no resource in view until the first of the month, when my wages will be forthcoming."

"Great Scott!" thought Joe, "I

hope they will be. Twenty five *pesetas* means five dollars."

Slowly he withdrew his hand from his pocket, bringing with it the entire available cash of the American Syndicate. From it he counted out twenty five *pesetas*, handed the amount to his secretary, and said: "Permit me to make you an advance payment upon your salary."

CHAPTER X.

A FINANCIAL CRISIS.

THE secretary received the proffered money in his hand and held it there for a moment motionless, while his eyes sought the floor, and his expression and attitude indicated extreme embarrassment. Joe watched him with some curiosity, for the young fellow's display of emotion seemed altogether disproportionate to the situation.

"His mother's affairs must have been in a pretty bad way," thought Joe; "he seems to be perfectly paralyzed now that relief has come."

"Senor Barber," said the secretary, presently, "will you believe me when I tell you that I did not dream of your coming to my help; that I did not explain our situation to you with any idea of getting an advance?"

"Believe you? Of course I will," exclaimed Joe, "why shouldn't I?"

The secretary gave a glance of hasty fright at his employer, and his dark face became crimson.

"But," he stammered, "I have not yet earned this money."

"You've come near enough to it, Mike," responded Joe, good humoredly, "and I can assure you that no American employee would feel the slightest hesitancy about getting an advance on his salary at any time when he might need the money for any purpose whatever."

"I thank you, then, senor, and you shall never have occasion to regret your kindness."

"I don't expect I shall so far as you are concerned, Mike," said Joe, with a mental reservation concerning that matter of regret as he recalled how insignificant was the balance of cash he possessed, and how every hope of success hung upon replenishing his supply generously within the next day or two.

The employer was still disposed to wonder somewhat at the excessive emotion displayed by the secretary, but it was characteristic of Joe that he speedily gave up speculation on an unprofitable topic like that, and bent his energetic thoughts to speculation of a more material nature.

"Mike," he said, "I shall send you out presently on some business, and when you go you may take time to give that sweetener to your landlord. If he makes any more trouble, send him to me. I will see that your mother has a roof over her head, anyhow. Now, as to business. The owner of the shop which I have hired has agreed to have it cleaned out and ready for use within a few days. I want you to keep an eye on him, and see that he does not delay the operation. Meantime, that there may be no delay on our own part in getting the business started, I must negotiate for chairs and tables, and the other things that go with an outfit for selling ice cream. You will probably be able to help me in this by reason of your acquaintance——"

Joe wheeled about sharply, for there was a knock at the door, and as it was opening, he rather expected to see Don Octavio, or, possibly, some other of the capitalists whom he had met the previous evening.

It was not one of those mighty citizens of Ponce, but the porter of the American Hotel.

"Pardon, your excellency," said the porter, advancing with some embarrassment, "but I heard you making inquiries about the boats to St. Thomas yesterday."

"Yes," responded Joe, "and I learned that one is to sail day after to-

morrow. Anything wrong? Has the sailing been delayed?"

"Not that, your excellency, or I should not have ventured to intrude, for you see if the sailing had been delayed you would have learned it in ample time at the hotel——"

"Of course," interrupted Joe, who speedily got out of patience with the roundabout way in which men of Spanish blood approached the point, "you need never hesitate to bring me information that you think will be worth while. Now, what is it?"

"The boat," replied the porter, "is going to sail tomorrow noon, one day ahead of the expected time."

"Well, that is serious!" exclaimed Joe. "How did it happen? But I suppose you don't know anything about that."

"Well, sir, I heard some gentlemen talking with the agent of the boat. They were business men of Ponce who seemed to be anxious to get to St. Thomas in a great hurry in order to purchase supplies of one kind or another for their improving business."

"Any ice cream dealers among them?" asked Joe.

The porter scratched his head.

"I believe so," he answered. "There were——" and then he proceeded to name nearly every caterer in Ponce with whom Joe had made a contract for the purchase of freezers.

"Your information is very useful to me, my man," he said, at the same time handing the fellow a *peseta*.

The porter touched his cap and departed, and Joe, throwing himself into his swinging chair at the desk, relighted the cigar that had gone out during his conversation with the secretary.

"I see how it is," he reflected; "the caterers are suspicious of me, and no wonder, for I have given them a most extraordinary bargain. They expect to be held to the terms of the contract, and they don't mean to lose a day's business. So they are going to St. Thomas to buy freezers and get them delivered here before they have to turn their present stock over to me. It isn't likely that they will succeed in buying anything in St. Thomas, for Seeborg & Company will wait for me, but if I have no cash to make a deposit on the bill, or even to pay my fare to St. Thomas and back, I don't see how I am to checkmate them. Of course I shall have to have some money twenty four hours sooner than I had expected to have any need of it, and of course I shall get it. Mike!"

"Si, senor."

Whatever Joe was about to say to his secretary must be guessed, for before he spoke the outer door opened, and in came a telegraph messenger. He brought a despatch from Seeborg & Company which conveyed in the briefest possible terms the acceptance by that concern of Joe's order.

"All right," thought Joe, "that makes me safe so far as the local caterers are concerned. The next problem will be the raising of money, and to that I must devote my undivided attention."

Thereupon, he gave his secretary instructions to make arrangements for the purchase of an outfit for the new café.

"Make no arrangements at exorbitant prices, Mike," he said, "and take with you a supply of the syndicate cards. If you find it is necessary, I will give you a letter authorizing you to deal in my name."

"You have not told me," suggested the secretary, "how many of these various articles you wish me to purchase."

"No, for I was intending to go with you to the shop and take measurements to see how many tables it will accommodate. You'll have to do that yourself, Mike. Go up there and make a written memorandum of how many tables and chairs will be required, and how many dishes and other articles of that sort. There'll have to be arrangements for a wash room, I suppose, if there is not one already. Get back here

as soon as you can with your memorandum, and then I will give you a letter that will enable you to talk with the furniture dealers.

"It's a pity," thought Joe, as he walked away, "that I have to leave the office closed during any hour of the business day, but I have got to find Don Octavio at once, and rig a derrick on him which shall lift me up and set me down in St. Thomas with money enough at least to put on the proper front with Seeborg & Company. The promotion of Porto Rico's business interests and the salvation of the American Syndicate depends at this moment upon ice cream. At the risk of trolley lines and all other enterprises, the monopoly in ice cream must be established."

He went up to the don's house, thinking all the way. Arrived there, he was informed by the porter that Don Octavio was not at home. The functionary at the entrance did not know where the don had gone, or when he would return.

Too disturbed by this information even to inquire for the ladies of the household, Joe turned about and went back to his office. Of course nothing could make him aware of it at that time, but the fact was, as he learned much later, that he passed within a few feet of Don Octavio, both on his way to that gentleman's house and on the return from it.

The slight distance that separated them was effectively magnified by a house wall, for early that morning the don had gone to the home of his friend Hernandez, to confer with him and the other capitalists whom he had introduced to Joe. They had their heads together over the American's ideas and propositions all through the forenoon.

The don had chosen his possible partners well. Every one of them, like himself, had foreseen a great revival in business through the advent of the Americans, and each one of them was intensely eager to profit personally out of the business boom that seemed certain to be inaugurated. To that extent, then, Joe had estimated them correctly, and could count himself fortunate in having come in contact so early with men who were eager to enter into new enterprises, but they were not the simple minded, untrained men of affairs that he might have hoped to meet.

They had heard much about American energy and enterprise, but they had also heard of American shrewdness. Especially since the beginning of the war had their journals been filled with accounts of Americans that gave to the people of the States anything but a highly moral character. Among those who cherished any lingering sympathy for the Spanish régime, it was held as a cardinal doctrine that all Americans are unscrupulous in business. Hence, the atmosphere of caution which Joe had noticed in the conversation of these men.

This came back with oppressive force to his memory during the several hours that elapsed between the time when he made his useless call at the don's house and the middle of the afternoon. He spent the time mainly at his office, hoping that the don would call.

Nobody came, except his secretary and some of the retail dealers with whom it was possible that he might wish to make bargains for furnishing his new café. Before them he kept a placid countenance and a general manner of financial ease, and the afternoon was not old before he had materially increased his obligations by contracting for the purchase of such articles as were required for the café outfit.

The last bargain of this kind had been made, and Joe was beginning to feel an uncomfortable desperation. This would not do at all, for only with a ground work of perfect self confidence could he venture to "strike" the don for a cash advance.

That he must do when it came evening, and in order to overcome his threatened apprehension, he had re-

course first to a brief season in the back room, and then to a walk. He had hardly stepped upon the east side of the Plaza Dominica when he saw Don Octavio upon the west side.

A cigar quickly found itself between Joe's teeth as he crossed the Plaza with a fine semblance of leisure, and confronted the don.

"Ah," cried the latter, with eagerness, "a thousand pardons, senor. I had intended to call on you today, but affairs!—affairs! You know, Senor Barber, how they press upon a busy man, and here you come with a fresh lot of them to torment us."

"I presume there is some torment about it," Joe responded, "and I happen to be in a position just now where I can relieve you from any further anxiety, as far as the business of the syndicate is concerned."

"Why, how is that? I do not understand you," cried the don, with an accent of apprehensive surprise.

"I am obliged to go to St. Thomas on business tomorrow morning," replied Joe, "and while I am there I shall have to take advantage of the situation to bring that matter of the proposed trolley line to a head. Cable communication from St. Thomas, you know, is in better shape than it is here."

The don's jaw fell.

"I don't suppose I understand yet," he said, "but you have business connections, or an agency, in St. Thomas?"

"The syndicate has some dealings in St. Thomas," responded Joe, with off hand veracity, as he thought of Seeborg's acceptance of his order, "but the main point is the fact that cable communication with New York is better established there than here."

"Ah, yes, yes. Hem! ha!" murmured the don, who was altogether too disturbed by Joe's nonchalance to recall that for ordinary purposes cable communication between Ponce and New York was then in fair working order. "You said something about the proposed trolley line. I understood that you would not seek to interest others than myself and my friends in the matter——"

Joe raised his hand in a deprecatory gesture.

"I have kept my word," he said gravely, "but that cannot prevent others from speaking to me about it. The need for a trolley line, you see, is manifest to any observer. It would be a wonder if I should be the only one to think of it."

The don's face was positively pale.

"I am sorry to intrude the affair upon such a busy man, Don Octavio," Joe continued, "but, as I was saying, you can drop the syndicate's matters at once if you choose to do so. On the other hand, if you and your friends wish to acquire rights in the prospective street car company, it would be better to do so at once."

"By the payment of forfeit money?" asked the don.

"Yes, some nominal sum to assure the syndicate that you and your friends will eventually take some considerable portion of the shares."

"How much should you suggest as the forfeit?"

"Oh," answered Joe indifferently, "say five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars, senor!" exclaimed the don, aghast.

Joe saw that he had made a mistake. The amount suggested was far in excess of what the don and his friends would consider proper. It was also far in excess of what Joe absolutely needed for the immediate emergency.

"Did I say dollars?" asked Joe, with a perfectly beautiful expression of surprise and annoyance. "It was the habit of speech, Don Octavio. I am so accustomed to thinking of a dollar as the unit of commercial transactions, that the word slipped off my tongue before I realized it. Of course I meant to say *pesetas*."

The sweet significance of this must be plain to every reader who is a ready

reckoner. It takes five pesetas to make a dollar, and Joe's bland acknowledgment of error in the use of words was in effect a reduction of his demand from five thousand dollars to one thousand dollars.

Even at that he had a moment of terrible dread, lest the don had been scared so completely by the announcement of the larger amount that he would refuse to supply the lesser.

CHAPTER XI.

SEEBORG & CO.

DON OCTAVIO fairly bubbled over with apologies. He would not have the American understand that he and his friends underestimated the importance of the street car scheme, or that they had any reluctance about intrusting their interests to a gentleman who had so recently come to their notice, but in their own discussion of the affair, they had themselves felt that a forfeit might reasonably be demanded to the extent of five thousand *pesetas;* this in view of the figures that Joe himself had given them on the evening previous.

" Of course you will understand, Senor Barber," the don rattled on, and for once Joe was perfectly content to have him make a long speech, " when it comes to the point of investing in actual shares of the company you will not find me and my friends slow in producing our money. As great a sum as twenty five thousand *pesetas* simply as a forfeit, however, and to be produced so suddenly, you must admit would be something of a staggerer. I can readily understand how your tongue would slip on such a matter, and as to five thousand *pesetas*, I have no idea that the thing will be difficult. Of course I do not wish to pledge myself upon such a thing without consulting my friends, for naturally it is not the amount, but the principle that concerns me. If I were to take five thousand *pesetas* out of my pocket at this moment, Senor Barber, and hand them to you, you would thereby consider all of us pledged to your undertaking, would you not? "

" Not necessarily," answered Joe, guardedly. " I should have no objections to considering you as the only Porto Rican investor in the enterprise, if you cared personally to assume so large a share of the capital stock."

The don shook his head decidedly.

" I cannot undertake so much alone, senor. I must be guided somewhat by friends who have been lifelong business associates, and moreover, I feel in honor bound to give them a share in the opportunity that has been presented to me."

" That high sense of honor speaks well for the stability of the undertaking," said Joe, grandly.

" Thank you, Senor Barber. You will never find your estimate of Porto Rican honor too low. I will lay this matter before my friends at once, and let you know about it. I suppose it will be necessary to allow some time for the drawing up of papers, will it not? "

" Yes, and I should really like to get it off my mind this evening, if I could," suggested Joe.

" That may not be impossible. Shall we find you at your hotel after dinner? "

Joe answered " Yes," and the two parted, with the customary expressions of mutual high consideration.

It would have pleased the American infinitely if the nervous don had actually presented him then and there with five thousand *pesetas*. But nevertheless, Joe did not suffer much from apprehension.

The time dragged slowly, but he put down a good dinner when that meal was due, and solaced himself with much tobacco, until about nine o'clock, when the don and his friends drove up in state. An adjournment was promptly taken to the syndicate office, where, by the light of candles borrowed from the

porter, the forfeiture paper was drawn up.

It is not necessary to state its provisions in detail. The Porto Ricans had a lawyer along to see that its terms were drawn exactly. In general it provided that in the event of a company being organized under the auspices of the American Syndicate to construct and operate a street car line between Ponce and the port, the four Porto Rican signatories pledged themselves to take and pay for, at par, a definite volume of stock; and the American signatory pledged himself to organize the company, convey to the Porto Ricans their shares of stock, and in the event of his failure to organize the company, to return to them the five thousand *pesetas*, the receipt of which he acknowledged, and which they paid in to secure their future interests.

It took a lot of legal verbiage to set forth this, and other features of the bargain. But all was adjusted at last to the satisfaction of the various parties to the agreement. Nothing remained then but to attach the necessary signatures and pay over the money.

That formality was postponed until the next forenoon, on the alleged ground that the four gentlemen did not happen to have as much as five thousand *pesetas* in cash about them. It is more than likely that that was the truth, but Joe nevertheless suffered a little fear, lest the postponement be due to a desire on their part to think the matter over further, for until their signatures were attached to the document, they were not in any way bound by it.

All periods of anxiety have an end sooner or later, of one kind or another, and so it may be stated, without further account of Joe's worriment, that at ten o'clock the next forenoon the Porto Rican capitalists and their attorney marched solemnly into the office of the American Syndicate, and deposited there the first real capital that that concern had known, aside from its manager's boundless audacity.

At that, the five thousand *pesetas* would not come anywhere near meeting the numerous obligations that Joe had incurred, and some scrupulous persons might affirm that no penny of it could properly be used by the manager of the syndicate for his immediate necessities. Both these considerations—that is, the actual inadequacy of the cash as compared with his needs, and the doubtful morality of using it as he intended to, occurred to Joe, but he gave as little attention to one as to the other.

With a thousand dollars in money in his pockets he felt equal to meeting any possible emergency that might arise, and therefore gave himself no doubt that he would replace it by commercial gains long before the signers of the forfeiture paper could have any right to demand it.

After the signing of the document there was an episode that struck Joe as extremely homelike. Pablo Vilamil, the retired merchant, suggested that the success of the new enterprise be assured by a libation to Bacchus.

He didn't put it just that way, and neither did he put it in the off hand American fashion, but the substance of it was the same from either the classical or the modern point of view, and the party adjourned to Joe's hotel, where the landlord's heart was gladdened by an order for small bottles.

The wine was drunk with much ceremony, and through the dignified felicitations and compliments of the Porto Ricans, Joe had no difficulty in distinguishing the expression of their sincere satisfaction with the turn affairs had taken. It gleamed in their eyes, it vibrated in the tones of their voices, it fairly shook from their grandiloquent gestures.

They had thought the thing over in their own way; had decided to make the plunge, and having made it, every man of them felt that his fortune was in a way to be magnified.

" Well, gentlemen," said Joe at last,

"I must be off, or lose the boat to St. Thomas. You may rest assured that I shall always feel a special interest in the fortunes of the gentlemen who have been first to utilize the services of the syndicate in Porto Rican business."

He meant every word of it. His heart actually warmed for these weazened old fellows who had thus come to his rescue at a moment when his whole career could not be in a more critical situation, and there was no doubt but that they believed him, and as it was apparent that they did not dream how slender a reed they leaned upon, the atmosphere was simply surcharged with mutual satisfaction.

Joe was the last passenger on the boat. The signing of the paper, the passing of the money, and the pouring out of the libation, had taken so much time that it nearly cost him his journey.

The first persons he saw on going on board were five of the Ponce café proprietors between whom and himself contracts had passed for the purchase of ice cream freezers. He couldn't well help seeing them, for they were gathered at the rail near the gangway looking for him.

They, too, had had discussions of the American's business operations, and being not utterly devoid of shrewdness, had come to the manifest conclusion with regard to it, namely, that he intended, if possible, to corner the market. They could see no other way by which he could come out of his extraordinary venture profitably, and so they hoped to get ahead of him in going to St. Thomas for the purpose of replenishing their stock.

As the time for the departure of the boat drew near, they had hoped that the American had not heard of the change in the schedule, and they had gathered at the rail simply out of eagerness to learn whether he was to make the journey or not.

These men were still very much in the dark as to Joe's scheme, in spite of having got so far as to guess his design to make a corner. How he could possibly beat them they could not imagine, but they were not over confident of success.

They, too, had heard about American shrewdness and cleverness in business matters, and they were fearful of the outcome.

Joe greeted them all pleasantly, but made no effort to get into conversation with them. Nevertheless, before the few hours' journey was concluded, he learned that these five represented all the caterers in Ponce with whom he had had transactions.

As more than one had often been in his office at the same time to sign the contracts, the news of what the American was doing had gone abroad among them, and by the exercise of ordinary business sense, they had clubbed together to send a few of their number to make purchases for all, and thus economize on transportation expenses.

The boat arrived in St. Thomas before the close of the business day. The Ponce caterers gathered again in a bunch at the rail, eager to get off first.

Joe watched them with no little amusement. He made no effort to disembark early, but managed simply to keep his men in view as they went away from the wharf. He knew that they would go direct to Seeborg & Company's, and that, therefore, he could have no better guide than they would constitute.

When presently he saw them entering a large storehouse on the principal street, he turned aside, and allowed several minutes to pass before he himself sauntered up to the place. The men from Ponce were talking excitedly in the doorway.

"None to be had!" he heard them saying.

With a careless nod he passed them, and went inside.

They seemed inclined to speak to him, and when he gave them little opportunity to do so, they followed him into the office. There Joe presented

his card to the first person who met him, and immediately an old man, with a very disturbed look upon his face, came forward.

"You have come just in time, Mr. Barber," said this man, who was Seeborg, the head of the house, "if you want us to fill your order."

"I believe I have your acceptance of my order," coldly answered Joe.

"Yes, but we did not understand the situation. Here are old customers of ours anxious to buy, and we cannot supply them. Naturally that should enable us to raise the price on freezers, to say nothing of the fact that we don't fancy putting off regular customers for an unknown concern."

"Has this man," excitedly put in one of the Ponce caterers, "been buying up all the freezers in St. Thomas?"

"He has control of the market," began Seeborg, when Joe interrupted sharply:

"I decline to discuss my business in the presence of these gentlemen. I shall hold you to the terms of your agreement, sir. What they may think, or do, is no concern of mine."

(To be continued.)

THE THIRTEENTH PENNY.

BY JEROME CASE BULL.

A homely romance of a miser, a street boy, and some particularly toothsome ginger cookies, the whole savoring of the Christmas season.

HE was an old man, dirty and ragged and gray. He sat at the foot of a flight of stone steps that led up into a dark and poor tenement on a smoky back street of the city. He was counting the pennies he had made that day from the sale of shoe strings, but he was not satisfied with the result; he made his returns only thirteen cents; and so over and over again from the palm of one dirty hand into the dirty palm of the other, penny by penny, he counted his money.

Thirteen was an unlucky number; he could not put that amount away into the bag with his other savings; what was he to do?

Near him stood a little street boy, ragged and lame. The lad had been watching the old man with wonder in his eyes at the display of thirteen cents, and now, as the man turned and looked up from his earnings, the boy's eyes met his. There was a frank smile on the lad's face and for once there crept into the old man's breast a feeling of fellowship with the world. He took a penny from his store and held it out to the boy.

The lad's face was thin and there was a sadness about the eyes and a drawn expression about the mouth that told plainly of a hard battle with the world; still, as the lad took the proffered money, his face brightened and into his eyes came a look of gratitude.

"Thank you, sir," he said, "you can get two ginger cakes for a cent at Aunty McGinn's at the corner. I'll buy a couple and give you one," and he hobbled away, whistling.

The old beggar sat still on the stone steps and looked after him. Why did the boy smile, he wondered, and why did he want to spend the first cent he had for cakes?

The thought exasperated the old man and he shut his fingers tightly over the coppers in his hand and put them deep into his pocket. Then he got up. He was all bent over with age and poverty and when he moved it caused him pain.

At the corner of the street he met the

lame boy. The lad had made his purchase of hot cookies and as he came toward the old man he held one of the cakes out to him.

"These cakes is right out of the oven, old man," he said; "don't you want one? They're bully!"

The cookies were indeed right from the tins. The spicy odor of the warm ginger of which they were made was irresistible, and as the boy broke one of the cakes and began to eat it the old man succumbed to the tempting scent.

It had been many a long year since the old peddler had tasted a ginger cookie.

"You might give me just a bit of a taste of the cake," he said, looking down at the boy.

"Oh, take a whole one; you bought 'em, you know," replied the lad. "Just taste it. It's bully, ain't it?"

The old man was almost afraid to break the warm cake. It smelt good and was soft as he handled it; but when he carried it to his mouth and bit a large piece from it the expression of his face made the lame boy laugh.

"Ain't it bully?" he asked. "Didn't think it was so good, did you? I tole you it was good, didn't I? Get two for a cent."

The old man had followed his first mouthful with the remainder of the cookie and just now his mouth was too full to speak. He could only say "u-u-gh." But in a second he answered the boy by shoving his hand deep into his pocket and then by giving him five of the pennies he brought therefrom.

The lad needed no instructions as to how the wealth was to be invested; he simply shouted: "All for cookies?" and hobbled away toward the corner. The old man shook his head to mean yes.

The lad was back in a minute and in his hand a paper bag of cookies.

"Better wait until we get to your house before we eat these, hadn't we, old man?" he asked as he came up, out of breath. "My! don't they smell good?" he added, holding the bag up to the old man's face.

The old man sniffed them and grunted a reply and the two hurried on along the street.

It was night now and dark and misty. There was an uncertain light in the street that made the tall buildings look ghostly. The lamplight at the corner behind them was only a blur. Before them the street was almost black.

"Where do you live, any way?" the boy asked when they had gone some distance without a turn.

But just then the old man stepped into a side alley and in a minute more was going up a rickety pair of steps into a tumble down old shanty.

"I'm glad we're getting there," said the boy, "'cause these cakes is getting cold, and they're better when they're hot."

The glow of an electric lamp somewhere in the neighborhood shone into the room they entered and fell in a white space of light across the floor. There was an old table and a couple of rickety chairs in the light and over in a corner, where it was dark, there was an old mattress spread over with a dirty blanket.

The boy hobbled to one of the chairs and sat down before the table. He made no comments on the room—he was used to its style of furnishing. As he untwisted the bag of cookies he remarked that a little water wouldn't go bad with the cakes; but the old man shook his head negatively. He had water in his room, he told the boy, only when it rained; he drank at the fountain by the post office and he washed his hands in the trough at the corner.

"Well, you is poor," said the boy, looking at his aged companion, "I didn't think any one was so poor as they couldn't have water to drink; but never mind," he went on happily, "these cookies is good any way you takes them."

The old man sat down opposite the lad at the table and began to munch the cakes. He ate greedily as though he were half starved. He was devouring a sixth cake when the boy spoke to him.

"I ain't had so many cakes, all at once that is, since last Christmas. Seems kinder like Christmas any way, don't it? 'Specially to have so many cakes all at once." He looked up into the old peddler's face as though expecting a reply. "'Tain't though, is it?" he asked doubtfully; "'tain't Christmas, I mean? Cause Aunty McGinn ain't said nothin' about it to me and she usually don't forget Christmas fer us fellers as hasn't any home much."

The old peddler started. It might have been that he had been dreaming and awoke suddenly, or that the cakes had made him sick. He leaned across the table and stared at the boy almost wildly.

"What did you say?" he asked loudly, excitedly.

"'At Aunty McGinn usually remembered Christmas fer us fellers. 'S'pose you know who Aunty McGinn is, don't you? Everybody knows her. Mostly we call her just 'Aunty' except when we wants to be werry polite and then we says Mrs. Jerry McGinn. Really don't you know her, old man?" the boy asked again.

But the old man shook his head and looked vacantly up into the flickering electric rays that came in at the broken window.

"Well, you just *ought* to know her," the boy went on, enlivened now with a spirit of loyalty to the "aunty" who remembered all the "fellers" at Christmas; "she's just like a mother to us all that never had no mothers to speak of; and if you ever wanted any sewin' done she'd do it for you in a minute, willin'. She sewed the patch under my arm to keep the crutch from wearin' when I came from the hospital; and things to eat! Why, say, you just ought to take a real dinner with her some time. I don't know how much I owes her for cookies. She says 'Oh, you pays when you gets to be a million heir.' I think"—and the lame boy hesitated as he said the words and a tremble came into his voice—"she kind of likes me somehow, 'cause she tole me once she used to have a little lame boy herself—and he died."

For a minute all was very still in the attic. The man and the boy both looked down and neither spoke. Gradually there crept into the stillness of the room the sound of sobbing and at it the lame boy looked up.

The old man's head had dropped over on his arms, spread out upon the table. He was crying.

"What's the matter, old man?" the boy whispered.

There was no answer.

The lad got up and crept around the table and put his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"What's the matter, old man?" he asked again, tenderly.

Still there was no answer; only the sound of the old man's sobbing. But pretty soon the old peddler commenced to mutter to himself. The boy stood by wondering what had come over him.

"Jane, Jane, Jane," he heard him say, "the cookies and the sewin' and the lame boy; it's Jane, it's Jane; I know it's Jane; it's like her—like her."

The boy tried to raise the old man's head, but it fell back on his arm on the table.

"Don't you feel well?" the lad asked. "I'll run fer Aunty McGinn; she'll fix you; she'll come sure if you're sick; she always comes to sick peoples," and catching up his crutch the boy hobbled down the stairway into the street.

The old man was left alone. He was unconscious that the boy had gone. When he ceased to mutter he raised his head and looked about him.

"I must have been dreaming again," he said to himself; but no; for there was the paper bag before him on

the table and some bits of ginger cookies scattered about. Eagerly he scraped the crumbs into the palm of his hand and carried them to his mouth. "It's Jane's cookies; Jane's, Jane's!" was all he could say.

By and by he got up and crept over into the dark corner of the room where the mattress lay. He knelt by the side of the tumbledown bed, looking cautiously about him. Then pushing his hand far into the mattress he drew out a small roll of papers.

Carrying the package back to the table he untied the roll and spread out before him a number of green notes. It was money. As he counted the bills he looked closely at each of them and made sure of their value. They were all for large amounts. Several of them bore a "C" in the corners and many had "Xs" and "XXs." He was a rich man.

He was still counting the money when a noise on the stairs aroused him. He heard some one say, "Just up here, Aunty," and before he could scrape together his money the lame boy hobbled into the room followed by Aunty McGinn.

The old peddler crouched low over his wealth, his arms outspread to hide the bills on the table. The white glow of the electric light without streamed down upon him; he was pale and frightened and his eyes stared wildly toward the door.

He looked like the miser on the stage counting his money in his dark attic with the rays of the calcium light shining upon him from the wings. He could not see the boy, nor Aunty McGinn, for it was black where they stood.

"Who's there?" he shouted, peering into the darkness.

"Me," answered the lame boy; "I've brought Aunty McGinn to see you."

As the boy spoke Aunty McGinn came slowly toward the table into the light.

"Go away, go away!" shouted the old man frantically, gesticulating his arms wildly; "go away, go away, I don't want no help."

But the good woman came up to the table and leaning over the wild old miser tried to quiet him.

Almost at her first touch the madness left him and he ceased his shouting and gazed up into Aunty McGinn's face.

"The lad said ye were sick," she said, "en I came to see if I could do a bit fer ye"—but as she looked down into the face turned up to hers her look changed to a frightened stare and she cried out: "The Holy Mother! the Holy Mother!" and threw her arms about the old man's neck calling, "It's Jerry McGinn came back again!—it's Jerry McGinn!—oh, it's Jerry McGinn!"

The next minute the old man and Aunty McGinn were wrapped in each other's arms and swaying to and fro like two long parted lovers.

"I knew it was you that baked them cookies," said the old man, "I knew it was you; there never was any others like them."

"En you've come back again to stay, en you've come back to stay," was all that Aunty McGinn could say while the tears rolled down her old, wrinkled cheeks.

The lame boy stood on his crutch near by and watched the two old people. He did not understand at all what it meant. But when they had all gone back to Aunty McGinn's warm sitting-room back of her bakery he heard all about everything.

How Jerry McGinn, her husband, had gone to sea many years before and how she had waited in vain for him to come back; how she had come to this country and made a living a baking cookies.

"En who'd a ever thought," she said as she finished her tale to the little lame boy, "that them cookies would ha' brought him back."

BEYOND THE GREAT SOUTH WALL.*

BY FRANK SAVILE.

Being some surprising details of the voyage of the steam yacht Raccoon on a trip undertaken by her owner with a full consciousness of its foolhardy nature, but without the faintest conception of the extraordinary happenings that were to become part and parcel of it.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

CAPTAIN DORINECOURTE and his friend known as Gerry are disconsolate over the mandate of the mother of the girls they love, Gwen and Violet Delahay respectively, which puts them aside as ineligible beside the Earl of Denvarre and his brother, the Hon. Stephen Garlicke, booked among the passengers on the steamship Madagascar for a winter's cruise around the world, and for which cruise Mrs. Delahay forthwith books herself and her daughters. While Dorinecourte is bemoaning the poverty which condemns him to his fate, he reads of the death of his uncle, Lord Heatherslie, which gives him the title and estates.

The uncle was a noted collector of coins and met his death while investigating an inscription on one of them pointing to the colonization of an unknown region by a certain people called Mayans, a purpose which he leaves as a legacy to his heir. Dorinecourte is inclined to pooh pooh the idea, but finally is induced to seek out Professor Lessaution, a Frenchman with whom his uncle had been associated in his researches. Ascertaining that the explorations must be made in the neighborhood of the South Pole and knowing that the Madagascar is scheduled to call at Port Lewis in the Falkland Isles, the new Lord Heatherslie equips the Raccoon for the voyage and embarks with Gerry, the professor, and a picked crew, for the south.

Here their further advance is blocked by a gigantic wall of cliffs, in which no entrance can be found, and no way discovered of scaling the giant heights. After spending three weeks in vain search, they steam north to the Falkland Isles.

During a frightful gale they see a burning ship, which proves to be the Madagascar, and it is their good fortune to rescue Lady Delahay, her daughters, Denvarre, and his brother. The storm grows fiercer and on account of accidents to rudder and shaft, they rig a sail and fly before the wind straight to the south, where they anchor in nearly the same locality as before.

That night there is a terrible volcanic eruption; islands disappear, new ones are created. Suddenly a towering tidal wave sweeps down upon the Raccoon. The yacht rises with it, and is swept over the Great South Wall, and into a peaceful lake where they find themselves absolutely shut in.

Dorinecourte heads a party of four to seek a means of escape; they find evidences of prehabitation, and, after an adventure with a terrifying monster, return to find that the lake has disappeared, leaving the Raccoon high on the rocks.

They renew their quest the next morning and are rewarded by finding an inlet with an ideal beach for the launching of the cutter. They explore this, and discover to their great dismay, that it has no outlet to the sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE NINTH CIRCLE.

AS we arrived, our noses were greeted with a most stupendous stench. It required but a moment for us to realize that the black objects that lay above the tide mark were the half dismembered bodies of sea lions, the intestines protruding black and decayed upon the smeared and oily sand.

Round about them were tramplings and churnings of the mud, and spreading away across the landward rubble to the entrance of the ravine were great sloppy paddings—the slow trudge of some ponderous and long nailed quadruped.

It was almost with gratified expectation that I recognized the trail of the Horror of the cañon. Here doubtless was his feeding ground, his private

* *This story began in the September issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

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abattoir, where he came down to prey upon the sleeping sea lion, even as centuries before he had lumbered down upon Alfa, Hardal, and probably many another of those hapless immigrants besides.

Here as in a trap he found his prey. Often one could suppose the sea lions passed through the sea entrance at the far end of the bay, failed to find exit, and tired with wearily threshing round their prison walls, landed to take their siesta in the sun. Here asleep they fell unawares into his maw, or, surprised in the rock ringed pool, gave him many a jovial hunt in the clear depths between the cliffs.

At the far side of the beach were other lumps, embedded in the sand. To them we strode and began to dig at them with our axes.

It scarcely came as a surprise when the powdery silt fell aside to disclose timbers sticking up gauntly from below—the worn joists and ribs of some stranded vessel.

One or two of the great timbers—carven and decorated by hands long dead—were now wind planed and worn by the sand drift, and slanted deep into the pebbles. We shoveled and scraped to trace them further.

Below the soil they rounded almost at right angles, and we uncovered one of them at full length. It measured a good forty paces—the keel, as we could but suppose, of some Mayan bark, sole remnant of what had been a gallant ship in the squadron of that lost and hapless race.

We scratched and delved, but nothing further than dried wood splinters did we discover. Finally we decided to explore the ravine for traces of the Mayans, or for the track of the great Beast.

This latter was plain as a cart trail on the softer ground, but soon faded and was lost among the rubble.

We felt no fear of consequences should we suddenly unlair the monster, for though the walls of the cañon were steep, they were broken by ledges. Up these we could skip swiftly enough, while he, with his ungainly body, would be unable to follow.

So up the loose rattling pebbles we toiled to draw near by degrees to the top, where the ravine passed into a scar of the mountain ridge, and then sinking rapidly, clove its way deep among the spurs and gullies of the far side.

At this point the immensity of the glacier we had crossed that morning was apparent. It stretched away westward in broad horizon touching acres of snowfield. Through another cleft a branch of it sank into the valley below us. Far down we could see a streamlet issue from its foot.

From the heights above the tumble of crevasses converged in the narrows like the handle of some huge fan. It smote into the gorge at its straitest, the brook pools glinting away between the rocks. On the spur between the valleys was broken rubble dotted with great boulders. Above all, in sunlit, cloud-like purity, the snow crest hung majestic.

Out in the distance, seen through the tunnel-like formation of the cliffs, the sea glanced and gleamed, flecked with white bergs to the far horizon.

It was the sight of this last that brought us up all standing. It seemed a trifle astounding to be confronted with the sea again when we had thus turned inland, and for some few moments we debated on the problem unavailingly. Then as I gazed round me various things seemed familiar.

In an instant the explanation came. We were standing in the very cañon up which we had marched the previous day, only we were entering the other end. No wonder that I had thought I had seen before that blue glacier foot and that chain of broken pools down the stream. I had—and not twenty four hours before, too—but from the other side.

Our ship and the sunk lake basin were on a great promontory. We had

followed the circle of the eastern shore and turned inland. Thus we had cut across the cape as the great fissure did —almost at right angles. If we had followed the cañon the previous day we should have attained to the very spot on which we stood.

It was evident that the glacier, into the recesses of which we had penetrated, and on the edge of which the ruined temple hung, was a branch of the one we had crossed an hour or two back. Amid this identical chaos of boulders we had watched the wounded beast disappear, and from some unseen cave or cranny he might now be spying us with gloating eyes.

I stared round me apprehensively, but nothing moved to break the long waste of gray rock and virgin ice. I turned to explain my discovery to my companions.

It did not take them long to recognize the familiar landmarks when I pointed them out, and they at once agreed with me that it was useless to carry further our quest for a beach. It was borne upon us with great conviction that the cliff barrier here stood just as remorselessly between us and the sea as it did on the western side of our lake.

We might, therefore, as well give up at once all thought of launching our boat in the ordinary manner. With the endless line of crags stretching for miles in either direction, it but remained to essay the lowering of it by davits or windlasses down the precipice, to chance its escaping uncrushed by the floating floe.

For the present we set gloomily back across the glacier to carry news of our discovery to our friends.

We roped up as we left the cliffs, proceeding gingerly upon our way. The crevasses honeycombed the ice at every step; some we bridged with our poles; some we jumped unhandily; some, too broad for either leaping or bridging, we rounded by circuitous ways which took us far out of our dead point for home.

At this height upon the glacier slopes we found the passage far more difficult and broken than upon the lower levels we had crossed in the earlier morning.

It was after a couple of hours of hard work, that, with red and glistening faces, we found ourselves within a few score feet of the further side. We stopped to mop our streaming brows and to congratulate ourselves on the conclusion of the hardest part of our labors. I produced my flask, at which the others smiled approvingly.

I took an inspiriting pull, handing it on to Garlicke, who was roped between Gerry and myself. He took it with unfeigned gratitude, and sucked at it sensuously, bestowing a wink at Gerry over the rim.

The latter observed him earnestly as the flask tipped gradually higher, and then dropping his axe upon the ice, strode towards his friend with a very unbenignant air, and an outstretched hand. The axe fell with its point buried in the rough surface at Garlicke's feet; the blade on the opposite side of the handle was uppermost.

"Kindly leave a saltspoonful," said Gerry irritably. "I happen to be just about as thirsty as you."

Garlicke turned slowly, the bottle still glued to his lips. He winked again with an indescribably annoying slyness. Gerry—with a touch of temper, it must be owned—snatched at his hand. Garlicke, with mock ferocity, warded him off.

There was a crackling sound as Gerry's foot burst in an ice bubble, and he stumbled. He rocked forward to fall prone beside a crevasse edge. The tense cord fell dead upon the keen blade of the axe set so rigidly uppermost.

There was a hum and a flick as the rope parted, the two released ends springing apart like rent elastic. Gerry gave a wild scrabble at the glass-like, elusive surface, and shot like a flash into the yawning gap.

There was a yell and a fierce rush from Garlicke, and I instinctively dug

my heels into a crevice, bracing myself starkly to meet his sudden pull. I thrust my own axe point into the ice, buttressing myself upon it. But for this three bodies would have been racing into the womb of the ice hill instead of one.

A dull thud came echoing up from the dark shadows beneath us; a few glassy splinters crackled and pattered downward; then came a silence broken only by the throb of our pulses as they sang dull and muffled in our ears.

Garlicke was as one possessed. "My God, my God!" he shrieked, "I've murdered him—murdered him. What am I to do? What am I to do? Speak, you fool," he yammered, "tell me what I'm to do—to do," and his voice rose to a scream, while he shook at my coat tempestuously. "Don't tell me that we can't reach him. My God, I shall go mad," and he flung himself down upon the ice, tearing at it with bruised and bleeding fingers as he chattered hysterically. "For God's sake, Heatherslie, say there's hope—that we can get him up. We must—we must. Lord have mercy upon me, what am I to do?" and he leaned over the crumbling edge, peering hopelessly into the depths.

Do you know the horrible, leaden, choking pain that leaps up and takes you by the throat, strangling you in a very fog of horror, when, suddenly, swiftly, in the midst of light and laughter, the Great Shadow falls between you and one at your very side.

When your heart swells with quivering pulses that shake your flesh. When your eyes burn and the deafness of despair is in your ears; when your knees rock, and the guides and thews within you string themselves like cords against your tense nerves.

Those of you who have been in like case to mine can realize what I felt when I saw the friend, who had been to me as a brother, snatched into the darkness of that cold pit. You of the majority who have stood in no such brain wrenching mist of terror—to you no words can describe it.

Those two seconds stand out redly scarred against the map of my life. They seemed ages untold of cruel anguish.

The strain of Garlicke's weight had nearly knocked all the breath out of my body, but I managed to swing him to his feet.

"Oh, you fool, you—you, what are you?" I gasped. "Pull yourself into the semblance of a man. Race to the ship for help. Get ropes. Run, you fool, run," and I thrust him from me roughly as I sat down panting.

He tottered across the few yards of ice between us and the rocks, and began to reel unsteadily down the slopes towards the great basin and the ship.

As he disappeared, and the breath began to slide back into my cramped lungs, I seized my axe and hewed myself a standing place beside the crevasse. Then I lay down upon my face, my head and shoulders outstretching far above the blue gulf, and set myself to listen with hopeless ears.

The hard damp silence of a vault was over all. No vestige of a sound was there, but the chill drip of the melting ice, and far away out of the distance the half heard break of waves upon the sea cliffs.

Now and again the wail of a tern or the call of a gull broke jarringly across the stillness, but from the grave below came nothing—no smallest sound to poise a hope upon.

Yet—was it the self mesmerism of a hope that would not be denied?—so faint that it left the merest echo of a tremor in my ears, a tiny sound seemed to float up from the depths. I called aloud. I shrieked to a fierce unnatural falsetto in my excitement. I struggled desperately to pierce the dulling thicknesses of ice.

I strained hazardously across the gulf in my agony to listen, listen, listen for the ghost of a reply. Still no answer came; only the pitiless drip pattered on monotonously. I pictured it falling on Gerry's cold, upturned face.

I struck savagely at the opposite wall of the crevasse. I cut a cranny and thrust the point of my axe handle in it. Then leaning on the head I hung out over the depths, my shoulders almost half way across the cleft.

There was a jerk as the sharp point snapped through the brittle support. My head plunged forward, hitting with tremendous force the smooth, blue surface beyond me.

A thousand stars and planets flashed before my eyes, spreading from a core of foaming light. Then swart and sudden as the night closes over, a tropical lightning flash followed darkness and insensibility.

* * * *

I blinked curiously, groping with owl-like eyes in the gray green light that swathed me. Before me rose a slope of ice—a gleaming hill blue with the cold azure of undying frost.

The smooth surface shone duskily; the twilight fell upon it from above in uncertain patches. Behind and above me was a curtain-like overshadowment of rock.

To my right rose the columns and porticoes of a building, shaded and deepening into blackness where the cloistered frontage retreated into the background. Close to my head, rising with gentle gradient from the pebbly floor, was a paved ascent to the main door of the building. To the left was a dark emptiness and bell-like out of the hollow distance came the tinkle of running water.

A few yards away lay a man's form—face to earth and still. The forehead leaned upon the forearm; the other hand was stretched abroad, as if grasping an unseen hold. The whole body had the pose of death as we find it when met with suddenness.

In the tired apathy that follows a great shock, I stared upon it wearily—unthinking, unreasoning, seeing something of familiarity, but with listless inability to follow the crude remembrancing of my brain.

As intelligence grew slowly back to me I struggled weakly and sat up. It was as in a long forgotten and half remembered vision that I knew Gerry's brown shooting jacket and his greasy field boots. With further recognition memory began to ooze back.

Gerry had been upon the glacier with me. And Garlicke. And my flask. Gerry had wanted the flask. Well, he couldn't have it now. I'd lost it. I tried wretchedly to remember how or where. Why, of course! that was what Garlicke had taken.

That ice hill, now, over there—just like the toboggan slide at Toronto two winters ago. I wondered if old Jim Paleriste was still *aide*. No; seen him in town since. Then there was that sweet little——

Oh, my God! Gerry had fallen in—fallen in—and I listened—and the tern had shrieked just as I thought I heard something. Well, that *was* Gerry—must be—snoozing away over there on his face. And that building? Well——

Why, of course, this was a dream. There was that absurd beast. That was part of a dream. Why on earth couldn't I wake myself. Baines would bring my hot water directly. Beastly unpleasant; just as well to know it was a dream. I'd have another wink or two.

Confounded wet and cold—and by Jove! cord breeches on. In bed. And blood upon them. Ouf! how my shoulder hurt.

A huge drop splashed from the roof upon my forehead.

At the touch of the cold water, suddenly as the sunbeams rend the sea mist, my senses leaped back to me, and dread—sickening dread—took possession of my heart.

I stared across intently at Gerry's rigid limbs. So we had fallen together into the depths—into the cold that kills. He was dead, no doubt; a little struggle against the numbing cold, and I too should pass into the land beyond forgetfulness. We had found the ninth circle of the lost.

I rose and touched and stretched myself wearily. How my back and shoulders ached, and what a sharp pang ran through my ankle as I dragged myself across the floor.

I knelt beside Gerry and turned his face to the light. It was white and hollow cheeked; his eyes were closed. I ran my hand beneath his coat and laid it above his heart. Was it still?—or was it my own anxious pulse that beat beneath my palm?

No, there was a stirring—a fluttering, faint and scarce discernible, but the life light still burned. I placed my eyeball before his parted lips. The out draft of his breathing struck against it, though ever so lightly.

I moved his arms. They were limp, but with no unnatural droop. Very, very gently, but perceptibly his chest rose and fell again, and something like a sigh fluttered out from between his lips. There was a faint flicker of an eyelid, and his fingers twitched automatically at the pebbles.

The worst of the overpowering weight of dread slid away from me hesitatingly. Perhaps after all Gerry was no more than knocked out of time; not injured fatally at all.

I shouted into his ear; a tiny movement of the eyelid answered me. I raised his head, scraping the loose sand into a pillow beneath it. I took his hand and began to rub it briskly, clapping it against its fellow.

A faint shade of color rose into his cheek; he sighed perceptibly. Again his eyelids fluttered, half closed again, and then opened wonderingly to their widest.

He stared about him, his gaze wandering with a drowsy air of astonishment from point to point. His hand swept the floor, picking at the little stones, and his breathing grew louder and more regular.

I called aloud his name, smiting him on the shoulder. He jerked a look at me from his drowsy eyes, frowned, made as if he would turn his head, and then a sudden faint consciousness seemed to return to him.

"W'as'r matter?" he whispered distinctly.

"Good man," I bawled joyously. "Wake up, wake up, old chap. Are you hurt? Feel yourself," and I dragged him to a sitting posture.

"W'as'r time?" he gurgled again.

"Time! Hang the time. You're not in bed. We're in the glacier. Get up and feel yourself."

He scrabbed weakly at the ground, caught at my sleeve, and leaned against me.

He stared at his surroundings, regarding the temple portico with desperate astonishment. Then the ice hill, sinking down to our very feet, caught his eye. He turned to me with wild amazement in every feature.

"It's a nightmare," he declared.

"No such luck," quoth I sadly. "We're here right enough. The question is how to get out before we're frozen stiff. Can you stand?"

He staggered to his feet, still lurching against me, and began gingerly to press his limbs and ribs. He moaned eloquently as his fingers roamed about his battered bones, making fearful grimaces.

"Ribs nearly bashed in," he remarked, "but no other damage that I can discover, bar bruises."

"That's all right. Now let's hustle round and see if there's any sort of way out. That stream over there must go somewhere, if there's room to follow it. I can hear it tinkling away down some sort of channel."

In the direction in which I pointed the sides of overhanging rock and glacier converged till they almost met, forming a low tunnel which struck further into the blackness. It was from this burrow that the sound of running water came.

Gerry looked at the dark entrance with much distaste.

"Ugh," said he, "filthy and cold it'll be. Don't you think——"

Click, click, click, and he stopped his argument to stare up to where something clattered above our heads. Gently, invitingly, a flask pattered into view, sliding down the slopes of the ice hill at the end of a string. It hopped and jigged away most suggestively.

We both gave a tumultuous yell of welcome, and dashed at it. I seized it, opened it, and poured half its contents down Gerry's throat before he could make any demur. Then I took a good pull at it myself, smacking my lips with intense enjoyment.

We clutched the string and tugged at it lustily, and those above tugged gladsomely and heartily back. Then I found an old envelope and began to scribble on it, using a rifle bullet for pencil.

"All right. Get a rope!" was the terse message I attached to the string, and we saw it flit upwards when our pressure relaxed, watching it disappear into the blue shadows of the ice roof with indescribable sensations of relief.

In a few seconds the yell of voices was borne down to us, faint as the chirp of a bird, but delightfully distinct, and we knew that our bulletin was received.

Within a minute the flask dropped down for the second time—full too—and on it another bit of paper showed white and welcome. The inscription was:

"Have no rope as long as this string. Parsons has gone down for another to splice. Hope all well.—S. G."

We knew that this meant a wait of half an hour at the least, and we took another pull at the spirit to fortify ourselves against the cold, which was wrapping us creepily in its embrace. Then we stamped and tramped violently round the cavern once or twice to enliven our circulations, and this brought us face to face with the stone portico at the back of the cave. We halted before it to stare at each other inquiringly.

I nodded; and then together we sauntered up the steps and stood in the entrance.

The temple was square fronted, with an oval doorway; along the façade ran pillared cloisters. It was built of carefully cut and mortised stones, hewn—as we could plainly see by the gaps—from the cliff behind us.

Upon the twelve great pillars of the portico were decorated pilasters, chiseled with a clean nicety in the hard stone. They gave evidence of a patient skill and an artistic conception beyond the average.

Within their shadow was a pavement, whereon a mosaic of graceful lines and figures entwined themselves. Centrally opened the portal.

The light filtered dimly through the entrance, and as we stood upon the threshold, the interior was black and mysterious before us. As our eyes grew more accustomed to the gloom, and the shapes of things defined themselves in the twilight, we discerned the grandeur and the horror of the place.

The interior was round—in shape something like the Roman Pantheon—and along the circling walls ran long inscriptions in the Mayan symbol, twisted in varying folds and weavings of devices. The floor was wide and thick with dust.

The disturbance of our footsteps made gaps in this, showing the smooth, hard blocked granite that paved it. It rang hollow beneath our feet, when the nails of our shooting boots reached it through the carpet of powdery refuse.

At the far end was a towering erection, dominating the emptiness, dimly shadowing through the dusk. It was not till we approached within a yard or two of it that we knew it for a graven similitude of the great Beast.

It stood in a sort of chancel of the building, looming high upon a rough majestic mass of granite. This pedestal—a boulder without any mark of hammer or chisel apparent upon it—filled one side of the sanctuary, and the image—carved from virgin rock—reached to the domed roof.

Every loathsome detail of the Thing

was reproduced with a skill most marvelous. The horrid foot webs with claws aspread were there; the long lowering neck; the malignant head fiendishly erect; the saw-like, serrated tail; the horrible dewlap; the filthy bloatings of the carcass; the thick legs, with bunches of muscle staring harshly out of the stone fore arms.

Below were inscriptions in the familiar symbol.

Far up in the fiercely poised head were eyes that glinted evilly—eyes that licked up into themselves all the poor light of the dim vault and concentrated it into two glistening points of wickedness. They seemed to follow us with such poignancy that we shuddered.

But the greater wonder and the heavier horror lay not in this foul image, terrible though it was in its lifelike imitation.

Circling round the throned idol—symbol of the most loathsome worship, as I suppose, and the cruelest that the world has ever seen—was a ring of brown and shriveled objects. They were cloaked with rotting garments, and lean with the waste of centuries. They were mummified by time, but in the undying cold, undecayed.

It was the last worship of the priests of Cay, overwhelmed in the sanctuary, defying the long drawn death of numbing famine in the presence of their god.

We two drew very near together, and I laid my hand upon Gerry's shoulder for mere support of a warm and sentient body. The fog of our startled breathings went up steamingly in the air. It smoked like incense before a yet sacred shrine of evil.

We gasped as those who seek fresh air in a stuffy atmosphere, and at the same time huddled to each other for warmth. Never in any other condition of heat or cold do I remember to have experienced a freezingly hot oppression.

There were thirty of these poor hapless souls; all were face to earth, with garments hanging about them by mere stillness of pose.

Their hands were yellow and claw-like, and were spread abroad upon the pavement. Their faces were swathed in brown hoods, that covered their features utterly. Their bony, shrunken outlines showed haggard through the musty rags that clothed them.

We looked questioningly in each other's eyes before we laid hands upon the rigid kneeling form nearest us. We raised the low laid face from the floor and turned it towards the scanty light.

The wrinkled features were drawn and crisp with the dryness of a hundred frozen years; the deep sunk eyes were blurred—the smoothness of the pupils dulled to roughness by the shrinking of the temporal muscles and nerves.

As we moved the head, a tooth or two clattered on the floor from the dried, fleshless gums, and gleamed white against the dust. The arms, set stiffly in their parchmenty skin, flopped helplessly abroad as we raised the body from its crouching position. The joints were tense as the bones. The whole body moved as one solid piece, as if it had been run into an invisible mold.

Across the drawn forehead was a white band, and on it was broadly sealed the similitude of the great Beast. On the floor in patches remained a few rags of the rotten clothing.

Silently we gazed on this luckless remnant of a long forgotten religion and race; then the ghastliness of the thing crowded upon our nerves fearsomely. Reverently we placed the poor gaunt body in its original position, and turned hastily to the door. We shivered as we gained the portico, and I passed the flask to Gerry.

At the moment he gulped at the spirit the rope came flapping and uncoiling down the ice hill opposite, and slipped up almost to our feet.

I sprang forward to catch it up, and began briskly to knot a running loop at the end of it. Gerry eyed me with approval.

"That's right, old chap," he remarked. "Up you go."

I wasted no time or words in argument, being well aware that he would defend for half an hour if necessary his proposition that I should have the first chance of ascent. I merely smiled upon him compassionately, reeving a deft hangman's knot.

This done, I flung myself suddenly upon my companion, threw the loop over his shoulders, and drew it tight beneath his arm pits. Then I yelled lustily, dragging at the rope with hearty tugs.

Amid the faint echo of an answering shout from above, I had the pleasure of seeing my friend fly swiftly towards the roof of the cavern, using language which might well have melted the adjoining ice. In a very halo of cursing his legs disappeared into the intricacies of the ice dome, his feet kicking extravagantly at space and dislodging an occasional icicle upon me like a malediction.

There was silence, and I was left alone with the ceaseless drip and the dreamy tinkle of the underground waterway.

I will own that for the few moments I was left companionless in the near presence of that musty ring of shriveled corpses I felt as uncomfortable as I remember to have felt in my life.

You must not forget that I was physically weak from the shock of my fall, and that my nerves had been wrung past tension point by my anxiety for Gerry. Then you will understand that the drip, the purr of the stream ripple, the gray green light from above in the uncertainty of its shadowing, the knowledge of the gruesomeness behind me, and the vault-like atmosphere, combined to make me almost hysterical. I could have screamed aloud, and didn't for reasons only known to my English birthright of prejudice and pride.

I wrestled through these aeon long instants of mental breakdown, and then there came the heartsome sound of a crack from above. I opened my eyes to see the rope fall anew upon the pebbly floor. With eager fingers I looped it over my shoulders, and with a mighty jerk gave the signal to haul away.

So I fled cherubim-like up out of the glassy solitudes into the untainted air and the blessedness of the sun, and never have I rejoiced with more whole souled gratitude in the same.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOUNTAIN WAKES.

As I shot beamingly out into the wholesome light of day a cheer rang out, waking the cold echoes delightfully. More than half the ship's company was ringing the crevasse mouth, Mr. Rafferty and half a dozen sailors hauling at the rope with a vigor that bespoke their entire satisfaction in the job.

It was with a mighty tug that they finally yanked me on to the glacier, and I unwound myself and crawled on to the flat ice most thankfully.

Gwen was there with Denvarre, and Vi was standing talking to Gerry, who leaned back luxuriously on a rug, enjoying the sunlight and the smiles of the ladies. Waller, his usual apathetic calm broken by an obvious air of relief, was the first to take my hand, and Lessaution, bandages and all, was ready to weep with a joy that I really believe was unaffected.

He had already gleaned from Gerry a slight inkling of the wonders that lay beneath his feet, and was demanding to be immediately lowered into their presence. His gratitude at our marvelous escape had a strong rival for the possession of his soul in the jealousy he felt that this notable discovery should have fallen to any one but himself.

I think Gwen, happy as she may have been in her new found love for Denvarre, could not altogether have forgotten that she and I, though we had never acknowledged it definitely, had

once been more than friends. Her face —I could but note it as I sped up from the mouth of the pit—had been white and anxious, and as I rolled unharmed from the edge to her feet, had flushed rosy red with what I could but hope was joy.

She smiled at me as I rose to my feet, and shyly put her hand in mine, her eyes humid and wistful as she felt my answering grasp. But her words were few.

"Thank God!" was all she whispered as she drew back to let Lessaution fling himself upon me with a flood of gratulation and inquiry.

We reasoned fluently with the professor as he escorted us back to the ship, disclaiming any desire to compete with him in the realms of research, and explaining to what simple and unsought chance our discovery was due.

No argument, however, would move him from his set purpose. He demanded that he should be lowered without delay into the Mayan hamlet, vociferating his determination with a volubility that drowned all reason in mere noise.

Finally we compromised. We put it before him that the launching of the boat was the supreme need of the whole party, and would take all the power and ropes at our disposal. No one could be spared to attend to his gropings in the glacier. If he agreed to postpone his desires till the launch was accomplished, we on our part solemnly promised that he, first of any, should descend into the mystic solitudes below, solitudes which, we represented, were still practically unexplored. He gave a grudging assent, and thereafter quiet reigned.

Gwen walked between Denvarre and me, and somehow a sense of discomfort seemed to hang about my companions. Despite my thumped understanding I thought that I was bearing myself not ingloriously in the conversational mêlée, but the interest they manifested in my recital seemed to lag.

Denvarre was distinctly gloomy, and Gwen was so desperately vivacious that I easily understood that she was not listening, but was occupied with other and unpleasant thoughts. I caught my breath as I wondered if by any possible chance they could have quarreled, trying with all my might not to dwell on the possibilities that such a matter might have for myself.

They seemed all right again at dinner, both of them, and Baines served a special effort to signalize our great deliverance.

After dinner we sat upon the deck in the starlight, and discussed coffee, cigarettes, and the chances of getting away. That these depended utterly on ourselves seemed entirely conclusive. A passing whaler was the tiniest of probabilities, nor would she be likely to sight any signal of ours on these desolate shores. True enough old Crum had a fair idea of our destination, but it would be many months before he would think it his duty to send to look for us. Nothing obviously remained but to attempt the launch of the boat, and decide who should go in it.

It was quite certain that the ladies could not face fifteen or twenty days in an open boat. If they could not go, Garlicke and Denvarre wouldn't.

Gerry was in no fit condition to face hardships after his knocking about, no more was I. The man to take charge then was Waller or Janson.

Waller we felt was the man for the job, but on the other hand we had also a strong feeling that bereft of his society and counsel we should be like children without their nurse. We decided to put the case before him, leaving the decision to his own good sense.

I did not think the men would refuse a chance to go if it was offered them. I felt confident that a sufficiency of them would prefer a cruise on open water, even in an open boat, to sitting longshore and hauling at hawsers for the entirely unprofessional object (from a seaman's point of view) of bracing up what had become a land domicile.

This especially would be so if the former procedure brought about a hope of eventually coming to a land of civilization, hard food, and good liquor—we had put them on an allowance of both—and away from horrifying fears of unknown and uncouth dragons.

For Mr. Parsons had not been idle in his conversational moments, and the details of our adventure in the cañon had been painted by him with an unsparing wealth of imaginative incident.

Waller picked his men, reporting to me that any one of the ship's company would have jumped at the chance to go. This matter being settled, it remained to arrange the practicalities of the launch.

Not only had we to drop our boat handsomely down a hundred feet of sheer cliff, but we had first to transport her bodily up the steep slopes of the basin before us. Looking at the job made it seem no more likeable; but the next morning we rose betimes and flung ourselves upon the business.

First of all we cut down the yacht's topmasts and sawed them into rollers. We did this with a light heart, well knowing that we could never want to test our ship's sailing qualities again. Then with levers we inserted them under the cutter's keel.

This done, we began to roll her proudly across the smooth rock floor—a transit we performed with consummate ease—and pointed her bows up the steep slope cliffwards.

Over the unavailing wretchedness of the next two days I must draw a veil. Shortly, we gave the business a very ample trial, and were thoroughly beaten at the start.

Tug as we would, the task was entirely beyond us—vanquished us hip and thigh. The angle, which at first was moderate enough, increased to about forty five degrees. The weight was about ten tons.

By the evening of the second day we had progressed about two hundred and fifty yards, and the worst was still to come. We had expended enough perspiration to float the boat, and had just paused to shove in the wedges behind the rollers while we rested.

We did this carelessly. They slithered on the smooth stone, the rollers revolved smartly, and before we could arrest her progress with levers, the wretched cutter was half way back to the bottom again, bumping and straining her timbers viciously.

Gerry sat down and voiced the sentiments of the whole company at this point. He explained that to him it was obvious that no less period of time than a century would suffice to see our labor approach completion. As the span of human life was now ordered, we were unlikely, any of us, to attain to this age.

Why then waste time that might just as profitably be spent in twiddling our thumbs. He added comprehensive anathemas on any who should attempt to combat this opinion, and then relapsed into surly silence, while the panting crew waited apathetically for further developments.

Then Waller suggested that our present attempt being a failure, the plan for reducing the launch to sections should be tried. This we had resolved to leave as a last resource, from haunting fears that once dismembered, we might well fail to put her together again, the book of explanations supplied by her makers having been lost.

I lifted my head wearily to meet this proposal, when my words were checked in the very utterance.

A dull boom, sullen and muffled at first, but swelling with grating intensity to a thunderous crash, rolled and reëchoed down and around the gray rock basin that surrounded us. The cutter swayed and danced, hammering and splintering the rollers under her. We ourselves fell in unstudied helplessness on the hard stone slabs.

The earth quivered in our sight as the heat haze quivers in the June sunlight. A current of hot air swept over us, seeming to swamp us in murkiness.

The little loose pebbles sang and clattered as they rolled down the slope, running together and leaping upon one another in little swirls and piles.

A giant crag fell from the glacier foot. The roar of it slammed across the hollow ponderously, the splinters scattering on the hard flooring of the lake bed, shooting out and across the smooth granite in a thousand chips of glancing, flashing crystal. The sun glistened upon them gloriously in many hued, rainbow rays.

Behind us a great pinnacle of basalt was flung from the peak, falling on the glacier with the crash of an artillery salute. A moan trembled out from the vitals of the riven glacier, as if from a prisoned soul within. The impulse of the crushed ice billowed out a dark spate of water at its foot.

Awe inspiring as were these manifestations, they did not affect us as did one slighter, but close at hand. A grate and crack from below made us turn swiftly.

The fissure across which our ship was buttressed with walls of boulder gaped widely. Into this sudden cleft the Raccoon slipped to the level of her bulwarks; the hawsers strained, tightened, thrummed tensely, and then snapped apart like the flick of returning thongs.

The masts whipped to and fro quivering, and the stays shook uneasily. Then, with a grinding of copper, the ship sagged over and lay still, propped by the ragged edge of the rock.

As we raced back across the lake bed towards her, a round, middle aged shriek broke the stillness of the after quiet. Lady Delahay was vomited up from the saloon as Baines and the cook erupted from the galley.

She stumbled across the deck, and with the aid of the valet's deferential hand, mounted upon the bulwarks. The rocks were now level with the stanchions, and she stepped upon them to sink down thereon in desolate helplessness, Baines hanging over her with well bred but astonished sympathy.

Gwen and Vi had been upon the heights above us, trying to sketch the line of needle-like pinnacles that crowned the ridge. Gwen, it appeared, had been engaged upon the very one that had fallen upon the glacier, and had been utterly stupefied, as it bowed towards her and then precipitated itself into the depths below.

Both of them were dismayed beyond measure by the upheaval and the partial disappearance of the ship, and came flying down the slope, frightened to death by the roar and thrilling of the solid earth, confidently expecting further shocks and total engulfment.

We met around Lady Delahay's prostrate form amid much excitement.

Nothing further occurred, but an oppressive silence seemed to have fallen over the land. The cries of the sea birds melted out seawards, and not one of them showed far or near.

The glacier stream had swept all its volume into that one great spout of a few minutes back, and not a single splash came from the empty opening in the ice. No sound was to be heard from the cliffs, though a minute or two before the fall and return of the surges had risen to us mellow and distinct.

We climbed the slope to look abroad upon the sea. It was oily and glass smooth as quicksilver, and far west the glow of the sunset was beginning to show upon its bosom, but not clear and gleaming. It was lurid, and suffused as with vapor mist.

The floe was clustered in strange herdings, and ringed beside the larger bergs were floating splinters from their summits. The dark lanes of water between the walls of ice were strangely regular—almost like the parallel lines of irrigation works. The usual motion of the unending swell had ceased utterly.

Suddenly Rafferty gave a shout.

"Saints in glory!" he exclaimed excitedly, "'tis the mountain that's afire."

We wheeled round to face the peak behind us. The torn scar left by the

unseated pinnacle showed hard and raw in the evening light.

From the dip between the snow caps a thin column of smoke was rising into the still windless air, commencing straight as a lance, but mushrooming out over our heads a few hundred feet up as if in weariness of its own weight.

It poured out of some new hewn chimney in the rock relentlessly slow indeed, and lazily, but with a very business-like steadfastness. A few smuts were wafted to us, falling upon our clothes and faces.

From that moment a very large lump of despair began to settle upon my heart and stayed there. I began to fully realize the nature of the trap we were in.

It must take days, work as we would, to get the boat up the slopes, put it together again on the top—even provided we didn't break it in the process—and drop it in safety down the cliffs. Waller might with very great luck get to the Falklands in three weeks. There might possibly be a ship there which would come to our rescue; very probably there might not. Giving everything the very best possible chance of succeeding, we couldn't get away from this horrible place under six or eight weeks.

On the other hand, Waller might never reach the Falklands at all. Every hazard of sea and ice would be against him. If he got there he might never get back, for the berg might close. Our provisions might fail; the birds and the sea lions would depart. The ship might sink further into the cleft and take our home and stores with her, for it was of course no more than likely that another earthquake shock would ensue.

And above all this, there was the horror of the cañon prowling around, ready to interrupt our proceedings at any moment. So beneath my breath I cursed the race of Maya, my besotted old ancestor, Crum, Gerry, Lessaution, and many other animate and inanimate influences that had brought about this disastrous expedition, and had landed us in this unspeakable plight.

When I had thus softly vented my feelings upon the smut filled air, forbearing open complaint as a bad example for the men, I turned to see what the others were thinking in the matter.

There was a grim look on Gerry's face. He, too, I gathered, was beginning to understand what was meant by that black cloud which now rolled between us and the sun like some monstrous umbrella.

Denvarre was looking at Gwen, and she, I gathered from the sudden motion of her face as I turned towards her, had but lately been staring at me, trying, I suppose, to understand what I thought of it. Garlicke eyed the phenomenon through his eyeglass, viewing it as if it was some second rate performance which had to be endured, but equally to be depreciated.

Lessaution gaped up at it open mouthed; he nodded like a mandarin, showing by his expression his complete satisfaction with these arrangements for further volcanic demonstrations.

Vi looked on with placid astonishment, being by now used to vagaries in this strange land of topsy turvydom, and not wishing to appear unnecessarily surprised. The members of the crew made unanimous use of the common adjective to opine that the smoke was sanguinarily droll, and at that they left it.

Waller's lips were compressed, though moving now and again in what I took to be *sotto voce* swearings, sharing no doubt with me a silent uneasiness that he preferred not to express.

An earthquake is no joke. One has absolute belief in the stability of the ground beneath one's feet—a belief which it takes much to destroy. When therefore you see the land shake like an ill made jelly, when it grins and grimaces at you like a third rate comedian, the traditions of a lifetime are undermined.

That upon which you have planked the whole of your confidence deceives you. Faith is no longer a rock. Belief

of every kind is vain. Stability in leaving the earth leaves all else unstable, and your spirit dies within you.

Nothing is impregnable or unassailable thereafter. You are, to put it tersely, most horribly afraid.

At any rate I was. For at least six weeks and possibly for a year we were to live under this shadow of death. The cave that we had chosen as a refuge, should the beast crawl down upon us, had now become a possible death trap more horrible than his maw itself. The mountain was obviously volcanic, and as obviously was the cleft the result of volcanic action.

Suppose it to close when we were in it. Like worms beneath a cart wheel we should be crushed. Suppose it to suddenly widen. Like worms again should we be dropped into the very bowels of earth to be hopelessly cast away.

So again I cursed my fate and those who had been its arbiters, and assumed a cheerful countenance.

"I think that's all for the present," I remarked courteously to the company at large, "so if you have seen all you require perhaps you'll attend to business."

They turned from their starings at the mountain, and Gerry chucked down the lever he still held with a surly air.

"So we're to start all over again?" said he.

"Have you anything else to suggest?"

He found no answer but a grunt, and I explained that Captain Waller's proposition seemed the only feasible one. We must reduce the launch to sections, and carry them one by one to the cliff top.

I invited amendments, but none were forthcoming, and collecting spanners, we turned wearily to work again.

By good luck the lost plan of construction turned up. It was ingenious, but fiendishly intricate, and it was hours before we properly mastered it. Then with wrenches and screw drivers we flung ourselves upon the boat, covering ourselves with dirt and wretchedness.

This, however, only after stupendous wranglings over the writing and the interpretation thereof; in which wordy mêlée Gerry and Lessaution nearly came to blows, sneering over every mortise, and displaying directly opposite views about every nut and screw.

Yet within the course of the next day, by superhuman exertions, we managed to dismember the boat, and transport it in sections to the cliff top.

Here we found that the undoing of her was but child's play to the putting of her together again. During the next three days language, temper, and filthiness of person bore hideous rule, and discomfort enveloped us like a fog.

Across these things I draw a discreet veil. Suffice it to say that on the evening of the third day, somehow or other, we had got the boat patched together and ready for lowering. Then we transported one of the ship's windlasses up the rocks, and fixed it firmly with stanchions at the edge of the crags.

We made a sort of cradle of hawsers. Then with immense care, and with ropes thickly parceled to avoid the frayings of the ledges, and with fenders firmly fastened to her sides, we were enabled to lower the cutter by slow degrees to the water, and to see her sit thereon unharmed.

Rafferty slid down to her, and there were lowered to him tow, chisels, and a pot of pitch. With these he contrived to give her an inside calk where her seams leaked worst from her unhandy rebuilding.

We left her floating for the night, with two men aboard to keep watch and watch lest the sea rising should dash her against the cliffs, or the floe bear down to nip her against the rocks. Upon the cliff top two more camped to be within rope's reach of the boatmen if need arose.

No misfortune happily occurred, and the next day found us toiling up the cliff with stores for her provisioning, and

water to fill her breakers. All these we passed down the swinging rope to Rafferty, who bestowed them in her lockers with nautical precision and neatness.

Finally by eventide Waller and his six chosen associates descended, and amid the cheers of the assembled company took their places at the oars.

Then with one last encouraging shout, and amid great wavings of handkerchiefs and caps, they pulled away steadily up the channels between the pack ice.

We watched them as they gradually faded to a black speck among the lanes in the floe and berg, and then disappeared to come into view again on the open water.

There we saw their sail rise against the rays of the setting sun, and slant away slowly towards the horizon. At last even this vague dot upon the emptiness of ocean was not, and we turned away to seek the ship in the growing darkness.

There was sadness and an irresistible presentiment of coming evil in my heart; undefined it was, but none the easier borne.

It was a silent and joyless meal we took before turning in, and I think every man of us sent up a prayer that night for our comrades on the open main; whose lives bore double burden, in that if evil befell them, we should all likewise perish.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TEMPLE AND THE LAIR OF CAY.

THOUGH during the days of hard work, while the boat was being launched, we continued to live in the ship, we did so by compulsion of necessity alone, not having the time to seek another dwelling place. Now the strain was over, we felt that it behooved us to seek shelter elsewhere, since another shock of earthquake might easily destroy the Raccoon and leave us utterly without abode in this land of desolation.

Therefore we cast about for a refuge which should be stable enough to withstand earthquakes, and also form a protection in case the Beast came down upon us.

Several moderate sized peaks rose from the glacier foot. They were precipitous in parts, but broken with ledges and crevices, making their ascent arduous, but by no means difficult.

One of these, a mass of granite shaped something like a pyramid with a flattened top, seemed to meet the case admirably. The breadth of its base made it unlikely that it would topple, however much it might be shaken, and its summit was scarred with deep clefts. Any of these might be roofed over with a few planks to make a famous shelter.

Janson and I made the ascent with some of the crew and made examination of the spot. We got up some timbers and a tarpaulin or two, and soon arranged an excellent series of little cabins, sufficient to house the whole party if the need arose.

We transported up to this eyrie a certain proportion of our provisions and stores, arranged hammocks for ourselves and cots for the ladies, and then felt that we had a satisfactory alternative abode if the ship should fail us.

This being accomplished, we had time and opportunity to turn to less pressing matters. We set forth on the following morning, therefore, to investigate the matter of the Mayan temple beneath the glacier, anent which Lessaution had muttered many jealous words during the last six or seven days.

For he openly declared that Gerry and I wished to keep the glory of this discovery intact, and were delaying his entrance into its mysteries of malice prepense.

We took our ropes, poles, and a ladder to the cliff top, found the crevasse, which we had marked with a cross hewn in the ice, and according to promise

lowered the Frenchman first therein. I followed him, and in due order came Gerry, Denvarre, and Garlicke.

I found the little professor trotting around the temple, exclamations of wonder and delight hurtling from between his teeth. His little arms waved, his little lean face beamed with scientific glee.

His self made dictionary and his grammar of the Mayan symbol was in his hands. In the pauses of his ecstasy he was trying to divine the inscriptions.

Now and again he stopped to examine the prone figures of the shriveled priests, turning them about and picking at them with a minuteness that struck me as both hard hearted and indelicate. Finally he dragged himself out of this haphazard abandon of discovery, and settling down before the base of the great pedestal, began to decipher the inscriptions with serious attention.

For some minutes he sat silently between Gerry and myself, who held candles by him. He conned the twisted devices, turning from them to his note book, and tracing out each symbol carefully.

Suddenly signs of the greatest excitement manifested themselves. He jumped up with an exclamation, nearly upsetting both of us, and rushed round to the back of the image. Here he began to butt at the solid stone in a manner that seemed little short of imbecile.

In the midst of these scrabblings a panel—as it seemed—gave beneath his hand; we stared wonderingly as a door slid open at his very feet.

Two steps were revealed, dropping down into a chamber in the stone. Into the blackness of this vault our friend flung himself, chattering furiously in French, without waiting to be offered a light. We only stayed for an additional candle to be lit and then followed him smartly.

It was a small dark room, and without exit to the air save by the way we had entered. Round the sides of rock hewn wall ran a slab.

Upon it were arranged various basons, salvers, spits, and other sacrificial instruments to which we could give neither names nor use. But what made our eyes sparkle and our breath come short and ecstatically, was the fact that each and all of these outlandish vessels shone yellow and lustrous in the candlelight.

They were in no degree discolored by age or by damp. At the which we knew that here indeed we had fallen upon the Mayan booty of which my uncle had spoken—"the ancestral treasures of that hapless race."

We stared with greedy eyes upon this hidden hoard. With awesome fingers we touched and handled the beakers, the basons, and the curious two pronged forks and skewers.

All bore traces of use, but we were at a loss to account for the jagged notches in the handles of some of the sword-like spits. They leaned against the rocky ledge, arranged in exact order along the floor.

At the upper part of each were wavering scars in solid metal; we might have imagined them to be decorative patterns, but for their scratchiness and irregularity. I took one in my hands and examined it carefully.

It had a hilt about half a foot from the thickest end. It was just below this that the dents ate into the metal. I caught hold of Lessaution by the arm to demand his explanations of this matter.

At first he contemned my curiosity, declaring that matters of much greater interest demanded his attention. He ran his fingers over the crisscross work, and suddenly shuddered, handing the thing back to me with a repellent gesture.

"It is explained there," he said, pointing to the device that ran above the ledge. "Those are the rituals of sacrifice. It is necessary to slay the victim according to the religion of Cay. So they stab the sword through the shoulder and pierce the lung, and the

victim dies slowly—very slowly, and he calls for long. So they think the god is well pleased.

"Then the poor people who die, they are in agonies—ah, so great a pain, and they bite and snap at the handle with their teeth. So here we see the marks. It is not nice—that, no, it is of the most horrible. But what would you? They were brutes, this people, but oh, so ancient," and he shrugged his shoulders as if much might be forgiven to a people who had conducted their deviltries from time immemorial.

I dropped the thing with a shiver and a tingling of my fingers. Brutes they were, indeed, these fearsome Mayans of the centuries of long ago. I could only give fervent thanks that they were not alive to welcome us to these savage shores.

I could well imagine the delight that would be theirs in spitting us on their horrible prongs, and leaving us to slow agony, tickling, as they would doubtless believe, their god's ears with our delightful tortures. And if they had not left us to pant out our lives before this beastial image, we should have been offered up alive to the monster himself, to meet a swifter doom, perhaps, but one as fearful.

I asked him how he was so sure of the matter. He explained that the whole of the devices that ran round the walls was the detailed dogma and rubric of the worship of Cay. Not only did these give full directions for sacrificial orgies, and prescribe particularly the transfixing of the victims in the manner spoken of, but also alluded to the keeping alive of these tormented wretches—I am only quoting from what he translated—with various drugs, the names of which he was unable to understand.

The inscription laid stress on the fact that the cries of these unfortunates were beloved of the god, and that, therefore, they were to be prolonged as far as possible.

It was only to be considered natural that the worship of such a filthy monstrosity should breed degraded cruelties, but I puzzled my head to think how Mayans in Central America could have possibly divined the existence of anything resembling this antediluvian Horror in the Antarctic Circle. I questioned Lessaution on this point also.

He said that his researches had led him to think that the last home of the Mastodon had been in Central America, and that before he became extinct he might have become the holy beast of the Mayan religion, much as the bull is to the Hindoos.

He went on to explain his theory that as by lapse of time the huge beast became a memory and a myth, he rose from being a symbol of the godhead to being confounded with the god himself. His proportions had probably been exaggerated by half forgotten rumor, and with his size had grown his sacredness.

To make themselves strong the priesthood had invented the human sacrifices, by which, doubtless, they could remove their special antipathies or heretics.

It was not surprising, he added, that the Mayans, born and nurtured in the service of this superstitious horror, should conceive the Dinosaur, when he thus descended upon them, to be their god in very deed. We must also reckon the effect their miraculous bringing to this desolate coast would have upon them.

There was no doubt that they had frequently striven to do their divinity honor by human sacrifices, and that one of their first acts must have been the building of this temple under the shadow of the overhanging rock.

It was to be supposed that the glacier had been diverted from its former channel by some earthquake shock, and had poured upon the building from above, bringing to utter destruction the town that had stood round it, the only exceptions being the house we had found upon the mountainside, and the one Parsons and I had discovered in the glacier.

This last had been saved by the

shielding cliff above it, though walled in by impenetrable thicknesses of ice.

The priests of Cay, evidently fanatic to the last, had seen no chance of escape. They had stored away their golden vessels, swept and garnished their sanctuary, and then laid down in grim hopelessness to die at the feet of their god.

Swiftly numbed by the overpowering cold, without provision or proper clothing, they had passed away in silent submission to the decrees of fate, and probably without much feeling or pain.

Lessaution surmised that the lone corpse Parsons and I had stumbled upon in the other dwelling was the remains of some unfortunate wretch who had been longer fortified by food and raiment, and had fought the cold with full knowledge of the ultimate issue. So in solitude and great fear he had met his death.

I pondered these ideas of the professor's while we collected the vessels of the sanctuary. We roped them up in heaps, and transported them to the foot of the ice hill.

Then we signaled to Rafferty, whom we had left above in charge of half a dozen of the sailors, and had the pleasure of seeing our trove whiz up into the sunshine, to be bestowed finally in the lockers of the ship, there to await the possibilities of our ultimate rescue.

As the last sheaf of spits disappeared into the gloom of the roof, we turned for further explorations. Lessaution held—and we felt that there might be something in it—that by following the course of the ice stream that tinkled into the channel at the extreme end of the cave, we might chance upon other remains of the Mayan village, or at any rate find more relics of their community.

Not wishing to leave any chance untried of discovering all we could of this strange people's habitation, we lit dips, took one apiece, and crawled into the mouth of the waterway.

It was low roofed and narrow, and we groped and splashed along it like rats in a sewer. The light played and spangled on the ice walls, and the gurgle of the ripples and our splashings reëchoed hollow and gloomily.

A draft sang back into our faces, making the candles sputter noisily. We thought that we must be approaching an outer entrance, though no light came through the ice. We wondered if by any chance we were in any communicating by way of the cavern that Parsons and I had first explored.

Suddenly the ice faded from about us, and with the falling splash of a small cascade the rivulet ran into an opening in a rock wall which faced us.

This we took to be without doubt the overhanging side of the mountain which backed the basin in which lay our ship. We peered down the tunnel, and seeing the fall to be but a foot or two, ventured in.

For the first fifty yards the way was straight enough, but then it began to turn and twist deviously, narrowing, though it grew higher. We easily understood that the water had worn a way through the granite by eating out a lode of softer mineral.

We were enabled to walk erect, though I heard Lessaution grunt complainingly behind me as he squeezed through the narrows, where the sides reached out to one another sharply.

A couple of hundred yards more, and a turn—sharper than any we had yet passed—whipped us round almost in our tracks. Before I could realize it we were striding out into a great hall in the granite, and the stream was almost lost in the sandy floor.

With the disappearance of the reflecting walls the darkness seemed to swallow the thin light of our candles utterly. A heavy effluvia-like smell hung in the air. In the act of wheeling round to speak to my companions I tripped. I plunged forwa-d, grasping the elusive sand, and plowing a groove in it with my chin.

My candle went out as I struck the

ground, but before its light snapped into nothingness I saw beside my face five long yellow objects spreading out ghastly distinct upon the dark floor. Looking back I saw the obstruction over which I had stumbled begin to roll slowly from between me and the lights of my companions.

It was silhouetted in irregular dents and jaggednesses against the dim illumination. I also saw the long yellow gleams move lingeringly from beside me in the twilight.

A yell went up from the others, and an odor still more pungent assailed my nostrils. I heard the slow, lurching sound of a heavy body churning the silt of the floor. But it needed not that to tell me in what plight I was.

We had penetrated to the very lair of the Monster. I had fallen headlong across his tail as it stretched in my path. Beside me was his webbed foot; my face nearly touched his clammy nails.

He was turning—turning—turning; in another second his huge neck would swing round upon me; I should be a mere swelling in that monstrous throat.

My knees were palsied by a terror that scarcely allowed me to rise. My joints were as water within me.

If ever man realized the terrors of nightmare in the flash, I did so during those two fearful seconds when I scrambled to my feet, and raced across the ten yards that separated me from the mouth of the tunnel in the rock. I leaped into it like a rabbit before the greedy jaws of a terrier.

The others were already jammed in its narrow recesses. As I joined them the last light fell into the stream with a hiss.

Kicking, reeling, panting, snatching at each other and at the rocks, we fought along that pipe-like passage, every nerve in our bodies tingling with expectant terror. My hair bristled on my head as I heard the snap of those grim jaws behind me, and for one awful moment I felt the horrible breath sing past my cheek.

I ducked to very earth, and at the same moment felt the rasp of the eager tongue upon my heel. Calling aloud in abject terror I plunged forward, bearing down Gerry and Lessaution with me.

We struggled together in the darkness, splashing up a little stream, and wallowing in the turbid mud, while above our very heads, it seemed, we could hear the hiss and pant of the straining lips.

As we drew away from the sounds behind us, I managed after a nervous effort or two to strike a vesta. The match sputtered, flared, and then burnt up steadily.

Lessaution was still grasping his extinguished dip, and thrust the wick into the flame. As it took fire he held it up, and in its steady light we saw the nearness of our escape.

Not ten yards away the long neck strained and weaved desperately, bowing towards us with frantic efforts. The wicked green eyes flamed, and the teeth snapped and chattered greedily. The murky breath from between them flooded the cavern noisomely.

The whole horrible scene stood out in frightful distinctness against the background of dark rock.

Then the dip flame reached Lessaution's fingers, and with a curse he dropped it. The fall of the darkness upon that brief but all too vivid glimpse of horror unmanned us all.

With a gasp we turned and fled recklessly into the darkness of the waterway without waiting for a light, paddling and splashing through the pools, tripping each other up, reeling, wrestling, smiting and bruising our limbs against the rocks.

Finally, with bleeding fingers and wet with perspiration and roof drip, we stumbled out into the dimness of the temple cave, panting, disheveled, like whipped curs, coughing still with the vile stench of that fearful kennel, shivering yet with the narrowness of our escape.

With broken sentences and half coherent words we arranged the order of our ascent, and were hauled up one by one. With grateful lungs and dazzled eyes we greeted the freshness of the glacier slopes, though it was with dejected mien we slunk back to the ship.

We sought victual, and later, tobacco, discussing the same on deck for appreciable minutes before any one ventured to refer to our adventure, even Lessaution's fund of conversation being dried up by his sense of defeat.

It was Garlicke who opened the conversation, and from a sporting point of view. He is a sort of last appeal on the subject of weapons of the chase, being a noted man at the running deer and such like competitions, as well as a keen game shot.

He demonstrated that the sporting Mänlicher rifle was the instrument marked out for the destruction of the Monster, giving his reasons for supposing that its bullet would penetrate any hide, provided that the missile had a hollow point. He regretted intensely that he had not had one of these useful implements at hand during the late *rencontre*.

Then the babble joined upon this issue and others flowing from it, and we felt our nerves grow back to us with our words, each of us expressing the opinion that to the determined man, armed with modern weapons, Dinosaurs were not necessarily invulnerable, and each asking, on reflection, no better than to beard the Beast again in his lair with suitable arms.

In which wordy tournament Lessaution, as was to be expected, rode triumphant down the lists, being willing, as he assured us, to compete with the Great Atrocity, equipped with no more than his native intelligence and a squirt.

This latter he proposed to fill with diluted prussic acid—of the commodity in question we possessed not a molecule, which he regarded as beside the question—and therewith advance down the passage up which two hours before he had so ingloriously fled.

Arriving within range of the gaping mouth, he would fill it with the fatal fluid. But one frightful writhe and M. le Dinosaure would lie dead at his feet. *V'là tout*.

This versatile proposal was met with abounding laughter, the which daunted him in no degree, but cheered us all immensely. For with laughter returned self respect, which had dropped from us in its entirety during the disgraceful rout of the morning, and we shook our fear from us as dogs shake their dripping coats.

To each came great resolves to personally seek out and destroy the Monster, and complacent with the future renown thus inwardly promised, each turned patronizing attention to the talk of his fellows, using their banal conversation to cloak the deep and secret devices that seethed within his own brain.

So content grew beneath the cloud of tobacco smoke, and pleasant talk expanded itself, and finally the ladies, under the persuasive tinkling of Gerry's banjo, consented to enliven the rocky solitudes with a song.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LITTLE DOG'S STUMBLE.

It was as Gwen began to lift her voice sweetly in the opening notes of "Just a Little Bit of String," that, with harassing appropriateness, the hawser, which had that morning again been tightened between the anchor and the ship, snapped with a ringing crack.

The deck quivered villainously, and I who had just risen to reach for more tobacco, fell upon my chair and smashed it to matchwood. The doors of the companion flapped to and fro, and the rigging quivered and thrummed.

We could hear the jar of the rattled machinery in the engine room.

At the same moment we were aware that the rocks were grinding upon the ship with a scissors-like movement, though happily they did not close. Had they done so we should have been nipped in their jaws with a very remote chance of escape.

We also realized that the smoke cloud, which had risen and grown thinner during the day, was expanding and thickening, making the twilight of the short Antarctic night a very business-like gloom.

We slipped across the gangways hurriedly, and grouped ourselves upon the rocks. A low rumble came creeping across the empty silences of the glacier. It rolled up to us like the muffled groaning of a buried army.

We could fancy that the tombed city of long ago was sending out its desperate call for succor. The rocks shook beneath us. The gravel danced and pattered about our feet.

We staggered, catching at one another aimlessly. Gwen, who was next me, tripped comfortably into my arms, where I held her with much content, both of us swaying absurdly.

The dull roar became abruptly a sharp crash. The ground rippled and worked horribly, and we were flung to earth, grasping at the rolling boulders. The cleft beneath the ship yawned like some Titanic mouth.

As the remaining hawser parted, the keel sank further into the opening with a thud, and the stones we had built up beneath it went clattering down into the abyss. Not ten yards from where Gwen and I fell abroad, and not two feet from where Lessaution groveled, a fissure opened and shut with a snap as of teeth.

The professor in fact declared that for one hair raising moment he looked into the very deepest fastnesses of death.

As the gap closed, a puff of sulphurous steam was shot into the air. It clouded over us, making us cough. A clatter of ice and falling water came from the glacier; a splinter or two fell from the peak. Then, suddenly as came the upheaval, quiet returned and fell upon the scene.

From that moment, though, the darkness was riven. The mushroom-like pall of smoke now hung over us rosy red from fires that burned beneath it in the lap of the hill. The crimson light flared down into the empty lake basin, reflecting back luridly from the rocks.

A small fine rain of soot, gray and woolly, began to fall; it got into our eyes and nostrils, and set us sneezing and winking prodigiously. Then in trembling and with hopelessness in our hearts we climbed the slopes to the cliff tops, filled with desolation in that the earth having turned traitor, we had but the sea to look to. How vainly we might look and how long, we knew but too well.

The red glow wavered upon crestless surges that moved slowly upon the crags. Far out to sea the islands of the first eruption showed black and shattered dim outlines in the cinder rain.

This fell mercilessly on floe and berg, blackening them to filthy patches upon the rosy sea. Far away we could still see the gleam of moonlight upon the outer ocean, peaceful and silvered against the blood-like hue of the landward waters.

From above us came the boom of irregular explosions, and gray tufts of smoke shot up into the darkness. Here and there crimson splashes of flame cut the smoke tower.

They were spouts of molten stone, the slag of that mighty furnace. The snap and hiss as these fell upon the glacier was like the overboiling of some stupendous kettle.

My eyes were seared with unrest in this hopelessness of sea and land. I turned them upon Gwen, who stood beside me, to give them comfort.

She had a lace shawl about her head and arched over her face, shading it from the steady drizzle of cinders. These lay upon the few unprotected curls that flecked her forehead, giving

her a *poudré* effect that in that deep twilight radiance was simply ravishing.

The same scarlet duskiness beat upon her complexion, giving it the tint of a moss. Her eyes shone anxiously, but like stars.

I gnawed restlessly at my mustache. I was but human and desperately in love. The desire to take her in my arms and swear that nothing on earth should hurt her was just on the borders of being irresistible.

"Magnificent sight, isn't it?" I questioned, looking down at her pleasantly.

"Gorgeous," she answered briefly, coming a step nearer. It was with a curious catch in her voice she added, "But what if it overflows?"

"Oh, it won't," I answered confidently. "Besides, the glacier's between us and it."

"Another earthquake might split the glacier."

"We'll wait till it does," said I cheerfully. "We shall be well away before anything of that kind happens."

She stood silent for a minute or two, tapping her fingers idly on the boulder beside her. Then she looked up at me with a quick smile.

"After all, it would be very soon over, wouldn't it?"

"Quite soon," said I with assurance. "And—and we should be all together."

She glanced up at me again with a queer little smile that tried to cover the catch of her voice.

"I don't know that I was thinking of —all," she said, and turned away to join the others as they began to wander back towards the ship, and I strode beside her, fighting my passionate impulses in silence.

For no doubt she had meant it for a reminder. Denvarre was the thought of her heart now that possible disaster hung over us, and I, in my blundering way, wanted to shove myself into an equality with him.

I chewed the cud of this reflection as we all strolled down the slope, and the bitter hope that the end might come as she had pictured it almost crept into my heart, so far outside the bounds of common sense does the fever of jealousy carry one. But I'm thankful to say that my English birthright of self possession came back to me within a score of strides, leaving me rational again.

I explained—and the others found it remarkably easy to understand—that it would be folly to think of sleeping aboard again that night. We must take up our residence on the cliff where we had prepared our shelter.

So up the ledges of the rock pyramid we scrambled, and lodged ourselves in the tarpaulined crevices at the top. We mostly slept, I believe, but I was restless. For I had realized only too well that the great smoke pall that overhung us and made long the night was Death's Shadow indeed.

As the dawn began to filter in under the fog of dust, I woke and strode out to see how fared the world of fire and ice.

A great hush had fallen with the livid morning light. The thunderous boom of the crater had ceased, and from above came but the distant purr and simmer of undying fires. The boil and roar of active eruption had died down. The great smoke curtain stretched away in a long wreath inland, carried before the cool sea breeze.

The heavy sulphur mist had lightened with the same fresh draft, and the gulls had returned and were clamoring overhead in their hundreds. The sea lay in purple splendor, save where it was broken by the soot begrimed floe. The swish of ripples on the cliff foot was peaceful as the drip of a well bucket.

I glanced down to where our ship lay. She seemed to have slipped over yet further in the night. A soft mist clung about her, and I puzzled myself to think how vapor could rise from barren and solid stone.

It was dissolving upwards as I watched, but ever forming anew. Then I understood that it was coming out of

the fissure—the steam no doubt of some underground geyser. The carcass of the great whale that had been stranded by the volcanic wave had slidden down the incline of smooth rock almost into the center of the basin.

I reflected with dissatisfaction that the stench of this offal so close to our headquarters would be by no means pleasant.

My eyes wandered to the cliff top where we had stood the night before, dwelling upon it with half painful, half pleasurable reminiscence. How sweet Gwen had looked, and how unattainable. I began the everlasting fight with my inner self that was new and old every morning, thrusting forward to my soul's attention every possible argument why I should think of her no more, and doing so naturally with the same pain and the same enjoyment as ever.

Into the midst of my musings came a sudden jar of unfamiliarity as I stared at the edge of the crags. I blinked unbelievingly.

A black breadth of shadow intersected the rocks as if a knife had carved them rigidly to line. I rubbed my eyes. There was no doubt about it.

A clean cut cleft was in the rocks, some twenty feet broad. How deep I could not tell.

I clambered down the ledges softly from hold to hold, avoiding noise that the others might have their fill of healthful sleep. I crossed the bare flat between me and the new made fissure, and stood upon the edge. I peered in.

The gash was driven deep into the bosom of the cliff, reaching to within twenty feet of the tide line. A lump or two of granite had fallen from the parting edges and lay in the nip of the angle below.

As I looked, one of them slipped in the vice-like hold, and settled nearer the bottom. A few seconds later another did the same. Then I understood that the gap was widening before me as clay cracks in the June sunshine.

I hung over the pit, gazing into it with hopeful eyes. Would the cliff be riven to its base, and the sea be let in upon us? Then, by Jove, we'd have the old Raccoon afloat again. We should escape from this land of desolation like rats from an open trap.

Into a slow opening like this the sea would pour gently. It would not overwhelm the ship with a sudden cascade. Such luck would be too stupendous—I assured myself of it most determinedly.

Yet—yet—what a joyous awakening it would be for my companions if so outrageous a thing could come about. How melodramatically we should sweep out into the free spread of waters beyond!

My chain of cheerful prophecy here got a sudden setback. As I looked at the largest stone in the crack, it split across. In spider-like ramifications cracks multiplied upon it. It fell apart into rubble. Finally only dust filled the crevice.

The rocks were closing even as they had opened. A stratum cleavage was here. It worked uneasily in the travail of the mountain behind—yawning in weariness of the constant convulsions. Now in the rest following the upheaval it was settling together again.

As I stood and pondered these things another eruption roared in the crater mouth. The ground rocked uneasily beneath my feet; I stumbled to my knees. With a snap the jaws of the cliff closed, nothing remaining but the ragged dent where the edges had been riven.

We proceeded to breakfast, with certain apprehensions of what might happen in the way of further earthquakes, but still with moderate appetite. There was one slight rocking of the ground, but it did not so much as upset a tumbler, and we concluded that the worst was, for the present, over.

As the morning drew on we descended to the ship to examine her plight. She was leaning over at an angle of

forty five degrees, propped by the edge of the crevasse. Her keel was straining at the splinters jammed in the narrows of the opening.

She lay so that her bulge almost covered the chamber in the rock. The hot fumes were still rising from below, smelling, for all the world, like the baths at Aix.

We got aboard and went down into the saloon. Everything was in the wildest disorder. The table, being screwed to the floor, was still unmoved, but everything else was piled in heaps between the floor and the lockers.

Hardly a bit of crockery but had its crack or two, and many of the plates and glasses were broken outright. In the hold the bilge was leaking through her strained sides, dripping down the rocks against which she leaned.

Not a rat squeaked or scampered in this—their usual stronghold—and their damp footprints were visible leading away from the ship. Evidently this dry dock was not to their liking.

We set to work to get up some coal from the bunkers and some provisions from the storeroom. All of us—even the ladies—carried a larger or a smaller package, and in about an hour the procession set back to the cliff abode.

Gerry and Vi were alone on deck as I emerged last from the companion. Gerry's face was a study in scarlet and surprise. Something had most certainly occurred within the last few minutes to move him greatly, and as I appeared he strode towards me with an air of joyful importance. At the same moment, Vi, who had turned quickly away as I stepped out of the doorway, swung quickly round again towards him.

"Hush!" she ejaculated, frowning with a meaning look towards the accommodation ladder, and Denvarre's head rose into view as he ascended.

Gerry stopped with a look of indecision. Then with a beneficent grin he wheeled round and offered her his hand to step down off the deck.

I saw that below the others were grouped upon the rocks, waiting for us to begin the ascent again. I was at a loss to account for Gerry's extraordinary behavior, especially the fact that he was walking happily enough with Vi, after avoiding her like the plague ever since he'd learned of her engagement.

I stepped down to join the party as Denvarre plunged hastily down the companion to fetch, as he explained, another pipe. I began to saunter along with Gwen and Lessaution, still watching Gerry and Vi.

In two or three minutes Denvarre overtook us. I noticed that Gwen shot a look at him as he reached us, which I found difficult to explain. He was wearing a stony expression, and avoided meeting her gaze. He began to talk to Lessaution with great vivacity, and the two gradually drew ahead of us, swinging between them the sack of coal that the little Frenchman had been staggering under alone. We were all more or less weighed down with stores, even the girls carrying their share. Gwen bore in one hand a pound of candles, and in the other a tin of mustard.

As the other two drew out of earshot, the silence deepened uncomfortably between Gwen and myself. I cannot explain it, but there seemed to be a sense of strain between us. I looked up once to find her regarding me with a fixed expression, and she reddened deeply as I caught the glance.

She turned her head away hurriedly. Then as if by an effort she faced me again. I could see by the catch in her pretty throat that she was gathering herself together to say something, something that she found it difficult to express. There came a sudden interruption.

Fidget, the fox terrier, had been gamboling and ambling aimlessly about. Suddenly, raising her nose, she sniffed the air curiously. She barked sharply, pattering back towards the ship.

She leaped the narrowest end of the fissure, and trotted up the further slopes of the basin still yapping angrily. Her nose was in the air defiantly; the bristles of her withers stood up.

She stopped with a quick jerk as she neared the top. Planting her fore legs stiffly before her, she began a series of shrill yelpings, dancing in her excitement.

Her bark leaped a couple of octaves into a shriek of fear, and out from behind a boulder loomed the hideous triangular head we knew too well. The Monster of the cañon lumbered into view, and the little dog turned and flew for us frantically, not the merest indication of her tail in evidence, so tightly was it tucked between her legs.

In her unseeing terror she fled straight towards us, not avoiding the cleft. Consequently she came slap upon it, and unable to stop, charged straight into it.

With a thump and a squeak she fell into the angle of the bottom. Being so far above her we could plainly see how she was caught in the nip of the crevice, where she remained struggling desperately upon her back, howling piercingly as she twisted and wriggled between the cruel stones.

We had commenced to run for our rock, which was fortunately only about two hundred yards distant. The Beast was still about a quarter of a mile from the ship and the fissure, out of which still came poor Fidget's heartrending yells.

" Poor little wretch," I remarked to Gwen, as I turned back to face the ascent. " But I expect it'll be mercifully quick and soon over."

No answer came, and I was aware—and the blood within me seemed to freeze with the knowledge—that Gwen was flying down the slope to where the little dog lay howling, her eyes ablaze, her curls streaming in the wind. She was calling Fidget desperately by name, while towards her with steadfast, leisured tread rolled that great Horror, as three centuries before he had swung down upon the hapless Mayan maiden.

" Stop," I screamed, " for God's sake stop! " and I flung away my burden and raced madly down the slope.

She gave no heed, still calling loudly to Fidget, whose whinings increased as we drew nearer.

I ran as I have never run before or since; I saw the eyes of the Beast glint emerald sheened in the sun; I saw his ungainly waddle break into a cumbersome trot, and the desperation of my speed brought me to Gwen's side in a couple of seconds.

" Stop! Are you mad? " I yelled. " What's a dog's life to yours? " and I snatched at her shoulder to drag her back.

A pebble shot from under my feet, glancing upon the water smooth granite, I fell heavily, while a thousand stars danced before my eyes.

As I scrambled dazedly to my feet, I saw Gwen thirty yards away lifting Fidget from the cleft, and rushed to meet her as she turned to run towards me. The Beast was a short furlong distant.

(To be continued.)

WHEN "HOME, SWEET HOME" WAS SUNG.

For one sweet moment, and there seemed
No North or South land there,
Across the river's breast there gleamed
The holiness of prayer.

S. H. M. Byers.

AN INDIAN ROUND UP.

BY THEODORE ALBERT MACE.

A long chase after a company of redskin cattle thieves, involving an extra hazardous bit of scouting and a surprise party calling for quick work.

"'TAIN'T so!"

"Wal, now, it is!" drawled Ben Wilmarth emphatically, holding in his pawing pony with one hand while with the other he removed his broad brimmed hat out of respect to the ladies on the veranda of the long, low structure in which lived the owner of Silver Bend Ranch.

"The whole bunch of cattle gone?" repeated Mr. Peters, the "boss," still incredulously.

"Th' whole fifty head," Ben declared convincingly. "Now, here's how the thing came about," he continued, swinging his leg over the pony's back and dropping to the ground. "Me'n' Nobby Benson hed the bunch well together an' was trailin' erlong towards Carlisle at a rattlin' pace, when a gang of them red devils (beggin' the ladies' pardon), part o' Gray Fox's gang from the upper reservation, I reckon, jest swooped down on us an' sent the whole kit an' bilin' of 'em akitin'. Glory! 'twas a stampede 'n' no mistake."

"And weren't either you or Mr. Benson hurt by the Indians?" asked the ranch owner's wife, Mrs. Boyd.

"Oh, no, ma'am. We jest wheeled an' scatted, fur there was ten or a dozen Injuns, an' they come on us so blessed sudden that we warn't able to do nothin'. But on the way back Nobby's horse fell with him, an' strained his leg so't he ain't much use."

"That is too bad. I'll go and see what I can do for him," Mrs. Boyd exclaimed, and she bustled away at once to find lotions and ointment.

"Nobby ain't hurt very bad, boss," Ben continued, turning to Mr. Peters, "but he can't ride none jest yet, an' you'll hev ter give me a side pardner till he gits on his pins again."

"I'll tend to that, Ben," Peters returned abstractedly. "I'm sorry about that stampede—fifty head o' picked cattle, too, the best of the herd. I wish I'd sent more of the boys with ye."

"'Twouldn't done no good—'nless there was enough of 'em to keep the Injuns from attacking us, or enough so't we could have put after the red scamps. Nobby wanted to do it as it was, but I objected. There was surely a round dozen in the gang, an' 'nless my eyes deceived me mightily—which I don't think they did—Gray Fox himself was with 'em. Then, likely's not, there's more of the scamps somewhere. It's pleasant weather now, government rations ain't good 'nough fur 'em, an' the hull derned tribe had rayther have the settlers' cattle."

"Boyd'll be tearin' mad about the loss of 'em," said Peters reflectively, "an' I shan't blame him. That's the second bunch this season. I don't see why them blue coated monkeys" ('twas thus he designated the United States troops) "don't keep the Injuns at home."

"Huh! *they* ain't no good," Ben declared, with all the disgust of an old ranger for the military powers that be. "Might's well set a lot o' dummies up in that fort ter defend the country. Th' 'kern' thinks as how, if the Injuns make a break, why they'll come right ter his fort an' tell him of it. Makes me

sick! He'd orter hev a lot o' them fellers patrolin' the country on the lookout fur a stampede from the reservation."

"Well, there ain't any use of waitin' for the troops to do anything about it."

"Not a bit. You lemme have half a dozen of the boys, and I can pick up the trail in short order, and perhaps git some o' the cattle back. Any way, I reckon we'll teach the red scamps not to come foolin' 'round the Silver Bend Ranch very soon again."

"Where'd ye say it happened?" asked the overseer, brightening up visibly at this suggestion. "Below the bend, eh?"

"Yep; just about twenty miles along the trail. Jest say the word, boss, an' I'll drum up some o' the boys an' start right off."

"And if you're going, Ben, I want to be one of the crowd," added Phil Boyd, who had been listening to the conversation from the veranda.

"Come along, then, Mr. Phil," said Ben, with a grin. "I'll show you better fun than herding on the range, or lassooing mountain lions in Lone Man's Gulch. We'll have an Injun round up an' git back them cattle if we kin."

"Go ahead, Ben," said Peters. "With Mr. Philip you won't need but four or five others. Get Dan Luther and his brother, Rafferty, and any others who can leave at the corral. If you happen to run across the blue coats just let them know about the raid. They probably haven't woke up to the fact that the Injuns have left the reservation yet."

With the overseer's permission to back him, Ben Wilmarth had little trouble in gathering a sufficient number of herders to follow the cattle thieves.

Phil Boyd was gladly accepted by Ben as a member of the party, for although Eastern bred, the ranch owner's nephew had spent several seasons in the Southwest and was an excellent shot.

The herders started off as gaily as though an expedition after a band of thievish Indians was simply a lark.

The "cow puncher" of the Southwest is a jolly, careless individual, reckless to all outer appearances, but with a quick presence of mind which often gets him out of scrapes. Ben Wilmarth felt himself in his sphere as leader of such an "outfit," for he prided himself on his knowledge of Indian warfare and ability to read "signs."

"Ye see, boys, we was jest passing the big boulder (some calls it the Tipping Rock) down yander, when them red scamps broke cover on us," said Ben, as the cavalcade rode along. "Nobby says to me, says he, 'My hoss says Injun, Ben.' 'Guess not,' says I. But we pulls out beside the trail an' lets the critters trot by us. Just then there came the bloodcurdlin'est yell you ever heard from behind them rocks, an' out rode the hull bilin' o' them Injuns, shoutin' and' swingin' their arms an' shakin' their old bladder rattles. Why them critters bellowed and stampeded before you could say Jack Robinson!"

"An' ye think they was Gray Fox's braves?" asked Rafferty, a short, thickset Irishman who had spent the greater part of his life on the plains.

"Know so," Ben declared, "I'd know that broken nosed rascal if I met him in Afriky, an' he was with 'em. They made for the Bowker Pass, an' if we ride hard, I'll bet ye we'll ketch 'em not far beyond the range."

"Then let's make a break for Bowker and not mind the trail," suggested Dan Luther. "I kin show ye a short cut."

"Go ahead then," said Ben. "They went there, sure, an' we'll soon pick up the trail once *we* get there."

Dan took the lead, and after two hours' hard riding through the hills they struck the plain again at a spot which he declared was less than five miles from the Bowker Pass. At the summit of a long rise Ben suddenly drew rein and motioned the others to fall back.

"There's a bunch o' folks about two miles away," he said. "See 'em there? Jest take a squint at 'em, will ye, Mr. Phil?"

Phil unslung his glass and sighted at the group of moving objects on the plain before them.

"By George, it's cavalry!" he exclaimed. "Uncle Sam's troopers are out for sure, Ben."

"Wonder what started *them* out," returned Ben. "Couldn't be possible that they have heard 'bout the Injuns so soon. They never hear of an outbreak until a week afterwards, at least."

"You're pretty hard on the troops, Ben," said Phil, as they rode on. "You know the Indians make it a point to slip 'em whenever they can. They can't watch 'em all the time, and so I suppose that accounts for the fact of their often getting away from the reservation, making a live stock raid, and getting back to their tepees before the troops know anything about it."

"Wal, what I wanter know is, why they don't kill the pesky critters when they *do* ketch 'em?" growled Ben.

"Oh, well, that's because it isn't the 'policy' of those fellows at Washington. They're not allowed to. I'll admit that the only 'good Indian' is a 'dead Indian'; but when a lot of braves have sneaked out of the reservation, and run off some settler's cattle, and the troops chase them for two or three days and finally run 'em down, what happens?"

"The pesky rascals surrender," admitted Ben.

"Of course they do," said Phil, triumphantly. "They sit down and fold their arms, knowing that a white man won't shoot an unarmed and non resisting enemy. It's not the soldier's fault."

"You always do stick up for the blue coats," Ben exclaimed, with a short laugh. "But if you'd lived on these plains as many years as I hev, you'd know better. We got along a dern sight better with the critters in the old days; at least, you warn't likely to make no mistake then. If ye saw an Injun ye shot him—leastways, ye did 'nless he got the drop on you first. There wasn't no reservation Injuns then, with tags 'round their necks, snoopin' erbout ter run off the stock."

Their near approach to the cavalcade of troopers cut off further argument. The herders rode directly to the head of the column, that had been halted, evidently for the purpose of allowing the officers, and an Indian scout or two, to more closely examine the trail.

"Run off some cattle, I s'pose?" remarked the commander of the government troops briefly.

"Yep; Gray Fox himself was with 'em. They lit out for Bowker, I reckon," responded Ben.

"What ranch?"

"Silver Bend."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Boyd's. And this is young Mr. Boyd, isn't it?" inquired the officer, more pleasantly, advancing toward them.

"That is my name, captain," responded Phil. "The rascals got away with about fifty herd of picked cattle which two of the herders were taking to Carlisle."

"Yes. Well, you see, two trails meet and cross here. One is doubtless the trail of the party you are following. The other is the trail of the main party —about fifty braves—which we have followed since sunrise. The cattle are steering direct for Bowker Pass as you thought, but the main body keep on to the south. I think they intend meeting the others at some rendezvous on the other side of the range. I *was* going to send a file of men after them——"

"That won't be necessary, I reckon, cap'n," interrupted Ben Wilmarth. "We'll keep right on arter the scamps, an' overhaul 'em, whether they jine forces with the bigger crowd or not."

"All right," said the officer, getting into his saddle again. "That will save my men, for we've had a hard day. If you *do* overtake them, and should not

see us again, could you get a report of the matter over to the fort when you get back?"

"I'll attend to that," Phil promised him, as the two cavalcades separated.

"Report!" exclaimed Ben, with an angry snort. "Ef that ain't jest like their blamed foolishness. I'd like ter write 'em a few reports. They'd be short, but ter the p'int! I'd hev 'em read like this: 'Left fort at sunrise. Chased sixteen Injuns. Killed ev'ry last one of 'em. Respectfully submitted, etc.'"

Phil laughed at this.

"You're altogether too bloodthirsty," he declared. "If we get back the cattle that's all *I* care."

"Well," returned Ben grimly, "you keep yer gunlock dry, jest the same. Ye might wanter shoot jack rabbits."

The trail of the stampeded cattle, with here and there the print of a pony's unshod hoof, was plain enough in the alkali dust, and there was little doubt that Bowker Pass was the objective point of the thieves. As they neared the range, therefore, the trailers traveled more carefully.

The entrance to the pass was of such a nature that the approaching herders could not see half a dozen rods into it.

As far as they *could* see, it appeared deserted enough; but there were so many convenient places for ambushes along its entire length that it was sheer recklessness for the whole party to ride right in.

"I tell ye what it is, fellows," said Ben. "One man's better'n two, or half a dozen, in that place, if there *is* Injuns there. If a feller's alone, an' he sees suthin' that ain't jest right, he kin wheel his pony an' skedaddle a great sight easier than if there was a mob right behind him. But who's a goin' ter be the feller to do the reconnoiterin', as they say in books?"

"Draw lots," Rafferty proposed.

"Right, my boy, we will," said Ben.

He stooped from his saddle and plucked a long, stiff blade of grass, which he proceeded to break into seven lengths, one slightly longer than the others. Having prepared these he hid them in his hand, offering only one to the view of each man.

They all drew, Phil (to whom such work was new) feeling, it must be confessed, a little fearful. However, the Irishman, Rafferty, drew the longest blade.

"Well, my luck," he said coolly. "Day, day, boys! If I don't see ye again, the mule's yourn," and he rode away with an assumption of carelessness which may or may not have hidden a good deal of feeling.

"Ef ye don't hear from me in half an hour, come on," he called, looking back over his shoulder, and then he disappeared up the pass.

The waiting men sat like statues upon their horses, without a word and hardly making a movement, half fearful that the terrible Indian warwhoop, or the report of Rafferty's rifle, would break the silence at any instant.

But as the minutes passed, all became more relieved, and when Phil, who sat with his watch in his hand, nodded to Ben as a signal that the half hour was up, the whole cavalcade rode forward into the defile at a swinging trot.

The pass was deserted, and not until they had mounted the rocky trail for half a mile did they observe any signs of Rafferty's previous passage of the defile.

Then, at a particularly difficult spot, where the spray from a rollicking little waterfall had made the path slippery, were marks which instantly assured Ben Wilmarth that the Irishman's horse had tumbled.

"The pony fell with him, boys," exclaimed the leader, reining in his own steed. "See, there's the print of its hull side in the mud. Guess Raf wasn't hurt, fur he seems ter hev gone along," and he cast a quick glance along the trail before them.

"Look here!" suddenly exclaimed Phil Boyd. "There's been more than

one here. See the footprints, Ben? Moccasins, by George!"

The men leaned eagerly forward in their saddles and gazed at the marks.

"Injuns, by jings!" declared Ben.

"Caught him, too, sure's thunder," remarked Dan Luther. "Jumped on him when his hoss fell."

"Right you are," responded their leader gravely; "and they've skedaddled with him. Mebbe thought he was the only feller follering 'em. Reckon they'll find their mistake, eh, boys?"

"That's the talk!" was the reply, and the whole party spurred onward.

But the redskins and their prisoner had a good twenty minutes' start, and that meant a good deal to an Indian who never seeks to spare horseflesh.

At the end of the pass the herders halted again and gathered around their leader for a council of war.

"I'll tell ye what it is, boys," said Ben, "that Gray Fox is a cleaner, an' no mistake. His name fits him, fur he's keener'n any old fox of 'em all. Ye kin see by these tracks that the cattle went through this here pass not long after noon, but two or three of the scamps hung back ter kiver their tracks from jest such a crowd as this here. It's hard lines that Raf fell in with 'em, but that can't be helped.

"Now you can see that the trails separate right here," went on Ben. "Them with the cattle's south'ard, likely ter meet the big gang that the sojers are chasin'; but these fellers with Rafferty hev kept right on westward.

"That's done ter lead any one that was a follerin' him away from the cattle. Arter they've done their prettiest ter slip us, they'll circle aroun' an' come up with the main body, too.

"Now I propose we separate. I'll take Mr. Phil an' foller arter those scamps that hev got Raf; an' you, Dan, take the other fellers an' keep on arter the cattle. We'll meet again jest as luck lets us."

"It's a goin' ter be dark in a blamed short while," said Dan doubtfully.

"Let it. You fellers keep on as far as ye kin; then camp on the trail an' pick it up agin in the morning. Now git."

Both parties put spurs to their horses and dashed away from the pass, shortly disappearing from each other's sight.

Ben and Phil rode like the wind for the first half hour.

"They've tried to hide their trail not far from the pass. It's coming night," Ben said, "an' we wanter find out their 'slip' and recover the trail agin before it's too dark ter do fine work. There'll be a moon by an' by, and we'll travel by that."

Within three miles of the pass the trail led them to a broad stream which here flowed through the valley. The Indians had entered the water upon one side, but there were no marks on the further shore to show that they had ridden on.

"Humph! that's an old dodge," muttered Ben. "They've kept in the stream for some distance, but as we know pretty well in which direction they're really bound it amounts to no slip at all. They went south, of course. Come along, Phil."

Phil accepted Ben's superior knowledge of Indian nature and rode on in silence.

In less than a mile they reached a part of the stream where the banks were higher. The opposite bank was especially high, its summit being quite twenty feet above the water. It appeared as though the stream had forced its way through the cut, for the bank sloped directly up from the water and the soil was sandy.

"That's the place," declared Ben, with satisfaction, reining his horse into the water. "That's where they left the stream, I'll bet ye. Ye see, the bank's so loose that it would rattle right down an' hide their tracks."

He forced his horse to ford the stream just above the bank, and, followed by Phil, mounted to its summit.

Sure enough, it didn't take a second

glance to show them where the horses of the party they were trailing had arrived at the top of the bank.

"Now we're off," cried Ben. "I don't believe the red rascals will try any more tricks just now."

It was nearly dark, even on the open prairie, and before many miles had been traversed they were forced to halt.

They rested their horses for several hours, until the moon arose sufficiently to allow them to travel, and then went faster than before.

At length, just as the moon began to pale and faint streaks of gray light were appearing along the eastern horizon, the trail left the open plain and struck out toward the hills.

"Ride easy now," said Ben warningly. "We may come upon 'em at any time."

They rode along for several rods farther and left their horses at the mouth of a gulch, up which the trail led.

The gulch soon broadened into a wide valley, and not far from its entrance Phil caught sight of a thin column of smoke lazily rising from a campfire. About the fire were three figures lying as still as logs.

"All sound asleep," whispered Ben with a chuckle. "See! that's Rafferty —the one without any blanket. By George! how easy we could pick the two rascals off. An' I would, if it 'twarn't fur that report we've got ter make to th' cap'n."

Ben shook his head and remained thoughtfully silent for a moment.

"I tell ye what le's do," he said. "You stay here, an' cover them two fellers, so's ter pop 'em over if I should waken 'em, an' I'll creep up, cut Raf's bonds, an' then we'll all light out."

Phil had no better plan to propose, although he considered this a very risky piece of business, so he allowed Ben to depart in silence.

He sheltered himself behind a boulder, and with both rifles (Ben had left his behind because it would be in his way) he thought he could cover the retreat of Ben and the Indian's prisoner successfully.

Ben crept toward the smoldering campfire, being very careful of every step, yet covering the distance with considerable despatch. In three minutes he was kneeling beside the prostrate Rafferty and loosening the thong which fastened his hands.

Rafferty had doubtless been unable to sleep very soundly because of the discomfort of his bonds, which were drawn cruelly tight, so he was awake before Ben touched him. Neither spoke a word, nor hardly dared breathe, so intense was their excitement.

Suddenly, just as Ben had succeeded in unbinding the Irishman's wrists, one of the Indians stirred in his sleep, rolled over toward the fire, and sat up.

For one instant he stared at Ben in speechless amazement, and then with a yell sprang to his feet, a long hunting knife clutched in his hand.

But Ben was not to be caught napping. He was on his feet, too, but in the confusion dropped his knife.

The yell of the Indian roused his companion, but before either of the red men had got their wits to working the sharp report of a rifle came from among the rocks near the entrance to the valley, and the first Indian dropped back upon the earth.

Another yell burst from the dusky warrior's lips, and was echoed by his companion, as they both sprang up and dashed away from the campfire, running like deers for the shelter of the boulders further down the valley.

Evidently the Indian who had stopped Phil Boyd's shot had not been very seriously wounded.

Ben rapidly stripped off the remainder of Rafferty's bonds, and helped him to his feet and on the back of his own horse which was picketed near by with the two Indian ponies. These Ben "gathered in" also, and then hurried back to the mouth of the defile where Phil was awaiting them.

"Took him right in the shoulder,

didn't it?" exclaimed the excited youth. "*Didn't* they run, though!"

"Yes, and that's what we'd better do, I reckon," declared Ben, and hurrying through the ravine they recovered their own horses, and, leading the captured ponies, started across the valley for the opposite mountain range.

They struck the cattle trail about noon, and not long afterward descried a great dust cloud approaching from the south toward Bowker Pass.

In a short time the cloud resolved itself first into the drove of stampeded cattle (or such of them as hadn't been killed for food by the Indians) in the care of Dan Luther and the other three Silver Bend herders. Behind the cattle came the United States troops surrounding the disarmed Indians, and meeker looking red men were never seen.

"It turned out jest's you said, Ben," said Dan, after greeting the newly arrived trio, and Phil had made his "report" to the captain. "The so'jers ketched the scamps jest arter sun up this morning, an' there wasn't a shot fired. Just rounded 'em up like er drove of beef critters. We got there jest too late fur any of the fun. Dern these blue coated chaps, any way! If they hadn't been snoopin' 'round we might have paid the red fiends off a little for all the trouble they give us."

THE PRANKS OF DESTINY.*

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

The terrible pass to which Felix Parsons finds himself reduced, the awful resolve he takes, and what swerves him aside from acting on it. The mystery about Rita Ortega and the great game of Pike Millington, played at double quick tempo

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PUNISHMENT OF FELIX PARSONS.

IT is not necessary to describe at length the hours of bitter mental struggle which took place between Felix Parsons and Pike Millington when the former discovered that his friend was not hurt at all—that he had been shamming all the time—that the doctors, the servants—everybody, in fact, who was in any way connected with the matter, had been acting under an agreement with the young financier, although Edna was the only one who was not ignorant of the object to be attained.

Felix was very angry at first, but bit by bit he was brought around to the point where he could see the humor of the thing, and at last he laughed as heartily as his friend; but it was by no means as easy to prevail upon him to keep the secret of his own sin. He insisted that he must go to Sam Millington and confess all, and then, if the millionaire chose to overlook the matter, he would be content to let it rest.

But Pike was not of that mind at all.

"Look at the position you will place me in, to say nothing of Ned," he said. "The governor would forgive you all right, clap you on the shoulder, tell you that you are smarter than lightning, offer you opportunities, and make you a millionaire again in less than no time." (Felix had told him about his losses, and the entire history of that night when Trevor requested the loan of him.) "I don't think that you ought to profit out of my father, because of your confounded theft—that's what you like to call it—and that's what you would do if you should go to him with

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a confession. Oh, yes, he'd forgive you like a book, but where would I be at? Hey? Do you think that he would ever overlook the fact that I played the 'horrible accident' game on him? Not much! I'm going to keep this thing up till I'm strong enough to travel—that is, so far as he is concerned, for I shall go out nights with you—and then you and I, and two others whom I shall invite, are going to take a trip abroad, at my expense.

"You needn't think that I excuse you, for I don't. If you had done the thing on your own hook, for your own self, I'd have helped to put a striped suit on you—I would, by the Lord Harry! As it is, you ought to be punished! I'll admit that, too; but it will punish you a whole lot more to compel you to lock the thing up in your own heart, than it would to let you go and blow the whole affair to the governor. He'd be proud of you, and before you had been an hour with him, you'd be ass enough to think that you had done a fine thing.

"And there's Ned! Well, if you have got any appreciation or chivalry in your soul, you'll keep that confounded mouth of yours shut. That's all I've got to say. If you still insist upon blowing your horn, go and do it, but you and I are strangers from that minute. Lord! how I want to smoke! Give me a cigar, can't you?"

Pike Millington had a way of overcoming opposition of all kinds wherever he met with it, and this case was not an exception, so that by the time nine o'clock struck the two men had arrived at a thorough understanding.

"Now, Felix," said Pike then, "I am going out for an hour or two. I think you ought to remain here this time, for the governor might run in, you know. Will you telephone for a coupé, while I dress?"

"Where are you going?"

"To get some air. I feel as though I had been on that bed for a week."

But he had another object than fresh air, for when he entered the cab, he directed the driver to take him to the Millington as quickly as he could; and when he arrived, he went at once to Rita's apartment and rang the bell.

Marie opened the door and instantly invited him to enter. He passed through the corridor, entered the parlor, and found—as it seemed that he had expected to find—Clarita Ortega eagerly awaiting him.

"Mr. Millington!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad you have come at last. I was growing very anxious, although you assured me in the note that you believed it would be all right. You are very late. It is almost ten. What was the danger which threatened Felix? Is he safe? Is there anything that I——"

Millington held up both hands, laughingly.

"Everything is all right," he said. "That answers all your questions at once. So I was right, eh? You have been here all the time, eh?"

"Yes. I did not go away. I have not left the house at all."

"Wise little girl! Wiser than Solomon! I suspected it this morning. I heard the swish of your skirts."

"What was the danger that threatened Felix? Will you tell me?"

"It isn't necessary now. It's all over, and he is as safe as a church. Do you remember that scoundrel Chapman? He put up a job on our friend; I headed him off; that's all there is to it. But there is something else on my mind now."

"More trouble, Mr. Millington?"

"Yes; I am afraid so."

"For Felix?"

"Yes."

"What is it? Tell me at once what it is."

"Well, I can't tell you all in a minute, but I think he is going away."

"Going away! When? Where?"

"I don't know, exactly. You see, it all came through something I said to him."

"Something that you—his friend—said to him! Will you tell me what it was?"

"That's the poser, Miss Rita. You see, it is rather hard for me to tell it to you, but I suppose I must."

"Yes," she said earnestly, "I think you must;" and her big eyes were fixed intently upon him.

"Do you remember that evening when I called with Felix? About Chapman, you know?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, I fell in love with you that night."

She drew back quickly and her face paled perceptibly. She could not understand this man. He uttered the words so calmly, his expression was so benign, and he seemed so unconscious that he had said anything unusual that she could not take offense.

"I do not understand," she said with such reserve and dignity that he smiled broadly.

"Yes," he continued placidly, as though he were discussing the most commonplace of things, "head over heels—clean gone—thought about you all the time—dreamed about you nights—wrote you fifty five or more letters, and burned 'em all—came East a week ahead of time on your account, and it's a mighty good thing I did. . . . . But I've got over it."

"Oh!"

"It isn't a very polite thing to say, is it?"

"It is a very pleasant thing for me to hear," she said, demurely.

"Whew! That was a *Roland* for my *Oliver*, sure enough! Yes, I've got over it—that is, a part of it. I think I am just as fond of you as ever, but in a way that maybe you'll like—big brother, and all that, you know; eh?"

She nodded and smiled. She was beginning to understand him better.

"But, you see," he continued, after he had smiled back at her, "I made a bad break."

"What is that—a break?" she asked.

"Never mind; you'll guess in a minute. When I got back, Felix met me at the train. I went to his rooms. We got to talking about you. He said that you were away on a visit. And then I up and told him that I was in love with you, and asked him, as your guardian, mind, if he had any objections to me."

"What was that for?"

"I was going to ask you to marry me."

"Did he have any objections?"

"He said he hadn't. Said I was the best fellow in the world. But all the same, that is why he is going away; at least that is part of it."

"Why should he go away because of that?" she asked.

"Why, to give me a clear field. He told me that you had refused him, but all the same, he didn't think you would have me. And now, I'm going to propose, and I want you to accept me."

"Accept you, Mr. Millington?"

"Yes, that's the idea. We'll be engaged just five minutes—oh, you needn't be frightened—I'll leave out all of the extras. Then, at the end of five minutes, you can tell me that you have thought better of it, and you can break the engagement; see?"

"No, I do not see at all. I do not understand what it is all about. You will have to explain."

"Do you want Felix to go away and perhaps never return?"

"No, oh, no!"

"Well, the only way in which you can keep him here is by doing as I say. Will you do it?"

"But it will be for only five minutes. You assure me of that?"

"Certainly. Now—are you ready? One, two, three, *go!* Will you be my wife? Quick, answer, say yes."

"Ye—yes."

"Say it louder than that; say it plainer."

"Yes."

"Hurrah! I tell you, I'm a schemer, and no mistake."

He sprang to his feet, seized his hat, and before Clarita realized what he intended to do, was half way to the door, calling out as he went:

"I've got you now, Miss Rita, and don't you forget it. Felix said you wouldn't say yes, and you have. He wants you himself—Lord, how he wants you, and I have stolen a march on him. He won't get you. I've got you, and what's more, I'm going to keep you."

With a loud cry, she leaped to her feet and started after him, calling wildly for him to return; but he only laughed, and increased his speed, darting down the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator, and she heard him close the front door behind him as he went out. Then, still quivering with excitement and anger, she returned to the parlor, threw herself upon the sofa, and burst into a passion of weeping.

"It was a trick—a trick," she moaned. "I am not bound by it. I will not be bound by it." Then she wept again; and in the mean time, Pike Millington had leaped into his coupé, still laughing, for he was immensely pleased with the trick he had played.

"I think I have fixed that all right," he said aloud, addressing himself, and he continued to chuckle all the way home.

He was still chuckling when he entered the presence of Felix Parsons, but he offered no word of explanation for his merriment, except to say:

"I'm laughing to think that my bones aren't broken, after all."

CHAPTER XXV.

"GOD BLESS THAT CABLE CAR."

THE early morning mail brought a letter for Felix. It was written in Spanish, and translated, it contained these words:

DEAR FELIX:

I am at home. Something very terrible has happened. I must see you at once. Come to me the moment you receive this.

RITA.

"Hello," said Millington, who saw him reading it and suspected who it was from. "Got a letter?"

"Yes; from Rita. She says that she is in trouble."

"Trouble! She didn't seem to be in any trouble last night."

"Last night! Did you see her last night?"

"Yes. I called there."

"May I ask why you waited till this morning to tell me about it? You must have known of my anxiety."

"Known that you were anxious? What about?"

Felix bit his lip with vexation. For the moment he had forgotten that Pike knew nothing of Clarita's flight.

"Was it your call there that gave you so much amusement when you returned?" he asked, coldly.

"It wasn't amusement; it was happiness. I asked Rita to be my wife, and she said yes."

Felix Parsons started back as though he had been struck by a bullet; but he recovered himself instantly, and then, very calmly, he extended the letter he had just received towards Pike.

"In that case," he said, "it is your place and not mine to reply to this letter."

"Not much, old man. The letter is addressed to you. You must answer it. Does she want you to go up and see her?"

"Yes."

"Then go; only wait till the governor has been here and gone. I'll have to crawl back into bed again, won't I? But before I do it, I will just write a short note which I will ask you to give to Miss Rita, only I don't want you to give it to her until you have had your talk out. Will you do me that favor?"

"Yes."

Millington wrote the letter, and, after repeating his injunction that it should not be delivered until after the other's interview with Rita was concluded, gave it to Felix. Then he got back into bed, replaced his bandages, darkened

the room, and awaited the coming of his father, who, punctually at nine o'clock, presented himself.

As soon as he was assured that his son was better and that the doctors had already been there that morning, he rose to go, saying that he would drop in again in the evening on his way up town; and then he added:

"I found that stock all right."

"Of course you did."

"But the package has been opened."

"Certainly. Two or three times. When will you be in this afternoon?"

"Between five and six."

Then he went out, and the bedridden patient kicked the clothes off and leaped to his feet.

"Now skip out, Felix," he said. "I won't stir out of the house till you return."

Felix made no reply until he was ready to go, and then he paused at the door, and said very slowly:

"I did not offer my congratulations, Pike, but I do now."

"Oh, they can wait till you get back. I'll want them then—and need them, too, I imagine."

As soon as he was alone, he rang the messenger call—it was then half past ten—and wrote another note. Here it is:

DEAR MISS NED:

Felix and I want to see you very much, and at once. You did splendidly about that safe, but affairs are not *entirely* straightened out, yet. I've got to have your consent to one more thing, right away. Can you come here at once? Answer in person.

PIKE MILLINGTON.

After the boy had gone, Pike took his stand near the window where he could see up the avenue, and for half an hour he neither moved nor turned his eyes away.

Then, suddenly, he laughed softly to himself, crossed the room, and stood near the door until he heard light, quick footfalls beyond it; and then the bell rang.

Instantly he opened the door.

"Come in, Ned," he said, laughing softly. "Felix will be back soon. He was called out on a little errand."

"It is not right at all for me to come here in this way," she said, entering the room, but declining the proffered chair. "No, I won't sit down. Is Felix coming right back? Yes? I will wait a few moments. Have you seen the papers this morning?"

"Not a paper. Why?"

"Oh, dear! It is so funny. All about your accident. One wouldn't think there is a whole bone left in your body. I wonder which gripman thinks he ran over you! Pike, do you see any gray hairs in my head?"

"Not a hair. Why?"

"It's a wonder. I never was so frightened in my life as when I was opening that safe. I wouldn't do it again——"

"You won't have to; that's one comfort. You did it up brown, though. Fooled the governor like a mice. Lord, Ned, I don't know what in the world I would have done without you. And that brings me to the thing I wanted to ask you about this morning: I don't know what in the world I am going to do without you, ever—and I have made up my mind that I won't."

"Won't what?" she asked, not comprehending.

"Won't do without you."

"When? Where? What do you mean?"

"Now. Everywhere. I mean that I want you all the time. That's the point: all the time. You're a dandy, Ned! There isn't a girl like you this side of heaven. Why, if you were my wife, with your grit and pluck and get-up-and-get, I'd control a railroad from the Atlantic to the Pacific in two years, and have a mortgage on the world in five; but, Ned, I'd have something better than railroads and mortgages—something better than anything and everything else in the world, for I'd have you. You needn't stand there and stare at me as if you thought I'd taken leave of my

senses; I've just found them; that's God's truth. And you needn't try to think up some new fangled way of saying no, just to let me down easy, for I tell you now, I won't take no for an answer. Nobody ever said no to me since I was born, and I'm not going to let a slip of a girl like you begin it; not much! Besides, you've got to help me out of this scrape with the governor. It'll never do in the world to let him know how we fooled him, so I've got to go abroad to mend my broken bones—and you have got to go with me. We're accomplices in crime, and accomplices for life, Ned."

"Have you quite finished?" she inquired, tossing her head and trying, with poor success, to speak coldly.

"Finished? No, I've just begun. Just as soon as you say yes——"

"I thought you said that was not necessary."

"Well, it isn't, only just for form's sake, you know—but just as soon as you do say it, I'll send down word and have my yacht put into commission, and you and I, and Felix and Rita——"

"Rita?"

"Certainly. I wish you wouldn't interrupt—you and I, and Felix and Rita, will have a quiet double wedding, and then we'll sail away. Ned, do you know that a man has to be educated in love, as well as in other things? The night before I started for Chicago, I went with Felix to see Rita, and blessed if I didn't think I'd lost my heart, for sure; but it turned out to be only my head. Then, when I ran into you yesterday, I not only recognized the symptoms, but I knew the difference between the real thing and the imitation. Don't you remember what I said about giving you a third of all that I possessed if you carried out the business yesterday? That's what I meant, even then. I made up my mind on the spot."

"Really, Mr. Millington——"

"There, now, I don't want to hear a word of that ancient form about its being too sudden, taking time to consider, and all that. It won't do, and it's all fol de rol, anyhow. Good lord, I've known you ever since you were a baby, and you've known me ever since I was ten years old, and you've pulled my hair, and put pins in my chair at school. What more do you want, I'd like to know! Ned, dear, I don't know how to propose—I don't know how to say things as they should be said—all that I know is that I want you. I want you for my wife—I want you to love me always, just as I love you, with all your heart and soul and strength."

He sprang towards her impetuously and put his arms around her, before she could prevent it or speak.

"Ned, Ned!" he exclaimed, "don't you see that I am in earnest? I don't know what I'll do if you refuse me; grin and bear it, I suppose; but—you won't refuse, will you? Look up at me, Ned. Will you marry me? Will you be my wife? Say yes."

"You told me that was unnecessary."

"Never mind, say it—say it!"

"I—I'd rather not. You say it for me, Pike—for I mean it—just the same."

There was an interval then, during which neither of them said anything, but it was terminated at last by Millington.

"Ned," he said, "there is one thing that I do want to say."

"What is it?" she inquired, moving farther away from him.

"God bless that cable car."

Then they both laughed, for at that moment the whole world was a laughing matter.

"I must go, Pike," she said, suddenly, starting for the door.

"Nonsense! Wait till Felix comes."

"No, indeed! I wouldn't for the world."

A few moments later, when, from the window, Pike saw her disappear around a corner, he turned back into the room with a laugh of utter happiness, and exclaimed:

"And I never once thought to ask her for that key."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THOUGH YOUR SINS BE AS SCARLET."

In the mean time, Felix had gone swiftly upon his errand, and found Rita in a state of nervous excitement bordering upon frenzy. It was evident that she had passed a sleepless night, and that the dawn had brought her no comfort.

"Felix, Felix!" she cried, when he entered the room, and she flew to him, and would have thrown herself upon his breast had he not repulsed her coldly and sternly.

There was a relentless, unforgiving, repellent look in his eyes which she saw instantly, and she shrank away from him with a low gasp of pain.

"You have come at last," she said, then, pitifully.

"I came as soon as it was possible after your letter arrived," he replied. "What is the trouble, and what is there that I can do for you? Don't you think it would have been more consistent if you had sent for Millington?"

She started back and gazed upon him, pantingly.

"He has told you?" she half whispered, in her intensity.

"He has told me that you accepted him—yes. As his promised wife, you should have sent for him, not for me."

"It is a falsehood!" she cried, wildly. "I am not his promised wife! I will never be his wife—*never!*"

"Have you not promised that you will marry him? Or has he lied to me?"

"Yes, I said 'yes' to him; but it was a trick—a trick."

"I confess that I do not understand you, Rita."

"Oh, Felix, let me tell you in my own way. I have suffered so, since that morning when—when we—were to be—to be married."

"When you ran away; yes, I remember. It is not so very long ago."

"I did not run away," she said with quiet dignity. "I was here in the house when you came, and I was looking at you from beyond the portières all the time you were here. I have not been out of the house since then. You may ask Edna Trevor—she knows."

"Edna Trevor? How is it that she knows?"

"She came here that morning, soon after you were gone. At first, Marie would not admit her, but she came in. I was there, upon the couch, crying, and she came and put her arms around me, and said that she was sorry for what she had said to me that day when we met at your rooms; and she kissed me, and begged my pardon, and she made me love her, although I wanted to hate her because I thought she loved you. She does love you, too, Felix, but not that way. I know that now. And then when I had cried and cried, I told her all about what it was that made me cry, and she consoled me, and told me that it would come out all right; and she made me promise that I would let her tell you all about it—that I was here—that I had not gone away at all. She was to tell you yesterday, and I thought that you would come to me at once—but you did not come——"

"She did not tell me," he said, speaking coldly. "It is true that she did express the wish to see me at four o'clock yesterday, but other things happened. I forgot it, and I suppose she did. But that does not account for——"

"Wait, Felix; let me finish what I have to say. Yesterday, in the forenoon, Mr. Millington came here. I was in the corridor, near the door, when he rang. I fled, but he heard me, and he guessed that I was here. He entered, and in this room he wrote a note, in which he said that you were in great trouble, and that it might be necessary that I should assist him in freeing you from it. Here is the note; you may read it. He also said that he would

call again in the evening; but it was nearly ten o'clock when he came. Ah! I wish he had not come! I wish he had not come here—ever!"

Felix smiled incredulously, and Rita continued:

"He told me that you were going away—told me of the conversation that he had had with you concerning me—told me that it was on my account that you were going, and he made me believe that if I would say 'yes' to his proposal, you would be prevented from going. I do not know how, but he convinced me that it was so; and he promised, on his honor, that the engagement should not continue more than five minutes—that it should be broken before he left—and then, when I had said 'yes' he sprang up laughing, and ran away, and I have been—I do not know what—loco—what is the word? Crazy?—yes, that is it; I have been crazy ever since. I could not rest; I sent you the note. Oh, Felix, tell me—I am not bound by such a promise—a promise secured by a trick."

"You did not regard your promise to me as binding; why should you consider this one seriously?" he asked, with cool sarcasm.

She could only gaze at him with wide, pleading eyes, which he chose to ignore; but at last she broke the silence.

"Are you going away, Felix?" she asked.

"Yes; I am going away, and I shall not return—at least, not for a long time."

"No, no! Do not go, Felix! What shall I do if you are gone?"

"You will do what is best for you, Rita," he said, more gently. "You will marry Pike Millington. He loves you. He is an honorable man. He is rich. He can make you very happy."

"No, oh, no!"

"I had no right to ask you to be my wife when I did so. I have forfeited my honor—my right to ask any good woman to share her life with me. Let me tell you who and what I am—what I was when I asked you to marry me, and then, perhaps, you will be glad that I am going away."

"No, oh, no; do not say that!"

"It is true. I am a thief—a common thief. I have stolen. It was from the consequences of a theft that Pike Millington would have saved me—it was from the literal consequences of such a deed that he has saved me. He was right when he said that I would suffer more in secrecy than in public. If I can no longer respect myself, how can I hope that others will respect me?

"Do you remember when I wrote you that letter, telling you that I was going away? Where do you think I was going, then? I had determined to take my own life. My fortune was dissipated, but my honor was untarnished. I thought that I had a right to die. I thought that I loved Carla Trevor. then; it never occurred to me that it was you whom I loved, but I remember, now—and I recall it with surprise—I remember that I possessed the courage to go where she was—to see her for the last time—to look upon her once more, believing that I experienced more regret at leaving her than for anything else—*but into your presence I dared not go*. I could look upon her, and smile, and keep my secret, but *your* eyes I avoided, for I must have known, instinctively, that they would read the truth.

"I did not realize that it was *you* whom I loved all the time, until I saw you together. Then I knew; but even when you left the letter saying that you would not marry me, I was not unhappy, for I believed that it would all come out right. But this morning, Rita, when in the midst of self abasement, standing heart deep among the fragments of my broken honor, I heard Millington say that you had promised to be his wife, I knew, for the first time, what misery is.

"It came upon me then, with all its force and terror. It is with utter shame that I confess that the wrong I have committed sank into insignificance be-

fore the greater misery of losing you—of knowing that you were to be the wife of another. And yet, if you were free now I would not ask you again to be my wife, for that stain is still upon my soul. It can never be washed away."

He sank upon a chair and covered his face with his hands, and she went and knelt beside him, looking up into his eyes pityingly.

"Felix," she whispered, "dear Felix, do you not remember what the Good Book says, and do you not know that it is true? 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be washed as white as wool.' I do not know what you mean—I do not know what it is that you have done, but whatever it is, God will forgive you."

In the midst of his misery, strangely enough, he remembered the note that Millington had sent to Rita, and now he took it from his pocket, and without raising his eyes, gave it to her. Wonderingly, she opened it and read, and then she smiled through her unshed tears.

"Look, Felix! Read!" she said; and mechanically he took the note from her and read the words that Pike had written.

My Dear Rita:

You must forgive me for the trick I played upon you. Never mind why; you will know when you read this. I release you from your promise. I don't want you to marry me. I wouldn't have you. Cause why? Because, in about half an hour I am going to ask Edna Trevor to do it. Bet you a hundred that she consents. Now one thing more. You made me another promise. I'm going to hold you to that. You agreed to help me to save Felix. There's only one way to do it. Marry him.

Pike Millington.

Felix loosened his grasp upon the letter and it fluttered to the floor. Then he opened his arms, and Rita nestled into them, supremely content. There was an interval of silence, and then Felix murmured:

"Darling, it is true. Though my sins be as scarlet, He will wash them white as wool."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST PIKE MILLINGTON.

Felix Parsons and Geoffrey Trevor stood facing each other in the library at Trevor House. The former had just entered the room in obedience to a summons from the latter, who had risen from his chair to greet him. Felix looked perplexed and troubled; Trevor's face was pale, sad, older, but firm.

"I came as quickly as I could, Pater," said Felix, assuming a lightness of manner that he did not feel.

"Is Rita with you, Felix?"

"Yes; she is in the parlor, with Edna."

"That is right. I am determined that she shall know who her father is, and that without delay, but there is one thing that must be explained first. Do you remember what you said to me in the carriage, the day that Carla was hurt? You told me that there was a chapter in my history which even I do not know. You must tell me what you meant by that."

"Must I, Pater?"

"You must."

Felix walked to the window, turned and came back again, and then, in a low, even tone, said:

"Before my father died, he told me a part of the experiences which you and he had in Cuba, twenty five years ago, and he left me a mission to perform. He knew of Rita's birth, and directed me to search for and find her, and always to watch over her as if she were my own sister. He told me of your marriage to her mother, of your separation from your first wife, and the reasons for it, and that you were ignorant of the fact that she had borne a child."

"All that is true. Go on, Felix," said the old man.

"I went to Seville. From there I

traced your child to Cuba, and thence to the City of Mexico, where I found her. She had been taken and cared for by a distant relative of her mother—a Senor Llorente."

"Yes, a scoundrel, if there ever was one. Go on."

"From him I learned the whole story——"

"His version of it, but an untrue one, surely. He could not speak truth."

"He gave me what seemed to be proofs of the correctness of his tale, and there was one statement which I determined never to reveal."

"What was that, Felix?"

"That your first wife had died only ten years before that time, or fifteen years ago now. That is to say, nearly six years after the birth of Carla. I was horrified. You——"

The old man raised one hand and stopped him. He was smiling and unmoved.

"It is not true," he said, calmly. "Carlotta—that was her name—died in my arms, from a wound inflicted by that very weapon that affected me so, the evening when we together called upon Rita. It was thrown through the open window by the hand of an unknown assassin, but, as I honestly believe, by Llorente himself, who loved her, and had been repulsed for me. I think the weapon was aimed at me, or at both of us, but it struck only her. She died instantly, without a word, and I never once left her side until she was hidden from earthly sight forever. That was two years, nearly, before the mother of Carla and Edna became my wife. Do you believe me, Felix?"

"Do I believe you? My God! If you only knew how I have suffered, fearing that you would some day know this thing that I was led to believe—fearing that Carla and Ned might hear of it—and the relief that I feel now! I should have told you five years ago, Pater."

"You acted for the best, and you have done nobly, Felix. I have only one more thing to say. You already know the reasons for my separation from Rita's mother. You must understand that no blame attached to her. She was jealous; that was all. Unjustly so, but it was Llorente's work. She left me and returned to her home in Spain. Ultimately, I followed her there. Our interview had just commenced; she had not told me of the child, but she had thrown herself into my embrace when that terrible knife flew through the window and ended everything. I loved her, Felix. That is all. Now, will you send my eldest daughter to me? Will you send Rita here? I will tell her who she is."

More than two hours elapsed after Rita entered her father's library before she came out again, and when she did, there was a new born happiness in her eyes and upon her face, which almost transfigured it. During the last half hour of that time, Carla and Edna were there also, and they all came out together.

Just what took place inside was never revealed by any of those who participated, but whatever it was, it had produced peace, harmony, and concord forever.

Felix was in the parlor, alone, and Carla entered and closed the door.

"Felix," she said, "I have come to ask your forgiveness. Will you grant it? I think I shall be happy again, if you will."

"It is I who need forgiveness, Carla," he replied.

"No, Felix, it is I. Let us be just to ourselves, and to each other. I am very happy in the possession of my sister Rita—still happier in the knowledge that she is to be your wife. She loves you much more deeply than I ever did. I love you now, better than I did then, for it was not real love, Felix; it was pride. And when I forgot myself and did that horrible thing, it was my pride that was suffering, not my love. I have never really loved. I realize that when I look at Rita. You are to be my brother, and I shall love you better so

than if you had been my husband. Do you understand me, Felix?"

"Yes, Carla, I understand. God bless you!"

* * * *

Old Sam Millington was sitting alone in a room in his residence that he used as an office, when there was a ring at the door.

Such a thing was almost unprecedented, since the house had been practically closed for a year, but he answered the summons, and beheld, standing upon the steps, the figure of a young woman.

"I am Edna Trevor," she said. "May I come in?"

"Certainly. Step in at once. What can I do for you, Miss Edna?"

"You can do a whole lot, if you will," she replied, walking briskly into his den. "I suppose you know that I am going to marry your son."

"Well, yes," he answered, smiling. "He told me about it this morning. I am greatly pleased, and told him so. Pike is a good boy—and a smart one. But it will be some time before he will be well enough to get married."

"He's well enough now," she said, bluntly; and then, while the old capitalist stared in amazement, she went on rapidly, and told him the whole story from beginning to end, omitting nothing, and she did it so quaintly, so energetically, and in such plain terms, that before she was half through there were tears of laughter in his eyes.

"You see," she concluded, "I would not be married under false pretenses. And then there was Felix, dying to come to you and let out the whole thing, only Pike—the big ruffian!—wouldn't let him, so I just made up my mind that I'd do it myself. I'm just as deep in the mud as any of them, and I've got a right to tell if I want to—and you will forgive us all, won't you?"

"Edna," said the old man, and the tears in his eyes were not all produced by laughter now, "if you will put your arms around my old neck, kiss me, and say 'Thank you, father,' I will promise to forgive."

"You wouldn't have had to ask me to do that," she made answer. "I should have done it, anyhow;" and she threw her arms around his neck, kissed him a dozen times, and thanked him with every one.

"Now, one thing more," she said.

"Another confession?"

"No, a trick. Pike is going to sneak out tonight—that's the proper word—and come to see me. Felix, and Rita, and papa, and Carla will all be there. I want you to come to the house quietly, at nine o'clock. I'll let you in at the side door, and then I'll conduct you to the parlor, right among the whole lot. I just want to see Pike wither up when he sees you. Will you do it? It will be the funniest thing that ever happened."

"Of course I'll do it. I'm putty in your hands, my dear. I expect that you will make a fool of me as well as of Pike."

"Oh, it wasn't much trouble to make one of Pike. He was quite near it already."

"I'll play my part well tonight. I'll be the stern and unyielding parent just as long as I can hold out. I'll get even with Pike, never fear."

And he did. Pages could not describe the consternation on the faces of all when he entered the room, and Pike Millington endured an hour of suffering that he never forgot. When it was all over, the elder Millington added these words to Felix:

"I do not entirely excuse you, but I do freely forgive you. It has been a lesson that you will never forget—and you ought not to."

One morning, a week later, Pike was reading the paper when he looked up suddenly, and called out to Felix, who was with him:

"Here's news," he said.

"What is it, Mill?"

"Chapman has shot himself."

"What?"

"Fact. Caught cheating at cards—couldn't stand the exposure—blew his brains out—here it is; read it for yourself."

* * * *

One month later there was a double wedding in New York, but it was by no means a quiet one. It was a very happy one, however, and one of its most striking features was the sight of Sam Millington and Geoffrey Trevor walking up the middle aisle of the church arm in arm—at least, that is what the papers said.

Then, later, when the reception was over and done with, Felix, with tender insistence, compelled Rita to raise her eyes to his, and asked:

"Are you truly happy now, Rita, my dear?"

And she, dropping her eyes again, said demurely:

"I could not express it in English, Felix. It has not the words."

THE END.

THE SPORTING ELEMENT.

BY OWEN HACKETT.

A college story, in which is set forth the fact that while the conscienceless are at liberty to take more ways than one of gaining their ends, the biter is often liable to be bitten.

I.

JACK BURKE came up to Harmondale College, and for some time attracted no particular attention, except as the fellow who had taken poor Sedley Geldon's old rooms in the South Wing.

"Poor Sed!" sighed Bert Sharpe. "To think they'd fire the life and soul of the college! And just because they found he was running a mild game of poker in his rooms—*those* rooms!" with a regretful glance up at the South Wing. "A better fellow and a freer spender than Sed Geldon never lived."

"Y-e-s," replied Dolph Johnes, in his slow, tired way, "it was sad—very sad! But what can you expect from a lot of old Faculty fossils, me boy? Why, I expect to go off the hooks myself almost any day."

"It would have been different if Sed had been cleaning out the boys and winning our stamps; but poor Sed always lost, somehow."

"Y-e-s; fate did seem to be against poor Sed. It broke my heart to see him go——"

"Besides, you went financially broke as soon as poor Sed left," Bert added.

"The luck can't run forever," was Dolph's philosophic reply.

"Do you know, Dolph, I think I'll have to make the acquaintance of this new fellow, just for the sake of getting a look at the old rooms where we used to have such sport. Ah, me! By the way, what's his name?"

"Boyle—no, that's not it, either; but it's some such Irish name. Burke! that's it."

But when it became known that Jack Burke was the son of Archibald Stanley Burke, Esq., the millionaire banker, there was a dead set made for him, especially by the small coterie of which Bert Sharpe and Dolph Johnes were the leaders, largely because, as second year freshmen, they set the pace for the new comers who flocked to their standard.

This coterie was what might be called the sporting element of Harmondale. You will always find this sporting element among college *boys;* a year or two later, when the students are becoming college *men*, this sporting element is not so pronounced, because there are not many of them left in college, as a rule.

But the millionaire banker's son met these advances firmly, yet with good

nature. He simply would not have anything to do with Bert Sharpe and his crowd, excepting in the casual relations of college life.

While he joined in most of the sports, being an especially good gymnast and long distance runner, and was active and prominent in all the serious college organizations, he was personally unobtrusive and extremely select in his close friendships.

By and by Sed Geldon's old rooms began to get a reputation again. Little by little it came out that they were splendidly furnished, that Jack Burke was a king of hosts, and that to attend one of his "nights" was just the jolliest event of the whole week at Harmondale.

But the sporting element was out in the cold, and they tried to get warm by calling Jack Burke a "cad."

Most of their information about Jack, his rooms, and his "at homes" was derived from Teddy Young, a little fellow with a refined face, of excellent breeding, a trifle timid, yet with a decided tendency to vivaciousness.

He had been "taken up" by Jack Burke and remained a familiar of the banker's son until he was drawn into the maelstrom of Bert Sharpe's coterie. Then Jack gave Teddy three words of warning; Teddy did not take them in a wise and manly spirit, and his intercourse with Jack gradually diminished.

By the middle of the term little Teddy Young was scheduled amongst the sporting element.

II.

It was about the first of May. The final examinations were close at hand, and "cramming" was the order of the day.

Jack Burke was far and away the most popular man of the Freshman Class by this time. He had refused the presidency, but accepted the captaincy of the freshman football team. He was a coming mile runner, and they talked of sending him down to the Intercollegiate Games next year.

He was intimate with the most brilliant seniors, prospective honor men and medal men, and as for himself, he figured up that he so far had about 80 per cent on the term.

So it is evident that he had managed to keep his scholarship quite up to the mark.

In fact, he was so much in the eye of the college that even Bert Sharpe and Dolph Johnes had long been trying to "make up" to Jack.

"Hello, Burke!" cried Bert Sharpe, as he and Dolph met Jack at the gate one afternoon about this time. "Whither away?"

"For a run, a nap, and a good long grind."

"Aren't you coming down to the track to see the great match?"

"What match?"

"Why, Teddy Young and Buck Littleton are going to run a hundred," explained Bert.

"Those little fellows can't run it in thirteen seconds," commented Jack; "so where do you get your 'great match?'"

"Oh, there's a pile of money up," said Bert.

"Y-e-s, in-deed," supplemented Dolph. "I've got fifty up in scraps here and there myself—on Littleton, you know."

"Ah, have you, indeed?" said Jack. "Is Teddy betting on himself?"

"Oh, he couldn't keep his amateur standard and bet—*directly*, you know," said Bert with a glance that the next remark explained. "*I'm* looking after Teddy's side of the betting."

"Well," and Jack turned away to conceal a frown, as he thought of his little ex protégé who had "gone wrong." "I'm sorry I can't find myself interested in the match."

"*Such* a queer duffer as you are, Burke!" declared Dolph Johnes. "Really, you know, you're positively interesting."

"Oh, I'm glad to know I can interest such a *blasé* person as yourself, Johnes," said Jack, rather nettled at Dolph's patronizing tone.

"Y-e-s," continued Dolph, whose perception of the sarcasm was not as slow as his words, "I may say I like you—er—against my will."

"Fortunately," said Jack slowly, "it requires very little exertion on your part to like me," which was a palpable hit at Dolph's proverbial weakness of character.

"That's all right, Burke," interposed Bert soothingly. "Dolph's will may be weak, but his wits are all right."

"Well," and Jack bent over to lace his shoe, "I *have* heard of people living by their wits, so I suppose Johnes has a future before him."

"Come, Burke! that's a little *too* strong," expostulated Bert Sharpe.

"Well, perhaps it is," admitted Jack, with a smile. "I beg your pardon, Johnes. I'm afraid I've got a little bit of Kilkenny in my blood."

"Oh, don't mention it," drawled Dolph. "I would have survived."

"You won't come down to the track, then?" queried Bert Sharpe.

"No, I think not. I don't see where the interest comes in."

"I'm afraid you've got no sporting blood in you," said Bert lightly.

"I'm not sure I know what you mean by that," remarked Jack.

"Well, for instance," spoke up Dolph superciliously, "I suppose you never made a bet in your life."

"That's what *you* call sport," exclaimed Jack. "What I would call sport is—well, for instance, to run you just for the fun of the thing from here to Harmon town and back, give you half a mile start, beat you, and do it in fifteen minutes. That is——"

"Hold on there!" interrupted Dolph. "We can stand a *little* bragging, Burke; but fifteen minutes is just a trifle too steep."

"You think I can't do it," exclaimed Jack.

"Oh, *perhaps* you *can*," replied Dolph. "Still I'd like to bet you ten or fifteen dollars that you can't."

"Thanks! I can't bet with you."

"Broke?" inquired Dolph with a slight sneer.

"No, I haven't had occasion to pawn my overcoat lately," which Dolph was known to have done last April. "And indeed," continued Jack, "I may say that, thanks to my not betting and 'sporting' generally, I manage to live within my allowance and keep a little extra cash on hand besides."

"Oh, this isn't Sunday, Burke," said Dolph, "so a sermon is a little out of order."

"Come on; we'd better make a start for the track, Dolph," and Bert Sharpe made a move.

"But it breaks my heart not to be able to take the gentleman up on his statement," lamented Dolph.

"See here!" exclaimed Jack. "I'll do this with you, as you're so certain; I'll make the run for a penalty, and I'll engage to do it in *fourteen* minutes, too —the penalty of my failure being that I'll tote you around the college grounds in a wheelbarrow five times; while if I win, you'll tote me around, say *three* times, as you're not very strong."

"Oh, don't be *childish*, Burke," cried Dolph. "I'll *bet* you *any* amount; but——"

"Hold on!" cried Bert Sharpe, suddenly. "I say, Burke, will you give us two minutes to consider that proposition—in private?"

"Yes, but not more, as I've wasted too much time already."

While Bert led his friend aside, Jack leaned against the gatepost and smiled to himself.

"Dolph, you take that offer!" Bert was excitedly whispering.

"Get out, Bert! I have no desire to go into such tomfoolery as being wheeled in a barrow."

"You won't; you'll lose and have to do the wheeling yourself."

"Well, so much the——"

"But *take the offer!* There's money in it for us."

"How do you——"

"Never mind now, but *take him up*."

Dolph looked searchingly at Bert and said:

"You've got a scheme?"

"Yes."

"I'll take that offer, Burke," called out Dolph.

"Very well, then. I'll be at this spot at three tomorrow afternoon, prepared to run to Harmon and back in fourteen minutes or better. I'm off for a trial heat now," and away started Jack.

"Now, what's all this about?" demanded Dolph.

"Sit down and listen to me," said Bert Sharpe in a masterful tone. "First, Jack Burke can do that distance in fourteen minutes or better."

"Go along! I don't believe it."

"I say he *can*. He knows the road and he knows himself, and he's not the fellow to make a claim that he can't make good."

"Then why did you have me take him up?" asked Dolph tentatively.

"So that *I* can make money on the event—for both of us."

"How are you——"

"Listen! You think he can't do it. Go right ahead; tell the crowd about it, let them have your opinion and make me a bet in public that he won't do it. That will work the crowd up to bet as you do, and I'll keep very quiet and simply take all the bets I can get; for I'm willing to risk all I've got and more besides on Jack Burke. As for *you*, don't you bet against Jack with any one but *me*. You'll lose, but I'll call your bet off and divvy on the profits."

"But, see here! *Suppose* you should get left."

"I tell you I won't. I believe Burke knows his business, and I'll back him right up to the handle."

"Yes, but *suppose*," persisted Dolph.

"Oh, then I'll pay up, of course," replied Bert pettishly.

"But you're broke, and so am I."

"Not exactly. Teddy Young's going to pay me the thirty five he owes me day after tomorrow."

"And he owes me twenty," reflected Dolph.

"So you see we've got the cash to meet contingencies."

"Providing Teddy doesn't go back on us."

"What are you talking about? Teddy Young is as square as a die."

"But his folks *might* not send him that remittance he wrote for," mused Dolph.

"Look out! here he comes. I've got his last fifteen in my pocket to bet for him on this match. All the same, I believe he's a dead sure loser, and I've bet against him on my own account," and the astute young rascal met the thoughtless little Teddy half way and told him he was certain to win his race with Littleton.

III.

At five minutes of three on the following day almost every member of the college was at or as near to the gate as he could crowd.

Bert and Dolph with their select crowd, "the sporting element," were the center of the concourse. All the preliminaries had been arranged that morning.

Bert had shut Dolph up when the latter suggested that some one should go over to Harmon and stand in front of the post office to see that Jack did the allotted distance. No, said Bert, that should be left entirely to Burke as a man of honor.

Three o'clock was sounding; before the third stroke Jack appeared at the door of the South Wing, clad in flannel trousers and shirt, rubber soled shoes, and a skull cap.

"Don't say a word about the bets, boys, while he's within hearing," Bert cautioned them. "He's a bit squeamish about that sort of thing."

The crowd gave Jack a cheer as he

advanced. He made his way out to the road, toed the mark, and waited for the word with very little preliminary talk.

A senior with a stop watch was appointed time keeper and referee.

"Are you ready?" asked the time keeper.

"Yes."

"*Go!*"

Away went Jack with a beautiful long stride, and in a few seconds he was lost to sight amid the leafy arches of the road.

A babel of voices arose. Discussion was lively and vociferous.

Bert Sharpe found many who, following Dolph's lead, were willing to bet small amounts against Jack's success. Few if any cared to bet on him, because the majority, who believed Jack would succeed, were not of the sporting element.

"Ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen minutes!" announced the time keeper successively.

All eyes were turned up the road.

"Thirteen and a half!"

No Jack yet.

"Thirteen and three quarters!" Not even in sight yet.

"*Fourteen!* and Burke loses!" cried the referee.

A howl of disappointment went up, during which Bert literally dragged Dolph out of the circle. Both their faces were white when they faced each other behind a big tree.

"*Fifty dollars out between us!*" cried Bert in a hoarse whisper. "May the everlasting mountains topple over on that miserable cad, Jack Burke!"

"It's all your doings, Bert Sharpe!"

"Don't talk that way, you idiot, in a time of trouble like this. How much tin have you got?"

"About five."

"The same here! Now for Teddy Young. He's our only salvation. My thirty five and your twenty are due from him, and that'll see us through. Where is he?"

"I haven't seen him."

"Hey, there, you fellows! is Teddy Young in the crowd?"

"I haven't seen him since the session ended," volunteered some one.

"Come, old man, pay up!" cried one of the winners, taking Bert by the lapel.

"Hold on!" replied Bert. "Ted Young owes me a pot of money, and—er—just excuse me a few minutes till I look him up."

"But what the mischief is keeping Jack Burke?" asked some one. "Twenty five minutes, and he's not in sight yet."

IV.

It was nine o'clock that night; the scene, Bert Sharpe's room in the East Wing. Bert was walking up and down excitedly, as the door closed on a departing visitor; Dolph was smoking a cigarette and looking sulky.

"Thunder and lightning! I can't stand this much longer!" cried Bert. "That's the tenth man who's dunned me tonight for the amount of his bet—with Teddy Young disappeared—skipped the place, I suppose—and not a sou in our clothes! And Jack Burke not shown up yet, either."

"There's something deuced queer about this whole thing," murmured Dolph. "*I* believe Burke just put up a job on us."

"By the way, is there a light in his room yet?"

"No," replied Dolph, glancing out of the window. "But that doesn't signify."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, he's probably slid in on the quiet long ago."

"Well, by Jove! I propose to see if it's so," cried Bert, snatching up his hat. "And I'll have it out with him now, you can bet, and make him see us through this thing."

"I'm with you," said Dolph, rising leisurely, and they both went out—across the campus to the South Wing, up the stone steps to the second floor, to poor Sed Geldon's old rooms.

Bert took the precaution to try the door before knocking. To his surprise it opened. The room was pitch dark.

"This doesn't look as if he were in," whispered Bert.

"Well, now that we've come so far, we might as well make ourselves comfortable and wait awhile," said Dolph, striking a match and lighting the gas.

"Well, these *are* the dandy rooms!" exclaimed Bert in spontaneous admiration. "So much for being the son of a millionaire."

"Who probably doesn't keep his money quite so dark as the careful son seems to," observed Dolph, dropping into an armchair.

"And these are poor old Sed's rooms!" murmured Bert, sitting on an end of the table and gazing around him. "To think what times we used to——"

The bedroom *portière* facing Bert was suddenly pulled aside, and Jack Burke appeared blinking in the gaslight and looking as if he had been asleep. He still had on the outing clothes with which he had started on his run.

"Oh, so you *are* at home," exclaimed Bert after his first start of surprise. "Sorry to have disturbed you, I'm sure," with a sarcastic intonation.

"Had a pleasant afternoon, I trust," drawled Dolph.

"You ran beautifully," said Bert. "I haven't heard whether you broke any records or not."

This gave Jack an opportunity to rub up his sleepy wits. At last he succeeded, and when he spoke it was decidedly curtly.

"You want to know why I did not make my run, I suppose."

"We have no very violent interest in the reasons," replied Bert, "seeing you lost, while we——"

"Whistled!" interpolated Dolph.

"When about an eighth of a mile from Harmon," began Jack, "I met with a sudden——"

"See here, Jack Burke," broke in Bert, dropping his tone of easy sarcasm, "let us come to business at once. I've——"

"Not so loud, please," interrupted Jack. "I have a visitor whom I do not wish to have awakened."

"Hang your visitors!" replied Bert. "We want to know what you mean by dumping us as you did."

"Dumping you? Why, my *dear* Mr. Sharpe, I'm the loser, and I am to wheel your friend around the college—without any dumping, I hope."

"Fiddlededee with *that!* We're out just fifty dollars on you."

"Doesn't that make you thrill with joy?" sneered Dolph.

"Do you mean to say you bet on me?"

"We did have a *trifle* of confidence in you as a man of honor," replied Bert.

"I presume you propose to blame me for your loss, then; whereas, I should not have started! But what is it you want? I have had a hard afternoon of it, though I confess I didn't run much, and I——"

"This is the long and the short of it, Jack Burke—you've played us a decidedly lowdown trick, whereby we're out fifty, and dead broke besides; and the least you can do is to advance that sum to us for thirty days."

"So you not only bet, but you did it without having the money to pay in case you lost," said Jack.

"Thus beginneth the second lesson," observed Dolph in a sing song voice.

"Don't be so fly at drawing inferences, Jack Burke; if Teddy Young had not skipped the ranch we wouldn't have had any reason to come squealing to *you*. You can well believe we're in a tight place when we do *that*. Let us cut it short now. Will you do the decent thing and tide us over—yes or no?"

"I certainly shall not."

"What?" exclaimed Dolph with affected surprise; "you refuse us a few paltry dollars, when you have that snug balance which you have saved by reason of your not betting? Fie, my dear Burke!"

But Bert did not take it with such easy carelessness as Dolph; he was biting his lips with vexation.

"The balance you refer to—my savings—I no longer have. It is gone."

"Gone since you mentioned it yesterday, doubtless," hazarded Dolph.

"Since you last saw me," replied Jack.

"Then like yourself, it ran away to Harmon and didn't come back, I suppose," sneered Dolph.

"Stop this, Dolph, and come along," cried Bert. "We have no further business with Burke—at present."

"Wait!" cried Jack, advancing into the middle of the room after a hasty glance behind his bedroom curtains. "I owe you an explanation of my failure to return."

"You're wrong," retorted Bert. "We owe you a return for your kindness, and we shan't fail to pay the debt," and Bert moved towards the door.

"I used the word 'owe' as a mere figure of speech," said Jack as he intercepted his callers and backed up against his door; "and I shall insist on explaining."

"Oh, as you please," rejoined Bert.

"But don't tag a moral to it, for heaven's sake," begged Dolph.

"You know that bridge over the stream just before you reach Harmon," began Jack. "As I came in sight of that, going at a clipping pace, I saw something dark tumble off through the side rails, heard a splash, a gurgle, and then I knew that somebody had fallen into the river.

"I dashed down the bank and saw, floundering in the shallow water fortunately—whom do you suppose?"

"Oh, come! no conundrums, Burke, when I've got a big one of my own to answer," said Bert, tapping the carpet with his foot.

"Well, then," said Jack, "it was Teddy Young!"

"And so that's where he was while we were hunting for him high and low. I hope you brought him back with you, with fifty five dollars in his pocket," observed Bert.

"Man!" cried Jack, "do you know what he was doing there—in the river? *He had tried to drown himself!*"

Bert and Dolph were shocked into seriousness for a moment.

"Well," said Bert at length. "I didn't think Teddy was *quite* such an idiot as that."

"And leaving his debts of honor unpaid," said Dolph with a look of disgust.

"Don't you see, you despicable, hardened blacklegs, that you—yes, *you*—would have been responsible for that boy's death, if he had succeeded? It is *you* who have made him neglect his studies to the point of flunking this month; you who have led him into debt, won his money from him, made him overdraw his allowance, until his father refused to give him another cent; it was you—you contemptible young scoundrels—who drove him to despair and——"

"See here, Burke!" exclaimed Bert, frightened by Jack's flashing eyes into paleness and a certain degree of calm; "you're making your words too strong."

"The only things too strong for you," cried Jack, flinging his door wide open, "are my good right and the toe of my boot. Get out of my rooms once and for all," and Jack seized Bert by the coat collar.

"Wait, Jack, wait!" cried a boyish voice from behind the curtains, and there burst upon the trio an apparition of little Teddy Young in a night shirt, holding a pair of trousers in his hand. "Wait till I give them their money! Wait, wait!"

The two young sports stood aghast! They could not help seeing that there was something wrong about poor Teddy.

His face was flushed, his eyes blazed, and he was feeling in the pocket of the trousers with a sort of feverish frenzy.

"Wait! Don't let them go, Jack! There—there's your money—*he* loaned it to me—take it!" and Teddy flung a roll of bills blindly before him, dropped the trousers and tottered into Jack Burke's arms, laughing and crying in violent hysterics.

Jack Burke carried the young fellow to the sofa and talked to him soothingly, holding his hands and gently stroking his forehead.

Gradually Teddy became calmer and calmer, and when Jack Burke looked around towards the door, Bert and Dolph were gone, and the bank notes which they were in need of so badly still lay on the floor where Teddy had flung them.

THE SUNSET HOUR.

THE western hills are fading now;
  The golden tinted clouds are gone;
The rising river's ripples flow
  More faintly in my fancy on;
The sweet repose, so still, so calm,
  Which sunset's softening shades impart,
Might soothe, methinks, like Gilead's balm,
  The weary or the wounded heart!

The flower's scent; the forest's force,
  Sweet silence of soft stars still share,
Since Sorrow's shadow, its sad source,
  Secretes with solemn, sober air!
Now its fierce fires spread o'er faint soul;
  No drop of dew dispels the heat;
Sad earth seems shriveled like a scroll,
  Nor lonely lakes lave lowly feet.

Where waves are wild, where shores are steep,
  And princely pines peer down in pride;
Where waters cheerless, dark and deep,
  In gloomy groans grate on life's tide;
Where reeds and rushes, red and rank,
  Skirt shining strand of shell strewn shore,
Or foamy seas sweep o'er steep bank,
  I hear the sullen, surging roar!

The sunset hour is sweeter far
  Than grandest glare of glowing noon;
I love to watch the first faint star,
  And gaze upon the sailing moon;
Then thought flies high, and memory
  Sleeps in the quiet of the scene,
Till in the future far I see
  A desert isle forever green!

'Tis fancy all! Earth hath no rest!
  Life's busy throngs, with bustling air,
Press on, while hidden in each breast
  Are eager hope and earnest care;
Till, tossed by turbulent desires,
  And dashed by disappointments past,
Spent by strong passion's seething fires,
  Life's sunset hour is seen at last!

Luther G. Rigg.

TRAIN AND STATION.*

BY EDGAR R. HOADLEY.

A railroad story in which the exciting experiences that befall a railroad man are related with vivid faithfulness to facts by one who knows whereof he writes. The quest of Dashwood Dykeman in search of a name that was more rightfully his and the strange happenings that marked his pathway to the goal.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

WHILE traveling on the limited express from Chicago to St. Louis, with his parents, Dashwood Dykeman is made an orphan by their death in a collision. His paternal grandfather, who educates him, loses his money, and informs Dash that the latter's name is not Dykeman, and that he—his grandfather—does not know what it is, as his son married a widow, with one child, against his parents' wishes.

Dash looks for a situation, and, after learning telegraphy, secures one which is lost on account of a wreck for which he is not wholly responsible. He starts to St. Louis to learn his father's name; the train stops in a village where a hotel is on fire; Dash rescues a woman and subsequently meets her and her daughter, Dorothy Orloff, on the train. Mrs. Orloff dies in the night and Dash meets the expenses of sending the body home with Dorothy, who has but little money with her.

In St. Louis Dash goes to his mother's old boarding house where he learns that his name is Dashwood Orloff, and his father was the conductor of the train on which his mother was killed. He is no relation, however, to Dorothy Orloff, and here he loses all further trace of his father.

Dash goes as brakeman on a freight train to help solve the mysterious disappearances of valuable freight. He succeeds in giving the officials a clue which puts an end to further losses; he is then transferred to a passenger train as the baggageman, where he is to watch the conductor, as the trouble lies with the tickets. For some time his watch is in vain, but one night as he has succeeded in opening the conductor's train box, a brakeman suddenly enters, and concluding that Dash belongs to his gang gives the whole scheme away. Dash proves to the contrary and the brakeman pulls a revolver—at the same moment the train is boarded by the other robbers, and for a time the shots fly wildly about. The brakeman and another robber are killed, and Dash is dismayed to hear one of the escaping gang addressed as Orloff. When Dash reports to the superintendent, he is offered a position as agent at Madrid. The good salary is not the only pleasing feature of the position, for Madrid is the home of Dorothy Orloff.

CHAPTER XXXVI—*(Continued.)*

AGENT AT MADRID.

AT many stations the agency for the express is added to the numerous duties of the regular agent. Dykeman had been aware of this, and when he found he was not to have it—for which he was not sorry—he had wondered at the moment who was the express agent, but he had not asked.

He had afterwards noticed a young man at the express car of the passenger trains attending to the business, and supposed he was the agent, but now he concluded he must be only an assistant to Forsdyke.

He was kept so busy for some days after his installation as agent at Madrid that he saw very little of the superintendent's clerk, except to return the nod of recognition the latter deigned to favor him with occasionally and to take his receipt for the remittances; in fact, the agent did not have an opportunity for nearly a week after his arrival to call on Dorothy, though she sent him a note, kindly inviting him to take tea at Mrs. Handiford's.

Though Forsdyke had a room oppo-

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site his, Dykeman had never seen him in it when he retired. At what hour the superintendent's clerk was in the habit of going to sleep the agent was unable to tell, though he heard noises in the opposite chamber at various hours—from midnight till towards early morning—that would indicate that the occupant was just getting to bed.

This was repeated so often that Dash was forced to conclude that Forsdyke was dissipating and running with a fast set, for he was positive the superintendent's clerk had no occupation to deprive him of his sleeping hours. But the young man, whenever Dykeman saw him after a night when he knew he had been keeping late hours, appeared as fresh and wide awake as if he had gone to bed with the chickens.

It soon became clear to Dykeman, without any demonstration or words from Forsdyke, that the latter was anything but pleased by the advent of the young railroader as agent at Madrid. The superintendent's clerk never failed to seize an opportunity to let the agent know, directly or by insinuation, that the latter was immeasurably beneath him, but Dykeman was only amused, and had but pity and contempt for his pretensions.

It was not till one day lacking a week after his arrival that the agent had an opportunity to call on Dorothy and her aunt; and to do so, he had to bend all his energies to get his reports made before supper time.

Just before six o'clock, as it was remittance day, he carried a money package into Forsdyke's office to get the usual receipt.

"Ah, Dykeman," exclaimed the young man, as he took the book and package on his knee, without relinquishing a cigarette from one hand, or the elevated position of his feet across one corner of the desk.

Dykeman ventured no remark, as he found that was the best method to get along with a self conceited and disagreeable person. He knew that the young man had not addressed him in a familiar manner because he wanted to be intimate, or even friendly. Forsdyke spoke in a patronizing way, much as a gentleman would to a favored servant.

He noticed that as Forsdyke scanned the money envelope a frown gathered on his brow.

"Why, how is this, Dykeman? Your remittance has fallen off to nothing almost," the latter continued.

"That's all the receipts that I have had, Mr. Forsdyke," replied Dash shortly, with slight emphasis on the mister.

He knew why the remittance was less than usual, but he felt that it was none of the other's business, and did not advance an explanation.

Forsdyke receipted for the package, and handed the book back to the agent, who started out.

"Hold on, Dykeman, I want to speak to you," interposed the superintendent's clerk.

"Well?" responded Dash, stopping and turning on his heel.

"I was down at Miss Orloff's the other evening, and she was saying that she thought it odd you had not called."

"Well?" repeated Dash, not very much pleased to hear the other use Dorothy's name, or that he was a visitor at her house.

"Well, I understand you are going down there this evening," continued Forsdyke.

"Yes; what about it?" and Dash flushed, wondering how he got his information. Then his heart gave a bound, and he was filled with a sickening doubt, as he asked himself: Was it possible Dorothy was on such intimate terms with Forsdyke as to tell him such things?

"If I were you, Dykeman, I wouldn't go down there," replied the latter, as if he was conferring a favor.

"Why?" asked Dash, quickly and with curiosity.

"Because Mrs. Handiford doesn't want you there, and besides——"

" You're a liar, Brakewood Forsdyke," flashed Dash unwilling to believe the statement, and not waiting to hear more.

" What? " shouted Forsdyke in a rage, springing up and advancing towards the agent with clenched fists.

Dykeman promptly put himself on the defensive, feeling fully able to take care of himself and give the other a warm reception. But before a blow could be struck, a shadow crossed the door, and turning, Dash saw Dorothy Orloff.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

" I BEG your pardon, Miss Orloff, do you wish to see me? " said Dash promptly dropping one hand to his side, and raising the other to his cap, as he turned to the young lady and advanced towards the door.

" Most happy to see you, Miss Orloff," joined in Forsdyke, in his politest and most winning tones, dropping all hostilities even more quickly than Dash had. " Won't you come in and brighten my poor quarters with your presence? "

" No, thank you, Mr. Forsdyke," replied the young lady, with an amused smile, glancing from one to the other of the would be belligerents, on whose faces the flush of anger had not entirely departed. " I'm in a hurry, and only wish to send a telegram."

" There's the operator, Miss Orloff," said Forsdyke, with a sneering emphasis on the word operator, as he indicated Dash with a lofty wave of the hand.

" Yes, Miss Orloff, I'm the operator," added Dash imperturbably, turning away. " Come to the office, please."

" Are you really the operator, too? I thought you were only agent," said the fair girl as she followed him.

" Yes," replied Dash, briefly and soberly, for he was still foolishly troubled by what Forsdyke had said.

" Oh, how lovely," went on the young girl impetuously and all over smiles. " You can teach me and I could tell what those aggravating old things are always ticking about. Couldn't you? "

" Yes, certainly, if you would care to undertake it, but it isn't as easy as it looks, and you wouldn't hear any secrets if you did understand it."

" You're not very encouraging, sir," she returned with a little pout; and then added with a roguish smile: " I believe you are afraid I would get your position."

" Oh, yes, very much," laughed Dash; " but you *could* be my assistant. How would you like to be night operator? "

" Oh, dear, I'm such a sleepy head, I never could keep awake," with a comical frown. " Would I have to begin with that? "

" That's generally the first work a new operator gets."

" Then I'll not go into the business; but I might learn it so I could telegraph just a little; couldn't I? "

" Yes, you could; but here we are. Have you your message ready? " said Dash as they entered the waiting room and stopped at the ticket window.

" Yes, but it's horridly written, and that's all the paper I could find in the house," said Dorothy, with the usual feminine excuses.

" I guess he can read it," laughed Dash jokingly, as he passed the paper through the window to the night operator, who had relieved him early so he might pay his expected visit at Mrs. Handiford's.

" He! Who? "

" The night operator."

" Does he commence work as early as this all the time? "

" No, but I wanted to get off, and he came down early to accommodate me."

" How good of him; and you're coming down to our house this evening.

I think you have been a very bad boy not to come before."

"I suppose I have, but I really couldn't possibly come before, as there was so much to do here," protested Dash.

"You're excused, sir," with the condescension of a princess. "I know you would have come if you could."

"I will come right now, if you permit me to escort you home," suggested Dash.

"Will you? How nice!" in glad surprise, and if Dash still had any doubts of the truth of Forsdyke's assertion, he should have had none now. "Can you really get away now without any inconvenience?"

"Yes; it's all arranged with my night man."

Dash and the beautiful girl walked down the platform. Brakewood Forsdyke saw them out of the end window of his office, and there was bitter envy and defeated malice in his heart.

"Miss Orloff," began Dash, as they started down the track, which was the nearest way to reach Mrs. Handiford's residence, "do you know, if you hadn't come to the office this afternoon I wouldn't have called this evening?"

"Why?" in astonished tones.

"Because Brakewood Forsdyke appeared to know I was going to your house, and said that I was not wanted there."

"Did he say that?" exclaimed the young girl indignantly. "The horrid thing! It's not true, and you ought to know it. I guess the only one who doesn't want you there is himself, and it's the last time he will come if I can help it. If he comes, I'll not see him."

"I told him he was a li—base prevaricator," added Dash, checking the harsher term, with a smile, as all his doubts took wing.

"And that's why you two were in pugilistic attitudes, glaring at each other as if you wanted to eat somebody?" observed Dorothy, laughing.

"Yes; and I'm sorry I didn't give him a good pounding, now that I'm sure of his underhand work, the upstart," exclaimed Dash, not very savagely.

"And you believed what he said?" said the young girl reproachfully.

"I'm afraid I did, a little," responded Dash sheepishly; "but forgive me, won't you?"

"You don't deserve it; but I'm glad you didn't fight—for Mr. Forsdyke's sake," laughed Dorothy, as she gazed at Dash's muscular figure.

She did not seem to have any doubt about which way the victory would have gone, and Dash blushed at her tribute to, and confidence in, his prowess.

"But how did Forsdyke know I was going to your house tonight?" continued Dash.

"You foolish boy! I don't know, but I suppose Aunt Helen let it drop, for she's a great talker. I'm sure *I* never told him."

The distance to Mrs. Handiford's was almost a mile, but Dykeman wouldn't have believed the statement if he had been told so that afternoon; it was, to him, the shortest mile he had ever walked.

Mrs. Handiford's cottage was situated on a hill, only a few hundred feet from the railroad, around which flowed a shallow and brawling stream which nearly made an island of the elevation. As the opposite shore was an almost perpendicular cliff of flinty granite, the railroad had avoided it by crossing the river on a high bridge, skirting the foot of the hill on which stood Mrs. Handiford's residence, and then returning to the other side, below the rocky formation, over another high trestle. The first named structure was named High Bridge and the latter South Bridge.

To reach Mrs. Handiford's the shortest way, coming from the depot or the village, one would have to cross High Bridge. The old country road to the town led straight back from the house three quarters of a mile, to get around

a bend in the river, and then it was a mile to Madrid.

Dorothy had no timidity about crossing the high trestle, especially with Dykeman beside her, for that had been her favorite route to and from the depot and town since her arrival at her aunt's.

It is hardly necessary to say that Dykeman passed a most enjoyable evening, though he did find that Mrs. Handiford was "a great talker," as Dorothy had said, and became a little tiresome after a while.

Mrs. Handiford took the opportunity to hand him the amount he had expended in behalf of Dorothy's mother, which he did not accept without many protests. Then he suggested to Dorothy that he should return the deed she had sent him, as he had not been able to make any inquiry concerning it; but she requested him to keep it in his safe for security, though she was doubtful if it had any value.

Dash agreed to do so, but mentally determined he would at once get some one to advise him how to proceed to find out if the deed had been made void by the recording of a later one on the same property.

It was a reasonable hour when he left the aunt and niece, but fortunately it was a moonlight night, so he could return over High Bridge, instead of having to make the long detour by the country road. He realized then, with only himself for company, that even the shorter distance was fully a mile.

This was only the beginning of many other visits that followed, and he was not always so fortunate as to return over High Bridge. Some nights were pitchy dark or stormy, and if he had not gone down on horseback, or in a buggy, he was compelled to return afoot by the long country road. He would have taken the High Bridge even then, with a lantern to show the way, but Dorothy entreated him not to.

It did not take it long to become generally understood throughout the village that he was Dorothy's "steady company." He tried to be moderate in his calls, and not be like the young man who called on his fair one seven nights in the week, and wished there were eight; but it must be admitted the agent went regularly and often.

Dorothy, too, was seen quite frequently at the station, but, as she always gave a plausible excuse for being there, it is not for us to say she had any other motive for going.

Bouquets of flowers were sent daily to the agent's office, and the night operator reveled in a veritable bower of sweet smelling posies, which he told the train men *his* girl had sent him. As he expressed it, in speaking of Dykeman and Dorothy, "the boss was as happy as a fly in a honey pot."

As time passed, Brakewood Forsdyke seemed to have given up any aspirations he had had toward Miss Orloff, and actually made overtures toward Dykeman for a closer and more familiar acquaintance. Possibly he realized that the agent held the winning hand of "hearts," and had sense enough to know when he was beaten.

As Forsdyke approached him in a proper spirit, Dykeman was only too glad to meet him half way, for he was the last one to cherish resentment against any one very long. Possibly it was because his heart was stirred with a "sentiment," and probably he felt so secure in the affections of the fair girl that he thought he could afford to be magnanimous.

It is said that "all the world loves a lover," so why should not a lover love the whole world, when his heart is running over with the sentiment?

Dykeman and the superintendent's clerk finally got upon very good terms with each other, though not intimate, and everything moved along smoothly for several months at the station.

Then an incident occurred that led up to most startling and disagreeable results.

Dykeman one day received the following message from the auditor of the company:

"Why are you not making your remittances more promptly? The last received was June 8th."

As it was then June 16th, and he had made four remittances since the date given in the telegram, it can easily be understood how surprising to him such an inquiry was.

He instantly referred to his express receipt book, and checked off the four remittances for which Brakewood Forsdyke had receipted. He was not responsible for the money after it had been turned over to the express agent and receipted for by him, and he was convinced he was not guilty of the slightest irregularity.

He immediately answered the auditor that he had made his remittances promptly, giving the dates of those since the 8th.

It instantly occurred to him that there was something wrong in the express agent's office to account for the non receipt of the packages, and he decided to speak to Forsdyke about it. But before he had an opportunity to do so, he received another message from the auditor, reading:

"Remittances all right. Do not say anything about them to express agent."

He felt relieved, and concluded that some one in the auditor's office had made a mistake, and the auditor did not want the express agent to know there had been even a suspicion as to the forwarding of the remittances.

The matter passed from his mind, only to be recalled at the end of a series of exciting and trying events, when he realized how far he had been from the truth in his theory.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE EXPRESS COMPANY'S SAFE.

"So you think I look worried. Dykeman," observed Forsdyke, a few days later, as he, Kinney, his assistant, and Dash were sitting around talking in the express agent's office, as had been their habit for some time past.

The agent had been given a day operator to assist him, and he now had occasional periods of relaxation from his duties.

"Well, I'll tell you what's a fact, Dykeman," Forsdyke went on, after a pause, "so would you, if you had the responsibility resting on your shoulders that I have. Between us, I don't mind telling you that there's ten thousand dollars in that little safe of mine in the corner, and I don't feel that it is the securest place in the world."

"Whew! You don't say!" whistled Dash, certainly astonished at the magnitude of the amount. "Whose is it, and why do you keep it there?"

"It belongs to the railroad company, and was sent down here to be used by the superintendent in purchasing a piece of property they want to possess, and on which they expect to have some lively bidding to meet. The sale was to have taken place three days ago, but it was postponed for a week."

"Why in the world couldn't they have bid just as well, and paid the amount with a check?" asked Dash, wondering that the company should have risked sending down so much cash.

"Because the owner of the property is a crank, I suppose, and wants the purchase money in cash," explained Forsdyke.

"Anything for the south express, Mr. Forsdyke?" interrupted Kinney, as a train pulled up at the station.

"Yes, here's a couple of money packages," replied Forsdyke, handing over a closed receipt book, with a couple of sealed money envelopes between the leaves, and a way bill wrapped about them.

The assistant grasped the book and rushed from the office.

"Now, as I was saying," resumed the express agent, glancing toward the

safe, at which Dash had been looking, "that thing isn't a safe deposit vault by any means, and I can't help feeling uneasy about it. The only difference between it and yours is that it has a combination besides the key. I don't suppose you could open it, even if I should give you the combination and you should try, could you?"

"I don't know," responded Dash doubtfully.

"Just try it, for fun," suggested Forsdyke, handing him the key, and giving directions as to the combination, which, by the way, were not the correct ones.

Dykeman hesitated for a moment, as a faint idea shot across his brain that it was not exactly the proper thing for him to do, especially where there was such a large amount behind the safe door. Had he considered the matter longer, he might have concluded it was a very unwise proceeding on his part, and declined.

He should have known that men in positions of trust, such as Forsdyke's, are not in the habit of intrusting the combinations of their safes to others; and that prudent men of business are very careful about keeping away from an open safe, or watching the operation of opening a closed one, when they are in an office other than their own.

"I don't believe you can open it," said Forsdyke, in a bantering tone, to stimulate the other to make the trial.

It had the desired effect, for, without further hesitation Dykeman grasped the long, slender key, and, kneeling before the safe, inserted it in the proper place; then he began to turn the combination dial.

"Excuse me a moment, Dykeman," cried the express agent suddenly, "I forgot something to go on that train. Just go ahead; I'll turn the spring latch on the door so no one will interrupt you."

Forsdyke went out, and the door was closed and locked behind him. Dykeman had no thought of the natural construction that could be placed upon his position—endeavoring to open the express company's safe with door closed and locked—by any one who did not understand the matter, and he had no suspicion that the situation had been deliberately planned by Brakewood Forsdyke. He was too much occupied in endeavoring to work the combination to think of these things.

Forsdyke hastened down the platform, and met Kinney, who had just concluded his business at the car.

"Look here, Kinney," he said, in low tones, "I don't like the way Dykeman has been sticking around my office lately, and asking questions about the express business. I don't say these things because I think there's anything wrong with him, but you know we've got a big pile in the box, and it's well to be careful about everybody. I'm going up town for a few minutes on business. I left Dykeman in the office, and you had better go there at once, and remain until I come back."

"All right, sir. I noticed he's been round a great deal lately, but he's all right, sir," responded Kinney, as he continued on his way.

As the assistant was furnished with a duplicate key to the spring lock on the door of the office, he could enter without having it opened for him.

When the spring lock turned in the door, Dykeman looked up, expecting to see Forsdyke returning. Kinney entered, closing the door after him, and stood for a moment gazing at the agent in speechless amazement.

Dykeman, on seeing who it was, rose to his feet, a flush on his face, occasioned by his bending posture, and threw the key on the top of the safe.

"I give it up; it's too hard for me," he said, as he stepped towards the door.

"Hold on, Mr. Dykeman. What were you trying to do?" interposed Kinney, finding his speech, and placing himself in front of the door, as if to bar the young agent's egress.

"Trying to open that safe; couldn't you see?" replied Dash; and then, like a flash, the whole significance of the situation shot over him. "Mr. Forsdyke said I couldn't open it, and he gave me the key and the combination to try it."

"It doesn't look likely he would do that, Mr. Dykeman, when there's ten thousand dollars in it," observed the assistant skeptically.

"Do you doubt my word?" demanded Dash hotly.

"No, not exactly, but you know——"

"Open that door, and get out of my way!" ordered Dash, burning with indignation.

Kinney hesitated for a moment, and though he was a tall, powerful man, he concluded it was not safe to oppose the athletic and enraged young man before him. He opened the door, allowing the other to pass out, and then stepped over and put the safe key in his pocket.

Dykeman was boiling with resentment that the assistant should even have had a suspicion that he was doing anything wrong. He did not for a moment dream that he had been intentionally placed in the compromising position and that Brakewood Forsdyke was playing a deep game.

But he did not relish being placed in a false situation before even Kinney, though he could not blame the latter under the circumstances, and he determined to see Forsdyke at once, that he might be placed right in the matter. He had no doubt the latter would explain satisfactorily the false but natural impression Kinney had received.

But he could not find Forsdyke anywhere about, and it was late in the afternoon when he saw him. Then he met the superintendent's clerk on the platform, as he was apparently just coming from the village.

The latter hastened to meet Dykeman, and glanced hurriedly and keenly about him before he spoke.

"That's a nice fix you got me in, Forsdyke," began Dash quickly, and still in some excitement. "I was a fool to touch your safe."

"Why, what's the matter, Dykeman?" responded the other, in feigned surprise. "You are as pale as a sheet, as if you had seen a ghost."

"It's worse than that," continued Dash seriously. "While I was working on the combination of your safe, Kinney came in. When I told him you had given me the key and combination, and asked me to open the safe, he doubted my word, and insinuated I was doing something crooked. He even dared to try to prevent my going out; but I tell you, if he hadn't got out of my way, I'd have knocked him into the middle of next week. You *did* tell me to try the safe, didn't you?" and there was determination in Dash's voice, as he looked keenly at the express agent.

"Is that all?" laughed Forsdyke; "of course I did. Don't you worry. I'll make it all right with Mr. Kinney."

"I want you to do it right now, and before me," demanded Dash quickly.

"Be calm, my dear boy; there's nothing to get excited about. Kinney has gone home, and we'll see him first thing in the morning."

"Well, but be sure you do it," responded Dash with a menace in his tones, and not exactly satisfied. "I have half a mind to tell the superintendent all about it," he concluded.

"Don't do it, Dykeman," protested Forsdyke hastily and in some alarm; "don't you see how seriously it would reflect on me if the old man learned I had done such a careless thing as to give the combination of the safe to any one while it had that money in it. There's no telling what he might do. I might get my walking papers."

This should have aroused Dykeman's suspicions that he had not been induced to try to open the safe without a purpose, but it did not.

"All right; I'll say nothing," he re-

plied slowly; " but be sure you make it all right with Kinney before me in the morning," he repeated in determined tones.

" Why, of course, my dear boy; but you seem awfully suspicious," replied Forsdyke tentatively.

" Not at all; but I don't enjoy this thing even to sleep on one night," responded Dash, to the other's evident relief.

He started off down the track to go to Mrs. Handiford's, and Forsdyke accompanied him a short distance, then hastened back to his office.

When he entered he found Kinney there. He had deliberately lied to Dykeman when he told him that the assistant had gone home.

Forsdyke went direct to his desk and shoved his hand into one of the numerous pigeonholes. He felt around in the aperture for a moment, and then a startled look came over his face. He hurriedly examined his pockets, but apparently with no result, for, turning to Kinney in evident excitement and alarm, he demanded:

" Where is it, Kinney? "

" Where is what, sir? "

" The key to the safe."

" Here it is, sir," and the assistant deliberately pulled the key out of his pocket and put it on the desk.

" You were trying to scare me, Kinney," laughed Forsdyke, with a sickly but assumed smile of relief. " Where did you get it? "

" Do you generally keep it in that pigeonhole? " asked Kinney, before answering the question.

" Yes; there's a false back to it no one knew of but myself till now."

" Are you sure Mr. Dykeman didn't know about it? " continued the assistant.

" Yes—or no; he may have seen me take it from there. Why do you ask? "

" When I came in from the express, after you had gone up town, I found him on his knees before the safe, trying to open it with this key," replied Kinney, and he went on to tell in detail his encounter with Dash.

" That fellow's got the greatest nerve I ever saw! " exclaimed Forsdyke indignantly, when the assistant had finished. " I never gave him the key or the combination and asked him to open it. I'm no such fool."

" Then you really think he would have robbed the safe if I hadn't interrupted him? " observed Kinney, who evidently wished to believe otherwise.

" Of course he would have done so. How can I think otherwise? " replied Forsdyke positively. " As I have said, I haven't liked the way he has stuck around this office. I thought he was up to something, and now I'm sure of it."

" Well, now, it's too bad. I never would have thought it," said Kinney regretfully. " You could have knocked me over with a straw when I saw him before that safe. But hadn't we better tell the superintendent? "

" I don't know but what we had," began Forsdyke reflectively, though he had not the remotest intention of doing so; " but no; if we did, he might believe Dykeman's story, and I'd get blamed for my pains; and, even if he didn't, he would make it uncomfortable for me when he learned that I carelessly left the key in the pigeonhole. I have a plan that will settle Dykeman, and probably put a couple of hundred dollars apiece in our pockets."

" What is it? " asked Kinney, who was of an avaricious nature, though honest.

" Dykeman has brought all this on himself, and ought to suffer. He will no doubt make another attempt on the safe before that money is taken away. Why not let him do it? We will watch for him, and surprise him at it, and we will then be praised. I have no doubt the company will reward us with a couple of hundred or so."

" How could we arrange it? " asked Kinney, though even he felt that it was despicable business to permit a crime

to be committed for their own selfish gain, when it could be prevented, and the perpetrator saved.

"I don't suppose he will try it again in the daytime," explained Forsdyke; "and it's more than likely he will come at night—this very night, perhaps. I've got a cot in my room which you can bring down to sleep on in the back room, and if he should come you will be sure to hear him."

"All right," agreed Kinney.

"You had better go get it now," suggested Forsdyke.

Kinney left the office to obtain the cot, and he had hardly closed the door after him when Forsdyke hurriedly opened the safe and transferred several packages of money to the inside pocket of his coat. He then closed the safe, but failed to lock it.

He then put all but two of the packages he had abstracted from the safe into the pigeonhole with the false back.

When the assistant had returned, and deposited the cot in the back room, Forsdyke said:

"Kinney, I have left the key to the safe in the pigeonhole, where Dykeman will be sure to look for it;" but the assertion was a falsehood, for the key was then in his own pocket.

Forsdyke went immediately to his own room, while Kinney remained in the office, and three hours later the latter lay down on the cot in the back room, determined to keep one eye open for the expected burglarious visitor.

The watcher was not, of course, disturbed during the night, but nevertheless, the next morning there was four thousand dollars missing from the safe.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN WHICH DASH FINDS HE IS THE VICTIM OF A PLOT, AND HAS ANOTHER ENCOUNTER WITH THE TRAIN ROBBERS.

BRAKEWOOD FORSDYKE was up unusually early the next morning, and went immediately to his office. Dykeman rose some minutes later, and walked over to his breakfast, at which he spent half an hour, but it was long enough for some startling developments to take place at the station.

Forsdyke found Kinney awake, and sitting up in a chair.

"He didn't come and our plan didn't work, did it?" was the express agent's greeting.

"No, sir; there didn't a soul come near the office," replied the assistant.

"Never mind; he will turn up, sure, sooner or later," said Forsdyke confidently; "and we'll repeat the program tonight."

He stepped over and put his hand into the pigeonhole, where the safe key had been kept, as if to get it, though he already had it in his hand.

Then he inserted it in the safe, and started to make the combination with the dial. The first turn he gave to the knob threw the bolts, and the door swung open.

With well feigned astonishment and excitement, Forsdyke staggered backward and to his feet.

"Good gracious, Kinney, the safe is open," he cried; and the assistant, who had been watching him, looked on in amazement.

"He must have blundered upon the combination, after all, and had already opened the safe when I interrupted him last evening," suggested Kinney.

"And maybe he has already helped himself," added Forsdyke, returning to the safe, and hurriedly pulling out a bundle of bank bills and greenbacks done up in packages of even amounts.

He quickly ran his fingers over them, and then repeated the operation, as if to be sure.

"Great Scott, Kinney, there's four thousand dollars missing!" he cried, in an agitated voice, when he had completed the second count.

"Then he had already been in the safe when I surprised him, and was closing the door to return the key to

the place where he found it," said Kinney, with a pale face.

"No doubt about it," cried the superintendent's clerk. "Oh, why didn't I examine the safe last evening, after you told me about Dykeman being at it. We'll have to tell the old man now, sure, and that pretty quick, for Dykeman may have skipped. Have you seen Mr. Layard? He was to have come in on No. 5 at six o'clock this morning."

Before Kinney could answer, the door was opened, and a gentleman with gray hair, but a young looking face, entered. It was the division superintendent, Layard, and the expression on the faces of his clerk and his assistant told him something unusual had happened.

"What is the matter, Forsdyke?" he asked, glancing from one to the other.

"We have just found the safe open, and four thousand dollars of that money gone, sir," replied Forsdyke, in a trembling voice which was not assumed.

"How did that happen? Have you any idea who did it?"

"Yes, sir; we have no doubt in the world but that it was Dykeman."

"You speak positively. Surely there must be some mistake. I would sooner believe anybody else on the road was a thief than he," said the division superintendent, who was familiar with Dash's record on the road, and had taken quite a fancy to the young railroader.

"I know it is a disagreeable thing to believe, Mr. Layard," answered Forsdyke, with assumed regret, "but when you hear what Kinney has to say, you will understand why I am so positive."

He thereupon told how he had left Dykeman in his office, making no mention, of course, of how he had got the agent to work on the safe, and then Kinney added in detail what he had observed immediately after. Forsdyke concluded by telling how they had arranged to catch Dykeman in the act, and about the discovery of the safe being open a few minutes before.

"You should have told me of this without doing anything of the kind," cried the superintendent, in stern, reproving tones; "but it has got to be looked into, and at once. Send for Dykeman."

Meanwhile, as soon as Dykeman had finished his breakfast, he hastened to the station, intent only on getting Forsdyke and Kinney together, and making the former tell that he had given him the key and combination to the safe, and asked him to try to open it.

He was very much worried about the affair, and had hardly slept all night. He entered the superintendent's office just as Kinney was starting out to find him.

Dykeman was about to greet the superintendent pleasantly, when he noticed the official's grave looks, and the significant glances of the others, and he knew there was something wrong. He then looked from one to the other in silence.

"Dykeman," began the superintendent, closing and locking the door, no doubt to avoid interruption from without, "I am very much pained to announce that the express company's safe has been robbed of four thousand dollars, and the evidence is that you know something about it."

Though Dykeman had been fearful of the result of his foolish act of tampering with the safe, this announcement came as a bombshell. He stood for a moment as if paralyzed, various emotions, astonishment, bewilderment, grief, and finally indignation, following each other quickly over his features, but there were no signs of guilt.

"You will have to submit to yourself and your room and office being searched," concluded the superintendent.

These last words stung Dash to the intense reality of his horrible and hu-

miliating position, and he recovered his speech with difficulty.

"Who dares to give such evidence?" he demanded hoarsely. "Is it you, Kinney?" turning fiercely upon the other.

"And Mr. Forsdyke," replied Kinney, in a troubled voice, and nodding affirmatively.

"Is it because you saw me trying to open the safe last evening?" continued Dash, trying to calm himself.

"You must admit it was a very suspicious position I found you in; yes, sir," replied the assistant reluctantly.

"Well, didn't I tell you Forsdyke had given me the key and combination, and asked me to see if I couldn't open it?" blazed forth Dash. "I repeat it now, in the presence of Forsdyke, and he won't dare to deny it."

Forsdyke was as pale as a corpse, but he screwed up his courage, and steadied his trembling voice enough to say:

"I never did anything of the kind. It doesn't look reasonable——"

Dykeman was dumfounded, and he never let the express agent complete the sentence he had started on. He sprang forward, balanced on his toes, and launched a terrible blow with his right fist straight at Forsdyke's head. The latter received the blow square on his forehead, and went crashing in a heap to the floor.

Dykeman now realized that he was the victim of a skilfully laid plot to ruin him, and that Forsdyke was at the bottom of it. He would have followed up his onslaught, had not the superintendent interfered.

Forsdyke was not seriously injured, or even rendered insensible, and he rose painfully to his feet, with his handkerchief pressed to his forehead.

"There's a better way to settle this matter than with your fists, Dykeman, which do not explain things at all," said the official, not unkindly; and then he thought to himself:

"There's something decidedly wrong here; there's a darky in this woodpile we haven't found yet. No guilty person ever acted as Dykeman does."

"All right, Mr. Layard," responded Dash, desisting from further hostilities. "I will do just as you say."

"Then give me all of your keys, both to the office and anything that is locked in your room."

Dykeman did so, and after Mr. Layard had examined everything in the agent's office, the trio followed him to the young railroader's room over the station.

There was nothing there that was locked but Dykeman's trunk, which was quickly opened and examined by Mr. Layard. Kinney rummaged about the apartment, while Forsdyke investigated a small closet at one end.

Finally, when the latter reached up and swept his hand along a shelf in the closet that had apparently nothing on it, a soft package was dislodged, and fell to the floor. Apparently without noticing it, Forsdyke raised himself, by grasping the edge of the shelf, and glanced all over the support, as if he expected to find something more, and an odd expression of perplexity and amazement came over his face when it failed to appear. He then dropped to his feet, and picking up the package, handed it to Mr. Layard.

Dykeman was thunderstruck, and giving Forsdyke one look, he sank on his bed, white and fairly gasping.

Mr. Layard examined the package, and found it was money, and plainly marked $300 on the band encircling the bills.

"How do you account for this, Dykeman?" he demanded.

"I don't know anything about it, sir; I never put it there."

The young man spoke with an earnestness that carried conviction with it, and gazed into the superintendent's face with clear and steady eyes. The latter could not believe he was a thief any more than that he himself was one.

" Do you know where the balance of the money is, Dykeman?" asked Mr. Layard, merely as a matter of form.

" No more than you do, sir," was the reply.

A searching investigation was made, but the balance of the money could not be found anywhere. Superintendent Layard questioned Dykeman over and over again, but of course could learn nothing more than the latter had already told.

" This is a case that will have to be turned over to the law," concluded the superintendent, with regret; "but if you will give me your word, Dykeman, that you will not leave here, I will see that you are not taken into custody, and will give my bond for your appearance when you are needed."

" Thank you," murmured Dash, gratefully and considerably relieved; " I will stay right here, and be ready to answer at any time."

" Do not say anything about this matter to anybody," added Mr. Layard, turning to Forsdyke and Kinney. " I will see the proper officers and take their advice."

After the others had gone, Dykeman straightened up his room and repacked his trunk. He then began his duties of the day, though he did everything in a mechanical sort of way, and was so stunned by the revelations of the morning that he seemed to move about as if in a dream.

The whole thing was like a horrible nightmare, from which he could not convince himself he would not awake. He was astounded at Forsdyke's villainy, and wondered why the latter should do such a thing. The express agent was undoubtedly wholly responsible for the vile plot, and Kinney was only his innocent tool.

As Dykeman thought of the former, his heart throbbed, and his blood boiled with indignation and anger. It was well that Forsdyke kept out of the agent's way that day, or he might have received an addition to the contusion on his forehead, in spite of Dykeman's promise to the superintendent to refrain from pugilistic methods.

While this dark cloud was hovering over Dykeman's prospects, another was gathering in nature about him.

The weather had been unusually hot and sultry. Not a breath of air had stirred all day long, and there was a leaden haze covering the whole sky. There was an oppressive quietness in the very air that seemed to make dumb animals droop, and to cause the leaves to hang motionless and wilted looking upon the trees.

The least sound seemed to be heard with singular distinctness remarkable distances, and the telegraph wires gave forth a dull moaning and vibrating noise. Weather wise travelers, who took the train that day shook their heads and predicted a storm of unusual violence. The unprecedented calm and sultriness certainly seemed to presage a warring of the elements.

Dykeman had just finished making his reports, which closed his day's work, and was about starting to supper, when word was brought that the night operator was sick and could not go on duty that night.

As the agent could not spare his day operator, he agreed with the latter that they should divide the night between them—the day man to work till midnight and he the balance of the trick till morning, so both could be on duty the next day. If the night operator was no better in the morning, they could arrange to have a man sent down in time to take his place the next night.

Dykeman had no inclination to go down to Mrs. Handiford's to see Dorothy that evening, though he felt more like making a confidant of her in his trouble than any one else; but as it was necessary that he should get as much rest and sleep as possible before relieving the day operator at twelve o'clock, he decided it was best not to make a call, and sought his bed at an early hour.

There was decided evidence of an approaching storm when he retired. He slept little, for the night was very close and warm, and he was oppressed with anxious thoughts as to the outcome of the serious suspicions that had been directed against him.

When the operator called him, he was easily awakened, and was quickly down in the office. The former went immediately home and to bed.

The approaching storm had not yet burst, though the lightning was flashing frequently, and the rolling thunder was getting louder.

The electric fluid played in sizzling sparks about the switchboard above the operator's table at each flash of lightning, the wind moaned without, and the wires running into the office over the window gave forth a metallic humming like a distant chorus of steam whistles.

Dykeman took no notice of these things, as he again went over everything concerning the safe robbery, and incidentally listened to what was being said on the ticking instrument before him.

An hour passed, and the only change in the situation was the nearer approach of the warring elements.

Then there came a blinding flash of lightning and a deafening peal of thunder, and Dykeman heard the latch to the office door at his back raised as if some one was entering. The thought occurred to him that it was somebody who had come to the station early for the two o'clock night express.

He turned his head leisurely to see who it was. Then he gave a start of amazement at what he saw and tried to spring to his feet.

A tall man dressed in black, with a slouch hat and a half mask, stood just inside the door with a Colt's revolver pointed straight at the agent's head.

"Down, young fellow, or I'll blow the top of your head off! Hands up!" came the command in hoarse, stern tones.

Dykeman sank back in his chair and raised his hands into the air, though they trembled and swayed as badly as the trees outside in the storm. He instantly decided that the fellow was after the remaining six thousand dollars in Forsdyke's safe.

Two more men, also masked, then came in, and in a moment Dash was bound hand and foot and a gag forced into his mouth. The agent's heart beat fast with excitement as his eyes took in every movement of the robbers.

After he had been secured, one of them removed the telegraph keys from the instruments, no doubt to prevent his calling for assistance, but the latter wondered how they expected him to do it when his hands and feet were confined.

Suddenly the man who had first come in uttered an imprecation, and, stepping over, gazed intently into the agent's face.

"It's him, as sure as shooting, boys," he cried, with cruel satisfaction; "the same fellow that spoiled our game at the Cut. But he'll never have another chance to block us, for I'm going to settle him right now."

Dykeman's heart came up into his throat, and a chill shot over him, as he recognized the speaker as the one who had been addressed as Orloff in the attempted train robbery at Big Rock Cut.

He felt the urgent necessity of speaking, but the cruel gag effectually kept him silent; and it is doubtful if he could have uttered a word without it, he was so paralyzed with horror.

The outlaw deliberately raised his pistol on a line with the agent's head, and the latter watched him with fascinated gaze, feeling that his time had undoubtedly come. The robber pressed the trigger, but there was no report—only the click of the hammer. It had missed fire.

The reaction was so sudden that Dykeman swooned. With another imprecation, the marauder cocked his re-

volver, and again pointed it at the helpless and insensible agent's head. It would certainly be a miracle if the weapon missed fire a second time.

CHAPTER XL.

DOROTHY PROVES HERSELF A HEROINE.

As Dorothy Orloff was a participator in some of the exciting and perilous events that occurred on the night of the memorable storm that passed over Madrid, and, as what she did has an important bearing on our story, we must take the reader back to Mrs. Handiford's cottage on the evening of the day that Dykeman passed in such a maze.

After supper, Mrs. Handiford had her man of all work, Needham, who was called Need for short, hitch up the horse to the top buggy, and immediately started to the village by the country road, with the hired man to drive for her.

She would never have ventured to make the journey at that hour in the evening, and in the face of a gathering storm, had it not seemed a case of necessity. A neighbor had stopped late in the afternoon, on her way home, and brought the intelligence from the village that a near and dear friend of Mrs. Handiford's was not expected to live, and had expressed a wish to see her.

As the days were long, and she would have at least an hour between six o'clock and dusk to make her visit, Mrs. Handiford felt reasonably sure of returning before nightfall.

As Need was the only member of the stronger sex about the place, and in fact the only person there beside the aunt and niece, Dorothy was left alone. It was not the first time the young girl had been left so, and she had no fears. Besides, she felt assured that her aunt would return, or that Dykeman would call before night came on.

But the gathering clouds and flashes of lightning made her anxious that neither should get caught in the storm.

Darkness came sooner than usual, occasioned by the black storm clouds, and no one arrived at the cottage. Dorothy felt disappointed first at the non-appearance of the agent, and then, as time passed, till it was nearly nine o'clock, she became apprehensive that something might have happened to her aunt.

Dykeman, she knew, might have been kept away by some unexpected business, but she could not understand the delay in the return of her aunt.

Dorothy did not consider herself in her anxiety about the absent member of the family—it never occurred to her that there was anything to be afraid of. She was not a timid girl, the darkness had no terrors for her, and the gathering storm was to her only a magnificent spectacle.

She sat on the front piazza, watching the vivid flashes, still low down near the horizon, and the rolling clouds marshaling themselves into battle array. She watched them closely, but her only feeling, besides that of awe, was one of apprehension that the contest would begin while her aunt was on the way home.

As the minutes passed, and the storm approached nearer, Dorothy became decidedly worried and anxious about her relative. She went to the sitting room, where there was a light, and tried to read a book, but she could not fix her mind on anything. Then, in spite of her anxiety, the young girl became very sleepy.

She lay down on the lounge, promising herself she would not go to sleep—in fact, telling herself she *couldn't* go to sleep, and, if her aunt did not come very soon, she would start out afoot, on the road to the village, to find her.

These determinations were made with energy, and in full faith, but in a few minutes they faded from her mind, her eyes closed, and she had gone to sleep.

The next thing Dorothy knew, there was a crashing, rolling report that almost deafened her, and she found herself standing upright in the sitting room, with shaking limbs and startled eyes. It was the same terrific clap of thunder that had ushered in the masked robber at the station, and was the letting loose of the full fury of the long gathering storm.

When she realized what had startled her, Dorothy regained most of her self possession, and felt considerably mortified that she had allowed herself to go to sleep, even for a few minutes.

She glanced toward the clock on the mantel shelf. *Its hands pointed to one o'clock, and she had slept four hours!*

With a startled exclamation she sprang closer to the timepiece, as if doubting the evidence of her own eyes.

One o'clock and her aunt not there! Where could she be?

"Aunty! Aunty! Aunt Ellen!" she cried, as she started for the front door, but there was no response, and only the rolling thunder and shrieking air broke the silence.

Dorothy pushed open the door, and closed it after her, to keep the rushing air from blowing out the lamp. Then she struggled to one of the posts that supported the veranda, and clinging to it, gazed out upon the wreck and devastation the storm was carrying with it.

The shallow stream that flowed around the foot of the hill had become a raging torrent. Huge limbs of trees were borne by the wind through the flying sheets of rain, and tremendous crashes now and then were heard, as some giant of the forest was uprooted and felled to the ground.

Mrs. Handiford's cottage was partially protected from the wind by the hill on the side of which it stood, and there were no trees near enough to do it damage by being blown down. Beyond the savage gusts which occasionally shook it, it did not appear to be in any danger.

Dorothy was about to return to the shelter of the cottage, when, amid the yelling of the wind, the swish of the falling flood, and the cannonade of thunder, she heard distinctly the shrill clang of an engine bell.

It was a light engine, or pilot, which had been sent out from the end of the division, to feel the way over the numerous bridges and trestles, to insure the safety of the express train that followed.

A moment later, and by the blazing flashes of light, she saw the engine creep out upon the South Bridge. Then there was a crash of rending timbers, the "kerchung" of a heavy engine's plunge into the angry flood, and the wild hissing of the water upon the hot boiler.

No human cry arose above these noises and that of the shrieking tempest, but it did not need these to tell Dorothy that there were brave men on that engine, and that if they escaped instant death in that terrible plunge they might need assistance.

Without waiting to think how her frail strength could be of any avail amid the warring elements, she flew out into the storm, down the hill, and to the spot nearest to where the engine had gone into the water.

She saw two men dead, and another apparently uninjured, but so stranded among the driftwood and débris of the fallen bridge as to be out of her reach. But she caught up the long slender limb of a tree, which had few branches, and extended it, when there came a favoring flash of light, out towards the struggling man. He grasped it, and with her assistance, was pulled ashore.

But the poor fellow sank to the ground, either overcome with his exertions, or suffering from some serious injury. As soon as Dorothy could gather courage, she approached him, and discovered when she knelt at his side, that he was a negro.

He looked up at her, rolling his eyes in a startling manner.

"Don't be 'fraid, missis; de Lord done sent you, I knows He did," gasped the fellow, as if in pain. "I'se hurt bad in yere, an' I ain't goin' for to live," he continued, as he placed his hand high up on his abdomen, and then let it travel to an opening in his shirt, from which he drew something; "but the Lord done sent you, missis, so this nigger can 'fess an' go to glory.

"I'se Sam, I is—Black Sam; all de railroad boys knows Black Sam. My ole mammy, Liza, works roun' to the station at Madrid, an' keeps de gen'lemen's rooms. When I war in Madrid ebenin' afore last, she asked me for to go over an' see ef I could fin' her specs in Mr. Dykeman's room, which war left open. I found 'em, an' war just goin' out when I hearn some one a comin' up de steps. I got behin' the open door, for I feared whoever it mought be, mightn't believe what Black Sam war there for.

"I see Mr. Forsdyke, the superintendent's clerk, come in, an' arter lookin' 'bout curious, put somethin' on the top shelf of the closet. When he done gone, I looked on the shelf an' foun' two passels o' bills like this 'ere one. I only took one, leavin' 'tother one there, an' here 'tis."

The latter was so filled with pity and horror at the situation that she hardly realized the significance of the information she had just received, and mechanically took the dark bundle which she thrust into the bosom of her dress.

Then, like a flash, she thought of the express that was due at Madrid at two o'clock, and the urgent necessity of warning it of the fallen bridge occurred to her.

Could she reach the Madrid station, and in time for the operator to get word to the express at the first station the other side of the South Bridge? But stay. Could she leave the poor, dying negro lying at her feet?

It would be better to leave him to his fate, she thought, than that many others should perish on the express, but fortunately the alternative was not left to her to decide.

"Good by, missis, I'se goin'," gasped the colored victim and Dorothy knew, from the horrid rattle in his throat, as he completed his words, that he had drawn his last breath.

Sick and faint she turned away, but still determined to make an effort to warn the express of the danger in its path.

All about her were the roaring waters, tearing up great trees by the roots and hurling them into the foaming cataract. The hideous wind yelled about the brave young girl and seemed to dare her to proceed.

She crept along in the darkness, buffeting the whirling cyclone and driving rain, her only guide the livid flashes that flared about her every moment, and at last reached the High Bridge trestle.

To cross this single tracked elevated bridge required the steadiest of nerves, even in the daytime, when all was peace and sunshine around. How could she cross it now, in that fearful darkness, by the vivid flashes of lightning that came only to blind her? What was there for her but death should she lose her footing, or be hurled from the structure by the howling wind?

Then the thought of the express again and its load of human lives. Death would be the penalty of her cowardice if she should not make the effort. This thought infused new courage in her, for she could not be a coward with so much at stake.

Down on her knees the brave young girl fell, determined to do her duty or die. Down on her hands and knees she went, and began the passage of the horrid chasm, straining her ears to hear, amidst the noise of the tempest, the whistle and roar of the flying express train.

(To be continued.)

UNTO THE FOURTH GENERATION.

BY MAUD HOWARD PETERSON.

A tale of our two great wars, showing how a bit of rosemary retained its meaning through the various vicissitudes of the epochs that marked the making of the American republic.

"There's rosemary; that's for remembrance."

SHE stood a quaint, tall, slender figure in white, with the parted hair, short waisted dress and high heeled slippers of old. The English ivy and Virginia creeper running around the pillars of the porch framed her in like a picture.

Far off lay the Dan and the Staunton with the sun shining on them, as they flowed nearer to form the Roanoke. To the right lay the stretches of meadow and borne on the air was the sound of negroes' voices singing in the tobacco fields. To the left lay the hedge of rose bushes and through the vista of holly trees gleamed the marble slabs of the graveyard.

At the foot of the steps stood a man holding his horse by the bridle. In his hand, over which fell a deep lace ruffle, was his hat and riding whip. From his high boots shone silver spurs and on his knee breeches glistened rose diamond buckles.

"Nay," he was saying, and his dark eyes flashed scornfully, "nay, doth King George think we will submit to such tyranny as this? I wager me, he knoweth not with whom he has to deal."

"Methinks you are right," the girl answered, "but I trow King George would be astounded could he but hear Sir Peyton Ravenscroft speak thus."

The man struck his whip against his boot and looked down upon it smiling.

"Aye, verily, but methinks he would be equally astounded could he but know that Lady Jean shared in my opinion."

"I care not what his majesty may think. I am no subject of his; I acknowledge no king; I am a free woman and a Virginian, living in a State that will have her liberty or die!"

"Sh—sh! You shouldst not speak so loudly, fair coz," replied the man looking cautiously around, "we are living in dangerous times when the very walls themselves have ears to testify against them that speak ill of the king."

"I care not," answered she again; "did we not throw off our English chains three years ago and did not Virginia lead?"

"You wouldst make a right noble soldier's sweetheart," Sir Peyton answered, looking up at her.

A faint smile crept around her ladyship's mouth.

"Who knoweth? Perchance, some day I may be called upon to fill the rôle," she said.

"Then by the powers above I do most heartily wish that I might be the favored man."

He dropped the bridle and ran up to where she stood. "Think you there is hope for such as I, fair coz?"

"Nay, for you are more a cavalier than you are a soldier."

"Times changeth men's positions," he said, with shining eyes. "The day is now at hand when we gentlemen of Virginia will leave our possessions and our homes and raise our swords for liberty!"

"Well said, Sir Peyton, and for that worthy speech you shall have a flower. Take your choice," she added.

"Nay, *you* shouldst give me one."

She took a spray of lad's love and offered it to him.

"Will this suit your lordship?" she asked half shyly, half jestingly.

He took it and pinned it on his coat and gave her in return a twig that he had gathered.

"See," he said, "if you care for me, treasure this as I shall treasure yours. And, Jean, some day perchance I may redeem the flower?"

"Never until you have proven yourself worthy of your spurs," she answered, but her fingers tightened over the bit of maiden's pride she held.

"Then, when I come, blade in hand, may I hope that you will look with favor on my suit?"

The question died on the jasmine scented air, unanswered, for a horseman galloped up the road and drew rein before the door.

"I give you greeting, Cousin Jean," he said, doffing his plumed hat, "and to you also, Ravenscroft," he added.

"I thank you," answered Sir Peyton, while the girl stretched out her hands in welcome, as though well pleased. He caught them eagerly in his and forgot the one cousin in looking into the other's eyes.

"Where did you come from, Vaughan?" It was Ravenscroft's voice and it recalled him to himself.

"Elm Hill," he said, dropping the girl's hands with a start.

They sat down upon the steps and the girl began to sort the flowers that lay in the flat basket by her side. Such flowers!—mock magnolias, in all their creamy beauty, jasmines, white and yellow and fragrant with a fragrance that no other flower can know; roses, varying from the pale blush to those of deepest dye; larkspur, rosemary and lad's love, and in the midst of all a spray of maiden's pride.

They helped her in their clumsy fashion, sitting on the steps below her, one on either side and looking up and smiling for sheer joy of youth and love.

In a desultory way they talked of England and the war, and once Vaughan caught her hand in his long, slender, nervous fingers and asked her laughingly if she would weep were he to fall. She silenced him with a reproachful look.

"Do you think my heart is made of stone, Sir Richard?" she questioned.

Vaughan sighed—he had hoped for more—he could not have said what.

Presently Ravenscroft rose to leave. He stooped and kissed her hand in token of farewell, and then held out his own to Vaughan.

"Nay, tarry with us yet a little while," the girl exclaimed, raising her smiling eyes to his; "methinks this is unseemly haste—but perchance Mistress Dorothy Fairfax is waiting to receive you?"

"How can you speak so?" he asked half angrily. "You know right well I have not seen Mistress Dorothy for over a fortnight!"

"Aye, and so the reason for your haste?" called the girl after him as he rode away; but she watched him until the holly trees hid him from her sight and when she turned to Vaughan the smile still lingered in her eyes.

"Ah, Jean," he said as he imprisoned both her hands in his, "you care for him, do you not?"

The girl threw back her head with a little gesture of disdain.

"And may I ask, Sir Richard, who gave you leave to question me so rudely?"

"I crave your pardon," he answered, while the shadows deepened in his eyes, "I crave your pardon a hundredfold but my own heart pain made me hasty in my speech."

The anger vanished from her face and for a moment she stood motionless before him, reading in his own full well the hidden meaning of his words.

"Tell me," he said, "is it Ravenscroft or me you pity most?"

"I knew not that either you or he needed my pity."

"Aye, verily," said Vaughan, "for do you not remember that pity is akin to—love?"

Her ladyship smiled. "Then I know not which I pity more," she said.

"I believe you speak truly. Do you remember what the Bard of Avon said?"

"He said so many things, that I cannot now recall the one you mean."

Vaughan took her hand, and in his low, strong voice repeated:

"To thine own heart be true,
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

There was a silence as though nature held her breath to listen, and presently he added:

"Jean, if in the time to come, Ravenscroft and I be no longer here to urge our suits will you remember this?"

She looked up then, without a touch of coquetry, for as she placed her hand in his, there rose before her the remembrance of another face and she answered:

"Aye, Richard, always!"

And she did. She remembered in the months that followed; in the years to come; she remembered when, a little later, with blades in hand, they came to say good by.

"And so King George has changed his policy," Sir Peyton said. "His men have met with defeat in the North but I wager me, they look for no such resistance in the South. Ah! Vaughan, we will teach these renegades a lesson they will not soon forget. They shall learn that the wealthy Virginia planter can wield his sword as well as did the men who took Louisburg from the French."

And Vaughan raising his blade until it glistened in the summer sunshine answered:

"Aye!"

And Jean, standing with them in the garden amid her flowers, threw back her head and echoed:

"Aye!"

Vaughan walked towards his horse, standing half hidden in the rose bushes, and began to tighten the girth. He knew Ravenscroft would thank him for this brief moment—he wondered if the girl did! Of her, he was not quite so sure.

Ah! it was this doubt that made him strong as him of the lion heart—this doubt that made him paltry weak at times and that now caused his hands to tremble at their task.

Ravenscroft looked at his companion appealingly.

"Jean," he said, "answer me truly—is it Vaughan or me you care for?"

She courtesied low in mock solemnity and she smiled the old beguiling smile. His man's wit was not keen enough to see the tears it hid.

"You flatter both yourself and Sir Richard Vaughan," she said.

"Jean," he cried, passionately, "trifle not at such a time. I know right well that it is one of us, but on my oath I cannot learn *which* is the favored man. Think not I speak for myself. Say but the name and if 'tis Vaughan's, I bless him in his wooing."

"To thine own heart be true," she heard again in fancy, and hearing, turned to Ravenscroft and smiled.

The smile was full of trust and hope now and though she said no word he gathered it to himself and treasured it.

Vaughan, emerging from the rose bushes, came toward them, and the girl, as if fearing she had said too much to Ravenscroft in that one look, went to meet him gladly.

"A flower in parting," she said, and he stooped from his horse's back that she might fasten a bit of rosemary on his coat.

They left her in the glory of the sunset, standing by the old gate post, shading her eyes with her hand. They left her a tall, quaint, slender figure, and a bit of maiden's pride was shining in her hair.

Vaughan saw it and he saw, too, that Ravenscroft wore on his coat a flower as bravely as did ever knight of old. With a lover's quick intuition he read the silent language written thereon—and reading understood.

After the turn in the road was past,

after the holly trees had hidden him from sight, he looked down at the twig fastened on his coat and smiled a far away, unfathomable smile.

"Rosemary; that's for remembrance," he said.

* * * *

While Greene was moving southward into Carolina, Cornwallis turned his men to Viriginia, and after having secured the forces which Arnold had left at Petersburg, took up his headquarters at Yorktown. The section swarmed with red coats, while a little to the southward lay an ençampment of Continental troops, watching eagerly, breathlessly, Washington and Rochambeau's next move.

Into a tent an orderly came one day, stating that the elder of the two men within was wanted at headquarters.

The commanding officer, deep in contemplation of a map, looked up as he entered, saluting.

"Ravenscroft," he said, "I wish to speak to you, today; not as your superior officer, not as general to aide de camp, but as man to man."

He paused; Ravenscroft inclined his head.

"Our army," went on the gray haired veteran, "joined by the French troops, have marched from Philadelphia to Elkton and from thence have taken shipping down the Chesapeake. All would be well, if we could but wait until Cornwallis' retreat is thus cut off, but we are weak in numbers and Hurlock tells me on good authority that unless reinforcements are secured within the next three days, a skirmish is inevitable—a battle possible. You see right well what this would mean to us. These detachments of red coats scattered throughout the land would bathe our lands in blood and later wipe us from the face of the earth. We must have help and soon!"

He paused and lowering his voice, pointed to a paper in his hand. "This document containing important drafts and orders must be delivered in person to the commanding officer of the detachment; unless this is done, the most urgent part of the mission will have failed; it must not at any hazard fall into the hands of the enemy; you see how sore is our strait. Now man, what would you advise?"

The lieutenant took a step forward; the blood of all the Ravenscrofts flowing through his veins, leaped up; the pride of all the Ravenscrofts shone in his eyes.

"You speak truly," he said; "help must be secured with all speed. Methinks a man accustomed to the saddle, with a knowledge of the surrounding country, the position of the troops, with the countersign and the necessary papers, could do——"

A smile crept around the commanding officer's mouth. He had expected this; he had not been disappointed.

"What mean you?" he asked.

The younger man bent over the map on the table.

"See," he said in an excited whisper, "it could be done by following the old pike road as far as Dinwiddie Court House; from thence a cut through the woodland would land him at Blackwater River; then on to the James; up the bank and across; passing between Williamsburg and Yorktown and beyond to our men."

He had spoken rapidly and now paused for breath. His eyes were shining with youth's enthusiasm.

"Well spoken, but do you not see that the plan is well nigh impracticable?"

"Nay, why so?"

"It would be a dangerous ride——"

"Aye, but in war times, at great issues, soldiers pause not to consider danger."

"A dangerous ride," the older man spoke calmly, "one that would mean almost certain death."

There was a pause. Before Sir Peyton's eyes there rose the semblance of a woman's face.

"Do you know one man, skilful,

faithful, brave enough to take the trip?"

"Aye, sir!"

The colonel raised his head.

"And he is——"

Clear and low rang out the young lieutenant's voice.

"Here!"

The officer rose and stretched out his hand.

"Could you start tonight?" he asked.

"Aye, but first I would ask that I might be allowed to write a few words to my home—a note that I will place in the hands of my friend and kinsman, Sir Richard Vaughan, for safe delivery in case"—the brave voice broke—"in case my mission should fail."

"One and as many more as you please, but the prayers of your comrades shall follow you to bring you back safely to them—and *her*."

The older man smiled thoughtfully as Ravenscroft saluted gravely and left him to his thoughts.

"A brave and generous heart," he said; "may the fates look kindly on his wooing."

* * * *

That afternoon as it verged toward twilight, Ravenscroft, equipped and spurred, went to headquarters for last orders. Ten minutes later he emerged with the document safe in his keeping. He went back to his tent, laid it with his cap and gauntlets near by and turned to get from his wallet the rough map of the surrounding country that he might the better obtain his bearings. After a hasty perusal he rose from his camp stool, and picked up his soft hat and gloves. Then he stooped for the paper. It was *gone*.

He looked again, scarce believing the awfulness of his discovery; he rent aside the flap in his tent and looked out—no one in sight; he tore open his clothes, he groveled on the ground, and then it was that in one wild burst of agony he fully realized the greatness of his loss.

Gone! like a mist of the morning; melting from under his touch. Gone! and now in the hands of a traitor; Gone! the papers he had sworn to defend with his life's blood; gone! and with it the safety of his comrades he had hoped to save; gone! and with it the untainted name of the Ravenscrofts.

He clenched his hands until the nails ate into the flesh; he bit his lip until it bled, and yet he heeded not.

Mechanically he found his way to headquarters. With a face from which all color had fled, with lips that could scarcely form the words of confession, in a voice that thrilled those assembled with a strange new awe, he told his pitiable tale, and then in the death-like silence that followed he unbuckled his sword, handed it to his commander and resigned his commission.

He stood there with uplifted face; with unseeing eyes; stripped of spurs and blade; devoid of rank—disgraced, and yet those who saw him then did say that he still looked the nobleman.

All night that little detachment watched and waited, dreading the birth of the new day. All night were the men preparing for the onslaught that was so soon to follow. Muskets were tested and polished, blades tried; already had some of the number been set to constructing the embankments.

Day dawned; from out of the east the sun came forth and eyes weary with a sleepless watch, looked in vain for the glimmer of red and sword blades in the dazzling light. Hours passed. Evening was near at hand. Another day dawned and another day crept by. Suddenly was heard the indistinct beat of horses' hoofs in the distance; faint at first but coming nearer. Then the sound of a bugle. Vainly the Continentals strove to pierce the mist that had fallen over the sunlight. Some murmured a prayer; the battle madness seized on others and they waved their blades aloft; some stood silent, Spartan-like, waiting for death, or worse.

Then from out of the mist into the cloud of dust; from out of the dust into the light of day, emerged a section of cavalry, followed by one hundred men on foot.

There came an order to halt. Weary and footsore they rested. As they looked toward the little detachment, the little detachment, wild eyed and haggard, looked back at them.

Speechless at first, then the men who had suffered a whole lifetime in that night, lifted up their voices as one man, in a great resounding cheer. Both wore the *blue!*

From the head of the forces there rode forth a man—the commander.

" Men of the American Army," he said, and he held on high his sword, " men of Virginia, men who are fighting for liberty, raise your voices and give thanks to God—and to your fellow comrade who has brought this thing to pass! "

Speechless they stood as he rode back and returned to the clearing, leading by the bridle a jet black, foam speckled horse, on which sat a man in civilian's clothes, and whose soft felt hat concealed the upper part of the bowed head. Speechless they stood when he raised it and pushed back its covering.

Before them was a tired, dust stained face, with weary, steadfast eyes; they looked, and as they looked they cheered, until the woodlands resounded with the shout and the valleys and the streams and trees echoed and reëchoed the one word—

" Vaughan! "

* * * *

Ravenscroft went forward to meet Vaughan, who stood a little apart and led him to where Lady Jean was sitting on the steps of the summer house.

She held out both hands.

" I might go all the wide world over," she said with infinite gentleness, " and I could never tell you how much I honor you and thank you for your brave deed. Peyton has just told me how you risked life and limb in order that *he* might not be exposed to the perils that beset you on that fearful ride."

" Nay, you must not thank me so," he answered, flushing and toying nervously with the faded plume in his hat, " no dangers were too great to encounter for his sake."

" Ah! Vaughan," Ravenscroft cried, stretching out his hand, " would to Heaven I were worthy of such love."

Vaughan grasped the hand and looked down upon it, smiling. " You should not speak like this; you seem to forget that you were more than eager to take the ride yourself."

" Aye, but with my impulsive spirit, methinks the mission would have failed. *I* never would have dreamed to doff my soldier's garb and disguise myself in civilian's dress."

" In your unseemly praise, you must remember that for one thing I crave forgiveness."

" And that is—what? "

" All during that long ride, I knew the agony that you were enduring—the agony I caused. I saw no other way, and yet I crave your pardon for causing you one pang."

Ravenscroft bowed his head in his hands.

" Oh, Vaughan! " he said.

The voice went on; more mellow and more strong than of old.

" I could not bear to see you risking death; you were my friend and kinsman and the little that I hazarded was done for you right gladly; for you "—he paused and with his other hand drew Jean's within its firm, strong grasp and brought them together—" for you, dear friend, and *yours*."

And then he left them and only shook his head in smiling protest when they begged him to remain, for one glance at their happy faces when he met them in the morning told him that Ravenscroft had redeemed his maiden's pride.

With unseeing eyes he walked past the rose bushes, on and on. Blindly he stretched out his hand.

It came in contact with a bit of shrubbery and it recalled him to himself. He had wandered to the garden and his hand had touched a flower. He looked down upon it and he smiled that same strange unfathomable smile.

"Rosemary?" he said half questioningly, and he raised his head as a conqueror—as might Richard of old. "Rosemary? Why, that's for remembrance."

II.

SHE stood a slender, girlish figure in white, with jasmine in her hands and in her hair. Her usually pale face was flushed with excitement and her voice was trembling with indignation.

The man standing at the foot of the steps looked up at her and smiled.

She saw it and it maddened her.

"You do not deserve to bear the name you do," she said, "you disgrace it and your birthright as a Virginian in siding with the North."

"You forget, Jean, that Peyton Ravenscroft of old was among the first to fight for liberty."

"No, I do not," she answered, "but he fought in defense of his State and he fought for the girl he loved."

"Jean," the other cried, "don't be so cruel; can't you see how hard it is to do what I think is right?"

"Is it right to fight against the State that gave you birth? Is it right to fight against your kin? Is it right to fight against the people of whose boundless hospitality you have received? Is this right?"

"Jean"—he began, and ran up the steps with outstretched hands to where she stood; she stepped back and motioned him away from her.

"Don't come a step nearer!" she said passionately; "don't touch me!"

He obeyed; his arms fell to his side, but his eyes met hers unflinchingly.

"Is it right to turn against the land that taught the boy; that trained the soldier; that made of me a man? Is it right to forget that while my father was of the South, my mother was of the North? Is it right to turn a deaf ear to the cry of the oppressed?"

Her only answer was to move towards the door. Suddenly she stopped; the anger vanished from her face and she half held out her hand.

"Peyton," she said, and the low, musical cadence of her contralto voice thrilled the man strangely, "Peyton, do not leave me—stay with me—do not fight against me and my people!"

He went up to her and took her hand, his face softening with love's charm. She believed that she had won. In a moment he had recovered himself.

"I cannot," he said.

She shook off his detaining touch and drew herself up, the pride of all the Ravenscrofts shining in her eyes.

"Then you can go," she said, "and remember that the day you raise your hand against the South you will have vanished as utterly out of my life as though you had never existed, and that I never wish to see your face again!"

"Jean," he cried, "remember my love for you—Jean."

For a moment she paused in the doorway and looked back over her shoulder at him.

"This is not the way *we* love," she said; "but I forget that you of the North are colder—there are still those who can fight for the land I love and as well—love *me!*"

The sound of horses' hoofbeats broke in upon the moment's silence that had fallen when her voice ceased. The girl raised her head and turning, ran quickly past Ravenscroft to meet the man who drew rein before the door.

"Richard," she cried, "Richard, I surely thought you were never coming. I have waited for so long!"

He caught her hand eagerly and his face glowed at the warmth of her greeting.

"Ah! my Lady Bird," he said, "I could not keep away; you are the pole

and I—well, poor I, am the mariner's needle."

He raised his eyes to hers and caught sight of Ravenscroft. For a moment he paused irresolutely. Then he stepped forward and put out his hand.

"Ah! cousin," he said, "I hardly looked to see you here." He dropped his voice, but the caution was unnecessary, for Jean had left them; "have you not reconsidered your decision—are you still bound for the North?"

"Yes," answered the other simply.

Vaughan, as if reluctant to sever the lifelong tie that bound them, slowly dropped the hand he held.

"Then, henceforth our paths are divided—but one word in parting—Jean?"

"She will not listen to reason."

Vaughan laughed softly.

"I can scarcely blame her," he said.

"She told me, just before you came, that she never wished to see my face again."

Vaughan laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

"We are sworn enemies," he said smiling, "or will be in a few moments—but let me give you a word of comfort in parting—a woman's heart is a strange bit of mechanism and she often does not understand its workings herself."

"Then you think she cares for me?" asked Ravenscroft eagerly. Aye! verily, love is greater than war.

"I don't know; her ladyship is such an uncertain damsel and she does not carry her heart on her sleeve, you know."

Peyton sighed. "But you, Vaughan—how is it with you?" As he spoke he looked deep into the clear depths of the other's eyes, as if he would read their secrets. They met his without a quiver of the eyelids.

"With me it is all serene," answered Vaughan.

There was a pause; then Ravenscroft picked up his soft riding hat.

"Good by," he called out. He spoke to Vaughan, but he looked longingly towards the bowed windows of the house.

"Wait," whispered Richard in his ear.

He stepped into the parlor where the girl stood arranging flowers.

"Jean," he said, "Peyton is leaving; are you not going to say 'good by' to him?"

"No," she replied, viciously snapping the thorns off a refractory rose.

"Why not?"

She raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"Is it necessary to ask?"

"But, Jean, think—he is your cousin; until now he has been your friend; at least he will always be your lover."

"I doubt it. Men are uncertain and they tell me the girls of the North are far from unattractive."

"Jean, you are unjust."

"Have you turned John Alden? Why must *you* plead *his* suit?"

"Because you are biased—prejudiced—you do not see clearly, you will not listen to him—because he is my friend."

"Your friend?"

"Always!"

"But he is a detestable Yankee!" The girl tapped the toe of her boot on the floor impatiently.

Vaughan smiled. "What a little rebel it is, to be sure," he said, addressing the crimson rose on the mantel.

Miss Ravenscroft did not move. Vaughan went up to her.

"Jean," he said, "let him see that we of the South are generous as well as loyal; show him that we can be womanly and manly as well as brave."

She hesitated.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"You are going to come with me," he said, leading her gently toward the door; "you are going to place your hand in his and smile as you did before this trouble came, and let him carry

away with him the memory of the Jean he used to know."

"Am I?" she asked, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or cry. "Oh, Richard, what a persuader you are!"

Like an obedient child she did as she was bid, but after the holly trees had hidden him from sight, she buried her face on Vaughan's shoulder and shook with tearless sobs.

"I *hate* him!" she cried passionately.

* * * *

Extract from a letter written by Miss Jean Ravenscroft of Virginia to her most intimate friend, Miss Dorothy Fairfax, of Albemarle County.

" * * * You would hardly know the old place. Uncle John suddenly appeared the other night, with a detachment of troops and has converted the left wing of the house into his headquarters. Such a running about; such confusion, such excitement! I suppose I ought to be used to it after three years (but I am not), for it has formed as much a part of our daily diet as the batter bread and fruit on which we are existing at present. Mother (who deserves to be canonized) says we should be thankful for *that*—but oh! I do get so hungry sometimes for the old luxuries of the old life.

"This morning we had another surprise. Richard dropped in upon us on a two days' leave of absence—dear old Richard; a little thinner, perhaps, a little graver; but still the same, only with an increased appetite! How he does eat—bread, fruit, hoe cake, indiscriminately. Poor fellow; I do not believe he has had a hearty meal for months. Aunt Keziah opened the last jar of preserves today in honor of his coming, and would you believe it he ate it all? I have slipped a bottle of old Madeira in his old, shabby army bag, for I am sure it will not come amiss. We only have a few left, but mother said 'Richard must have one.'

"I have been going over some old letters today—from my great great grandfather, Sir Peyton, to his sweetheart. You know her name was Jean; I was christened for her. Such strange, time worn letters, Dorothy, yellow with age and stilted in style but somehow breathing the same old attribute of friendship and the older attribute of love. And then there are others from Sir Richard Vaughan to the first Jean. He was Dick's great, great uncle, and he never married. His letters reveal nothing and he did not seem to care for women; though Lady Jean describes him as 'a brave and gallant and honorable gentleman.' He must have been all that, for once he risked his own life in order that grandfather's might not be imperiled. I do not quite know how, but I think it was a long and dangerous ride he took in the Revolutionary days.

"I wonder if they were as exciting days as the ones we are living in now? From the letters, there was a marvelous sort of friendship existing between these three—the Jean and Peyton and Richard of old! You see the names have all been perpetuated. Sir Richard lived to be over forty, but he never smiled on any woman, so the letters say. He traveled a great deal but the old place was always his headquarters. He must have done a vast amount of good out West among the Indians, for he became their friend.

"One day there was a skirmish and he fell, fighting for his chosen people. They brought him home and then they found that in the pocket of his coat was a bit of rosemary. That was all. Call me romantic, if you will, but somehow, Dorothy, I think that was the key to the romance of his life.

"You remember his grave here, do you not? It is quite near Sir Peyton's and Lady Jean's. You used to be so interested in them that I thought you might like to hear these fragmentary bits I have just learned myself. Somehow, I imagine the Richard of old must have been like my Richard of today, fearless, strong and brave.

"I miss you so much. Dorothy.

What ever persuaded your father to move up to Albemarle? I know the country is beautiful, but I am lonely—so lonely—and heartsick, Dorothy, with the struggle of it all. We have given, *are* giving so much—our all—for *what?*

"I have my serious doubts as to your ever receiving this letter, the mails are not to be trusted just now.

"Now and always,

"JEAN."

"P. S.—By the way, Austin Feild has been promoted to uncle's staff. He has beset me with questions about you—says—but there, *of course* you do not care what he says. J."

* * * *

Extract from a letter written by Miss Dorothy Fairfax of Albemarle County to Miss Jean Ravenscroft of Virginia.

"* * * Your letter reached me after a delay of nearly three weeks; and I consider myself lucky to have got it then.

"The excitement is increasing every day and at present we are in the depths of woe. The scouts are after father. His fame as a hunter has gone abroad and they are anxious to capture him, so that he may show them the shortest cut through the woods to join their men. He is in hiding just now, and old faithful Charles takes him his meals. Mother and we three girls are alone in this great house—Ned with General Johnston near Atlanta and Robert with General Lee at Petersburg.

"Some Yankees came here yesterday and ransacked the stables, taking all the horses. And Nancy—you remember Nancy?—well, I heard they were coming and I hid Nancy in the cellar.

"Two lieutenants came into the house for something to eat and they stood directly over the spot where she was. I simply could *not* get them to move. Just then Nancy snorted—she must have smelt powder; the war instinct was always strong in Nancy. She snorted, and I groaned in spirit. The Yankees heard it and turned from the shadow, and then, Jean, I saw that one of them was—Peyton Ravenscroft—but so changed, so emaciated, that I scarcely knew him.

"He recognized me at once, though, and asked me if I would shake hands—possibly he has had so many rebuffs lately from his old friends in this section of the country—he did not know quite how I would take it.

"Between ourselves, Jean, I was so glad to see a familiar face I could have fallen on his neck and wept. I forgot I was a Southern girl—that he was a Union man—forgot the estrangement these last three years has wrought and remembered only that I was a woman and that he was ill—and—and—will you forgive me if I say it, dear?—was perhaps a little homesick for—*you!*

"He seemed so pleased, and his first words were 'Have you heard from Jean?' He had such a hungry, wistful look in his eyes—I think even you would have pitied him.

"Well, he has gone now but he left my Nancy behind, for which I am duly grateful. I wish there were more men like him, Jean. You remember I wrote you that when Robert was on duty as sentinel at Belle Isle, he was there as a prisoner. I verily believe the day he was brought there, Bob could have killed him with pleasure—he was so thoroughly disgusted that General Lee should have lost such a clever fellow. But before he was exchanged, Bob wrote that *he* had *them* captive. You know there is not much sentiment about prison life, or much love lost between the guarded and the guards; but Bob says, he truly believes that Ravenscroft's unfailing cheerfulness and willingness went a long way toward keeping his comrades alive.

"It was he who nursed the sick and wounded; he who comforted the homesick dying, and when he fell ill, Bob says he moaned and moaned for—who do you think, Jean? This letter is not an appeal for Peyton Ravenscroft, your cousin, but although until today the

blue coats of the Federalists were to me like a red flag to the eyes of a bull—I cannot forget his wistful, haunting face or how good he was to—Nancy.

"Lovingly,
"DOROTHY."

"P. S. Is Austin Feild still on your uncle's staff?

"D."

* * * *

The night was a dark one. The moon was obscured by clouds and no stars were visible. Up and down, up and down, paced the sentinel in his monotonous walk. His tread was the only sound that broke the stillness of the night.

To the right rose the low range of Virginia hills, standing out prominent from the lesser blackness of the sky beyond. To the left lay the sleeping camp, and silence and darkness hovered around all.

Once or twice the steady walk of the sentinel faltered as if he was weary or preoccupied. The smoldering embers of the dying fire fell on his face as he passed, and found it strangely drawn and white. His soft gray hat, drawn well over his eyes, could not altogether conceal the passion that burned therein; the passion and the pain.

"I cannot do it," he muttered to himself once or twice. "I *cannot*. She would not expect it. How do I know whether she still cares? If she ever cared? And then of late I imagined"—he paused and shook himself impatiently. "Bah! what a fool I am to have such thoughts! You must be hungry, old man—rations *are* running low and no mistake. Poor old South, you have made a desperate fight but I am afraid your race is almost run."

The South! The Cause! Ah! how he had suffered and endured for them! Ah! *She* loved them, too! What would the life of one Yankee be to her, against the life of one of their own men? What, indeed—unless he was her lover!

Was he? That was the point. The sentinel reversed arms and turned to begin anew his march. As he did so he glanced towards a low, dark building that stood near. In it was a man—a Union soldier—a dangerous one, too, and noted for his daring; captured that day on his way to join Sheridan's army.

The sentinel glanced up at the night sky. Dark—not a star; no help to be found there! He looked at his watch. The dawn would soon be breaking; he would be relieved and then it would be too late. There must be no delay in the decision.

He gripped his musket until his hand held the impress of it; then he resumed his march, but he did not pass the little barred window of the low building this time—he paused and tapped gently. The prisoner came to the grating.

"What's wanted?" he asked. His tone was wide awake; it showed he had not slept.

"Hush, speak softly!"

"Who is it?"

"It is I, Vaughan—Richard Vaughan."

"My God; what brings you here?"

"The memory of the old times—our friendship—Jean." He glanced over his shoulder cautiously. "Listen," he said, speaking hurriedly, "our men will show you no mercy—you are a dangerous person to be at large. You were caught spying today. Tomorrow you are sentenced to be shot."

The man's hold tightened on the iron bars at the window, but he gave no outward sign. Vaughan looked at him.

"The same old spirit," he said, "it would be a pity to extinguish that! You must get out of this. In the left hand corner of the room, near the surbase, the wall is rotting away; you from the inside with your knife; I on the outside—ten minutes silent work and presto! you are a free man. I will turn my back. You will creep around in the shadow of the woods to the outside picket; there will be a horse waiting for you—my own. That's all. Do you understand?"

"Vaughan you are mad; what will this cost you?"

"A fine—an imprisonment; perhaps a court martial, but I have influence——"

"I cannot do it."

"It is only a chance—a desperate one, but you must take it. Think, your life is at stake!"

"Come with me!"

"No, not *that*. A prisoner might escape through negligence of duty, but I could never turn my back on the men and the cause for which I have suffered so much."

"Forgive me," the other whispered hoarsely.

"Come, we have not a minute to lose. Do not hesitate. Do not stop to question me, only do as I bid you. Think what it means: freedom, love, youth, life itself—Jean!"

"She does not love me," he said hopelessly.

"Try and see!"

Then Vaughan crept around into the deeper shadow and a few minutes later the two men stood out in the open, face to face.

Vaughan took his hand and he looked deep into the other's eyes as friends would who expect a long parting.

"Tell Jean," he said, "if we do not meet very soon"—he paused, and when he spoke again the tremor in his voice had passed, leaving it quite strong—"tell her the South was dear, but that I held the tie of kin still dearer—and now, Godspeed!"

There was a grasp of hands, a look from each to each that was at once a prayer and a reconciliation; then one man stole deep into the shadow, and the other returned to take up his march. Two men! One to make a desperate fight for life and liberty and love; the other to pause occasionally and glance toward the barred window of the little house and to smile as at a victory won.

* * * *

They stood face to face—alone—these two men. The lieutenant—the commander. The judge and the self accused. The story had been told—told before the flight was discovered. His sword lay on the table near by and he waited for his sentence. There had been no shielding of himself; it was all set forth in as few words as possible, but the eyes that met those of the general so unflinchingly had a gleam of triumph in their quiet depths—triumph but no shame.

"I would speak to you as a friend, Vaughan, before this becomes known—before the disgrace and publicity of a court martial, for your mother's sake, for you, whom I have known always and until now trusted all my life."

His late lieutenant flinched a little.

"Was this man a friend of yours?"

"A friend and a cousin."

"You knew each other well?"

"Intimately; before this war separated us."

"He was your friend and kin—is this your only reason in helping him to escape?"

"No; there was a woman—his cousin—the girl he loved—it was for her——"

"His cousin—was she also yours?"

Vaughan flushed. "Yes," he said.

The general studied the toe of his boot.

"Vaughan," he said, "forgive me, if I open an old wound, but I must sift this matter to the bottom. It is your only chance."

Vaughan drew himself up; the pride of all his Southern blood leaped through his veins.

"You are right. You shall know it all. But I do not want undue influence brought to bear in my favor. The act was mine. I knew what I was doing. I am ready to abide by the consequences. If it means a life for a life—his life against mine—it is best so. I am the fitter one to go, for he has her—it was to have been one of us—she cared for him—it was for her sake as well as his. That is all."

The general passed his hand over his forehead and murmured something about "the confounded morning light."

"Vaughan," he said presently, "do you realize that in giving yourself up you acknowledge yourself an accomplice? It would have gone easier with you if you had simply found the prisoner escaped at daybreak."

"Yes, but though the ties of blood proved the stronger of the two, I could not forget I still owed and always will my allegiance to the South!"

Again the general shaded his eyes as if to shut out the sunlight; before him rose the semblance of a woman's face—it was that of Vaughan's mother. He walked over to him and handed him his sword. There was a strange expression on his face.

"No truer man ever drew this in defense of the cause," he said; "forgive me, lad, for the torture that these last moments must have given a soul like yours; but it was the test."

Aghast, Vaughan stood silent. He did not touch the offered blade.

The general smiled faintly.

"In thus shielding you I do the South no harm," he said. He moved a step nearer. "General Lee surrendered yesterday," he added.

* * * *

Jean finished reading the letter she held and then laid her cheek against it and cried. It was from Vaughan. It told of Lee's surrender—that was all—a short note brought that morning by a messenger—but how it hurt!

To have suffered, to have endured, to have fought, to have waited, to have hoped and hoped—in vain!

She opened a second letter—brought by the same orderly. She glanced at the signature in surprise. It was from Vaughan's commander. Not long and to the point, but as she read, the happy tears stood in her eyes, for it meant Richard's life and—she paused—she would not allow herself to think—she had thought until her eyes were heavy and her brain was dull.

The morning dragged. She went to her room to dress. Vaughan had written he would be there in the afternoon—he must not find tears and long faces awaiting him. The Spartan spirit still breathed in the South.

Then she went to meet him. Suddenly, half way down the old garden path, she paused. What was that she saw, there behind the rose tree near the little graveyard? Not a blue coat surely! She went nearer. A man lay on the ground asleep—his back was to her; his left arm done up in a handkerchief as if wounded. She stooped over him and then drew back with a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"Peyton!"

The man sat erect, stared, brushed his hand over his eyes as if to dispel an illusion and then started to his feet.

"Jean!"

"How did you come here? Is your arm hurt?"

Ravenscroft smiled. It was so exactly like Jean to ask two questions at once.

"It is a long story. I was captured—Vaughan——"

"Yes, I know."

"How?"

A wistful note crept into the low contralto voice.

"The general wrote me"—she paused and bowed her head, as if in the presence of some one ranking high above her. "God bless my Richard," she added in a whisper. That whisper was a prayer.

A moment later she was facing Ravenscroft again.

"What made you come here?" she asked.

"The hope that I might catch a glimpse of you. I did not mean to force an interview," and his voice grew a little hard. "I had nothing to say to you, but I wanted to see you—that's all. I waited, the loss of blood overcame me and I fell asleep where you found me."

"But your arm?"

"I was fired on when I thought all danger was past—ten miles from where I was imprisoned. Great heavens, it was a mad gallop, a sort of go as you please race, over ditches, vaulting fences, across the fields, up the hill at a run and down it at a tear." Suddenly he paused and laughed—a little mirthlessly, "Forgive me," he said, "I forgot it could not possibly interest you."

"It was somewhat risky your stopping here," she said, ignoring his last words.

"Yes, I admit that."

The woman turned her eyes to the long, low stretch of meadow that lay in the dim distance against the azure sky.

"That is, twenty four hours ago it might have been a dangerous thing to do; now"—her lips trembled ever so little—"it does not matter now," she said, "General Lee has surrendered."

There was a long silence. A wanton breeze stole through the arbor vita; far off a whippoorwill called to its mate. Behind them some one stole into the little graveyard and stood there transfixed; but they did not heed.

They were looking into each other's eyes. Ravenscroft did not move. The girl held out her arms appealingly; then they dropped to her side. She caught her breath in something like a sob.

"Peyton," she said, "see! the war is over—this terrible war—are we not going to have peace?"

"Yes," he said, but he did not attempt to come nearer.

"Do you remember when we were children how we used to quarrel and then 'make up'? Do you remember the bit of lad's love and maiden's pride we tied together one summer day so long ago? See, I have it here"—she drew a tiny envelope from her bosom—it was soiled and worn—"I have carried it near me all these years—these years that have taught me how cruel life can be—and yet—how dear!"

Ravenscroft took a step forward; his lip was trembling, but he did not move.

"Ah! Peyton, why do you not help me? Must I humble myself yet more? Have I not atoned by my past suffering a hundredfold for my cruel words to you? See," she stretched out to him a small foot, incased in what once had been a shoe; she touched the dress she wore; it was old and worn; "see what you have brought us to—and yet——"

"Yes?" he said. His voice was full of repressed passion.

"But Peyton, there is one thing stronger than a woman's pride—it is a woman's love!"

She went up to him like a pleading, contrite child.

"Dear," she said, "I come to you today, stripped of the old time wealth; the old time pride. I come to you, humbly, devotedly, loyally, with all my heart and soul. Will you take me? I come to you as a woman comes to the man she loves."

There in the safe shelter of his embrace she stood, knowing that the strong arm which had fought a thousand men in the past would henceforth strike in her defense alone.

* * * *

Behind them stood a silent figure—he was looking at the old time graves at his feet.

"Sir Peyton Ravenscroft, Bart," he read on one and the carved crest shone in the sunlight. "Lady Jean Ravenscroft," he read on and marveled that history should so repeat itself.

There was another slab—a slab a little apart from the rest, but he lingered there the longest. "Sir Richard Vaughan" he read, and he stood there thinking while the sun sank in the west. "They say you never married. I wonder why," he mused; "I wonder why." He parted the bushes and looked toward the two in the garden. With a sudden snap, the lad's love and the maiden's pride sprang together, hiding from his sight the Jean and Peyton of the present, the Jean and Peyton of the past.

A soft gray mist rose from the near

by river; into the blue ether soared a swallow, singing as it soared. Dimly as from a distance a bird note reached him—plaintive, clear and sweet—until the singer was lost in the immensity of space; and then it was that into his steadfast eyes there crept a shadow. Blindly groping he stretched out his hands. They touched a blossoming spray—a bit of rosemary.

BLACK CLOUD PEAK.

BY E. E. YOUMANS.

An adventure on an amateur deer hunting expedition, wherein is recounted how a foolhardy ambition hung its possessor from the literal verge of destruction.

THE dogs suddenly began barking fiercely, and a moment later a great racket was heard in the underbrush.

The hunters paused, and with their guns held ready for instant use, waited to see what was coming.

They were much excited; it was their first experience at deer hunting, and from the baying of the approaching hounds they were sure a stag had broken cover.

Opdyke was the coolest of the party, but even he could not master entirely his agitation as he said:

"Be sure you take good aim; we must not——"

The sentence was never concluded, for at that moment the bushes before them were suddenly parted, and a magnificent deer burst into view with the dogs in close pursuit.

The men were so excited that they forgot to shoot, and swift as the wind the game bounded across the clearing, and not until it had nearly reached the other side was any attempt made to bring it down.

Then Opdyke recovered himself sufficiently to shout:

"Fire!"

At the same moment he leveled his gun and pressed the trigger, but the report of his own weapon was the only one heard, and the stag was seen to sway slightly, stumble, then recover itself and bound madly on.

The shot had not been wasted, but the aim was not sufficiently accurate to prove fatal, and the amateur sportsman turned to his friends, demanding angrily:

"Why didn't you shoot? I told you to do so. If we'd all fired together we'd have brought him down. You're a fine lot of chumps, anyhow."

"Don't be so fast," cried Sam Bolton. "You have nothing to boast of; you were so excited yourself that you almost forgot to fire."

"I did, eh? Well, I'll have that deer anyhow, and don't you forget it," continued Opdyke with energy.

"I don't think you will," Bolton rejoined doubtfully. "He's making straight for Black Cloud Peak, and that's a dangerous section to travel over."

"I don't care; I'm going over it, and if you fellows don't want to follow me you can go around the mountain, and meet me on the plains below."

"You'd better not," said Tremley. "There's precipices and chasms in the peak which the deer won't be able to pass, to say nothing of a man."

"I'm going all the same. There's no use asking any of you to go along, for I see you're all afraid. Meet me on the other side of the mountain, and I'll have the deer with me."

Saying which Opdyke, who had slipped a fresh shell into his gun, shouldered the weapon and started off.

He was angry at himself for having become so excited when the game first

appeared, and was fully resolved to secure another shot.

His friends made no further attempt to dissuade him from his perilous journey, and, after watching him till he had crossed the open and entered the brush, began making their way around and down the mountain to the point where he must come out, that is if he succeeded in crossing Black Cloud Peak.

Opdyke himself gave no more attention to his friends, but pressed on through the brush in the direction the deer had fled. The baying of the hounds could just be heard far in advance, but this did not discourage him; he would catch up in due course.

He knew he had attempted a decidedly dangerous enterprise in crossing the peak, but he was provoked with his companions, ashamed of himself, and did not care particularly for personal danger.

A drop of blood on the ground suddenly attracted his attention, and he stopped for a moment to examine it. He knew now the deer was wounded, and perhaps it would become exhausted and be run down by the hounds.

He hurried on, and presently came to another blood mark, followed by another a little farther on, and his excitement increased as he began to believe that his shot might prove fatal after all.

The trail of blood was now well defined, and he encountered little difficulty in following it. It led directly toward the top of the peak, and in a few moments he came to the base of the elevation.

"Here goes," he cried with flashing eyes. "I'll have that deer, or know the reason why. The fellows don't get a chance to laugh at me now."

The next moment he was toiling up the steep incline, with the trail of blood still in sight. But the path was so rough and uneven that he soon began to wonder how the wounded game could make its way at all, and he was obliged to be extremely careful to prevent a serious fall.

Presently he found himself on the verge of a deep chasm, around which he had to slowly work his course with the greatest caution.

He could no longer carry his gun, as he was forced to use his hands constantly in making the ascent, so he strapped the weapon to his back.

Several times he was tempted to turn back as his course grew more perilous, but the dread of being laughed at after making such boastful assertions, prevented him from yielding.

When he came to another precipice, along which a narrow path led over a ledge of rock from which he could look down many feet, he drew back with a cry of alarm. But the deer had passed it in safety, for he could see the trail of blood, and, after several unsuccessful attempts, the persistent hunter finally got himself started.

He kept his eyes turned from the frightful abyss, as step by step he picked his way over the ledge, and when at last the danger was passed, uttered a sigh of relief.

"That was awful," he gasped. "I hope there won't be any more such places."

He was almost up to the top by this time, and the clouds seemed to be only a few feet above him.

In times of a shower they appeared to rest on the summit of the peak, and it was to this fact that the elevation owed its name. The thunder would roar down the chasms, and the vivid lightning play around the rocks in a way that was appalling to the beholder.

But Opdyke had no time to think of this now.

He had already gained the highest point where the trail led, and noticed with keen satisfaction that it began to descend.

The baying of the hounds reached his ears at intervals, coming up from

the base of the peak on the other side, and he was sure the deer had fallen at this point.

And now he was assailed by a new fear. Could his friends go all around the mountain, and reach the spot before he could cross the peak?

He did not think they could, but he had lost considerable time back at the chasm, and the idea that they might do so made him somewhat uneasy.

"I *must* get there first," he cried. "To fail now, after all the danger I've passed, would be more than I could stand."

He pressed on eager and excited.

So sure was he that the game had been run down by the dogs that he abandoned the course of the trail, and started straight down the peak toward the point whence emanated the baying of the hounds.

He appeared to have selected a comparatively easy route, and was making such progress in the descent that he began congratulating himself on his coming success, when he suddenly paused with a groan of dismay.

Another abyss deeper, wider and more frightful by far than the other yawned ahead of him.

This time there was no ledge by which to cross, and with a sinking heart he began to think he would be compelled to turn back, when, chancing to look some distance below, he uttered a cry of joy.

A small tree had fallen across the chasm in such a way that the top was suspended above the brink of the abyss on the opposite side. The youth was confident he could walk out on this and leap over without danger.

There were little branches protruding from the trunk at convenient intervals, and it would be an easy matter to pass over by the aid of these. The adventurous hunter stepped upon the tree and made his way out cautiously at first, becoming more courageous as he found the tree scarcely felt his weight.

Suddenly he heard a peculiar noise behind him.

He started, looked quickly back, could see nothing to cause alarm, and began to advance again.

He had probably accomplished half the distance when there was another slight noise in the rear, and Opdyke was appalled to feel the tree sinking under him.

He turned swiftly to work his way back, but before he could take a step the tree dropped, and he clutched desperately at the branches to save himself.

Fortunately, all the roots did not part, and being held by two or three tendrils, the tree swung to and fro like a pendulum with the horrified man dangling from the branches.

The sensation was awful.

Hundreds of feet below were the jagged rocks and boulders upon which he would be plunged to destruction if those few frail roots should separate.

He looked up with fear and trembling, and cried out in horror as he beheld the roots slowly but surely slipping away.

With an energy born of utter despair, he began climbing for life. It was the only thing he could do, and he realized it.

Would the roots hold two minutes longer?

The tree swayed with every motion of his body, and steadily those roots continued to slip.

Up, up he swiftly mounted, and now he had almost reached the top. Only one foot more, and he would be safe.

But now two of the roots had broken, the whole weight was sustained by one which threatened to snap each second.

He had just extended his hand to take the hold that would draw him to safety when the root broke, and with a yell of terror he seized the upper end, while the whole tree went plunging and crashing down to the depths below.

There he hung dangling over a horrible fate, for the root being relieved

from the weight of the tree, could support him easily enough, and with all his strength he drew himself upon the edge of the precipice and rolled a few feet away from the brink.

For a long time he lay there, scarcely able to realize his miraculous escape, and when at last he rose to his feet and began making his way along the precipice to a point where a crossing could easily be effected, his face was still white and his step unsteady.

After a while he found a place, and crossed over, to continue his way down, but he had given up all hope of reaching the deer first, and made no attempt to hurry.

At last he arrived at the foot of the peak, and began making his way through the bushes to the open country beyond.

Suddenly he heard a shout to the right.

"The others!" he cried, springing forward. "They're just coming around the mountain. I can get there first after all."

He plunged ahead with renewed hope now, and when he came to the edge of the bushes beheld the deer sure enough lying dead on the border.

The hounds were not in sight, and Opdyke concluded they had gone to meet the approaching men, whose shouts were momentarily drawing nearer.

"I've won! I've won!" he cried, and just then his friends appeared around the bushes.

They saw him at once, and began cheering, while Opdyke waved his cap in triumph as he stood over the fallen stag.

"My shot *was* a fatal one, after all," he said, as they came up. "I chased him over the peak, and, you see, here we are."

His friends were profuse in their congratulations.

Opdyke then told of his narrow escape, and when he concluded Sam Bolton could not resist giving himself the satisfaction of saying:

"I told you so."

I MISS YOU, DEAR.

WHEN morning's light first tints the gray of dawn,
And sleepless eyes tell day is here,
And all the world is stirring into life,
Then is the time I miss you, dear.

When noontime comes, and brings its hour of rest
From busy toil, so full of care and fear;
When man so needs the solace of a smile,
Then is the time I miss you, dear.

When twilight falls, and all the world is still,
When echoes come from far and near,
And sighing winds lull weary souls to rest,
Then is the time I miss you, dear.

Through every moment of the lagging day,
So long, without your words of cheer,
And when, at night, I kneel me down in prayer,
Then is the time I miss you, dear.

Bruce Whitney.

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AN AFRICAN SECRET.

BY FREDERICK R. BURTON.

An experience in the heart of the Dark Continent. The strange manner in which an American chances on a fellow countryman of whom he is in search, and the terrifying chain of incidents to which association with him gives rise.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.

A MAN IN THE AIR.

FOR more than an hour it had been a steady ascent, and when, at last, these two wanderers in the heart of Africa emerged from the blind forest, they saw a considerable stretch of comparatively barren upland before them.

They halted as with one will and gazed across it.

" Well, Pan," said one of them, in a cheerful voice from which months of roughing it had not taken the Yankee twang, " it's not yet noon. We'd better keep on and have our midday snooze among the trees at the top there."

He pointed to what seemed to be a fringe of forest along the horizon at the summit of the slope.

" Yes, Mr. Bradshaw," the other assented quietly.

They resumed their march without further words, the American striding a little in advance of his companion, who seemed, therefore, to be more a servant than a guide.

So it was, indeed, for although the black man had been engaged on the strength of his extraordinary familiarity with the interior of equatorial Africa and the tribes that dwell there, the American had long since pushed on to regions as little known to the guide as to himself; and this fact added to Bradshaw's unassuming gift of leadership, caused Pan instinctively to follow rather than lead, or even presume so far as to walk abreast of his employer.

His full name was Pantonga, or something like that. Maybe he had been endowed with a long string of names besides, but if so, he himself had forgotten them, and when Bradshaw made his acquaintance at St. Paul de Loanga, the black had smilingly said that white men, if they began by calling him Pantonga, speedily shortened it to Pan, and that it might as well be Pan from the start.

Pan's trade, if so it could be called, was that of assistant to explorers.

You know, every white man who makes a bit of an excursion into Africa is an " explorer." He may never venture to step aside from the well beaten caravan roads, or plunge so far into the wilds that a card with Uncle Sam's

stamp on it will not overtake him. Nevertheless, and particularly in his letters to his local paper, he is an explorer.

There is room in immense Africa for many such, and it is not a difficult matter to pick them up if you look for them at any of the few important seaports. As that is just what Pan was shrewd enough to do, he had come in contact with many Englishmen and Americans, to say nothing of the fact that he had had his first lessons in the real business of exploring from the great Stanley.

He would not have been able to follow this vocation if he had not been possessed of far more intelligence than the average African, and being thus favored in the way of ability and opportunity, he had acquired a good working knowledge of the English language, a consideration of no little value to a man like Bradshaw.

Moreover, Pan had a smattering, at least, of many a tribal language and dialect, and on the rare occasions where words failed him, he could rival deaf mutes in the facility with which he made his wants known by signs.

Altogether Pan was about as near the ideal for guide, companion, and servant as one could hope to find, and his present employer had had no reason to be other than satisfied with him.

" You know, Pan," said Bradshaw, after they had tramped a time in silence, " the most singular thing about this country is something that is a long way from it."

As he spoke he flicked the perspiration from his cheeks with his fingers.

" Yes? " responded Pan, uncomprehending.

" I'm alluding to the sun, my esteemed friend," continued Bradshaw in an airy way that he often adopted when conversing with the black. " The sun, as perhaps you have observed, is quite some distance away."

" I have walked many days' journey," said Pan gravely, " and never have caught up with it."

Bradshaw chuckled. " And yet," he rambled on, " the same sun shines on America, but, so help me the respected memory of Sam Hill, it never bakes, boils, fries and sizzles human beings there as it does here, not even in City Hall Park, New York, which is the hottest place on a summer day, Pan, that my country knows."

" I should like to see it once," remarked Pan.

" Oh, once! A thousand times! " cried Bradshaw, vehemently.

Then he drew a long breath and shook his head as if to dismiss thoughts that might make him wish to retrace his steps before he had accomplished the task that brought him to Africa.

" The odd thing is," he continued lightly, " that in America the grass and trees grow up just as they do here. They never grow downward. They're mostly green, too. Of course, the ferocious beasts that drag our wagons and others that bark at our heels are somewhat different from the playful lions and dignified elephants that one meets here, but after all the really singular thing about Africa is the sun. It wasn't so bad while we were crawling through the jungle, but here it's —it's—confound it, Pan! it has baked such a hard crust over all my ideas that I can't get one of 'em out."

" I am sorry, Mr. Bradshaw," said Pan, so sincerely that the American laughed outright.

" You beat Sam Hill, Pan," he chuckled, and then, suddenly changing his manner, " we don't want to get much further from the caravan, do we? " he asked.

By caravan, Bradshaw meant his pack train.

There is no making a real journey in Africa without one. Bradshaw's train consisted of a score or more of blacks, all of whom were as much lower in intelligence than Pan as Pan was supposably lower than his employer.

They carried camp utensils, they cleared away undergrowth when it ob-

structed progress, and they were prepared to carry the white traveler himself if at any time he tired of walking.

That was often enough, if Bradshaw's loud grumbling conveyed a particle of truth, but thus far he had not permitted himself to be carried a rod. On the contrary, he had forced the pace, and to such purpose that three of his original train had been unable to stand it, and they had been sent back to the coast at different intervals with letters to be mailed home.

Bradshaw never could endure to refer to his cohort as "train." He told Pan that the word was too suggestive of better modes of traveling, and Pan, though comprehending but dimly his employer's meaning, obediently abandoned the word, and never referred to the company as other than "the caravan."

At this time the caravan was resting in the forest. It had occurred more than once during the journey that the travelers found they had adopted an impracticable route. On such occasions Bradshaw and Pan went on alone for the purpose of discovering, if possible, a better way.

Often, too, this pair made side excursions of considerable extent even when no exigency of the journey had arisen to demand such effort.

Responding to Bradshaw's question, Pan pointed toward the summit of the slope up which they were toiling.

"I think," said he, "there must be a river beyond there. We can soon tell."

"I wouldn't mind giving my feet a chance with a few days on a raft," grumbled Bradshaw.

As they neared the forest, which proved to be much less extensive than it had appeared to be from below, a large bird with brilliant plumage soared away from a tree and hovered for a moment as if in curiosity over the travelers' heads.

Instinctively Bradshaw's hand reached for the rifle that was slung across his back, but it was a spasmodic motion merely. The weapon was left untouched.

He had been too long in the wilds to feel more than transient temptation for game that could be of no possible use to him. During the first month of his wandering he had shot many a bird for its feathers, many a beast for its skin, intending to take such trophies home; but all had been thrown away, and now he shot only when necessity demanded it.

Bradshaw threw himself down under the first tree he came to, and, lying on his back, stretched arms and legs to their full extent after the manner of soldiers who have brief opportunity to rest while on march.

"Not a step further," he said, "until the sun begins to go westward."

Pan followed suit without comment, and for a few minutes they rested in silence. They were not sleeping, though, and presently, when Pan perceived that his employer was awake, he said:

"Mr. Bradshaw, I wish you would tell me about Sam Hill. From other Americans I have heard much about your great chiefs, but until you came I think I never heard the name of Sam Hill."

Bradshaw smiled at the little patches of blue sky visible through the foliage. It was not only that the artless question amused him, but it awakened pleasant memories of his boyhood which had been passed mainly in a Vermont village where the mythical "Sam Hill" was such a universal by word that the habit of using it stuck to him unconsciously even after years of city life and association with cultivated people.

"What chiefs of ours are you most familiar with, Pan?" asked Bradshaw.

"I know that your George Washington was a very great man," answered the African, "and your General Grant. I have also heard often of P. T. Barnum."

Pan pronounced the initials of the great showman's name as if they were a name in themselves, and he was much astonished when Bradshaw burst into laughter.

"Petey Barnum!" exclaimed the American between his laughs. "Oh, the ingenuous simplicity of untutored man! O Sam Hill! It's all right, Pan, my valued mentor. Petey Barnum was a great man, and no mistake. And so was Sam Hill. I'll tell you about him. Sam Hill was——"

The history of Sam Hill got no further. The men were startled by a strange sound, a loud swish! as if a giant lash had been whirled through the air.

Both sat up suddenly to see what it portended. They did not at the moment perceive what had caused the noise, but their eyes were shocked by a spectacle that caused them to forget it.

High in the air, it seemed at least a hundred feet, was the almost nude body of a black man whirling over and over. Something fluttered from his neck, what they had no time to guess, for the body, at its extreme height when they caught sight of it, fell rapidly and landed with a heavy jar a few yards from where they sat.

Bradshaw got up and ran quickly to the spot. Pan followed more slowly.

"Dead, of course," said Bradshaw, in a low tone, as he viewed the well nigh shapeless mass of bruised flesh. "But what the mischief can it mean?"

"An execution," muttered Pan, as he stooped over the dead man and studied the form intently.

"Execution?" repeated Bradshaw, aghast.

"Yes," said Pan, and he took up the end of the thing that had fluttered from the victim's neck.

It seemed to be a tough, fibrous reed. "This," continued Pan, "this—I cannot tell the right word for it——"

"Thong," suggested Bradshaw.

"Yes. It was tied to a tree and, as you see, it has broken. That explains how the body came to be flying through the air. But, Mr. Bradshaw!" and Pan drew back quickly without rising, "we must not stay here! We are in the greatest danger!"

Ordinarily quick to adopt the suggestions of the African when facing a crisis, Bradshaw on this occasion was not sufficiently alert. The grewsome spectacle had not only shocked him, but it had aroused all that aggressive repugnance with which a civilized man resents barbarity.

With no suspicion whatever as to the cause of the tragedy, he was stirred with indignation that might easily have led him to retaliation in the interest of the victim. In short, the American's fighting blood was up, and he recoiled from the very idea of retreat.

Nevertheless, his months of experience in the wilds had taught him some measure of discretion, and it was only after the briefest hesitation that he undertook to follow his guide's advice.

He heard Pan's voice whispering, "Down, Mr. Bradshaw!" and was in the act of stooping when he saw that he was too late. A number of black forms appeared suddenly in the fringe of trees, springing as it seemed from out of the ground. They approached him.

It would have been the height of folly to stoop then, and it would have been equally impolitic to make any offensive demonstration. So Bradshaw stood motionless save for a gesture of friendly greeting.

Several of the savages were evidently stirred to hostility at sight of him, for they began at once to make threatening motions, but one who appeared to be their leader restrained them by gesture and spoken command, and they all came on quietly but rapidly.

Bradshaw noticed that their dull eyes glowed with unmistakable surprise, a manifestation quite uncommon to other savages with whom he had come in contact.

The ordinary African had impressed him as curious only concerning what the passing white man might give him in the way of trinkets. These fellows looked as if they had never seen a white before, and as if they were bewildered at discovering such a being.

They halted a few paces away, and, paying not the slightest attention to the body of the black, fixed their wondering eyes upon the living white man.

There was a brief interval of silence, and Bradshaw repeated his friendly gesture. The leader responded in kind, and then, in a guttural voice said something which Bradshaw recognized as a very imperfect Dutch patois, but which he could not understand.

Guessing that it was an inquiry as to whether he spoke that language, he shook his head and replied, " No, English."

" How much? " asked the leader, then.

Bradshaw smiled, the question was such a plain intimation that this man, at least, had had dealings with English speaking traders.

" I no sell," he replied, with a struggle to limit his speech to the simple words with which these people were probably familiar; " I buy——"

" No! no! " the black interrupted impatiently; " no sell, no buy. How much you? " and he held up three, four and five fingers in succession.

" Oh! " said Bradshaw, " you want know how many of me? Me, alone," and he held up one finger.

He inferred that a question of this sort referred only to the number of whites in his party, blacks seldom counting for anything to their fellow natives.

The leader's face was stolid, but it was fairly evident that he received the statement with incredulity, so Bradshaw continued persuasively:

" Me friend. Me cross country. Me pay you. No want land. No want ivory."

This eloquent address was intended to convey the idea that he was simply an explorer traveling for personal pleasure, and with no thought of claiming any of the country he traversed in behalf of a distant king; and further that he was willing to pay tribute for the privilege of a peaceful transit through the territory occupied by this tribe.

If he thought of it at all he took it for granted that they would suppose that he was accompanied by a train of pack bearers.

Up to this time there had been no difficulty worth mentioning in gaining the assent of tribes to a journey across their lands. Solemnly conducted negotiations always ended with a distribution of flimsy trifles to the chief men, and by so doing lightened the burden of one of the carriers to a considerable extent.

The black was silent for a moment, seeming to consider the matter. Then he said, " You come talk chief," which Bradshaw interpreted to mean that he was invited to conduct his negotiations at the tribe's headquarters.

It occurred to him then to wonder what had become of Pan, for that accomplished linguist was essential to the satisfactory transaction of business with the natives, and moreover, on all previous similar occasions Pan had stood at his side from the beginning to vouch for him and clear up knotty points either in language or the terms of the bargain.

Pan was not in evidence, although of necessity he could not be far away. Bradshaw was impelled to call to him, but so great was his confidence in Pan's loyalty and shrewd sense that he refrained from doing so, telling himself that Pan's absence must be owing to some good reason that would appear in due time.

Accordingly Bradshaw nodded assent to the leader's suggestion, and the leader, after a glance at the dead black and a few words to his companions in

their own incomprehensible language, led him away among the trees.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THE STRANGE NOISE MEANT.

Bradshaw felt quite at ease. There was nothing in the immediate circumstances to cause alarm. If these savages saw fit to execute one of their number by some extraordinary means that Pan had not had time to describe, surely that could bode no harm to a passing traveler.

There was no doubt that after the customary parley the king would accept the white man's presents and permit him to proceed on his way unmolested even if not guarded from possible attack by other tribesmen.

Moreover, and this would have impelled Bradshaw to risk much for the sake of the interview, this king might be able to throw some light upon the problem which the American had come to Africa to solve.

It was a little irritating that Pan should have held back at this juncture, but inasmuch as these savages had some knowledge of languages other than their own, Bradshaw had no doubt that somehow he would be able to get through the negotiations successfully alone.

They had hardly more than entered the sparse forest when they came to the edge of a gully perhaps thirty feet deep.

The depression was plainly artificial. The original surface must have been composed of a thin layer of loose stones which had been removed to permit of excavating the sandy soil beneath.

At the bottom were numerous indications that the work of excavation was still in progress. Crude tools were lying about, and there was a coarse wire screen such as is used in civilized countries for sifting sand.

This article surprised Bradshaw greatly, for within a thousand miles he had not seen one other thing that suggested civilized methods of labor, save the materials he carried with him.

More conspicuous than the sand heaps and the screen were two savages who evidently were awaiting the return of those who had gone out to meet the American. One of them was of stature almost imposing, and his native dignity was enhanced by a more generous supply of clothing than graced the persons of the others.

His distinguishing garment consisted mainly of a brightly colored sash that was wound about his shoulders and across his chest. It seemed to be quite thick in places, as if the strands from which it was woven had become knotted in the process.

This man's companion was of a type like the rest, low brow, squat nose, protuberant lips, and that apathetic expression of the eyes that tells of abject subjection rather than docility. He stood a little back of the other, and protected him from the sun by holding up a shade made from long, stiff leaves.

Bradshaw naturally inferred that the well dressed individual was the king of the tribe, and he noticed that the monarch's eyes bulged with surprise when he saw the group at the edge of the gully.

"Very odd," thought Bradshaw; "these English speaking negroes seem to be more unfamiliar with white men than any I have yet come across."

He looked around for any sign of the tribe's habitations, but saw none. Directly across the gully, about fifty feet away, the forest continued unbroken.

At the left there was an outlet, as if the excavation had been conducted from that direction, but where it led he could not see, and there was little time for observation, for he had to descend the steep side of the gully by a rude path that called for the greatest care to keep from pitching headlong.

Arrived at the bottom, Bradshaw made extravagant signs of respect for the king, who apparently received them unmoved while he listened to what the

leader of the party had to say in explanation of the stranger's advent.

Bradshaw, of course, could not understand a word, but aside from possible references to the dead black man, he presumed that the conversation was about himself.

Presently he of the bright sash addressed him in fair English:

"How did you come here?"

"Your majesty," answered Bradshaw, pointing to his feet, "you see my only means of locomotion. O king——"

"I am no king," interrupted the black, impatiently, "but no matter. Go on."

Surprised beyond measure not only at the black's command of English, but at his denial of royalty, Bradshaw was nonplussed for an instant, and the black repeated, "How did you come here?"

The American's native humor was stirred, and he smiled good humoredly as again he pointed to his feet, but before he could add to his answer with spoken words, the black interposed:

"Yes, but how to this spot? What led you here?"

"Nothing, your highness," said Bradshaw, then, with perfect frankness. "I am traveling across Africa at my own will. I am not the agent of any government, I do not come to claim possession of any land. I merely wish to pass on without disturbing anybody."

"That is impossible!" exclaimed the black, with marked emphasis; "but you do not answer my question."

"As to how I came to this particular spot? I thought I had done so. Accident, your highness. I had no idea any tribe lived hereabout, or worked here, especially a tribe that would use such implements as that," and he pointed to the wire screen.

The face of "his highness" was sternly forbidding.

"You have said that you are alone," he remarked; "that cannot be true."

"My carriers," said Bradshaw, "are distant a half day's journey."

"Where?"

Bradshaw pointed toward the west.

"Are no other white men with you?"

"None, your highness."

"You are the only man of your race who ever set foot within this sacred region."

The black's tone and manner were extremely menacing, and at last Bradshaw began to feel a bit nervous as to the outcome of the negotiations toward which he had looked so confidently.

He wished heartily that Pan were at hand to help him out. Nevertheless he gave not the slightest inclination of alarm when he answered, "My chief desire, your highness, is to get out of this region without delay."

"You shall be gratified," said the black.

He addressed a few words to his followers and looked up toward the edge of the gully. Bradshaw followed his gaze, but saw nothing to arrest his attention.

"You wish to go out by the way you came?" asked his highness.

"Yes, in order to rejoin my carriers," said Bradshaw. "But before I go I should like to tell you just why I am in Africa. Perhaps you can give me valuable information. Certainly in all my journey I have not met anybody who seemed so likely to be of assistance to me."

"Do you promise never to come here again?"

"Willingly."

"And that you will never tell anybody the way to this sacred place?"

"Inasmuch as I doubt if I could find my way here again, that is easily promised, your highness."

"What is it you wish to know?"

"I am trying to learn the fate of a fellow countryman who, ten years ago, landed at St. Paul de Loanda and set out soon afterwards for the interior. His friends have not heard from him since."

The black dignitary looked at Bradshaw almost pityingly for an instant.

"There is little pleasure," he said, "in jesting with a dead man. Your friend's fate was doubtless similar to your own."

"Your highness seems to threaten," Bradshaw began, when the black made a slight gesture, which was immediately followed by a pressure upon the American's arms.

Bradshaw made a quick, violent effort to move them, but speedily gave it up, for he saw that he had been pinioned securely. A thong similar to that which he had seen on the dead man's neck had been cast about him and made fast before he could stir.

"Your highness' jest takes a very practical turn," said Bradshaw, coolly.

"My men have learned to do their work well," was the significant reply.

A half dozen blacks had leaped beside Bradshaw at the moment when the thong was cast about him. He could feel that others were behind, holding the thong. There was no possible mistaking the sinister aspect of the situation.

Bradshaw bitterly accused himself of imprudence, while at the same time he could not see how he could have acted otherwise. How could he suspect that here was a tribe that differed so radically from the simple minded people whom he had met elsewhere in the dark continent? Why should he not have supposed that ordinary methods would avail with them as with others?

"I can endure your jesting," he cried sternly, "but you know better than to do me the slightest harm. The civilized country whose speech you have learned has long arms."

"Not long enough to reach to central Africa," responded the black dignitary, contemptuously, as he again directed his gaze upwards.

Again Bradshaw followed his eyes. He saw that several of the blacks had climbed up to the top of the excavation. They were all standing now at the base of a tall, very slender tree that was rooted within a yard of the edge.

There were no branches on this tree within twenty feet of the ground. Above that the foliage was abundant.

One of the men bent over at the base of the tree, another got upon his back in a stooping posture, a third climbed upon the back of the second, and then the three gradually stood up.

The top man proceeded to "shin" his way up the trunk, while the other two stooped again to permit another man to mount their backs.

This process was continued until four men were climbing up to the foliage. They went so far that it seemed as if the tree must break under them.

It swayed perceptibly under the weight of the first, and he, laying hold of a short branch near the crest, depended from it so that the top of the tree began to bend over the excavation.

When his comrades climbed further up, their weight bent the tree still further in the same direction until gradually the top sank so low that the men's toes touched the bottom of the excavation. The tree was then like a giant hoop, for it was more than bent double, the crest being lower than the roots.

Bradshaw watched this operation with growing apprehension and horror. He began to perceive what had caused the extraordinary phenomenon of a man's body whirling a hundred feet in the air, and he now understood what the dignitary meant by assuring him that he should be allowed to leave the place at once by the way he came.

If further proof as to the correctness of his surmises were needed it was furnished by an accident.

One of the men who had helped bend the tree down lost his hold and dropped to the ground. Relieved of so much weight, the tree instantly began to swing back to an upright position, and the other men in alarm let go also.

In a flash the tree rose and towered straight at the top of the excavation as before; and as it swept its leafy crest

upward there was that fearful *swish*, as of a mighty lash, that had startled Bradshaw when he was resting at the border of the forest with Pan.

It was appalling, this living engine of murder, with its terrific power and marvelous elasticity. No guillotine could be more certain, no hangman's rope more dreadful.

Bradshaw turned his eyes from the tree, that swayed slightly from the impetus of its rise, and looked at the black dignitary.

"Quite a tree you've got there," he remarked with a drawl.

The tall black's impassive demeanor was visibly shaken by the American's nonchalance.

"What!" he cried; "don't you realize that that is the way you'll take from this sacred place? That thus we assure ourselves against your return?"

"Oh!" said Bradshaw, "you use the tree as an elevator, do you? It seems a little unhandy to bring the thing down. I should think, now, that tree would serve your purpose better if it was split up and made into bows."

"To shoot you with?" snapped the black.

"Oh, no; I didn't come to Africa to be shot."

"But you did to die!"

"I think not. I'm hunting for a man. If you can't or won't give me any information about him, the sooner you send me on my way, the better. You see, my carriers over there won't know what's become of me."

"They never will know!" cried the black, beside himself at the American's indifference. "The tree will be brought down again, and when it rises next time you will be hurled into eternity."

"That's quite a throw," drawled Bradshaw, "and no tree in Africa is equal to it."

With a snort of rage, the black turned to his men and gave commands in quick, harsh tones. Obediently several started again up the side of the excavation to the base of the tree. Two others stepped up to Bradshaw and tied a fibrous thong about his neck.

"Rather close for a hot day," he remarked.

"Do not dream your impudence will save you," exclaimed the black; "you'll whine loudly enough within fifteen minutes, but that will not avail you either. It is your fate to die because you ventured to set foot upon this sacred place."

The men were beginning again to shin up the tree. For all his indifferent demeanor, Bradshaw's heart was thumping at a rapid rate, and he wondered that no flush betrayed his intense anxiety.

Fifteen minutes! Could anything happen in that time to save him? Would Pan come back? What could be hoped for from Pan with all these twenty against him?

Even if the entire force of carriers could be brought up they would be useless against such bloodthirsty barbarians as these. But what had become of Pan? It did not seem like him to desert his employer even in this overwhelming crisis.

Bradshaw was far from making light of the situation. It appealed to him with all possible force and seriousness, but his tone was cool, crisp, and businesslike when next he addressed the black leader.

"I don't know what there is in this place to make it sacred or so important for you to keep it hidden," he said, "but I have no interest in it. I told your subordinate that I expected to pay for peaceful transit here as I have done elsewhere. I presume he understood me. I shall be glad to hear your terms while your men are getting that tree down again."

"Ha!" exclaimed the black, contemptuously; it was almost a laugh, and if it had been quite one, Bradshaw would have been inspired by hope; for there are possibilities in a man who can see humor in things.

"I have some matters that might be

useful to you in your work here," Bradshaw added.

He was thinking of the two spades in his outfit. They had been invaluable to him more than once during the long journey, but he could sacrifice them better than a trip skyward via that tree, and he had perceived early that this was not the kind of savage to whom it would do to offer the trinkets usually current in such transactions.

"You interest me," sneered the black. "I thought you would offer a string of beads, or possibly a top hat."

"No, no, not to you," said Bradshaw; "I prefer to hear your terms. If I can meet them I will do so."

"It is not my habit to waste words," responded the dignitary, recurring to his former cold style of utterance, "so we will not discuss the matter further. As for the matters you hint at, I shall be glad to make use of them. They will be in my possession by nightfall if your carriers are no further away than you said they were."

Bradshaw felt his heart sink deeper than it had done when the savages pinioned him, or when he saw his impending doom in the rising of the tree. It was not his own fate now that concerned him. That was settled unless he could make some effect with one last stroke that he held in reserve.

But even if the conviction were not deepening that his own fate was sealed, he yet would have grieved at the doom awaiting his faithful carriers.

He had not been long enough in Africa to arrive, as so many whites insensibly do, at the feeling that "niggers" are merely animals to be sacrificed if need be to the exigencies of the superior race. To him the black man was still a human being, and he regretted, oh! so bitterly, that he had admitted the near presence of his caravan, and not only that, but had frankly pointed out the direction in which it lay.

It would be the simplest thing imaginable for these ruffians to fall upon the carriers unawares and put them to slaughter, if they did not add inconceivable tortures. Bradshaw wished that he had practised deceit, but in speaking the truth he had followed the policy advised and invariably pursued by Pan in dealing with the simple minded natives. Ah! where was Pan now?

"You will not get them unless I let you have them," said Bradshaw, sternly.

The tree top was descending under the weight of five men this time.

"You are still bold," said the dignitary; "do you not believe that in one minute you will fly to your death?"

"*No!*" shouted Bradshaw with all the force of his lungs, and so explosive and stentorian was the sound that all the blacks, even including their leader, were startled.

Bradshaw was beginning to make his last desperate play.

"*No!*" he shouted again; "I am protected by mighty spirits! They will not suffer me to be harmed, and they will strike with instant death the man who tries to harm me!"

The black dignitary gave his victim a prolonged stare. What it portended, whether his superstitious fears had been in the least aroused, Bradshaw could only guess.

This strange man, so superior to the thick lipped savages who obeyed him as if they were slaves, might be as far removed from superstitious influence as Bradshaw himself.

It was the leader alone who could be frightened, for without Pan to convey his meaning to the others, the victim might declaim in English to the last chapter without producing the slightest effect. This thought was all too clearly framed in Bradshaw's mind.

As the savages pushed him roughly over the ground until the foliage of the bended crest brushed his face, he seemed to see the pages of his book of life opening one after the other before his eyes.

There were pages devoted to his happy boyhood, and these, quickly turning, gave place to others descriptive of his early struggles in the city; fair pages, these, for fortune had favored him, and all were illuminated, all from boyhood on, by one sweet, girlish face whose tender eyes looked out upon him trustfully; and here, where should be but the prologue to the larger book, was a page that terminated abruptly in blood red letters:

FINIS.

Working apparently from habit rather than from express command, for he of the bright sash said nothing to them, the blacks tied the thong that bound Bradshaw's neck to the tree trunk, and stood aside.

Those whose weight had bent the tree down were still holding to it. The victim fixed his eyes unflinchingly upon the leader. Death in this horrible form might come, but it should not be accompanied by the expected whining.

The dignitary raised his right hand high above his head.

"Summon your protecting spirits," said he, "for when I lower my hand the tree will hurl you to death."

"The tree will not rise!" cried Bradshaw loudly.

Even then, while a sneer distorted the face of the black, the hand began to descend.

"Farewell, Irene!" was Bradshaw's mental cry, his lips remaining tightly closed, his eyes fixed as ever upon the face of his murderer.

CHAPTER III.

RETREAT.

The hand fell sharply to the black dignitary's side, and the men who held the tree leaped away.

There was a momentary, uncomfortable tug at Bradshaw's throat, but not even his heels were lifted from the ground. A light breeze set the foliage of the bended crest to rustling. It seemed as if the tree were sighing regretfully at its incapacity to rise.

Well nigh shocked with amazement at the justification of his prophecy, Bradshaw began to cry "You see——" when his words were lost in a loud report from the top of the gully. It was followed instantly by another. With the first report, the black leader leaped straight into the air, and with the second his attendant executed gymnastics of a similar sort.

It was all accomplished in a second. At the first sign that the tree was failing to do its deadly work, the dignitary's lips had parted as with unutterable rage, his eyes had bulged, and he had seemed on the point of leaping forward to attack the prisoner.

The shot struck him before he had stirred, and when he leaped, it was to fall lifeless at Bradshaw's feet. The attendant stumbled and fell across the body of his master.

The other blacks, momentarily paralyzed at the inaction of the tree, were thrown into a panic by the shots. They set up a howl of dismay as they saw their leader fall, and ran with all possible speed out of the gully.

They were still in sight when Bradshaw heard steps hurriedly descending the steep path at his back, and in another instant Pan was at his side, his smoking rifle in one hand, a heavy hunting knife in the other.

Bradshaw tried to speak, but his voice, so strong when the peril was greatest, utterly failed him. He could only choke inarticulately, and there was a mist before his eyes.

"We must hurry, Mr. Bradshaw!" exclaimed Pan, as with quick strokes he severed the thongs that bound his employer's arms and neck; "they have left you your rifle. Together we can give them a good fight, but we must get into a better position. They might surround us here."

Before he had finished speaking, Pan had freed the American, and they immediately climbed up the side of the

gully, passing as they did so the base of the death dealing tree.

Bradshaw glanced at it, and saw that just where its curve was sharpest the trunk had been cut almost through. The severed fibers protruded like a thousand needles. A little more and the entire tree would have fallen into the gully.

Arrived at the top, and panting from the exertion, Bradshaw grasped Pan's hand in a hard clasp.

"Well done, old fellow," he began, but Pan interrupted energetically:

"Not now, Mr. Bradshaw! The danger is still great. Hurry!"

Pan had already started on a run, and the American followed, unslinging his rifle as he tore along. When they came into the open, near where they had rested, a flock of vultures rose screaming from the ground.

Bradshaw knew what it meant, and his heart sickened as it flashed across him how narrowly he had escaped serving them as food; but he cast no glance in the direction of their pitiable prey, for Pan seized his arm and pointed along the line of the forest toward the entrance to the gully.

A number of black men were in sight, peering at them and apparently in doubt as to whether pursuit should be given.

One, the same probably who had led the party that came upon Bradshaw, seemed to be urging the others to action.

Bradshaw and Pan halted as with one will, wheeled about, and sent a pair of bullets toward their foes. Then, without so much as a glance to determine the effect of their shots, they ran on again down the long slope up which they had toiled in the morning, and abated none of their speed until they had come well within the forest at the bottom.

There Bradshaw leaned breathless against a tree, while Pan looked back through the foliage, scanning the broad stretch of upland narrowly.

"I think," said he, "they do not follow, but they may be able to fall upon the caravan before we get there. We should lose no time."

"They only know in a general way where the caravan is," responded Bradshaw, as he started on again.

"True, but they know the forest as we do not."

"Don't you think we've scared them out of any further hostility?"

"Those few? Yes, perhaps; but there must be many more, and with such leaders there will be no end to their war upon us."

"You did for their leader right enough. He won't give us any more trouble."

"There must be others to take his place. You noticed him, Mr. Bradshaw?"

"I should say I did! He was an able controversialist."

Pan frowned slightly, an indication that he had come upon a new word and one that conveyed no meaning to him.

"I suppose so," he said, deferentially; "yes, if you say so, but you noticed something else, perhaps?"

"He seemed to me quite unlike the other fellows," Bradshaw responded; "not only in his remarkable familiarity with my language, but in appearance."

"I am glad you saw that, for you will understand how great the danger is as long as we remain anywhere near this tribe. That man was not of the tribe he commanded."

"What was he, then?"

"I do not know. It is all strange, but I think perhaps he was an Arab."

"By Jove! yes! The nose and lips were of the Arab type, though his hair and color were more like the ordinary native. But I guess he was an Arab sure enough, Pan."

"Then," said Pan, earnestly, "you see the danger. There are more of them. This leader will be succeeded by another, and the other will have the same reasons for killing you as this one did. The Arabs reach far in Africa."

"I see the danger, Pan, but it beats me why this fellow should have been so set on killing me. He talked a lot of rubbish about the sacred place."

"I heard most of it and I do not understand it. We may find out before we go much further."

Bradshaw was deeply impressed by Pan's seriousness. Never given to anything but gravity of demeanor, Pan nevertheless was not inclined to worry.

Up to this time he had met all the emergencies of the journey with unmoved calmness, as if all that could happen in Africa was an old story to him. Now he was thoroughly disturbed, and so intent was his anxiety to reach the caravan before the savages could make an attack, that Bradshaw refrained from asking about his apparent desertion.

All energy was bent to making progress through the forest, and to such good purpose that they came upon the carriers within three hours after their retreat from the gully.

Nothing had happened at the camp, and before any move was made, rest and refreshment were absolutely necessary to the American and Pan. They ordered their pickets to take posts further than usual away, and while they were eating, Pan told his share in the events at the gully.

CHAPTER IV.

A MEETING IN THE WILDS.

"It is a common thing in Africa," Pan began, "to use a tree in executions. I knew what had happened almost as soon as I saw the man's body flying through the air, but I did not then guess and do not know now what led to it. I only know that it must have been something serious."

"I wonder," Bradshaw remarked, "whether it was as serious as my walking innocently into that sacred hole in the ground?"

"Very likely," responded Pan, gravely, "but in any case it meant that the tribe was in an excited condition, and therefore dangerous to approach. I knew that men would be sent up to learn what had become of the body, for usually the thong holds and the victim is left swaying at the tree top. I believed it would be dangerous for us to be found looking at the body, but there was another reason that came to me very suddenly.

"It is said that somewhere in Africa is a tribe that is exceedingly rich in such things as black men prize. Many wild stories are told about this tribe. They say the king has hundreds of wives who are bought at high prices all over the continent; that the chief men have many things that are made in distant countries; and that they are so powerful that no nation has ever beaten them in battle.

"What makes them so rich nobody can say, but it is believed that they kill every stranger who enters their territory, and that no one ever has escaped them. This may explain how they possess things that were made in your country, or in Europe, but I am telling you only what I have heard. It may not amount to anything."

"Do you think this is the tribe?" asked Bradshaw.

"I do not say so even now," replied Pan, cautiously, "but that thought came to me when we were looking at the dead man's body. There is so much mystery about this tribe I speak of that some have declared that it does not exist. No one has ever been able to say where its chief town lies. The most that has been said has been to point to the interior with the words 'many months' journey.'

"We have come a long distance. We have crossed countries where no white man had been before. The language of these people—I heard them speaking together at the tree—is strange to me; that is, most of it, though I think I could make myself understood by them."

" No doubt about that, Pan. You could get on in Iceland."

" I have never been there. But, Mr. Bradshaw, I am trying to explain how I came to desert you."

" Great Scott!" cried the American, " you don't need to explain that after the way you rescued me. I am more anxious to know how you managed it."

" It was very simple, though an accident might have spoiled it all. You remember that I was stooping when I spoke to you. I supposed you would do so also, and when I saw that you remained standing and that those men were coming up, I was frightened, not only for you, but myself. I hated to run away and I dared not rise. I was a coward for a moment, Mr. Bradshaw."

" I guess that didn't last long," said Bradshaw, smiling.

" No. I saw that I had not been seen, and as the men were busy with you they were not likely to see me. So I wriggled away in the grass, knowing that if they were friendly no harm would come of my disappearance, and that if they meant mischief I might be able to help you later.

" As soon as they took you to that place they had dug out of the hill, I crept up to the edge and listened. It was plain enough to me that they meant to kill you, and I cannot tell you how frightened I was then, for I had seen the force of that tree. I thought at first of shooting the chief before they bound you, but knowing that there must be more of them not far away, I feared that would only bring on us a greater number than we could possibly handle.

" Then I saw a way to disable the tree, and I knew that if that could be done the men would be so scared that for a time they would not try to do anything.

" You see, the black men think these execution trees are controlled by powerful spirits, and if a tree should fail to act, they would suppose that the spirits had turned against them. I saw that I could disable the tree and shoot the chief, too, which would be sure to throw them into worse confusion."

" Good logic, Pan."

" Eh? Yes, I suppose so. If you say so, of course it is. Well, I was nearly caught when the tree broke away from the men, for at that moment I began to work with my knife. I was greatly afraid they would see the gash I had made on the trunk when they came up again, and as the tree sprang up as if it hadn't been cut at all, I feared I shouldn't be able to cut enough in time to have any effect. It proved, though, that when the tree was upright the gash was only a thin line on the bark, and the men didn't see it.

" Now, Mr. Bradshaw, you know that if you bend something that is very strong, but also very—what is the word?"

" Elastic?" suggested Bradshaw.

" Is that like rubber?"

" Exactly, Pan."

" Elastic, then, that if you draw a sharp knife across it where the bend is greatest, you cut easily. You know what I mean. I miss some words."

" It's all clear now," said Bradshaw. " The fibers being strained by the process of bending, will part more quickly if you apply a knife to them than would be the case if the fibers were in their ordinary condition."

" That must be it, if you say so. Any way, the knife cut like cheese—no, not so easily as that, but while it would have taken me an hour to cut through that tree with my hunting knife, heavy and sharp as it is, if the tree had been standing straight, when it was bent I cut as far as was necessary in—well, in time to save you."

" And a good job it was, too, Pan!" cried Bradshaw, springing up. " What is the next thing? March?"

" I think so, Mr. Bradshaw, as fast as possible, and we should always select a camping place where we can easily defend ourselves."

In short order the caravan was on its way.

It was slow progress for the carriers. Bradshaw and Pan had left the train at sunrise that morning because it seemed that they had plunged into an impassable wilderness. They had gone out to seek a better route, and the forest was no less troublesome now than it was then. There was nothing for it, however, but to struggle on, for they believed it would be certain destruction to make for the open upland.

They came to no suitable place for camping before nightfall, and had to make the best shift they could in the jungle. Extra precautions were taken to guard against surprise: pickets were doubled, and Bradshaw and Pan took turns in patrolling the outskirts of the camp.

No disturbance of any kind occurred, and the next day, when they pushed a few miles further in the same toilsome fashion, they were still unmolested.

With every hour that passed, Bradshaw's confidence grew stronger, and he would have made for the open if he had followed his own judgment, but Pan was simply obdurate in his insistence that caution was still necessary, and Pan had proved himself too trustworthy to be summarily overruled.

Four days more were spent in laborious marching through seemingly interminable thickets, when at length the ground began to slant upward, and they came at last to comparatively open hill country.

Bradshaw had fretted a good deal over the slow progress, and was finding it extremely irksome to be held down to Pan's ideas. Pan, meantime, took all the grumbling with impassive gravity, as if that were a necessary part of the game, but he stuck to his advice with unexampled persistence.

"Now," said Bradshaw, when they came to the first open place, "we can go on as if we had a right to live."

"I don't know," Pan responded; "I wish we could come to a river and make rafts so as to get further and faster away from that tribe."

"Nonsense!" cried his employer, "we're on safe enough ground by this time."

Pan made no reply, but there was that in his grave expression that showed he doubted. He made no further objections, however, to proceeding according to Bradshaw's desire, and that night, when they camped in a ravine near the summit of the ridge they had been climbing, they resumed the ordinary devices for protection from assault by men or beasts.

Since leaving the neighborhood of the execution tree they had had but one little episode to relieve the dull monotony of the march, and that, considering that they were in the heart of Africa, would hardly be worth the telling if it were not for the bearing it had on subsequent matters.

It was on this last day and after they had struck into the hills.

One of the carriers was at the moment a little in advance of the party, and next behind him were Bradshaw and Pan. Suddenly the carrier came leaping back, his mouth agape with terror. There was no need to ask what was the matter, for a deep growling sounded near.

"A lion!" exclaimed Bradshaw, his voice vibrant with the pleasurable excitement of encountering big game.

Their rifles in readiness, he and Pan went on a few paces until they found themselves confronted by a lioness.

She faced them growling and whisking her tail, while her eyes seemed to be on fire with determination. A young cub, who looked as innocent as any kitten, was sitting beside her, staring with unmistakable interest at the intruders.

"She'll fight hard," whispered Pan. "If it hadn't been for her cub she would probably have run from us."

Bradshaw was aiming, and as Pan ceased, he fired. The great beast leaped her length into the air and fell motionless, save for the last quivering of death.

"Too easy," said Bradshaw, "but it will do to talk about at home."

Just then Pan fired at the cub, but not before Bradshaw had knocked up the muzzle of his rifle so that the bullet went cutting leaves off the tree tops.

"Why——" began Pan, in amazement, and then stopped abruptly, as if he would not venture to question his employer's proceedings.

"We'll capture the cub," said Bradshaw. "He's too young to be dangerous."

"If he's with us," Pan suggested, "it may bring other lions about."

"So much the better. If I don't have a brush with something once in a while I shall grow rusty."

Pan had done so much advising and insisting recently that he evidently felt unequal to opposing this freak of his employer, and the upshot was the speedy capture of the cub.

The little fellow, startled at what had happened, but evidently uncomprehending his loss, made not the slightest resistance, and though he whined a good deal, he trotted on after one of the carriers as docile as a lamb. When they made camp for the night he was tethered near Bradshaw's shake down.

"What do you think you will do with him?" asked Pan.

"I haven't got that far," the American answered. "He'd make a fine souvenir to take home, though seriously I have no idea that can be managed. I have saved his life from sudden impulse, and ever since then I've been wondering whether it wouldn't have been much more sensible to put him out of the way."

"I think so," said Pan; "of course it is so if you say so."

This ambiguous speech, which might be interpreted as a reflection upon his good sense, tickled Bradshaw hugely, and he chuckled some time over it, much to Pan's mystification.

"As long as we've got him, Pan," said Bradshaw, at length, "we'll feed him well, and if it seems best to get rid of him we'll do it in some quick, easy fashion."

It was then near sundown. The simple business of camp making had been finished, and the cooks of the party were preparing supper.

Bradshaw and Pan had gone out to the mouth of the ravine to determine the advisability of posting a picket there through the night.

Suddenly Pan seized his employer by the arm and drew him behind a tall shrub.

"Look!" he whispered; "a little to the right. He's back of that rock."

Instinctively Bradshaw had unslung his rifle, and he held it now in readiness for quick firing as he peered in the direction Pan indicated.

For just an instant he saw nothing; then from behind the rock, a boulder that stood quite by itself at the mouth of the ravine, a man stepped cautiously forth and gazed steadily toward them.

He was half nude, and such garments as he wore were of the kind used by savages; but even in the gathering gloom of early evening the most casual glance showed that he was not a native of the wilds.

His skin was dark, but it had the rich hue of sun bronzed white.

His hair was long and unmarked by kinks. Moreover, a long beard depended from his chin and covered the greater part of his face. A light gust set it to fluttering, and as he stood with one hand upon the boulder, solitary in this vast wilderness, he might have seemed like a druid of old awakened after centuries of sleep.

Bradshaw slowly lowered his rifle, and, still gazing at the stranger, placed his hand on Pan's shoulder. He gripped hard into his companion's flesh, and Pan noticed that his employer was trembling violently.

After a moment thus Bradshaw's agitation ceased.

"Wait here," he said, and, handing his rifle to Pan, he walked from behind the shrub and went toward the stranger.

The latter seemed to hesitate an instant as he saw Bradshaw approaching, but it was only for an instant. He left the rock and met the American half way.

"What country are you?" he asked, and at the sound of his voice Bradshaw started and gazed more earnestly upon the old man's sunburned features.

It was a harsh, hoarse tone, having something of the native African guttural in it.

"I am from America," Bradshaw answered, slowly.

This statement evidently made no impression on the other, for he went on directly:

"I was sure I saw the smoke of a campfire. I come to warn you. Put out your fires at once, go back the way you came, and let no man see you until you are at least a hundred miles away."

"I thank you for your warning," said Bradshaw, speaking with manifest difficulty while he continued to search the old man's features; "and it seems good to hear my home speech from one who learned it where I did. Is it possible that it does not give you pleasure to see and speak with a fellow countryman?"

The old man listened to him impassively.

"I did not say I was an American," said he; "that I have some interest in men of your race is clear enough, I suppose, from the fact that I have come up here to warn you of your danger."

"What is this danger?"

"Not more than two miles below there is the chief town of the most powerful and most bloodthirsty tribe of men in all Africa. Nothing will persuade them to spare the life of any white man who enters their kingdom."

Bradshaw paused long before responding, and when he spoke he leaned forward, piercing the other's eyes with his own.

"Not even yours, Mr. Murdock?" he said.

CHAPTER V.

A TOKEN OF HOSPITALITY.

The old man leaped as did the black dignitary when Pan's bullet pierced his heart. His bearded lips parted, his eyes dilated, he threw up both hands and clenched them as if he would strike Bradshaw down. Then he wheeled about and set off down the ravine on the dead run.

Bradshaw made after him instantly and overtook him easily within a few paces.

"Mr. Murdock!" he cried, "do not run from me! I have come all this way into Africa to find you. Don't you know me, Mr. Murdock? Don't you remember——"

"You are mistaken, young man," gasped the other, struggling violently but vainly in Bradshaw's grasp; "My name is not Murdock. Go away while there is a chance that you may do so in safety."

"Come with me, Mr. Murdock."

"No, never; my name is not Murdock, I tell you!"

"Don't try to deceive me, Mr. Murdock. You betray yourself by the effort. I come as a friend."

"I'll not believe it. I never saw you."

"You knew me in my boyhood."

"It is a lie. Unhand me, I say!"

Up to this the old man had not ceased to writhe and wrench this way and that to be free. He now gave over and stood, panting and trembling, glaring fearfully at his captor.

"I beg you to be calm, Mr. Murdock," said Bradshaw, then: "it breaks my heart to compel you to listen——"

"I'll not listen," panted the old man, hoarsely.

"You must. I come with a message from Irene."

A pitiful gasp choked in the old

man's throat, and his muscles, still tense from excited resistance, suddenly yielded and became powerless.

" She sent me to Africa to find you," added Bradshaw, gently, and he relaxed his hold.

The old man came near to falling and might have done so had not the younger caught and sustained him.

" Irene ! " the harsh voice spoke in a fluttering whisper. " Oh, my daughter ! " and the old man shook now with sobbing.

There were tears in Bradshaw's eyes. Murdock's denial of his identity, his frantic resistance to friendly appeal, were matters of profound mystery to the young traveler ; but there was contagion in the overwhelming emotion evoked by the mention of Irene ; and Bradshaw's own feelings were deeply stirred by this sudden coming upon the object of his long search.

" Come up to the camp, Mr. Murdock," he said, persuasively ; " there is much that we will want to talk about, and if there is danger from below we shall be safer up there than here."

Murdock controlled himself with evident effort and looked up the ravine. He saw Pan standing a few rods from them with a rifle in each hand.

The faithful black man had drawn near when the struggle began in order to be of assistance to his employer if there should be need.

" Who is that ? " asked Murdock, suspiciously.

" One of my men," Bradshaw answered ; " a loyal fellow and unusually intelligent for a native."

" Does he speak English ? "

" Fluently."

" Then I'll stay here and listen to what you have to say. I won't risk being overheard. Send him back to your camp."

" As you will, Mr. Murdock," and Bradshaw beckoned to Pan.

The black man came up slowly, looking at Murdock instead of his employer.

" You may go back to the camp, Pan," said Bradshaw, " and tell the men that no one of them is to come this way before I return."

Without a word Pan turned about and went slowly up the ravine. His last glance was at Murdock. It was not until he had disappeared from view that Bradshaw discovered his rifle leaning against a rock beside him.

" You say my daughter sent you," said Murdock, in controlled, almost sullen tones, " and you have made me betray myself. It will be well for you if it does not prove a trick. Who are you ? "

" It is no wonder you do not know me," Bradshaw answered, " for after all these years it was only with difficulty that I recognized you. I do not think I should have done so if I had not been on the lookout for you so long."

" My appearance——" Murdock began, and then checked himself abruptly. " You have not answered me."

" I am Elmer Bradshaw, Mr. Murdock. Surely you remember me."

" I knew your father, I think."

" And have I faded from your recollection ? "

" No. You used to play with Irene, didn't you ? "

" In old Vermont. Yes, Mr. Murdock."

" I should not have known you. You were a child then."

" And I was at college when you left the country."

" I should probably never have thought of you again if you hadn't found me," Murdock went on as if he had not heard Bradshaw ; and there was a note of resentful harshness in his voice.

" I can quite understand that you would have no interest in me as a boy," said Bradshaw, " but I have not forgotten you, and your many friends speak often of you."

" What do they say ? " asked Murdock, with a trace of eagerness.

"They regret your long absence. Many of them believe that you are dead."

"Let them believe it!" exclaimed the old man, with a startling access of energy.

"Irene never would believe it," said Bradshaw, quietly.

"Ah! Irene!" and the harsh voice was again subdued; "what of her? Is she well?"

"She was when I left America, months ago. She longs to see her father."

The tropical darkness had gathered so quickly that now it was almost impossible for the men to see each other's faces clearly. Murdock no longer made an effort to do so. He looked toward the ground, and often his voice suggested that of a man mumbling in his sleep.

"She is a woman grown by now," said he; "she gave promise of great beauty."

"Irene is most beautiful," responded Bradshaw, with an effort to speak calmly that would have been only too plain to an ordinary observer.

Murdock apparently failed to observe his emotion, for he went on almost mechanically:

"Has she married?"

Bradshaw drew a deep breath and held it with lips hard pressed for a moment before he replied.

"She has not, Mr. Murdock. Irene is too anxious about the fate of her father. She longs to have his consent and blessing."

"To her marriage?"

"Yes."

"Why is she not content with her mother's assent? Does her mother oppose her?"

"Mr. Murdock, your wife died four years ago."

The old man continued to gaze at the ground. Not the slightest movement indicated that the information aroused emotion of any kind.

"She died," Bradshaw continued, after a pause, "with your name on her lips. For a long time she had been failing. Nothing was the matter, so far as medical science could say. She simply faded gradually, and when she had passed on, the physicians agreed with the general opinion that her heart was broken by your disappearance from her life."

Still Murdock stood motionless and another pause ensued.

"It is better so," he muttered at last. "Irene is young. She is therefore happy, or will be so."

"Irene will be most happy if you come home with me," said Bradshaw.

"Why is she so insistent? I do not understand——"

"Why should a daughter long to see her father?" interrupted Bradshaw, with some vehemence; "think of it, Mr. Murdock! She is alone in the world. She loved you as a child, she loves you now that she is a woman. Would it not be strange if she didn't want to see you?"

"I did not mean that," Murdock replied rather hastily; "all this comes on me so suddenly and unexpectedly that perhaps I am confused. How comes it that she has not believed the reports of my death? I suppose such reports have been current. And how comes it that she sends you on the almost hopeless search for me here in Africa?"

"I am anxious to tell you that. I love your daughter, Mr. Murdock. I have been in love with her ever since I can remember."

Bradshaw hesitated from the embarrassment that all honest men feel in discussing the deepest secrets of their hearts, but Murdock gave neither word nor sign to assist him. So, after a moment, he went on:

"I think there never has been any more question about Irene's affection than about mine. I asked her to be my wife a long time ago. She made me the happiest man in America by consenting, but there was no thought on either part of a speedy marriage. I

had not more than made my start in life, her mother was beginning to fail, and you were absent."

"My absence didn't need to make any difference," mumbled Murdock.

The young man felt a throb of pain. That this father must have been insensible to family affection was a discovery he had expected to make, that is, if it should prove that Murdock had been alive and free all these years; but to awaken only a slight semblance of it now, was doubly distressing from the fact that the daughter, who should have called forth the tenderest feelings in Murdock, was Bradshaw's sweetheart.

It seemed barbarous to stand there and try to convince Murdock by argument that it was natural that his daughter should yearn for his presence and guidance. Yet just that had to be done, and the young man spoke with the greater intensity from the very restraint that he necessarily felt in saying things that implied reflections upon his sweetheart's father.

Murdock listened without comment to the story of his daughter's troubles after her mother's death. There were legal questions of an embarrassing nature, for no evidence existed that her father was dead, and the disposition of property that might be hers, and might be willed by him to others, was a difficult matter.

Bradshaw told how a temporary solution had been reached by Irene setting aside a large fraction of the modest estate which might by any possibility be in dispute, and reserving for her own use only what was absolutely necessary for her maintenance.

"Then," said Bradshaw, "my own affairs prospered. I came into possession of what is ordinarily called a fortune. I wanted to share it with Irene. There was no longer any possible reason for her not becoming my wife so far as my ability to care for her was in question.

"She recognized that and told me that she could not be content to seek her own happiness while there was doubt about her father. She stubbornly believed you were alive, picturing you as a prisoner in the hands of savages, waiting hopefully for rescue. Irene believed that if you could be found your freedom could be bought.

"I told her I would search for you. I have been expecting to learn that you were put to death by savages somewhere here in Africa, though when I set out I had become more than half convinced by Irene's confidence that you were alive. I am here, then, to purchase your freedom, to do all in my power to help you to rejoin your daughter. That you love her is clear, and by that love, Mr. Murdock, I beg you not to return to the town of the blacks, but go with me to my camp whence we will start at once, this night, for the coast."

Murdock shifted restlessly from one foot to the other. It was the first movement he had made during the narration and appeal. After long hesitation he said:

"It would be impossible for me to start tonight. Such action would bring the whole tribe in pursuit at once and escape would be out of the question. But you'd better start back at once, Elmer. The warning I gave you was genuine."

"I shall not leave without you, Mr. Murdock," responded Bradshaw, firmly.

"Why wait for me?" asked the old man. "I can follow when the opportunity arrives. Why sacrifice Irene's chance of happiness? Return to her, Elmer, with my blessing. Say that I gladly assent to her marriage with you, that I have no idea of despoiling her of the little property I had accumulated, and that I will return when I have accomplished what I am here for. It will be much better that way."

"What can you hope to accomplish here that will be worth more than a civilized life and your daughter's affection?"

Murdock was silent a long time.

"It will be better," he said finally. "Irene will admit as much when I return."

"Mr. Murdock," said Bradshaw, in decided tones, "if I had found proof of your death, I should have returned to America before now, and Irene would have been satisfied. She would never forgive me, and I should never forgive myself if, having found you alive, I should return without you."

His persistence seemed to rearouse the old man's resentment, for his voice, that had been subdued during his later remarks, was harsh again as he said:

"To linger here will mean your death, young man."

"As well die here trying to help Irene as return to America without you," retorted Bradshaw.

"You are determined to risk staying, then?"

"Until you consent to go with me."

There was another long interval of silence. At length, with a deep sigh that seemed to announce that he had come to a decision, Murdock said:

"It is all the more important, then, that you put out your campfires and do everything possible to prevent your presence becoming known."

"Shall we not start at once?" asked Bradshaw eagerly.

"No. I have said that would be impossible, but it shall be as soon as I can see the opportunity to do so with safety. I know the situation here, and you must trust me."

"I will, and I do, Mr. Murdock."

"That is right. Meantime, having no fires, and being under necessity of shooting no game, you will suffer for food. I will see that you are supplied."

"It won't be necessary. We have supplies that will do very well for a time. We can dispense with fresh meat."

Murdock stirred uneasily. He lifted his face and looked toward Bradshaw, but it was too dark now for either to see the other more than dimly.

"I am sorry," said Murdock, in that low, sullen tone that he had used earlier in the conversation, "that you reject the little hospitality that I can offer."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Bradshaw, with a sharp twinge of regret, "I didn't mean to do anything of the kind. You seemed to fear that we should be in want and I intended only to reassure you."

"You have come so far and are so kind," muttered Murdock, "that I should like to share with you what little I have."

"Please pardon my apparent rudeness," pleaded Bradshaw; "by all means send up some meat. I shall be delighted to think that in a way I am at your table. I used to take dinner at your house sometimes when I was a boy, you know."

"Yes," said the old man doubtfully, as if he failed to remember the circumstance, or as if he were thinking of other things; "I will bring you a dish prepared by myself. It will not be safe to send it. There is no one I can trust sufficiently. But I do not want any of your people to see me. That might be dangerous, too."

"I shall respect your wish, but how shall we arrange it?"

"I will be back within an hour. When I am near your camp I will whistle softly. Come out then alone and meet me."

"And at that time perhaps you can say when we may start for the coast."

"Perhaps."

"Till then, Mr. Murdock."

Bradshaw held out his hand, but in the darkness the old man did not see it. There was no similar offer on his own part. With a mumbled "good by," he had turned abruptly and started down the ravine.

It was with mingled elation and sadness that Bradshaw hurried back to camp. There was natural exultation that his quest had met with success.

All his friends at home, all except Irene, had said that it would be the

veriest wild goose chase. They not only believed that Mr. Murdock was dead, but they had no idea that any trace of him, or knowledge of his fate could be found. And here he was alive and well.

Well, yes, physically; but mentally? That half framed query placed a load of apprehension on Bradshaw's heart that he could not reason away.

Dressed little better than a savage, it was significant that he had forgotten such an apparently trivial thing as a hand shake with a fellow countryman. It was by no means so significant as his grudging consent to return to civilization and his daughter, and yet, there might be strong if not good reasons for that.

Bradshaw told himself that there must be reasons, mistaken ones, probably, but nevertheless reasons of a sort to account for Mr. Murdock's long desertion of his home.

As he went up the ravine the buoyancy of youth helped him partly to dispel the depression. The best of it all, he thought, was that Mr. Murdock was alive.

Association with civilized men would speedily restore him to his former self. That long absence from home could not be forgotten, but it could be forgiven.

"There must be no campfires, Pan," said Bradshaw, as soon as he arrived at the camp.

"Did he say so?" inquired the black man, quietly.

"Yes. He tells me we are very near the most hostile and powerful tribe on the continent."

"Then we must put our pickets far down in the ravine."

"No, Pan. Post no guard in that direction."

"Did he say so?"

"Certainly!" and Bradshaw's tone was a bit sharp, for he was irritated at Pan's evident distrust. "That is the man whom I have been hunting all over Africa."

"I know; that is, I supposed so. I do not like him, Mr. Bradshaw."

"I see you don't, but that can't make any difference. Confound it, Pan! that man is my sweetheart's father. He knew me when I was a little boy. He came out to warn us, not knowing that there was anybody here whom he knew. Of course his advice is to be trusted."

"Yes, certainly. Of course it is if you say it is. But I do not like him."

"Oh, bosh!" and Bradshaw turned away in disgust. He could not have told why he felt so resentful of Pan's demeanor. There was a strange mixture in his own feelings that he shrank from analysing. He wanted to rejoice heartily in the discovery of Mr. Murdock, and he could not. That cloud of depressing apprehension hung over him, and Pan's words made it deeper.

Not that he distrusted his sweetheart's father; it was more as if he feared that it might have been better for all concerned if Mr. Murdock never had been found; but Bradshaw would not permit himself to entertain that thought, and it was only natural that he should vent his uncomfortable feeling upon the faithful Pan.

"I'm hungry as a dog," he said presently. "Mr. Murdock is going to bring me some food as a matter of hospitality, but I can't wait for it. Have them get me something, Pan."

"It is ready," said the black; "I have been waiting for you."

"So! you mean well, don't you, old fellow? Here, shake hands, will you?"

Pan gravely gave Bradshaw his hand. "You are very kind to me," he said.

"Nonsense! I'm not half as appreciative as I ought to be. Never mind, Pan. You just go on doing what you think is right and let me sputter."

It was a genuine relief to Bradshaw to "make it up" so quickly with his loyal assistant, and during supper they talked freely of possible plans for the return journey to the coast as soon as

Mr. Murdock should say that he was ready to accompany them.

Pan was evidently at pains to say nothing to suggest that he was suspicious, and only once hinted at his anxiety.

"What did Mr. Murdock say was the name of the tribe?" he asked.

"He didn't say," replied Bradshaw, "and I forgot to ask him."

"That is too bad."

"Are you thinking it may be the tribe you told me about the other day?"

"It might be. I will try to find out tomorrow. I'd rather not leave the camp tonight."

"Of course not! You mustn't think of such a thing. Couldn't get on very well if they should catch you, Pan."

After supper, Bradshaw treated himself to a smoke. Tobacco was one of the few luxuries carried on the expedition, and he had been very chary as to the use of it lest his supply be exhausted before the end of the long journey. This night, however, his mind was so bestirred with conflicting thoughts that he felt a positive need of the soothing drug.

The campfires had been extinguished according to orders, and pickets were posted in all directions except the mouth of the ravine. It was Bradshaw's intention to place a guard there also after Mr. Murdock had come again and returned.

He said nothing of this to Pan, but having lighted his pipe with precaution that not even the flare of his match should reveal the presence of his party, he puffed away with a considerable degree of contentment until a low whistle apprised him of Mr. Murdock's approach.

He rose instantly, as did Pan also, and a number of the blacks crept up to them.

"Tell the men to be quiet, Pan," said Bradshaw; "It is my friend. I am going out to meet him."

"Not alone, Mr. Bradshaw?"

"Yes, alone. You must stay here."

Pan caught his employer by the sleeve. His voice was husky and tremulous.

"Let me go with you, Mr. Bradshaw," he pleaded. "You do not know what trap——"

"Trap, Pan!" exclaimed Bradshaw, his former irritation rising again; "remember, this man is my friend."

"Yes, if you say so; but Mr. Bradshaw, let me go. You shall not venture there alone. I insist——"

"Oh! you do! See here, Pan," and Bradshaw freed himself roughly from his assistant's grasp, "you'll stay where you are and remember your place. I believe I am master here."

There was a sound in the black man's throat very like a sob.

"It shall be as you say," he said sadly.

Bradshaw strode away thoroughly angry. "This comes of permitting a servant too many liberties," he said to himself. "I shall have to be more stiff with Pan on the return march."

He came upon Mr. Murdock within a hundred yards of the camp. His form was barely distinguishable.

"The tribe do not suspect your presence in the vicinity as yet," Murdock whispered. "You will be cautious about exposing yourselves to view in the daytime?"

"Surely," answered Bradshaw, "and you will not compel us to remain here long, I hope."

"No, but great caution will be necessary to my departure. I will come again in the morning. Possibly we can start then."

"I hope so."

"I must not linger now. Later I will make all clear, but my absence from the village, if noticed, might ruin all. Here is food. I did not bring meat. I thought later of a cereal with which you are probably not familiar. I like it much and I hope you will. It is especially good just before turning in for the night."

"Thank you, Mr. Murdock. I am sure I shall like it. I shall rest easy now that I have seen you again."

"Did you think I wouldn't come back?"

"No, your word satisfied me, but after such a long hunt I'd rather keep you with me. You understand?"

"Yes. I must get back. Good by."

Murdock slipped away as abruptly as he had done before. After listening for a moment to his retreating footsteps, Bradshaw went back to the camp.

Pan was standing as if rooted to the spot where he had received his employer's last command.

"Here I am, Pan," said Bradshaw, in a tone that conveyed reproof. "You see your tremors were not justified. You may post a picket in the ravine now."

"You have brought something, Mr. Bradshaw."

"Yes, a cake, or something of that kind, that my friend made for me. I'm not hungry now, but I'll sample it and then turn in."

Pan reached out in the darkness and snatched the cake from his employer's hands.

"What the mischief——" Bradshaw began angrily.

"The cub has not been fed," interrupted Pan, in an agitated whisper. "This will do for him."

He had leaped to the spot where the cub was tethered.

"Come here, you impudent rascal!" exclaimed Bradshaw. "You're carrying familiarity too far, my fine fellow," and he strode up to Pan.

"Listen, Mr. Bradshaw!" said the latter, with such an intense accent of earnestness that Bradshaw paused in wonder.

He heard the cub crunching something, and despite Murdock's warning he struck a match to see what was going on.

Pan had given the little beast a fragment of the cake. It had been partly swallowed, when in the flare of the match, Bradshaw saw the cub suddenly stagger, work his jaws as if trying to be rid of the morsel, and stumble upon his side while his legs quivered convulsively; and before the match went out the cub was dead.

"Good God!" gasped Bradshaw, sick with horror.

Immediately he struck another match and with shaking hand held it over the cub to be certain that he had seen aright. Then he looked at Pan. The black man held the rest of the cake toward him.

"Mr. Bradshaw," he said, "shall your slave eat of this to convince you that you should let it alone?"

CHAPTER VI.

MURDOCK'S QUEST.

BRADSHAW recoiled from the proffered cake with a gesture of horror.

"There must be some mistake," he said.

"It may be so," answered Pan, with his customary gravity; "of course it is if you say so, but the cake is poisoned."

"Mr. Murdock could not have known it."

"Perhaps, if you say so, but the cake is poisoned."

This quiet iteration of the appaling truth fairly prostrated the American.

"I must sit down and think," he said faintly. "Oh, Irene! what message shall I take home to you, my darling?"

They went to his shake down and for a full minute Bradshaw sat with his head in his hands, trying to bring the bewildered tumult of his thoughts to order. It was Pan who broke the silence.

"May I speak?" he asked.

"Oh, help me, Pan!" Bradshaw moaned. "A second time you have saved my life."

"I would have eaten the cake myself if the useless cub had not been at hand," said Pan; "I was so sure of

treachery! If the cub had not died so quickly, I should have left you, for I knew that I was troubling you."

"Do not dream of excusing yourself, Pan. It only adds to my grief. And yet, I cannot easily believe that Mr. Murdock knew what he was doing."

"You do not need to think of that now, Mr. Bradshaw."

The black's tone of quiet assurance did much to soothe Bradshaw's agitation.

"I have been utterly unmanned," he said, "but I will pull myself together. What is the first thing, Pan?"

"You noticed how quickly the poison acted, Mr. Bradshaw?"

"Indeed, yes," answered Bradshaw, with a repressed shudder.

"So, then," continued Pan, "if it was intentional it means that we must act quickly. We should not take risks. It is right to hope that your friend meant honestly, but we should act as if he intended the mischief that would have been done."

"And that means that we should move from here at once."

"Yes, Mr. Bradshaw. If this treachery should be followed by a night attack the trouble will come quickly."

"And they must not find us here!" exclaimed Bradshaw, springing up with all his natural energy.

He was anxious now for his men. He saw how probable it was that, if Murdock were in league with the savages, as was horribly possible, the supposed death of the white leader of this expedition would be followed immediately by the extermination of the carriers.

The men were aroused and all the pickets called in. As quietly and speedily as possible they got their traps together and climbed up the side of the ravine whence they proceeded slowly along the crest of the ridge in the direction where they presumed lay the chief town of the tribe.

This was a strategic move agreed upon by Bradshaw and Pan on the theory that if the savages attacked and found that the party had gone, they would infer that a retreat had been made in a contrary direction.

Not much distance was traversed, for they feared to come too close to their enemies, and when a halt was made, half the men were posted as pickets, the ravine top being covered at every possible point of vantage.

Then through the long night they watched and waited. No stealthy step of man or beast came to disturb them. The failure of the tribe to attack seemed no less a mystery than Murdock's treachery, and the suspense was all but unbearable.

Toward morning Bradshaw threw himself upon the ground and slept fitfully till sunrise. When he opened his eyes Pan was approaching.

"We chose a good place in the darkness," said he; "will you come and see?"

Bradshaw followed him among the trees that covered the hilltop to a point where there was a sheer descent of two hundred feet or more. So steep was it that no tree found rooting there and the view eastward was unimpeded.

To their left lay the mouth of the ravine. Before them stretched a broad plain terminating in low hills upon the further side.

The sun's rays glistened upon a river that flowed from the distant hills through the plain and past a large town in the middle, the nearest houses of which seemed to be about a mile away.

Even as they stood there they could distinguish men moving about the town and congregating in a square before the largest building in the place.

"That must be the king's house," said Pan, "and something unusual is going on; but if we must fight we can give them a hard battle here."

"Yes," responded Bradshaw, "they can hardly surround us."

"I am going to the town," Pan continued, and he began to divest himself of his civilized garments.

"Have you thought of the risk?"

"Yes, and what greater risk can there be than remaining here with no knowledge of the real situation?"

"You are right, Pan, and I am more than hopeful that you'll come out of it successfully. Ah! see there!"

He caught Pan by the arm and directed his attention to that part of the plain that lay between them and the town.

Less than half a mile away they saw a man whose waving beard distinguished him as Murdock, running rapidly toward the ravine. Now and again he crouched and proceeded more slowly, and he was evidently at pains to take all advantage of trees and other objects that might screen him from view of persons in the town.

"What can it mean?" exclaimed Bradshaw. "Undoubtedly he's on his way to see me."

"To learn whether his trick succeeded," said Pan.

"But why should he hurry? Why dodge being seen from the town? Doesn't that show that he must have been ignorant that the food he brought was poisoned?"

"I cannot tell. I think—but no matter; you will meet him, I suppose?"

"Surely, Pan."

"And this time I know you will be on your guard. So I shall go on to the town."

"But what if he should bring word that it is necessary to retreat at once?"

"Then retreat—if you trust his word. I will overtake you if I come away from the town alive. Good by, Mr. Bradshaw."

The black was already on his way down the steep hillside and Bradshaw went back to camp and thence to the ravine where he had first encountered Murdock.

Murdock had not yet arrived. After a moment of anxious thought Bradshaw concealed himself and waited.

Presently he heard a cautious stirring of bushes, and he saw Murdock's face peering from a mass of tropical foliage.

The old man's brows were knit, his lips parted, and his bronzed cheeks had a hue of ghastly pallor. He looked and listened intently for several seconds and then crept carefully forth and proceeded up the ravine.

Bradshaw followed with the utmost care, losing sight of Murdock from time to time.

At length he saw the old man standing beside the dead body of the cub. Both hands clenched were raised high in air, his head was thrown far back on his shoulders, and his limbs were trembling.

It seemed to Bradshaw an attitude of infinite despair. He was thrilled at the sight, though he knew not how to interpret it.

With a long fluttering sigh, Murdock let his hands fall to his side. Then he began to scan the ground.

Signs of a recent camp were plain enough, and to one familiar with the wilderness there was no great difficulty in discovering the route taken by the retreating party.

Murdock presently began to ascend the side of the ravine. Then Bradshaw stepped forth from his concealment.

"Here I am, Mr. Murdock," he said, in a tone that he tried to make natural and cordial.

The old man whirled about at the first sound and for an instant stared at Bradshaw with bulging eyes. Then he ran tottering to where Bradshaw stood, fell on his knees, placed one trembling hand on Bradshaw's wrist and with the other plucked the hem of his coat.

"Thank God! thank God!" he gasped repeatedly.

"What is the matter, Mr. Murdock?" asked Bradshaw, trying to make the old man rise, and almost recoiling from him as he did so. "Calm yourself and tell me."

"Your camp was deserted," chattered Murdock, "and—and——"

He tried to look Bradshaw in the

eyes and, failing to keep his own gaze steady, stared about him vacantly while he seemed at loss for words.

"Did you think something had happened to me, Mr. Murdock?" Bradshaw asked.

"I feared—Oh! I feared—but it matters nothing. You are alive and all will perhaps be well."

"What was it you feared?" insisted Bradshaw; "I must know, Mr. Murdock."

The old man looked around him helplessly.

"That food," he stammered almost inaudibly; "after I got back to the town I—I discovered that there was something wrong with it. An enemy meant mischief for me. I feared you had eaten it."

"I thought you said you prepared it yourself."

"I—I did. The stuff was put in while my back was turned. What did you do with it, Elmer?"

The old man's dishonesty was so palpable that Bradshaw was hard put to it to refrain from denouncing him; but Murdock was Irene's father!

"Before I could eat it," he answered, "the cub got at it. You see how it served him," and he pointed to the dead beast.

Murdock appeared to be terribly shocked.

"Awful!" he whispered; "Oh! Elmer! you didn't suspect me?"

"How could I suspect you, Mr. Murdock?"

The old man looked this way and that, spatted his hands together in the most nervous fashion, and shifted restlessly on his feet. Ever and again his eyes met Bradshaw's, but not to linger in a steady glance.

In his own eyes there gleamed that low kind of cunning that overreaches itself and is easily discovered. Bradshaw noted it and was more and more repelled, but his mission in Africa was to save this man, and he held himself firmly to the purpose.

"The fear of what might have happened to you has upset me completely," whined Murdock, "but it is well now. Where have you placed your men?"

"Where they can resist attack better than here," Bradshaw replied without indicating the direction.

He wanted to ask Murdock further about the poisoned cake; why he had not returned as soon as he discovered that there was something wrong with it? Why he had waited till morning? Why, then, he approached a friendly camp so cautiously, and other obvious questions that could not fail to confuse the old man and involve him in a mesh of contradictions if he should continue his deceit.

But not only was Bradshaw restrained by sentiment from convicting his sweetheart's father of abominable crime, but there was a deeper question the answer to which could be gained only by patient observation. Having once attempted to kill the man who came to help him, why should Murdock now be so anxious to know that he was alive?

The answer came by inference much sooner than Bradshaw could have hoped it would.

"You gave me a scare about the tribe, you know," he added to his reply to Murdock's question, preferring that the old man should think that the lie about the cake had been accepted as truth.

"Yes, I remember," said Murdock, "and I want to tell you more about the tribe. I want to go with you now, Elmer, if you will take me with you?"

"I came to Africa to find you and take you home," Bradshaw responded; "I have told you that I should not start back without you. I stand by that."

Murdock's extreme nervousness continued to manifest itself in weak gestures and quavering voice, but he spoke more connectedly and rapidly.

"It is most fortunate," said he, "that I did not stay with you as you asked me to last night, for something has

happened below there that I could not have learned. A small party of men who had been absent from the town for a long time returned unexpectedly before sunrise this morning, bringing information that has set the whole tribe in commotion.

" So important was it that the king was awakened and I was called, too, for I have been the king's adviser for some time. Thus I learned speedily what had happened.

" These men reported that they had been attacked by a white man of marvelous power who not only escaped miraculously from the death they sought to inflict upon him, but that he had called thunderbolts from heaven that struck down Dirik, the high priest who was in charge of the tribesmen. They say, too, that this wonderful white man had a black slave who attended him, and that these two have taken possession of the sacred place where dwell the spirits that protect the tribe.

" There are other details, but these are the main facts as presented by the frightened blacks. Listening to them, and knowing of your presence here, and thinking of your journeying about the country, I inferred that this wonderful white man must have been you, Elmer."

" Yes," said Bradshaw, " I guess it was. The only difficulty with the story is that I didn't take possession of their sacred hole in the ground. I ran away as fast as I could."

" That doesn't matter. The blacks are superstitious to the last degree, and if you killed Dirik as they say, after escaping somehow being killed by their tree of execution, you may be sure they were too panic stricken to observe whether you retreated or pursued. Besides, they may not be telling the entire truth. Having been scared by your apparent overpowering of their guardian spirits, they may have invented other details to excuse their desertion of the place."

" Probably they have done so unless it happens that there is another white man traveling through Africa who had a similar experience to mine and who didn't run away but settled down in the sacred hole."

" No, no! that cannot be!" cried Murdock in great excitement; " it must have been you. I am sure of it."

" Well," said Bradshaw, soothingly, " call it so. The question can be settled easily enough if it's important. Where was the place that this affair occurred?"

" Ah!" and Murdock was more excited than before, " that is what I do not know! I must know! You must tell me! It is most important to me, and to you, Elmer."

" I should think it more important to start for the coast as soon as possible."

" No, not till we have gone to that place where you met Dirik and his men. I have been trying to find it for many long years. We must not return to America without going there. Why! Elmer, that is the richest diamond mine in all Africa!"

CHAPTER VII.

DISCOVERY OF THE DIAMOND MINE.

So, then, the mystery of Murdock's behavior was partly cleared. He had fallen a victim to the diamond fever and taken up association with a tribe of savages in the hope of finding a valuable mine.

Possessed by that idea, he had resented the appeal of friends and daughter to return home and had gone so far as to attempt the life of the man who had come thus far in the friendly effort to save him.

Then, when he discovered that this man might be able to guide him to the long sought mine, he had repented his villainy, and his repentance went no further than selfish interest.

It was not that he feared Elmer

Bradshaw had been killed. His anxiety and regret were aroused solely by the fear that he had put out of the way the one man who could aid him in the discovery of the mine.

Bradshaw saw as much as this and it framed itself in his mind, while the old man was speaking, with all the suddenness and clearness of a revelation. How much more lay behind Murdock's extraordinary conduct he did not, could not dream.

This revelation alone was enough to cause him the severest struggle in determining what course he should pursue.

His overwhelming impulse was to leave the wretched old man to his fate; but Murdock was Irene's father! It would be faithlessness to her to let any effort go untried that might induce him to return not only to his home, but to his former upright self.

Was there any hope for the latter consummation? Could any man who had descended to murder be redeemed?

Bradshaw could not answer these questions, but in the very light of their hopelessness, his resolution was then and there taken. Come what might, he would be loyal to the idea that had inspired his long journey.

He would shut his eyes to Murdock's crime, to his infatuation with regard to the diamond mine, to all save the one purpose of the expedition: the restoration of Murdock to his daughter.

From this resolution Bradshaw never wavered, though more than once thereafter it seemed as if he would go mad with apprehension and dismay as the bitter truth became revealed in brighter and brighter light.

The tumult in his thoughts was not reflected in his face. On the contrary, so great was his effort at self control as he framed his resolution, that he seemed wholly unaffected by Murdock's declaration about the mine.

"Don't you understand, Elmer?" cried Murdock. "You have discovered a mine of incalculable richness."

"Mr. Murdock," responded Bradshaw. "Irene's happiness is more to me than all the diamonds in the world."

"Ah! you are a young man, Elmer——"

"And you are Irene's father."

"Yes," and Murdock trembled as with palsy; "I think of Irene. I would make her rich, Elmer, rich beyond her wildest dreams. She shall have a palace, jewels, servants by the score——"

"This is childish, Mr. Murdock, and unworthy of you!" exclaimed Bradshaw; "your daughter would rather have her father near her than be possessed of all that money can procure."

"She is a woman, Elmer. Women think more of the affections than men do, and they do not realize the importance of money."

"I, too, Mr. Murdock, would surround Irene with all possible comforts and luxuries. I am not fabulously rich, but I can provide her with all she can possibly ask for."

"Perhaps, Elmer, but think of the greater security in multiplying your fortune a hundred fold! Come! you will show me this mine and we will share it."

"I will take you back to Irene, Mr. Murdock."

"You shall, but as a rich man. And your own fortune, Elmer——"

"Is sufficient."

"Then go back with it to Irene and comfort her. Tell me where the mine is and I will soon return, and what I bring with me will more than compensate for my absence."

"Will all possible wealth restore your wife to life?"

Murdock shuddered violently and his pleading tone changed to one that was harsh with wrath.

"I see," he cried, "you will not tell me! Perhaps you mean to go back there alone and rob me of what I have been so patiently trying to gain. Very well, Elmer, try it. I will go back to the town and inform the king. He will scour the country for you and not

rest until he has killed you and exterminated your followers."

The old man turned about as if he would put his threat into instant execution. Bradshaw seized him and held him firmly.

It may be that the struggle of the evening previous was in his mind to deter him from futile resistance, and it may be that the threat was but a ruse to bring Bradshaw to terms; at all events he was passive in Bradshaw's grasp, waiting for the younger man to speak.

"Wait, Mr. Murdock," said Bradshaw; "remember, I know nothing about this mine except what you have vaguely told me. I do not know that the place where I had my adventure was a mine, though it may be so. How do you know that a mine exists?"

"I want to tell you, Elmer. I will give you all the information that I have been years in acquiring if you will promise to help me gain possession of the mine."

"I will do anything in reason to induce you to return to America with me, but I must know clearly what I am about."

"Yes, that is right. Then listen, Elmer. The tribe that holds this country is superstitious, powerful and bloodthirsty to the last degree."

"What are they called?" asked Bradshaw, as he released the old man and pointed to a moss covered stone on which Murdock seated himself.

"Marotse. Their king is Bangwe, and while he, in ordinary respects, is an absolute monarch, and while he profits by the mine that lies within his territory, he does not know where it is and he is himself ruled by three Arabs who have played upon his superstition until they are able to work the mine for their own gain and that possibly of confederates at a distance."

"Was the man Dirik, I think you called him, whom Pan shot, one of the three?"

"Yes. The others, fortunately for us, are away and will not return for a long time. Arabs in Africa, as perhaps you know, are traders, and their traffic is mainly in slaves. They are the terror of most tribes, but the Marotses, so far in the interior, had not suffered from them until Dirik and his partners appeared. I may not know all the details of Dirik's first ventures here, and such as I know I have been long in getting, but I know enough to be sure of the situation.

"These three Arabs were the forerunners of a great slave hunting expedition. Following the usual custom, they planned to buy a number of people from Bangwe, the king, or, failing to make a bargain, to bring a small, well armed body of their followers and subdue the tribe.

"Before they had approached the king they accidentally discovered a deposit of diamonds that seemed to be and probably is inexhaustible. Here was business that might be made far more profitable than slave dealing. The question was how to utilize their discovery.

"There were a number of obvious considerations to take into account. If they subdued the tribe and thus gained possession of the diamond field, knowledge of their conquest would in time spread over the continent and come to the ears of Europeans.

"Now Arabs are held in suspicion by whites of all nationalities, and there is a general effort to prevent the slave trade. That in itself would be likely to cause interference with the designs of these three, but more than that, if they opened up diamond mines and dealt openly in their product, there would certainly ensue an influx of Europeans who would deprive the Arabs of their discovery, or at least rival them in operating it.

"More important than these considerations, however, was the possibility of turning the discovery to their individual profit. That they determined to do without incurring the hostility of

the Marotses, which would give them constant trouble, whereas they saw a way to make allies of the tribe.

"To begin with, they blackened their already dark skins so as to disguise their nationality as far as possible. Then, having presented themselves to the king, they shrewdly took advantage of circumstances to play upon his superstitious nature and his gratitude as well.

"For generations the Marotses' chief town had been upon the bank of the Banje river, and the river had gradually changed its course. The change was not perceptible to the blacks, but it had turned the site of their town to an unwholesome marsh. The result was a pestilence, which the Marotses attributed to the malign influence of spirits.

"They had sacrificed to their gods in vain, and at the time when Dirik and his partners appeared, a favorite son of Bangwe was stricken. Dirik told Bangwe that the Marotse gods had fled, and that himself and companions were high priests of other gods who were desirous of finding a new country where they could live in quiet.

"Dirik said his gods would not only drive away the evil spirits that were inflicting the tribe with pestilence, but would protect the king, make him exceedingly rich, and bless the kingdom generally.

"It was only too evident that the old time gods were useless, and Bangwe told Dirik to prove the efficiency of the new gods by curing his son. With a great amount of ceremony and mystery, Dirik took the ailing boy somewhere up into the hills where, naturally enough, he speedily recovered.

"That settled it. Bangwe killed off the priests who had been beating their tom toms vainly against the pestilence, and told Dirik to instal his gods without delay. Dirik then imposed a condition to the effect that the actual residence of the gods should remain forever unknown even to the king. Bangwe agreed, and to fasten his hold more securely, Dirik directed the whole town to migrate to a more wholesome locality at a little distance.

"Imposing ceremony attended this matter, the Arabs making it a feature of alleged religion and saying nothing about hygienic conditions. As a result the pestilence abated and the entire tribe believed in the new gods and yielded the most implicit obedience to the three high priests.

"Having once got their hold on Bangwe and his people, it was a simple matter for the Arabs gradually to impose other conditions to the continued good will of the gods. Men were necessary to the working of the diamond mine. So they informed the king that the gods needed servants whose lives must be devoted to the gods. In this way they contrived to get all the help they needed.

"Whenever Dirik calls for them a number of men are told off from the tribe and they accompany him, where, no man knows except yourself, Elmer, and they never return.

"I suspect that periodically Dirik executes his workmen in order to terrify the others into absolute subjection. At all events until this morning no one who ever went to the supposed home of the gods returned from it save the Arabs themselves."

Murdock paused, and Bradshaw asked:

"How do the Arabs market their product?"

"Two of them make a journey annually to the Transvaal. They are there now. Ah! they must have accumulated an immense fortune by this time."

"In that case, I wonder they have not retired before now to enjoy the fruits of their venture."

"Retire!" cried Murdock; "retire, Elmer, with millions left untouched in the ground? You do not realize what it means to devote one's life to the quest for fortune."

"No," thought Bradshaw, "I don't, and I hope I never shall."

"Where is the man," Murdock continued, "who ever had enough? The more you get the more you want, and I can as soon think of these Arabs giving up the mine as that I would give it up myself if I had found it."

"Then I'd better not show the way to it."

Murdock stared in momentary surprise. Then he perceived that he had blundered, and tried speedily to right himself.

"My case is different," he stammered. "I am growing old. Many years have been spent in fruitless effort to make the fortune I desire. Now all I ask is to be able to go home with a good showing for my effort, and that can be had if you will help. You will, I know you will. You promised——"

"I made no promise," Bradshaw interrupted. "I clearly left my course to be decided in the light of reason. You haven't told me all yet. What are your relations to the Marotses?"

"My relations with the tribe?" repeated Murdock, blankly; "what can that have to do with it? Not," he added hastily, "that I would reserve anything."

"I don't see anything embarrassing in my question," said Bradshaw; "I am naturally curious to know how you have managed to pick up as much information as you have, and how you have kept out of the Arabs' way. Dirik gave me to understand that it was death to a white man to enter this territory. You said as much yourself, you know, when you first met me last night."

"Oh!" and Murdock seemed to be relieved; "of course there's nothing embarrassing in that. I didn't understand you, and, in fact, I was coming to that matter.

"It was after my arrival that the Arabs, or, as the tribesmen always call them, the high priests, made it an iron law that no stranger of any race or color should be permitted to live if he set foot on Marotse territory. So in one sense I am no exception. The three priests were all absent when I came.

"One of the king's high officers had mutinied. I suppose it was a part of the trouble that grew out of the semi revolution effected by the Arabs. At all events, this fellow tried to subvert the government and dethrone Bangwe. By the merest accident I came upon the king just as the rebel was about to assassinate him.

"Of course I had no interest in the matter other than to promote my own ends, and those would better be subserved by maintaining established authority than by risking the favor of an insurrectionary party.

"It was really quite a crisis for me, for I could have aided either side, or I could have refrained from action, which, as matters stood, would have been the same thing as aiding the insurgent. So I shot the insurgent."

Bradshaw started, not at the tragedy narrated, but at Murdock's cold blooded manner of relating it. The old man observed the effect of his narrative, and was proceeding to justify his course at length, adducing, however, no better arguments than he had already indicated, when Bradshaw interposed.

"Never mind," he said sharply; "you shot him. What happened then?"

"Naturally enough, the king was grateful. The death of the insurgent settled the rebellion, and there was no more trouble of that kind. Bangwe entertained me to the extent of his limited notions of royal hospitality, and eventually made me his adviser, a kind of prime minister, you know."

"But what induced you to remain? Surely the dignity of office under such a——"

"The diamonds, Elmer, the diamonds!" cried Murdock. "Don't you understand that that had been my sole incentive to exploration ever since I set forth?"

"Had you heard of the mine then?"

"Yes, by tradition. I had come upon some very vague reports of the existence of diamond fields far north of those in the Transvaal, and I was hunting for them. I believed I was on the right track when I came to the Marotse kingdom, and I was convinced of it after I had met the Arabs.

"They were very suspicious of me at first, and but for the fear of alienating the king altogether, and thus bringing on themselves unnecessary trouble, they would have had me executed. A kind of compromise was effected by which I was allowed to remain, with restrictions upon my movements and authority, and with the understanding that any other white man who came should be put to death immediately.

"I accepted the situation, partly because I had to, for otherwise I should have been killed, and partly because I was confident that in time I could overreach the Arabs and learn where the mine was.

"At one time I taxed Dirik with my belief in the mine, and drew from him admissions that more than satisfied me that I was right. I tried to get him to take me into the scheme, but there I failed."

"But, Mr. Murdock," said Bradshaw, "how could you have hoped to profit single handed if you had discovered the location of the mine?"

"I can't answer that question in detail. When you left America could you have told precisely what you would do in Africa? Of course you couldn't. Circumstances were your guide, just as they have been mine, just as they would have been had I been able at any time to find the mine, just as they are now that I have found a way to find it."

CHAPTER VIII.

PAN'S ADVENTURE.

THE strain upon Bradshaw's nerves was not a little relieved by Murdock's frankness. After getting well started upon his narration, he had shown few symptoms of that frantic nervousness that marked the first part of the conversation, though ever and again his eyes glowed with that low cunning that suggested things he might have told had he been so inclined.

There was enough in what he did tell to occupy Bradshaw's thoughts, and he gave little concern to what might have happened that was not set forth in the narrative. What might happen now was more to the point.

"What is going to be the result?" he asked, "of this return of the diamond diggers?"

"Nothing, I hope, until Dirik's partners get back. Long before that has happened we can have gained the mine, dug a lot of diamonds, and intrenched it to resist attack."

"I see. But what makes you so confident nothing will happen meantime?"

"I have advised Bangwe to that effect."

"And you did that to enable us to gain time?"

"Certainly, Elmer."

"Doesn't it strike you that the Marotses have any right to what lies in their country?"

Murdock stared in evidently genuine amazement.

"Is it quite fair," Bradshaw persisted, "after enjoying the hospitality and confidence of a king, to desert and trick him as you suggest doing?"

"Man alive!" exclaimed Murdock, then, "I never heard such questions raised in Africa. Rights of the savages? Why, Elmer, to begin with, I took up with these people for the sake of getting at the diamonds, and it is pretty late to raise these fine distinctions which don't hold on this continent, any way. Then, as for the diamonds, the Marotses don't care for them. They have no use for them, no idea of their value. It's a thousand to one that the men who worked under

Dirik never knew what they were about."

"But you said the king profited by the gems."

"Certainly. The Arabs have kept their word. Their 'gods' frequently bring to Bangwe the sort of things he likes most, and the entire tribe benefits indirectly. As a matter of fact, the arrangement has been a good thing for the Marotses."

"Then I say that it is a pity that Pan had to kill Dirik."

"Oh!" cried Murdock, rising and shaking his fists in the air, "your sentimentalism puts me out of all patience with you. Here we are wasting time——"

"See here," interrupted Bradshaw, severely, rising also, "as the representative of your daughter I am the man whose patience is to be considered."

Murdock's anger collapsed instantly, and he became again the nervous, cringing wreck he had been at first.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Elmer," he whined. "You see, I have stuck to this project so long that I don't think of much else as——"

"That is just what is the matter with you. You ought to think of your daughter."

"I do, Elmer, I do. Have I not told you I wish to make her rich?"

"I don't care to hear that argument again. We must discuss matters connected with our return to the coast."

"The first thing, then, is to tell me where the mine lies. Did you not say it was to the west?"

"I didn't say one thing or the other."

"But you will?"

"I'll see about it when Pan returns from the Marotse town with definite information as to the plans of the tribe."

Murdock's jaw dropped as if he were stricken with horror.

"Has your man gone to the town?" he asked.

"He has, and I have little doubt that he will return in safety."

"Then, Elmer," and Murdock raised a shaking hand above his head, "you must promise me now to take me to the mine. Your man will probably not return. He will be discovered, and that will set the king's forces upon you. In such an event I shall probably not be able to save you, and in short, if you do not promise I shall inform——"

"You have already threatened to betray me, Mr. Murdock."

"You use a hard word. Perhaps you will understand how determined I am when I tell you that my purpose in coming last night to warn you was not to save your life, but judging from the smoke of your fires that white men were here, I wanted to frighten them away lest they discover the mine and despoil me of what should be my property."

"You speak of your determination," retorted Bradshaw; "do you forget mine? I have come to Africa for a purpose that I intend to fulfil. Whether we go to the coast via the mine or not remains to be seen, but to the coast we go together, and you will stay with me from this time on."

Murdock looked at the young man with an expression of mingled hatred and fear. Presumably he not only saw the hopelessness of attempting direct resistance, but perceived also that his one chance of going to the mine lay in submission, for he drew a long fluttering breath and whined:

"You do not need to be so severe with an old man, Elmer. I am willing to remain with you."

"Then," said Bradshaw, "we'll go up to the camp and wait for Pan."

It seemed likely that Murdock had been up all night, and that sleepless hours combined with unusual excitement had exhausted him; for, when he arrived at the camp, he threw himself upon the ground and slept for hours.

Pan returned about noon. With him was a young woman, a native of the Marotse tribe.

The moment he saw her and before any explanations were begun, Brad-

shaw noticed that she was of exceptionally good appearance for an African. In the eyes of a black man she would undoubtedly have been a beauty.

"I had begun to fear," was all Bradshaw said by way of greeting.

"I hope I shall never have to take such a dangerous trip again," Pan responded. "If it had not been for the excitement down there, which causes some confusion, I don't think I could have come out of it alive."

"And you've done better; brought a captive, I see."

"No, not a captive. I trust in your generosity, Mr. Bradshaw, to save her."

"From what, Pan?"

"Death. She was sentenced to die this afternoon."

"What was her offense?"

"That she was the daughter of the man whom we saw killed by the tree off yonder."

"Great Scott! we get mixed more and more with that tree affair at every turn."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Bradshaw."

The American pointed to where Murdock lay sleeping.

"He wants me to take him to that hole in the ground," said Bradshaw. "He swears it is a diamond mine."

"It may be so," returned Pan, showing no interest in the matter, "and if you care to go, it may be as well to march in that direction."

"We'll talk it over, but my belief is that we should take the course that will bring us quickly to the coast. Meantime you may be sure I will do what I can to protect the woman, but I'd like to know how you identify her as the daughter of that man who was a victim of the tree."

"By this," and Pan handed Bradshaw a trinket, made apparently of bone.

While Bradshaw was looking at it, Pan added: "When it comes to deciding on the way to the coast you mustn't overlook the fact that we are rather more than half way across the continent. It may prove easier to go on to the Indian ocean shore than return to the Atlantic. We are not many days' journey from the Zambesi river. The river we see in the plain below flows into the Zambesi, and if we wish to strike that great waterway, our most direct route would take us past the hole that now you call a mine."

"That's decidedly interesting!" exclaimed Bradshaw, "for I've been more than half convinced that we should have to take in the mine for the purpose of humoring him," with a jerk of his head toward Murdock. "He's a hard customer to handle, Pan."

"I like him no more than before," said the black, "but if you must take him, you must."

"That sums it up; but what is this trinket?"

"I took it from the body of the man who was killed by the tree. It is a family totem, and I took it because I recognized it as such, thinking it might possibly be useful to us. I don't know that it will serve us, but it has served her."

"She has one like it, I suppose."

"Yes; I saw it in her hand and noticed the similarity. It seems that the men at the mine were of this tribe——"

"I have already learned that."

"And of their return? Well, it has made a great commotion down there. They seem to think that a terrible invasion is threatened, and they are preparing their defenses."

"Aren't they going to make a move in the direction of the mine?"

"Apparently not. Their language is very hard for me, but I got the idea that there is some strange notion among them that it is forbidden for any of the tribesmen to go to the sacred place. You see, they regard the mine as sacred just as that man did whom I shot."

Thereupon Bradshaw told Murdock's story of the mine. Pan listened without comment until the end.

"I think he told the truth," he said then. "Of course the Marotses do not know anything about mines. They think the place is the home of their gods and that men who go there and never return have somehow failed to please the gods. I learned that much from the woman. As fast as I learn her language better I shall know more about these people."

"Of course you are sure she can be trusted?"

"Very sure, Mr. Bradshaw. It was not very far from the king's house that I saw her. She was in the grasp of a soldier, and he, like many others in the town, appeared to be in a panic. She was struggling to free herself, and her wrist being bared for an instant I saw the totem and recognized it.

"I saw at once that she might give information that would be useful to us, so I got close to her and showed her the totem I had taken from the dead man, making her a sign which she understood to mean that I would befriend her if possible.

"Just then the king himself and two or three warriors, evidently officers of high rank, came hurrying by. The warrior who had the woman called out to them asking, as I understood it, for instructions. One of the chiefs shouted back something which the warrior understood to be a command to let the woman go, for he immediately released her.

"She turned and fled, but hardly had she got started when the chief who had given the command chanced to look back, and seeing what had happened, he shouted again at the warrior. Plainly the chief's first order had been misunderstood, for the warrior set out after the woman to recapture her.

"I put out my foot, tripped the warrior and gave him a push that sent him sprawling. Then I ran after the woman, hurried her around the nearest house, and so by many turns through the town to the plain whence we came here by a roundabout way."

"That was an adventure and no mistake!" exclaimed Bradshaw; "but, Great Scott and Sam Hill! what risks you ran!"

"Yes," said Pan, simply, "it couldn't have been done if it hadn't been for the general confusion. I have managed to learn from the woman that the returning party brought news of the death of her father, whereupon the decree went forth that she must die, and likewise all the other members of the dead man's family. It seems she was the only near relative. The Marotses believed that the anger of the deities could be—what is the word?"

"Appeased?" suggested Bradshaw.

"Yes, appeased only by slaying all of the offending man's family."

"Well, we must take her to a place of safety, which means out of the Marotse kingdom. Get all the information you can from her, Pan."

"I shall do so, Mr. Bradshaw."

They then discussed the problem of getting to a seaport with the least difficulty. Bradshaw was averse to going near the mine on account of the possible difficulty of getting Murdock away from it; but, on the other hand, there was the problem of managing him without going there, and as Pan had become satisfied that the shortest cut to the Zambesi was by that route, it was decided to take it.

If the Marotses had been peaceful it would have been a simpler thing to go via the river flowing through their chief town; but that was altogether out of the question, and as there were other towns to the north, all of which would have to be avoided, there was nothing for it but a long detour, which meant much the same route that had been pursued previously. This had one distinct advantage: the way had been broken, and progress, therefore, could be comparatively speedy.

Murdock opened his eyes just as the discussion was concluding.

"Are you going to the mine, Elmer?" he asked.

"Yes," said Bradshaw; "we shall start at once."

A gleam of intense satisfaction lit up Murdock's eyes and he sprang to his feet almost with the alacrity of a young man.

"I will do anything to help," he cried. "Let me be a carrier, so that we may gain time."

The blacks were even then finishing their preparations for the march. As Murdock looked around to see what he might set his hand to, he saw the woman whom Pan had brought from the town.

Instantly his face clouded with a most ferocious expression and he turned to Bradshaw, saying:

"How the devil did she get here?"

"Pan brought her," Bradshaw answered, with marked deliberation. "They were going to execute her down there."

"Why didn't he let them do it, then?"

Murdock's tone was well in keeping with the expression of his face. It aroused the attention of the woman, who had been sitting mournfully quiet, a little apart, ever since her arrival.

She looked up, saw Murdock for the first time, and immediately gave plain signs of extreme alarm.

Pan, who had gone to give some order to the carriers, was also attracted by Murdock's voice, and he came back hastily.

"That question doesn't deserve an answer," Bradshaw was saying.

"She must go back to the town," cried Murdock, "or no; that might be dangerous, for she would betray us. Better that she be put out of the way here."

Bradshaw was so profoundly shocked at this brutal suggestion that he hardly had the voice to say, "She goes with us."

Murdock stamped his foot and shook his fist.

"She shall not go," he cried. "You choose between us, Elmer."

"Mr. Bradshaw," said Pan, "excuse me, but I know you must take your friend with you. You need not take the woman if she is in your way. She shall not go back to the Marotses. I will take her with me."

"And leave me, Pan?" asked Bradshaw.

"Yes, Mr. Bradshaw, leave you and your friend."

"Well, by Sam Hill, I guess not! Mr. Murdock the matter admits of no argument. The woman goes, and you go, too. If you choose to go as a prisoner, that is your own affair, but as a prisoner, you won't see the diamond mine, nor be released until we are on the ocean."

Murdock panted inarticulately, staring from Bradshaw to the woman and Pan. Evidently he was struggling between his mad desire to see the mine and some equally mad hostility against the unfortunate woman.

Bradshaw had found his voice, and he could not restrain it at once.

"If you were anybody but Irene's father," he said, "you would be left to your fate. Perhaps you would like to go back to the Marotses now? You have been absent long enough to justify King Bangwe in giving you a peculiarly warm welcome."

"I cannot go back now," whispered Murdock, his eyes still wandering; "the king would regard me as a deserter. And the mine! After all these years! I must see it, Elmer. You must forgive an old man's quick temper. Don't think ill of me, Elmer."

His voice had reverted to his characteristic whine.

"Oh! don't appeal to me like a sick child," exclaimed Bradshaw; "be a man and behave yourself," and he turned in disgust to give directions to the carriers.

Immediately he heard Murdock speaking in a low tone to the woman, and he swung about again. The woman was shrinking away from Murdock and looking terribly frightened, while

Pan stood beside her, his usually placid brow wringled by a frown.

"I do not know all he says, Mr. Bradshaw," said Pan, directly, "but he is threatening her."

"Murdock!" cried Bradshaw, sternly, "that woman is under my protection. Treat her accordingly or it will be the worse for you."

Murdock's bronzed cheeks paled. He mumbled something unintelligible and turned away.

Bradshaw looked at him steadily for several seconds, and satisfied that self interest would prevent him from leaving the party, went about his work with a heart on fire with conflicting emotions.

He had been obliged to threaten Irene's father. He was obliged to harbor this man whose character had become distorted to the vilest degree of savagery. He was distraught by the immeasurable grief it would be to Irene to learn the facts about her father's downfall.

And yet, he saw no other possible course than to adhere to his resolution and take Murdock home to America.

CHAPTER IX.

MURDOCK AND MTEMA.

THE party was soon on the march. With one forerunner as an advance guard, Bradshaw and Pan were in the lead. The woman walked beside Pan, and immediately after them came Murdock, silent and sullen.

No event of importance attended the first stage of their journey. For an hour or two Bradshaw kept a man far in the rear to apprise him of any possible pursuit by the Marotses; but it seemed that whatever the tribesmen might be planning to do, their suspicions had not been aroused concerning a party of invaders so near their town.

Eventually, therefore, the expedition proceeded as usual, and as time passed, Bradshaw's buoyancy once more asserted itself. He was far from being assured when he thought of Murdock, but he gave as little thought as possible to that uncomfortable subject.

It was such a relief to be on the way home again that he could not do otherwise than hope that with a return to the associations of civilization, Murdock would be restored to some endurable semblance of his former self.

Bradshaw counted heavily on the influence Irene would have over her father. It seemed impossible that in his daughter's presence Murdock would continue to manifest the savage traits that he had acquired by long residence among the Africans.

In order to stimulate the reawakening of better feelings, Bradshaw had a pack of clothing opened the first time the party paused for rest.

"Mr. Murdock," he said gently, "I should think it was about time you had a new suit. I'll be your shopkeeper. How'll this do for a 'hand me down?'" and he held forth a suit of light cloth with a gesture to suggest the typical second hand clothing dealer.

There was no change in Murdock's expression to show that he appreciated or even understood the pleasantry.

"I'll do anything you say, Elmer," he answered submissively, as he took the garments.

He put them on and seemed to shrink from the glances of his companions.

"They feel a bit strange," he said sullenly.

"I shall be surprised if they do not make you feel more like returning home," Bradshaw responded.

Murdock made no further remark, and the matter was not mentioned again.

They camped that night at the edge of the great forest through which they had traveled so blindly to the kingdom of the Marotses, and next day plunged into it along their beaten track. It was nothing like so tedious as before, the main reason being, perhaps, that now there was a definite end in view.

The same order of march was maintained, Pan ever keeping at the side of the Marotse woman, with whom he kept up an incessant conversation, partly in spoken words and partly by signs. He told Bradshaw that he was learning her language.

"What is your friend's name, Pan," inquired Bradshaw, "if you've got that far?"

"Mtema," Pan replied.

Bradshaw puckered his lips in a vain attempt to pronounce the first two letters satisfactorily together.

"I give it up," he said, with the first approach to a laugh he had known for days; "tell her not to be offended if I make it plain 'Tema."

"She is very grateful to you, Mr. Bradshaw," said Pan.

Struck by a new thought, Bradshaw took the first opportunity to speak to Pan out of Murdock's hearing.

"Has she given you any reason," he asked, "for Murdock's savage hostility to her?"

"No. We do not mention him, for he is constantly listening to us, and of course he understands all she says."

"Try to dodge him, then, and ask her."

"When I can understand her well enough," Pan replied.

Murdock, indeed, seemed to keep Mtema under constant surveillance. He had not spoken to her after Bradshaw's threat to make him a prisoner, but he remained persistently near her except when a halt was made for meals.

At such times Pan was occupied with various duties, and Mtema sat by herself. Murdock then hung around the campfire, seeming to take great interest in the cooking, and offering from time to time to help.

This puzzled Bradshaw and aroused the gravest apprehensions. He had one expérience with cooking on the Murdock plan, and he wanted no other.

It was natural enough that a white man should feel the need of something to do, but why he should not be content to throw himself down and rest after a toilsome march and let the blacks attend to the menial work, was not clear.

It was a horrible thought that this man's long familiarity with the African wilderness might have enabled him to pluck poison from the rank vegetation along the way and mix it unseen with the food that was being prepared.

"Mr. Murdock," Bradshaw said at the end of the second day, "I'd much rather you let the men look after the cooking. They're used to it, and I find it doesn't do to get them in the way of thinking that they can have assistance for every little thing."

"Very well, Elmer," Murdock responded in a tone that was repellently subservient, "it shall be as you say."

He sat down, with a long sigh, and presently asked:

"How much farther is it to the mine, Elmer?"

Bradshaw could have told him, but prudence vaguely warned him not to do so.

"It's a long journey," he replied; "I'll tell you when we get there."

"By watching the movements of Dirik and his partners," Murdock went on, "I had become satisfied that it was about a week's journey, but they may have taken a roundabout way for the purpose of concealing the place more effectually. I had also come to the conclusion that the mine lay to the south of the town, and we are going northward."

"We are on the way to it," was all Bradshaw would say.

With each day after this Murdock had some similar question to ask, and once he tried to draw Bradshaw into a discussion of plans for working the mine. Bradshaw, however, fought shy of the subject, dismissing it so curtly that Murdock did not refer to it again.

He was more and more restless as time passed, showing in many ways an excitement that he had great difficulty in repressing.

"You mustn't get your hopes too high," Bradshaw suggested; "the mine isn't likely to be such a valuable matter as you think."

"Only take me there!" was Murdock's reply. "I can see that we must be approaching it by the marks along the route of your previous journey."

On the fifth day they made a much longer stretch than usual. Bradshaw forced the pace with the idea of camping that night within easy reach of the mine by the succeeding noon.

It was his firm intention to keep his word to Murdock by showing him the mine and then insisting that the journey be resumed at once, and he believed it would be easier to execute this plan if the stages were so arranged that there should be no halt for a night within the vicinity of the mine.

The result was the utter exhaustion of apparently every member of the expedition when night fell. Bradshaw himself was the first to yield to sleep, and his slumber was deep.

Not so with Pan. Ever watchful and indefatigable, his eyes were wide open long after all others had been breathing heavily. He even got up and moved cautiously about the camp, inspecting the pickets, and taking a long look in the darkness at Murdock's motionless form.

The old man seemed, like the rest, to be wrapped in unconsciousness, and at length Pan returned to his shake down and tried to sleep.

Probably it was the first time in his life that he found it impossible. Leg weary though he was, he could not still his apprehensive thoughts.

A long time passed fretfully. The small noises of the forest were infernally loud to his unusually sensitive ears, but no other sounds broke their monotony.

At length he sat up suddenly, but with the greatest care not to make the least noise.

No movement was distinguishable unless it might be the rustling of the warm night breeze in the foliage. The heavy breathing of the men was plain enough, and now and again one of them turned restlessly.

Pan started to lie down again, and checked himself. He put his hand to his brow and felt drops of perspiration there.

It was all but totally dark, and, though Bradshaw lay very near him, he could barely make out the outlines of his employer's recumbent form.

All was as it should be there, and Pan turned his eyes in the direction of Mtema's sleeping place.

He could distinguish nothing. Embers of the camp fire still glowed, but they cast no light upon her.

Noiselessly he got on hands and knees and crept toward her.

Half way he paused, conscious of a sound that did not accord with the ordinary noises of night.

What it was he could not make out. It seemed to cease as soon as he stopped to listen.

Pan crept on again. He was close to Mtema now, when something, a ripe nut, probably, fell from a tree among the glowing embers of the fire, causing a tiny flame to flash momentarily.

By its light he saw Murdock, on hands and knees also, bending over the sleeping woman. The old man's hand was raised and a long blade gleamed beneath it.

With one leap Pan was upon him. He wrenched the knife away just as the blade was descending and, catching Murdock by the throat, pushed him over against a tree trunk, holding him there as with a grip of steel.

Mtema sat up with a low cry of terror.

"Be still!" whispered Pan to her in the Marotse tongue; "you are safe. The master must not be disturbed."

The woman shrank away a little, but made no other sound. Pan looked at Murdock, the fire giving just light enough to distinguish his features at such short range.

Murdock had grasped Pan's wrist, trying to break the black's fearful clutch, and his jaws were parted in the vain effort to breathe.

"What's up?" came drowsily from Bradshaw.

"Nothing of consequence," answered Pan, in a steady voice; "I stumbled upon a root."

"We'll put arc lights around the camp hereafter," said Bradshaw, with a yawn; "better go to sleep."

"Yes, Mr. Bradshaw."

Bradshaw turned over and in half a minute was sound asleep again.

Pan never moved his eyes from Murdock's and the tragic tableau endured until the old man was purple and his limbs began to quiver convulsively.

Then the black, pointing the knife at Murdock's heart, whispered "Silence!" and relaxed his grip.

The air rushed into Murdock's lungs with a gasp and a rattle that seemed likely to arouse the whole expedition, but nobody stirred.

"I think I will call Mr. Bradshaw," whispered Pan, "and kill you before his eyes."

"Oh! spare me, Pan," whispered the old man; "I did not know what I was doing. I walked in my sleep."

"That is a lie," said Pan, calmly, "but you are his friend, and I must spare you."

"Yes!" whispered Murdock, eagerly catching at the one favorable point, "Bradshaw would never forgive you if you harmed me. I will make you rich, Pan——"

"Stop!" interrupted Pan, in a low but intensely angry tone; "keep that kind of talk for villains like yourself."

He reached out for Murdock's throat again, and held up the knife as if he were unable to resist the impulse to slay the old man on the spot.

Murdock was horribly alarmed.

"Don't!" he whined piteously; "don't, Pan! I won't hurt the woman. I'll let her alone, you may be sure of it."

"Get back to your place," said the black, rising.

The old man slowly stood up. He was shaking so violently that he could hardly keep his feet.

"You won't tell Bradshaw, Pan?" he asked. "Think how it would disturb him. You are very fond of Bradshaw, Pan, and you wouldn't do anything to give him heedless trouble. I will——"

"I am thinking of all that," Pan interrupted. "Get to your place."

Murdock stumbled across the camp to his shake down and collapsed rather than lay down there.

Pan spoke briefly to Mtema and then stationed himself midway between the two, where he remained, broad awake, till morning.

CHAPTER X.

DIRIK'S DIAMONDS.

BRADSHAW explained his plan for the day's movements as soon as he waked. Pan listened with occasional nods of approval, and at length said:

"I can think of nothing else, Mr. Bradshaw, but I have a favor to ask."

"You may be sure it is granted, old fellow."

"I wish, then, you would walk with your friend. I like him no more than at first, and it is unpleasant to have him always so near to me and Mtema."

"I don't suppose 'Tema is so very fond of him, either, is she?"

Pan averted his eyes.

"Let us march behind the carriers," he said.

"Certainly," answered Bradshaw; "you'll come up fast enough if there's any need of your help. I don't know what will happen to Murdock when once he sees the mine he's hunted for so long, but I presume I can manage him alone quite as well as with a hundred assistants."

Murdock approached them, hesitatingly. He glanced askance at Pan as

if to discover whether the black had reported the episode of the night, and his voice was more than ordinarily tremulous as he asked:

"Shall we reach the mine today, Elmer?"

"I expect so," Bradshaw responded, "but we cannot halt there long. We must make for the Zambesi."

"Not halt there!" cried Murdock, excitedly; "why, what are we going there for?"

"To let you see it, I suppose, and because it is on our way."

"But, Elmer, think of the diamonds!"

"Would you linger there to be overwhelmed by the Arabs and the Marotses?" demanded Bradshaw.

"They won't come, Elmer. I'm sure of it. The Marotses would be afraid to approach the place unless they were so ordered by Dirik's partners, their high priests, and the priests have gone to the Transvaal. Ask the woman. She will tell you that I speak the truth."

"I am not doubting you, but——"

"And before the priests could arrive," Murdock went on passionately, "we could fortify the place so as to resist any attack they could possibly make. You see, the Marotses do not use firearms; the Arabs have prevented that."

"I won't discuss it," said Bradshaw, sharply.

Nevertheless he had to discuss it in one way and another during the ensuing march, for Murdock was so frantic with excitement that he talked persistently and would not be quieted. It looked to Bradshaw as if the only way in which he could accomplish the purpose of his journey to Africa would be to make Murdock a prisoner and so compel his presence with the expedition.

Against that plan was the terrible possibility that any such measure might undermine the last vestige of sanity the man possessed. He was even now little short of a monomaniac on the subject of the diamond mine, and not a harmless one at that, as Bradshaw had occasion to know. He might readily be thrown into total mental wreck by any violent opposition to his desires.

So it was with a very heavy heart that Bradshaw at last saw stretching before him the long, bare slope that led to the place of the execution tree.

"Is it up there?" asked Murdock, eagerly following Bradshaw's gaze.

Turning to Pan, Bradshaw said, "I will go on ahead with one man to see that the way is clear."

"Let me go! let me go, Elmer!" cried Murdock, well nigh beside himself.

"Yes," said Bradshaw, patiently, "you can go, too. It will give you so much more time, if the mine proves to be deserted, to pick up loose diamonds."

The sarcasm was lost on Murdock.

"There won't be anybody there," he responded, "you may be sure of that; and if there were we could drive them away easily enough. Come on! We waste so much time."

Rather than yield to his mad impatience Bradshaw took more time than was necessary in making arrangements for the scouting trip. He disposed of the expedition within the shelter of the forest and had a picket placed at the very edge whence a view could be had up the slope to a point not far from the mine. Then he arranged a little code of signals in accordance with which the men were to follow or remain in concealment, as circumstances might demand.

Murdock fumed and fretted during all this, and Bradshaw paid not the slightest attention to him until, worn out with waiting, the old man set off alone.

"Come back, Murdock!" commanded Bradshaw, then, with all sternness; "you shall not go one step unless you agree to obey orders, and the first

disobedience will mean binding you hand and foot for the rest of the journey."

Thoroughly scared, the old man returned and promised abjectly to obey.

At last they set out, and Murdock made the pace. There was no restraining him further than to require caution when they came near the sparse forest at the top of the slope. Having little doubt that the place was deserted, Bradshaw went straight toward the mine.

He insisted on a slower pace and greater care as they went in among the trees, and with considerable caution the three drew up to the edge of the excavation and looked down.

Nobody was there, and it seemed as if nobody had been there since the routing of the blacks two weeks previously. The sand heaps were undisturbed, the crude tools were lying about, and in the very center of the pit were two skeletons, one lying across the other, both picked clean by vultures.

The scanty clothing that had been worn by the victims of Pan's bullets, was little disturbed, and the bright scarf of the high priest, with its bulging lumps, was more than conspicuous.

"Dirik's scarf! his badge of office! See!" cried Murdock wildly, and he began at once to descend the steep path.

Bradshaw let him go. No harm evidently could come to him, and it was undoubtedly better to let him work off his accumulated excitement as rapidly as possible.

So Murdock was left in the mine while Bradshaw and his one companion went back to give the signal for the advance of the rest of the party.

Bradshaw did not hurry. He was harassed with doubts as to what course should be pursued. This was the most critical stage in his mission, and he wished it were well over.

He waited until he saw his men defile from the forest below and begin the ascent of the slope. Then he returned to the mine.

Murdock was on his hands and knees before the sand heap behind the screen, pawing over the dirt, examining every pebble he found and tossing aside those that seemed to him unpromising. He was muttering unintelligibly, meanwhile, and when he heard Bradshaw coming down he looked up for an instant.

Bradshaw paused in his descent to look curiously at the execution tree. It was beginning to wither. He shuddered as he recalled how narrowly he had escaped death from it.

When he came to the bottom he sat upon a loose rock and watched Murdock thoughtfully. What should be done with him? He had left the sand heap and run to the bank at the end of the excavation. There he seized a pick and began vigorously to ply it. As fast as he loosened a handful of dirt, he stooped and pawed it over.

"Diamonds are not so plentiful as you thought they would be, are they?" asked Bradshaw.

"It's diamond dirt, sure enough," replied Murdock, without looking up. "Oh! what a fortune lies right in our hands! Wealth, Elmer, wealth untold, if I could only find one little pebble to indicate where to hunt for more."

"Would you know a diamond if you saw it?"

At this Murdock raised his head in astonishment.

"I didn't put in a year at Kimberley for nothing," he said.

Then he went frantically at his work again, running from spot to spot, picking here and there, and thrusting his fingers into the soil.

"You've got good spades in your outfit," he panted; "with them we shall make famous progress. Will the carriers be up soon, Elmer?"

Bradshaw made no response. Sick at heart, he rose and started toward the mouth of the excavation to see what lay beyond. Murdock called after him:

" Find another pick, or something in the way of a shovel, Elmer. We may make a haul before night that will be worth the interest on your entire fortune for a year."

Once out of the excavation, which curved sharply where it entered the hillside, Bradshaw found himself at the head of a lane that led straight down to a river not very far away.

His heart leaped at the sight. On their first visit to this place, Pan had asserted that there must be a river on this side of the ridge, and here it was close at hand.

Doubtless it was a confluent of the Zambesi, and from here on the journey would be comparatively easy.

As the lane was well trodden, showing that it was a passage from the mine to the river, it occurred to him that possibly the waterway would involve the necessity of passing through the chief town of the Marotses; for Dirik's routed workmen had returned to the town in canoes, thus proving that the river was their thoroughfare.

To learn what he could on this point he went on to the margin of the river, passing on the way a number of huts where undoubtedly the black miners had lodged. There was no sign of life in or about them now.

At the river's edge were plain indications of a landing place for canoes, but there were no signs of boats or other craft. Bradshaw had dimly hoped that a raft might be there that had been left behind by the Marotses. The lack of one was a small matter except for the time that must be consumed in felling trees and constructing such a craft.

As he stood there he picked up a stick and threw it far out upon the water. It floated rapidly away in a northeasterly direction. That was satisfactory, for it meant that this river flowed from and not to the Marotse town.

Then Bradshaw felt a slight tinge of uneasiness. It had taken his expedition six days to march from the neighborhood of the mine to the outskirts of the town; and the morning after his arrival there the routed blacks had come in canoes. They had worked their way against the current, a strong one, as the floating stick showed, and it had taken them six days, for there could be no doubt that they started immediately after the death of Dirik.

How long would it take a party of warriors to come from the town to the mine, considering that the current would be in their favor?

It was an anxious question, for whatever the answer, it seemed that his party was liable to attack at any moment. The Marotses might have started already in spite of their superstitious aversion to intruding upon the home of their gods.

There could be no doubt whatever that in time the Marotses would come; for when Dirik's partners returned from the Transvaal they would incite the entire tribe to war rather than lose their property.

So it was with a heart heavier than before that Bradshaw retraced his steps to the mine. On the way he heard Murdock laughing and crying aloud incoherently. The sounds were horribly thrilling, suggesting as they did the complete wreck of the old man's mind.

Bradshaw hurried, and when he rounded the curve in the excavation, he saw Murdock kneeling beside the skeletons.

He had Dirik's bright scarf in his hands, and he was ripping it apart at every spot where there had seemed to be a knot in the fabric.

" Ha! ha!" he shouted as he observed Bradshaw approaching, " see here! Diamonds, Elmer, diamonds!"

He held up a pebble that he took from a fold of the scarf and then thrust it into his pocket.

" It was Dirik's hiding place," he raved on, ripping the fabric as he talked and cramming the pebbles into his pockets; " he well knew that it was a safe place, for his person was sacred

to the Marotses, and not one of them would have dared touch a diamond once it was placed in the scarf, not even if the blacks knew how valuable the stones were. But I dare!"

Bradshaw halted at a little distance, repelled by the spectacle. Murdock tore away at the scarf much as a wild beast tears at a meat covered bone, and when next he extracted a pebble he held it toward Bradshaw.

"I said I would share with you, Elmer," he cried, "and I will keep my word. Here, come and get it."

Then, as Bradshaw did not move, Murdock arose and ran toward him. He clung to the scarf as he ran, and the fabric being wound about the skeleton, dragged it along the ground after him.

"Stop that!" cried Bradshaw.

Murdock halted, looked around, and kicked the bones to free the scarf.

"I tell you to stop, you miserable fiend!" exclaimed Bradshaw catching Murdock by the arm and shaking him violently. "Have you no shred of humanity left in your savage body?"

Murdock stared and chattered with the shaking.

"What should we care for a nigger's bones, Elmer? Think of the diamonds! Here, take this one, and we will share the rest turn in turn."

"I don't want it," said Bradshaw, turning away.

"Don't want it?" screamed Murdock. "What are you thinking of? Perhaps you think I'm not sharing even, eh? Well, then, if you're such a fool as to refuse these diamonds I'll keep 'em myself. I won't make you another offer," and mumbling more and more incoherently, he squatted on the ground and resumed his task of ripping the scarf to pieces.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEPTHS OF INFAMY.

SHORTLY after this, Pan and Mtema appeared at the top of the excavation. Bradshaw directed that the carriers be taken around the hillside to the huts formerly occupied by the Marotses.

"We shan't have to waste time setting up a camp," he said, "but can get to work at other things without delay."

"You're not going to work the mine, I hope," Pan responded.

Bradshaw shook his head.

"I'll join you below," he said, "and tell you there what I think should be done."

Accordingly he left the excavation and waited for his men at the huts.

As soon as the carriers had come and had disposed of their burdens, he gave orders for the decent burial of the skeletons, and as Murdock had done plucking them by that time, this was accomplished without arousing any outcry from him.

With seemingly exhaustless energy he applied himself again to prodding the walls of the pit. He appeared to have forgotten Bradshaw's repugnance to the very subject of diamonds, for once when the latter was near, the old man remarked, without looking up:

"By tomorrow, Elmer, we can get at this systematically. I'll examine the ground meantime, so that we can know just where to set the niggers to digging."

Bradshaw ignored him, and as they went down to the river bank he said to Pan:

"I'm convinced at last that he is insane."

"It may be," Pan answered with gravity that was unusual even for him; "it may be; of course it is so if you say so, but I do not think it."

"How can it be otherwise?" Bradshaw asked fretfully; "you have seen how he has acted ever since the march began, and you see what he is doing there."

"Yes, Mr. Bradshaw, I have seen, and I know."

"Know what? You speak as if you knew something that I haven't yet discovered."

Pan tried to evade an answer.

"You have decided to have a raft built, I suppose," he said.

"Yes," Bradshaw responded, looking curiously at his companion. "Set the men to work, for no time should be lost, and then tell me what's on your mind."

Pan summoned the carriers at once as if fearful that Bradshaw would change his intentions. He busied himself in superintending operations more than was necessary, and at length Bradshaw told him to desist.

"You are holding something back from me, Pan, old fellow," he said, "and I won't have it. Let the men work by themselves. They know well enough what to do. Tell me, Pan."

"Ah! Mr. Bradshaw," exclaimed Pan, as if the words choked him, "I have lost the opportunity to do you the greatest possible service. I should have killed that man last night when to do so would have been justifiable in your eyes. Then you would not have been obliged to take him home."

"Killed him last night?" repeated Bradshaw, slowly and in great amazement; "what do you mean?"

Then Pan told him about Murdock's attempt to murder Mtema.

"Madman!" exclaimed Bradshaw.

"I think not," Pan continued; "he may be mad on the subject of diamonds but there is reason enough in his other actions. I have wondered and wondered whether I ought to tell you. It will put a new load of sorrow on your heart."

"You must tell me, Pan," said Bradshaw, calmly, "now that you have gone so far. I am sure nothing can make the man seem worse to me than he now does."

"But it makes your problem harder."

"Great Scott! can it be harder than it is now?"

"You shall say. The man is no longer of your race. He has become a savage."

"That has been painfully evident for some time."

"You do not take in my full meaning, Mr. Bradshaw. Murdock has joined the tribe. He is a Marotse."

Bradshaw frowned dubiously.

"That is not exactly surprising," he said; "Murdock himself told me how King Bangwe made him a sort of prime minister. That meant a pretty close alliance with the tribe."

"Yes, but did he tell you that it included a formal initiation to membership in the tribe? Mtema has told me about it. There was a great ceremony, lasting quite a day, in the course of which Murdock renounced his native country and his religion, and adopted the pagan religion of the Marotses."

"You see, nothing surprises or shocks me now," said Bradshaw, with a sad smile. "I did not know that Murdock had gone so far as that, but it is all in keeping with his desperate purpose to find this mine.

"It is a consistent feature of his mania. Having set his mind to the accomplishment of this purpose, he halted at nothing that might promote his ends. He justifies his recent desertion of the tribe and his deception of the king by the fact that it was his original, deliberate intention to do so if the opportunity arose. Mind you, Pan, I'm not justifying him in the slightest degree. I am merely pointing out that his apparent adoption of Marotse citizenship and the Marotse religion, were only apparent.

"It was a false course, but it was deliberately chosen for the end that he thinks he has at last accomplished. That end, of course, involves his return to civilization as a rich man, and the critical question will be to convince him that he is now rich enough with the diamonds he found today to return with us and without further delay."

Pan's grave face was drawn with anguish as he listened patiently to his employer's argument. Noting the expression, Bradshaw added:

"Doubtless you wonder that I am willing to take back with me a man who has become so degraded as to attempt murder. I am not exactly willing to do so, but I feel that I have no choice. If he is insane, as I still think, or if there is any chance for his redemption, it will be better for him to place him in the care of his family, to say nothing of the tender interest the one near member of Murdock's family will have in his welfare."

"Mr. Bradshaw," cried Pan, in a low voice tense with pain, while his grave eyes were lustrous with sympathy, "it may be a question as to which family has the right to care for Murdock, or be cared for by him."

"Which family?" Bradshaw repeated blankly, the dark truth beginning to throw its shadow over him.

"He took a Marotse wife eight or nine years ago. It was an essential feature of his initiation into the tribe, and he did not gain the entire confidence of the king until his child was born."

Bradshaw could utter only a low moan of distress.

The horrid stain at last laid bare, Pan spoke with more freedom and directness than he had at first.

"You can see now," he said, "strong enough reason for every crime this man has committed and attempted. Doubtless he does wish to return to civilization, but you may be sure he does not wish to take a black wife with him. He has the pride of white birth left in him. Could he face his friends and the members of his American family if they knew that he had adopted savagery with all that that implies?

"You know well that he could not, and no one knows it better than Murdock himself. That fact explains everything. Shall I go on, Mr. Bradshaw?

"Yes," groaned Bradshaw, "go on, Pan, and set all in the clearest possible light."

"Then understand first that we have been mistaken about the Marotses. They are not a warlike tribe. To be sure they have their soldiers, and they have had their little wars, and like all Africans of the far interior they are given to bloody practices; but as tribes go, the Marotses are reasonably peaceable. Their reputation for extreme savagery and power is due to the crafty management of the diamond hunting Arabs who have spread reports about them in order to frighten others away."

"Can 'Tema tell you all this?"

"No, but she gives me certain facts which I put with other facts and then draw conclusions. I am not likely to be mistaken."

"No. I have no doubt that you are right. Go on."

"This reputation of the tribe suited Murdock's designs. He was not only fearful of the coming of white men on account of the diamond mine, of which they might take possession, but he dreaded lest some passing traveler should linger long enough to learn his history and take reports of it back to America. So, when he saw our campfires he came out to frighten you away, not dreaming, of course, that he would be recognized at once.

"When he found that you knew him he had to face a dangerous crisis and act quickly. If he consented to return with you he would have to abandon hope of finding the mine, and that he could not do. If he persuaded you to help him search for the mine, it was a thousand chances to one that some day you would discover his exact relations to the Marotse tribe.

"There was only one way to solve his problem, and that he tried to do by bringing you poisoned food.

"Why he repented of this attempt is already clear to you, for with the return of Dirik's men he perceived that through you lay his best chance of finding the mine. You knew where it was. So then he treacherously advised the king to look out for an invasion by

way of the river, and stole off to our camp in the belief that he could induce you to go direct to the mine.

"You may say that there was even then some chance that you might discover his shameful course, but, in the first place, he was willing to take great risk for the sake of finding the mine, and in the second place, if you should discover it, there was always the remedy of murder. He would not have tried poison again, but a stab with a knife, a blow with a pick, these might have been tried, and they may yet be tried, Mr. Bradshaw."

"I shall be on my guard, Pan," said Bradshaw, gloomily, as the black man paused impressively. "I suppose his hostility to 'Tema was due to his fear that she would expose the truth just as she has done."

"Yes. Mtema lived near him. There is a shameful story about a great wrong that Murdock did to her father, but it is not necessary that you should know it. His hostility to her will perhaps be clearer when you know that it was through his influence that her father was sent with Dirik to the mine."

"Isn't it possible," asked Bradshaw, turning for relief to a matter that had no direct bearing upon his problem, "that Murdock had 'Tema's father sent to the mine in the hope of discovering through him where the mine was located?"

"I can only guess at that," Pan answered, "but my guess is no; for I believe Dirik, always suspicious, would find cause to execute speedily any man who had been sent up by Murdock's influence."

Bradshaw bowed his head, convinced.

"And now," said Pan, "I suppose the hard question is, what is to be done?"

"I am more than ever sure that he is mad!" cried Bradshaw; "he is hopelessly, incurably insane! I will not think otherwise of my Irene's father."

"It is well to think so, but——"

"I will not think otherwise, Pan!"

"Then I will say nothing."

"No! no! do not take that attitude. I have need of every thought you can possibly have on the matter."

"I was only going to say that mad or not he is dangerous. He stole the knife with which he attempted Mtema's life from the camp kitchen, undoubtedly with the intention of so disposing of the weapon that suspicion would fall upon one of the carriers. Here he has other weapons at hand, picks and so on, and it might be well to make a prisoner of him at once."

"I think not," said Bradshaw, slowly. "To make him a prisoner would mean either that he must be taken with us, or released when we depart. I cannot at this moment make up my mind to a final course. It seems impossible to take such a moral wreck home with me, and yet, that is what I came to Africa to do. I must have opportunity to think, Pan, and by the time the raft is ready I will be decided. Meantime, with caution, we can prevent any tragedy."

"We cannot be too careful," said Pan, regretfully, "not to let him suspect that Mtema has exposed him. There would be no end of murderous attempts if he knew."

"For the present, then, we will go on as before, but with great watchfulness. I had planned to appeal to Murdock to be satisfied with the plunder he has obtained, but I shall give that up. Perhaps," Bradshaw added bitterly, as he rose to give his attention to raft building, "perhaps I should urge him to return to his Marotse wife."

"Where he would certainly be killed," said Pan.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE MAROTSES ARE COMING!"

BRADSHAW did not go up to the mine until it was time for the evening meal.

Then he went alone to summon Murdock. He found him seated on a sand heap.

The old man had taken off his coat and spread it over his knees. On it were scattered a score or more of pebbles which he was counting and fondling.

"Dirik's scarf was a good find," he said quietly, as Bradshaw approached, "but it is only an indication of what there is stored up here for us. See this," and he held up a small stone; "I found that myself. It should make a brilliant worth hundreds of dollars in Maiden Lane, and yet I could toss it away without a thought in view of the treasure that is to be uncovered."

Bradshaw was astonished. There seemed to be no trace of madness in the old man's demeanor. His tone was cool and calculating, and his estimate of the stones on his lap was no more than might have been expected from any miner.

Evidently the frantic excitement that had marked his advent to the mine, had been worked off by the tremendous energy with which he had applied himself to digging. It came upon Bradshaw with sickening force that Pan might be right in regarding Murdock as a degenerate for whom no palliation in the way of madness could be found.

"We ought to have better mechanical devices than can be had short of a long journey," Murdock continued, "but they will come in time. Dirik could have had them. He brought up this screen, apparently, but I suppose he feared to bring much in the way of implements lest some of the prospectors at the south should follow and learn the location of his bonanza."

"It is supper time," said Bradshaw.

"Well, I'm ready for it. I haven't done so much hard work in many a long day."

The old man carefully stowed the stones in the pockets of his coat and put it on.

"We'll have a long talk this evening," he said, "about putting the place in defensive condition. Some of the men can be occupied with that while others can be put to work directly at digging in the mine."

Was not this evidence of insanity, thought Bradshaw? The tone was reasonable and so, from one point of view, were the thoughts; but how could a sane man forget so quickly that but a few hours previously Bradshaw had manifested unshakable aversion to the whole diamond scheme?

Murdock certainly had forgotten it, though he made no further offer to share his find with Bradshaw, for he talked as if it were a settled thing that the expedition was to remain there and work the mine.

"The men are busy building a raft," said Bradshaw.

"There's no hurry about that," returned Murdock, calmly. "Of course we must have a raft, but that can be made later. The first thing is to prepare defenses. Don't you think so?"

"We'll see," Bradshaw replied.

Murdock continued to argue on the way to the huts, and after supper he sought to resume the discussion, but Bradshaw begged off on the plea of fatigue.

"Busy yourself as much as you want to in the mine tomorrow, and I will look after outside matters," he said evasively.

"All right," answered Murdock, cheerfully, "but you'd better follow my advice. We're going to be rich; multi-millionaires, my boy!" and he slapped Bradshaw familiarly on the back.

Bradshaw recoiled from his touch and had much to do to control himself. In the gathering gloom he could see Pan's eyes glaring hatefully at Murdock. How would this dreadful matter end?

Through the night Bradshaw and Pan kept watch by turns, both fearful that Murdock might be plotting new mischief, or that his delirium, as the American chose to regard it, might re-

cur; but the old man slept till sunrise as quietly as a healthy child.

On awaking he went straight to the mine, asking that his breakfast be sent up to him, a request with which Bradshaw was only too glad to comply.

So they saw little of him during the day. He came down to dinner, looked at the unfinished raft, and shook his head gravely.

"Better be preparing defenses," he said, "though I admit that there's little reason to hurry them. No Marotse will dare come this way without the leadership of one of the Arabs."

In fact Bradshaw by no means neglected defenses, though he was at no pains to throw up intrenchments. He and Pan explored the hilltop and found a spot whence a glimpse of the river could be obtained by climbing a tree. The little section of the stream then visible was in the direction of the Marotse town.

They stationed a carrier in the tree with instructions to keep his eyes glued upon the distant river and report instantly the passing of canoes or any other sign of approaching tribesmen.

After the rest of the party had dined one of the men was sent to relieve the man in the tree. In less than half an hour he returned, trembling with terror. He had found the right tree, as he made sure by climbing it and seeing the river, but there was no sign of the man who had been stationed there.

Pan went back with him, Bradshaw remaining to hasten the work on the raft. The tree was found deserted, just as the second man had reported.

Then Pan went in a direct line from the tree toward the mine. About midway he came upon the dead body of the first carrier. The unfortunate man had been stabbed through the heart, and there were marks upon his throat to indicate that in a struggle he had been prevented from giving a cry of warning by choking.

How many had assailed him could not be told, and the point was unimportant. An inference of much more consequence was that the approaching Marotses had sent on a scout to see if the mine were occupied, and that the guard, having seen the scout pass his tree, had tried to get back to the mine to give warning.

Probably the carrier met the scout, or scouts, on their return from the mine where they must have seen Murdock at work.

It was evident that the carrier had been dead for two or three hours at least. Therefore, the scouts had had time to get far away, and perhaps had already rejoined the oncoming party.

A thousand Marotses might meantime have passed that point in the river that was visible from the observation tree. They might be already at the landing.

This thought lent speed to Pan's feet as he hurried back to the camp. When he arrived the men were tearing the huts to pieces for the purpose of using the material in the completion of the raft.

"The Marotses are coming!" he cried.

"How far away?" asked Bradshaw, quickly.

"I don't know. They may be very near."

"The raft will float us as it is. Tell the men to put our stuff on board."

To this end both Bradshaw and Pan set to work. The blacks, knowing something of the cause for alarm, hurried back and forth between the huts and the river, carrying luggage and placing it upon the raft.

The river bank near the landing was covered with a dense growth of high bushes whose luxuriant foliage shut out all view up the stream. Even when one stood at the further end of the raft he could not see more than a hundred yards away on account of a bend in the stream and a point of land that jutted out from the bank just above the landing.

This was most unfortunate, especial-

ly as the river could not be seen at all from any place near the mine, except for the small patch of water revealed at the landing itself where the Marotses had cut away the trees.

"The scouts probably saw no more than Murdock and may report that he is the only one here," suggested Bradshaw, as he and Pan bore a box of food to the raft.

"You forget the man in the tree."

"That's so, but even then they might not have known that he was on guard there. They evidently didn't see him in the tree."

"I wish they had."

"So? What's your idea?"

"This," said Pan; "seeing only Murdock and one man on guard, they may suppose that he is here alone, or at best with but a few companions. There are none too many of us, but if they had seen the entire party, they might suppose that there were many more, and therefore they would be slower to make an attack. As it is, they may come straight on—there!"

He broke off abruptly, for there was no further need for speculation. A long arrow whizzed through the air, struck the box they were carrying between them, and stuck there.

At the same moment a few blacks who were on the raft disposing of the luggage, set up loud cries and scurried ashore.

"Halt!" cried Bradshaw and Pan together, but the carriers rushed past them unheeding.

"Don't let them desert us, Pan," said Bradshaw, dropping the box; "get them into some sort of order. I may be able to prevent an attack."

He ran out upon the raft and looked up the river. A huge canoe, crowded with armed blacks had just come around the point of land at the bend.

Bradshaw raised both hands, palms open above his head as the best sign of friendliness he could think of.

"Oh, Mr. Bradshaw, they'll kill you!" he heard Pan cry.

It flashed upon him then that such must be the outcome if the Arabs held the Marotses to the policy of killing any man who had discovered the location of the mine. Only in that way could they maintain possession of their treasure ground with absolute certainty.

That this was good reasoning, whatever else might be said of it, was immediately apparent; for he had no sooner appeared on the raft and raised his hands, than a shower of arrows were let fly at him. It seemed as if every man in the canoe who was in a position to bend his bow, had shot.

Perhaps from undue haste, or from the fact that the motion of the canoe prevented steadiness of aim, or both, none of the missiles did any damage.

They splashed in the water, went singing over his head, and stuck in the logs of which the raft was constructed.

The volley was not more than despatched when the blacks, with hoarse cries, made ready for another.

"I'm too good a target," thought Bradshaw, and he retreated.

He saw that his carriers had made for the mine. At the top of the lane Pan was arranging the more courageous of them in line, and distributing the firearms carried by the expedition.

Murdock, attracted by the commotion, had come from the mine, pick in hand, and was prancing about in all his characteristic excitement.

One slender hope occurred to Bradshaw, and he hurried up the lane, hearing the second volley of arrows clip the foliage and thud in the ground as he ran.

"Murdock," he cried, "these men doubtless know you. At all events, you can speak to them in their own language. Go down and assure them that the most we want to do is to get away, and that there is no need of a fight about it."

"Merciful heaven, Elmer!" shrieked Murdock, "do you want me to be murdered?"

" I want to save lives on both sides. Come! I'll go with you if you're afraid."

He caught Murdock by the arm, but the old man held back and struggled violently.

" They'll fill me with arrows," he gasped, and when Bradshaw released him in disgust, he fell sprawling in a helpless heap on the ground.

" There's one more chance—for delay at least," cried Bradshaw. " Pan, tell the men to fire, one after the other, in the direction of the canoe. If we happen to hit anybody, so much the better, but we may be able to convince them that we've got a small army here prepared to fight desperately."

He set the example by discharging all the chambers of his revolver one after the other in rapid succession. Pan and the others followed suit till the wilderness rang with the fusillade.

" That will do," said Bradshaw, presently, as he reloaded his weapon. " We'll save the rest of our ammunition for business."

CHAPTER XIII.

BATTLE.

THE ruse evidently had the effect intended, for the canoe of warriors did not come into view at the end of the lane. Bradshaw took advantage of every second to encourage his carriers and place them in the most advantageous position for a fierce struggle.

Most of them were easily ordered, for they had had experience in other transcontinental expeditions, and the few who could not recover from the panic into which the coming of the Marotses threw them were left cowering at the far end of the mine.

There was no effective force lost by the timidity of this fraction of the party, for there were not firearms sufficient properly to equip those who were eager to fight.

" Elmer," said Murdock, a moment after his refusal to parley with the Marotses, " you mustn't think me a coward. I——"

" I'm not thinking of you at all," interrupted Bradshaw, curtly; " keep out of the way."

" I want to help," persisted Murdock, following Bradshaw around; " no good would come of my going down there to be shot before I could open my mouth, but I'll fight for the mine as bravely as anybody. Give me a rifle, or a revolver, Elmer. I'll stand by you and defend the mine as if I were fighting for my family."

" Which family?" demanded Bradshaw, turning suddenly and facing the old man.

He regretted the words as soon as they were uttered, but the mischief if mischief it were, had been done, and the words could not be taken back.

Murdock's jaw dropped and a villainous light flashed in his eyes.

" Never mind, boy!" he rasped, " I'll fight for the mine, and we can settle our account later. Will you give me a gun?"

" There's none to spare," said Bradshaw, turning abruptly to the carriers.

It was probably well for Murdock that the hateful expression of his face and his threatening gesture were not seen by Pan, who had gone to place Mtema where she would be secure from stray shots from the enemy. He came up now and stood for a moment at the head of the lane.

The carriers had been placed under cover of the trees along one side of the lane, so that, if an attack should be made along it, the enemy could be enfiladed after a fashion. Being near the excavation, they could also fire in that direction if the Marotses should disembark elsewhere than at the landing and make their way through the forest to the mine.

" Think of anything else, Pan?" asked Bradshaw, coming from among the trees and standing beside his black lieutenant.

" Yes, many," was the quiet answer,

"but our force could not be placed in any better way. The men are as well protected as possible from injury by arrows. Listen!"

They gave the closest attention, but could distinguish no sound.

"I must have been mistaken," said Pan, "but I thought I heard them breaking through the thicket above the landing. It isn't likely, Mr. Bradshaw, that they will consent to let us off without a fight if for no other reason than that that traitor is with us. If it should be the case that the Marotses are not led by one of the Arabs they may be frightened away by our volley, for, as I told you, they are not a remarkably warlike tribe. But if one of the Arabs is here, he will lead them on and they will follow because of his authority as a priest.

"As I have learned a little of the Marotse language I will meet them, if they do not assault without warning, and see what can be done."

"It does seem," said Bradshaw, "as if they might be persuaded into letting us go on without bloodshed, and you are more likely to win them over than Murdock would be. But there's great danger in it, Pan. Do you suppose they would know the meaning of a flag of truce?"

"If they have an Arab leader, yes, and if they appear at all it will mean that an Arab is with them."

"Then it must be tried. Let's not trust to waving a handkerchief, but make a real flag."

He cut a twig from a bush, trimmed it, and fastened a handkerchief to it with thorns.

"That ought to do the business," he said, handing the flag to Pan.

Murdock came up to them.

"Will you let me have a weapon of any kind?" he asked in a surly tone.

"No," answered Bradshaw, firmly, "and you'd better keep out of sight."

"You think me a coward, but I'll fight if I have nothing better than a pick to strike with."

Murdock then went in among the trees where the carriers were waiting. The suspense was becoming intolerable.

"Hadn't we better scout down to the river?" suggested Bradshaw.

"There they are!" answered Pan, in a low voice, and he started directly down the lane.

He had seen a black face peer out from a bush, and as he went down, holding up his flag, the bottom of the lane filled rapidly with warriors. There were spearmen as well as bowmen, and the latter formed in front, each man of them with an arrow caught in the string, ready to raise and shoot.

Towering above the rest, and standing at one end of the line they formed, was a man who could be none other than the Arab leader, Dirik's partner.

Pan went on until he was about midway between the two forces. Then he paused, and Bradshaw, waiting with his carriers among the trees, heard him address some words slowly to the Arab.

"It's a relief that they respect the flag of truce," he half whispered to himself; "we may be able to do something with them."

"We shall have to fight them," responded Murdock, who was beside him and had heard; "better let me take one of your revolvers."

Bradshaw made no reply. He listened intently, as if by so doing he could hear what the Arab replied to Pan. He could hear, indeed, a rumbling voice, but no words. Pan turned his head presently and announced the Arab's reply.

"The high priest of the Marotses will consent to a parley on one condition. He demands that we surrender Murdock."

"Before he will treat with us about anything else?" asked Bradshaw.

"Before he will treat at all," answered Pan.

"For God's sake, Elmer, don't do it!" cried Murdock, catching Bradshaw by the sleeve.

Thrusting him aside, with a frown of disgust, Bradshaw returned this reply:

"Tell the high priest that we can accept that condition only on his solemn promise that Murdock's life be spared."

"Oh, Elmer, don't give me up!" pleaded Murdock, piteously; "he won't keep any such promise. I won't be given up! I'll fight if you surrender me."

"Hush!" commanded Bradshaw; "I must hear what goes on."

Pan had delivered his party's reply, and now turned to convey the Arab's ultimatum:

"Unconditional surrender of Murdock, or extermination of the expedition. If we surrender Murdock, he will parley."

"Elmer!" began Murdock, in a whimper.

"See here!" interrupted Bradshaw, wrathfully, as he seized the old man by the wrist; "you ought to be shot for supposing I could deliberately sacrifice you. You ought to be turned over to the Marotses to suffer the extreme penalty for your desertion of your king. You ought—ugh! I'm thinking of your Marotse family, do you understand? Now, listen!"

Bradshaw then turned to Pan, who still stood between the forces with the white flag raised above him.

"Tell him to bring on his extermination," said Bradshaw.

Pan faced the enemy once more to repeat the reply of his commander. The words had been uttered loudly, and either the Arab understood the language, or he interpreted aright the ring of defiance in Bradshaw's tones; at all events, ignoring the sacred emblem of truce, and not waiting for Pan to speak, he gave the word for his men to shoot.

Two score arrows sped instantly from the bows. Many of them whizzed past Pan, some coming in among the trees where the carriers were in waiting; but one at least struck the faithful black, and he reeled, fell flat upon the ground, rolled over upon his side, and lay motionless.

"Ah, treachery!" cried Bradshaw, in a voice that rang with anguish. "Fire, men! and charge them!"

The carriers understood and obeyed. A volley belched from the cover of the trees, and through the smoke of it Bradshaw and his fighters rushed down the lane.

Murdock snatched a revolver from the hand of an unsuspecting carrier and fell in close behind Bradshaw.

Arrows sang in the air about them, and there were reports of firearms, too, from the enemy. The Arab leader, at least, was provided with the weapons of civilization.

Bradshaw fired as he ran, seeing the enemy but dimly through the smoke, and giving as much attention to avoid stepping upon Pan, whom he failed to see.

He could distinguish the tall form of the Arab, and he made straight toward it. As he ran he observed with pride that his carriers were fighting well, charging with a fury that told of their desperation, if it did not speak for their actual courage.

There was a rapid cracking of firearms, while the buzzing of arrows diminished. As he approached nearer the enemy, Bradshaw saw that the bowmen were drawing aside to let the spearmen receive the charge.

Their spear points were leveled at the charging party, and the Marotses seemed to stand like an immovable wall.

Just as Bradshaw came close to the Arab and was about to fire at him, a number of shots, fired almost simultaneously, thickened the smoke so that he could not see his target.

He halted an instant, and as the smoke thinned, he perceived that the Marotse spearmen were breaking for cover. The bowmen had disappeared altogether, and the tall form of the Arab leader lay stretched at his feet.

That explained the demoralization of

the enemy, and knowing that the fight was won, Bradshaw would have restrained his men from unnecessary slaughter, but they were beyond his control, some of them apparently beyond the reach of his voice.

They dashed into the bushes, firing at will, as they had all through the brief battle, and with wild yells chased the panic stricken Marotses to their canoe, which had been beached at the point near the bend.

The first who came to it pushed it out into the water, and later comers swam to it if they were not picked off by the exultant carriers, who banged away as long as any ammunition was left.

Meantime, Bradshaw stood looking at the dead Arab for a moment before taking a complete account of the result of the conflict.

"You deserved it," said Bradshaw, "for your treachery, but on account of the Marotses I can't help feeling sorry you had to be killed. It's a misfortune to the tribe."

"It may be so," said a familiar voice behind him; "if you say so of course——"

Bradshaw whirled about at the first sound. He stared a moment at the grave face of his black lieutenant, and took up the characteristic formula:

"It may be Pan come to life. Of course, if he says so it is so, but I do not think so."

"You are quite right, Mr. Bradshaw," said Pan, seriously, "for I haven't been dead."

Then Bradshaw burst into laughter that was almost hysterical. He threw his hat into the air and it lodged in a tree so high up that eventually one of the carriers had to be sent up to get it. He wrung Pan's hand and danced around him until the solemn black man seemed to be alarmed for his employer's sanity.

"And did you really think they had killed me, Mr. Bradshaw?" he asked, when he had an opportunity to speak.

"To be sure I did! Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, perhaps you should, for that was what I meant the Marotses to think, but I presumed you would know that I was pretending."

"Ha! I promise never to believe anything else of you as long as you live."

"I don't think you mean that, but no matter. One of their arrows gave me a little scratch in the side which won't trouble me. I fell, for I was pretty certain that if I ran back to join you, I would be hit by a bullet before I could get there. As soon as our men fired I rolled aside so as not to be stepped on, got up, and went to fighting with the rest."

"Did you bring him down?" asked Bradshaw, pointing to the Arab.

"I think so," Pan answered indifferently. "You don't know yet what else has happened?"

"No, and I am ashamed of myself. I must see if any of our good fellows are hurt. Some of them seem to be finding targets still."

"Yes, they'll fire as long as there is a Marotse left in sight. I think none of our carriers are severely hurt, but see here."

He turned Bradshaw about and pointed up the lane, where, a few paces distant, lay Murdock, face to the sky.

Bradshaw went up to the old man at once, and his face was very grave. Murdock was dead.

"Hit by a bullet," said Bradshaw in a low voice.

"Yes," Pan responded; "the Arab at least had revolvers. Tell me, Mr. Bradshaw, does this solve your hardest problem?"

"I think it does, Pan," Bradshaw answered solemnly, "for there is an ancient proverb that I shall take for guidance: '*de mortuis nil nisi bonum.*'"

"What does that mean, Mr. Bradshaw?"

"It means that one should speak nothing but good of the dead."

"Then I should have to be silent," said Pan, turning away.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOMEWARD.

THE flag of truce was near by. When Pan fell he had thrown it aside, and it had caught in the branches of a bush beside the lane. As if to testify to the desecration of the emblem, an arrow had gone through the cloth.

Bradshaw took the flag down, removed the cloth from the staff, and placed it over Murdock's upturned face. Then he summoned one of the non combatant carriers, who were beginning to straggle down from the mine, and stationed him near the body to drive away the vultures who were already circling overhead.

As soon as he could get his men together, Bradshaw took an accounting of casualties. It proved, as Pan had said, that none of the carriers was seriously wounded.

Several of them had been clipped by arrows, and one had a hole in his arm made by a pistol ball; but the medicine chest of the expedition was amply equal to the proper treatment of these injuries, and only the man with the bullet hole was incapacitated for work.

On the attacking side, beside the dead Arab, they found six Marotses. It was gruesomely significant that all were dead. How many had been shot and killed after they took to the water could only be guessed.

A glance at the slain showed that not only did the carriers shoot to kill, but if their first shot failed, they repeated the dose until fatality was assured.

The afternoon was yet young when the battle was over. There was no reason for lingering at the mine, but on the contrary, the best reason for hurrying away from it. There might be another canoe load of warriors on the way under the direction of Dirik's remaining partner. Bradshaw had no thirst for more fighting, and he accordingly hastened preparations for departure.

The raft would have been in better shape for a long voyage if another day's work could have been spent upon it, but it would do for a start, and repairs could be made anywhere, once the expedition was far from possible encounter with pursuing Marotses.

The two spades in the outfit and some of the tools lying about the mine were put to immediate use in making graves for the dead. A general trench was dug for the enemy, but Murdock's body was buried separately.

While some of the carriers were employed at this task, and others were completing the interrupted loading of the raft, Pan said:

"Dirik's diamonds, Mr. Bradshaw; what are you going to do with them?"

"Nothing," answered Bradshaw with a shudder. "In view of Murdock's long effort to find the mine, he may as well be left in possession of the stones he obtained."

"Certainly, if you say so," said Pan, indifferently; "they won't do him any good."

"If they would you'd take them from him, I suppose?"

"Perhaps. Yes, I think so."

"I do not blame you," said Bradshaw, "for thinking bitterly of Murdock, but you must remember——"

"I know. He was your sweetheart's father. I am silent," and the black man went down to the raft whither he had conducted Mtema as soon as the battle was over.

Bradshaw had given little thought to the diamonds until Pan spoke, but there was a matter that he had considered very sadly. He had come to Africa to find Irene's father, had found him, and must now go home to tell the news of his death.

Following the suggestion of the Latin proverb, he could refrain from disclosing anything more unpleasant than the loss of Murdock's life in a

fight for defense against savages; but what could he say to Irene as to her father's thoughts of her? What token could he bring to her that she had been in her father's thoughts at all?

Suddenly he remembered the small diamond that Murdock had found in the sands of the pit. That had not been rifled from a dead man's garment; it had been unearthed by Murdock's own endeavor. Bradshaw had noticed that Murdock placed it by itself when he stowed away the pebbles in his pockets.

He stooped over the old man's body and put his hand in the pocket where that diamond had been placed. It was there, alone, and Bradshaw took it.

"For aught I know," he said to himself, "Murdock may have intended this as a present to his daughter. She shall have it, and in its pure rays she shall see nothing but the goodness that ought to have been in her father's life."

Two hours before sunset the raft, with all on board, was poled out into the stream. When they had gone so far that they could see beyond the bend, they had a view up the river that extended not less than two miles.

No sign of human life was there. If the surviving high priest should think of pursuit, his quary was certain to have a long start.

The current bore them swiftly, and when they went ashore for the night, it was with no anxiety as to further conflict with the Marotses.

Two days after leaving the mine they came to the Zambesi. There were then fully fifteen hundred miles of waterway between them and the ocean, with difficulties and perils from rapids and cataracts, and many tribes of savages to be passed.

More than once they had to abandon their craft and proceed overland to a point where another could be constructed; once they experienced partial wreck by running upon a submerged rock; often they were delayed by the necessity of parleying with solemn chiefs; but the greatest hostility they encountered was that of nature, and her obstacles were overcome with sturdy persistence.

So, at last, they found themselves at the mouth of the Zambesi, whence it was possible to reach other parts of the world by the contrivances of civilization.

It was a feature of Bradshaw's contract with his carriers to return them to St. Paul de Loanda, far away on the western coast, and he held to it faithfully, great though his longing was to return to America and Irene with all possible speed.

There was no going by a direct route. A trading vessel took the party to Mozambique, where, after a wait of several days, they took passage for Cape Town. Another wait there, a long voyage up the coast, and at last the low Angola hills appeared as blue spots upon the eastern horizon.

Bradshaw and Pan were on deck engaged in earnest conversation. It was a topic that they had discussed often since leaving the Zambesi.

"It is useless, Mr. Bradshaw," Pan was saying; "I cannot go with you further. I am an African——"

"But not a savage, Pan."

"You are very kind to say so, but my home is here. It is the same with Mtema. My wife will be happier in a country that is comparatively familiar. She will be, even here, far enough away from her kindred."

"I cannot have it so!" exclaimed Bradshaw; "you were born for civilization, if not in it, and 'Tema will be happy wherever you are."

"It may be so. I hope so, but we cannot go with you. After all, Mr. Bradshaw, I am a good deal of a savage. There is too much blood on my hands——"

"All shed in honest warfare, Pan."

"You always think kindly of me."

"I should be a villain if I didn't! Think of Murdock, Pan."

"Of Murdock!" exclaimed Pan, with a start.

"Yes. There was a man born in

civilization who went to live among savages. I knew him when I was a boy, you know, and I am certain that he was not a bad man; but see what association with savages did for him. He not only became one of them in form, but he became degraded in character until the vilest Marotse would blush for him. Now, you have the right instincts, and so has 'Tema. Think how much better civilized associations will be for people like you two. I don't see how you can be a better man, old fellow, but you'll be better off among people of good manners and larger knowledge. You must go with me."

The black man shook his head despondently.

"It is impossible," he said. Then, looking Bradshaw directly in the eyes, he went on: "You have asked me to think of Murdock. I will, and this is what I think. You would not care to have constantly near you the man who deliberately shot your sweetheart's father."

"Pan!" gasped Bradshaw.

"I did not mean to tell you, but you force me to, for you will not take no for an answer. You know what cause I had to hate and fear Murdock. I was in love with Mtema almost from the moment when I rescued her in the Marotse town. I also loved you, Mr. Bradshaw, as man loves man. I feared for you every moment, for I did not believe that Murdock would let you take him home, or let you go without him. He was waiting his opportunity. The diamonds were his sole care. For them he would risk anything, as you saw that in the battle, coward though he was, he yet ran into the thick of the fight.

"Well, in that battle I saw him a pace or two behind you. He had a revolver in his hand. I do not pretend to say that I know what was his intention, but I feared, and I watched him more carefully than I did the enemy. I saw him raise his weapon. In the same line with you was the Arab. Perhaps Murdock aimed at the Arab, but I do not think it. I believe he intended to kill you in view of the Arab in order by that act to make his own peace with the Marotses.

"For days I had felt that the best service I could do you would be to put Murdock out of the way, and thus relieve you of your burden, but you would not have forgiven me. Here was my opportunity. I shot Murdock first, his revolver exploding harmlessly after he began to fall. Then I shot the Arab leader."

"You did what you thought was right," said Bradshaw, in a choking voice, as Pan paused.

"And now you can probably see that it will be better if I and Mtema remain in Africa."

"Yes, Pan, it will be better."

"Do you forgive me, Mr. Bradshaw?"

"Forgive, old fellow? You are a noble man, if ever there was one. There is nothing in my heart for you but gratitude and affection."

* * * *

While waiting for a steamer in London, Bradshaw had the diamond cut and mounted. Irene wore it at her throat when they were married. No shadow of the dark truth about her father has fallen upon her, and none ever will.

THE END.

DECEIVED.

If the love I bore and sought
 In return were something bred
Out of adolescence, wrought
 In a young and idle head;

If it were a dream without
 Promise that could be redeemed,
Still—and though I've found you out—
 It is better to have dreamed.

Joseph Dana Miller.

BY FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

The story of John Ashton, involving the quality of a sin and a coincidental mystery, being a tale in which New York and London are links in a chain of extraordinary incidents.

CHAPTER I.

THE LONDON INCIDENT.

TWO incidents, remote as to their locality, yet strangely coincidental when considered on the basis of corrected time, are responsible for this remarkable history. One happened in the city of New York, the other in London; one, during the small hours of the morning when the American metropolis is as near sleeping as it ever is, the other at or near sunrise over the British capital.

They affected people who were entirely unknown to one another; they wrought marvels of circumstances in the destinies of all who were concerned; they played with the fates of one man and one woman, and by them were brought about such complex conditions that credulity stands appalled, and hesitates before them.

The New York incident was a scene of crime, although no crime was committed; but a long time elapsed before its chief actor discovered that his soul was not branded with the scarlet letter of responsibility for the taking of a human life. The London incident was a wedding which occurred at an ultra fashionable church in the most aristocratic section of that great city, and the principals were as prominent in the social world as a high born, beautiful woman, and a titled young man, handsome, rich and popular, could be.

Apparently, these incidents have no connection—are as unrelated as the positive and the negative poles, and yet each vitally affected the other; and by them was begotten a direful necessity.

The Church of the Annunciation was packed. It was the occasion of the marriage of Lady Mercer Covington, to Lord John Makepeace Hertford, ninth earl of Ashton and Cowingford, and because the bride had for three seasons been the acknowledged beauty of London, and the groom, for several years, the hope of fathers as well as mothers, the occasion was one of unusual interest to every one who knew them.

The young earl—just past thirty—in addition to his wealth, which was almost unbounded, was a man of sterling qualities and irreproachable character. He was talented, handsome and unspoiled by the elements around him which might have been the undoing of others in his position. His popularity did not cease at the margin of his own circle, but extended to the lower classes, among his tenants, and in fact magnetized and won all who came in contact with him.

He possessed that happy faculty of appearing to think of himself last, and his habits of study had kept him free from the contaminations which as a rule beset the younger branches of the aristocracy, when unlimited wealth is added to beauty of person and unquestioned popularity.

He was Lord John to everybody, even the trades people, and he rarely saw the name of Ashton, except upon his letters and his own visiting cards. He was tall, broad shouldered, clean shaven, clean cut by nature's chisel.

His eyes were dark, though blue, when close inspection could be had, his hair black and with a decided inclination to curl over his temples, when he permitted it to attain a sufficient length. His nose was straight, his mouth firm and perfect, but with an almost imperceptible dimple of humor at each corner, in defiance of the severity otherwise suggested.

His skin was extraordinarily white; perhaps it appeared more so, because of the blackness of his hair; yet there was nothing of pallor about it—nothing of unwholesomeness, for his complexion was rich, warm, clear, even robust.

The bride—who can describe her? Words are as inadequate as is the brush of an artist who attempts to reproduce the glory of a Mediterranean sunset. She was a Juno and a Circe in one. A magnificent woman with the olive tint of the south on her skin, the bloom of perfect health on her cheeks, and the glory of unthinkable promise in her dark eyes.

During the three seasons of her experience, she had swayed the world around her as a helmsman steers his ship. It had responded to her touch as certainly as a well trained horse feels the tightened rein in the hand of his master; and she had done it all unconsciously—would have done it unwillingly, had she known how perfectly it obeyed.

Her conquests were regretted; she sorrowed for the men she had been obliged to refuse, just as she gloried in the man she had accepted. Him she loved; not as thousands upon thousands of men and women love, when criticism and kisses are borne upon the same breath, when passion and petulance lurk in the same endearing terms, when pride and policy, devotion and deception at the same time adorn and disfigure the erratic god.

She loved with that superlativeness of thought and deed, that completeness of heart and being, which has within it nothing of ostentation, but everything of reality.

The wooing had been short, but direct. They had known each other as children, and they had not met again till this season. The existence of each had been forgotten by the other, except in that general way in which one remembers a playmate of childhood; and then, fate brought them together once more in a formal presentation.

"It is my old playmate, Mercy," the young earl had said, smiling with pleasure; and she had replied: "Yes, Jack, your playmate still, if you wish."

Then they walked apart and talked over those half forgotten hours until the rooms were filled with guests and they were obliged to part.

"Mercy," he said then, while the others surged around them, jostling him even as he spoke, "I am going to ask you to fulfil the promise that you uttered a few moments ago. I want you to be my playmate always. May I come and ask you that question?"

"Yes, Jack," she replied, "you may come, but you need not ask the question, for you have the answer now. We will be playmates always."

Such was their engagement; and now, the wedding.

Never, in the history of London, short of royalty itself, had such an occasion as this wedding gladdened the hearts of the smart set—of those who loved show more than reality; the outward and visible sign, more than the inward and spiritual grace; though there was nothing of true worth lacking in this particular function.

It was the inward and spiritual grace with the outward and visible sign necessarily present, because of the riches of the groom, the beauty of the bride, and the acknowledged superiority of position enjoyed by each. It was, in one way, too, an innovation, for it was the first of the early morning weddings, held at sunrise, just as the sun begins to polish the visible world with a gloss of gold and ivory—when the birds be-

gin their daily carols, and when everything is fresh, and green and glad.

At five o'clock in the morning the words were said which made Lord John and Lady Mercy man and wife; and there was the wedding breakfast at high noon, the informal reception during the small hours of the afternoon, the few hours for rest and recuperation, and the grand reception in the evening.

Not for one moment during that long and fatiguing day were the bride and groom permitted a moment together alone. They met and parted, met and parted like the waves of a restless sea, driven hither and thither by the hurrying, unsympathetic wind; and when Mercy found a moment for that rest of which she stood in such need, there were a score or more of her friends who sought to solace her siesta—and several who actually attempted it.

From the moment when she heard the benediction of the dean until she stood beside her husband again in the evening to receive their guests, she did not exchange a word alone with him; there was only now and then a silent hand clasp, or a whispered syllable of tenderness.

There was royalty present at that wedding, and there were dukes and earls, marquises and baronets with their ladies, so that London had not for many seasons witnessed such a function; and there was not one among the throng who did not honestly congratulate both bride and groom.

Just at midnight, when happiness was rampant, Lord John's valet thrust himself through the throng and whispered something in the ear of his master.

Those who witnessed the act, saw that a look of intense annoyance swept across the face of the earl, and that he whispered a sentence in reply. Then the valet withdrew, and a few moments later, the earl, grasping an opportunity, left the room.

The only apology that he made, was to his wife. To her he murmured:

"I must leave you for a few moments, Mercy. Robert has brought me a message, and I must attend to it."

Then he smiled and left her, touching her white arm with the tips of his fingers as he withdrew.

When a half hour had passed, the young countess became impatient and others in the room, wishing to depart, asked for the earl. Within an hour, a servant was despatched to find him; but he returned presently, unsuccessful.

"Bring Robert to me," commanded the countess then.

She caught her breath with a vague sense of alarm, and then laughed at her own fears; but when she saw Robert standing in the doorway and detected upon his face the anxiety which even his passive countenance could not conceal, her heart gave a great bound, and then, for a moment, almost ceased to beat.

Robert was almost as well known to her as the earl, for he had been Lord John's attendant, and was a man grown, in that long time ago when they were playmates.

He did not wait for the question that he knew she would ask, but anticipated it.

"I do not know, my lady," he said. "I gave him his hat and he went out, saying that he would return immediately. I have waited at the door for him ever since, and until your ladyship sent for me. I know that he has not returned."

"Why did he go out, Robert?"

"I do not know, my lady."

"You brought him the message which called him away?"

"Yes, my lady."

"What was it?"

"The message that was given to me was this: 'Say that his friend Tom must see him at once. He will understand.' I told him and he did

seem to understand. I gave him his hat and he left the house. By my love for him, Miss Mercy—excuse me, my lady—that is all I know."

Mercy was very white now, for she was frightened. There was in her mind an inexplicable presentiment that he would not return, or that a great danger menaced him; but she controlled herself admirably.

"Robert," she said presently, "repeat again the message that was given to you. Repeat it word for word, just as it was delivered to you for him."

"I have already done so, my lady. The message was, 'Say that his friend Tom must see him at once; he will understand.' That is the exact message, word for word, just as it was given to me—just as I repeated it to him."

"Did he seem to understand to whom the message referred?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Do you know to whom it referred?"

"No, my lady. Mr. Jack looked annoyed when I mentioned the name. That was all. He made no comment."

"Was it a man who gave you the message?"

"Yes, my lady, a man and a stranger—not a gentleman. I think he was simply the bearer of the message."

"Robert, you have known Lord John since he was born. What friend has he, who bears that name, who might have called him out in that manner?"

"My lady, I know of only two friends by that name, and they are both here in the house at this moment. I have no idea who it could have been."

Mercy was silent several moments. She was endeavoring to control herself, and at last, by a supreme effort, she succeeded. When she did speak again, her voice was low and firm.

"Robert," she said, "the guests must not know. Nobody but you and I must know. I will leave the room, and you must announce that the earl is suddenly ill; that I have gone to him. Get them away, out of the house, all of them, everybody; then, when they are gone, every one, come to me. Oh, Robert! What could have happened to him?"

"Alas, Miss Mercy—my lady—I do not know. Nothing, I think, only he has somehow been detained. He may come at any moment."

But he did not come. The guests, loud in their expressions of sympathy, departed. The lights were extinguished until the great house was shrouded in darkness, except where they shone from two windows in the apartments of the countess.

There, behind tightly drawn curtains, still arrayed in her reception costume of satin and pearls, the young countess was restlessly pacing the room, while before her, with downcast head and his hands behind his back, stood faithful old Robert.

Three hours had passed since Lord John left the parlors, and Robert had become dumb for lack of further argument to appease the anxiety of his mistress. His concern was as great as hers; his ignorance as profound.

Mercy had sent her maid to another part of the house; now she told Robert to recall her.

"The servants must not know that he is gone, Robert," she said, wistfully. "He will surely return before long, and you must wait up for him. You will not desert your post?"

"No, my lady, no. I will wait"

"And the servants?"

"Take no heed of them, Miss Mercy. Leave it all to me; and if I may venture one word of advice——"

"Yes, Robert; what is it?"

"Let your maid put you to bed, and send her away as though nothing had happened. I will listen for your bell, while I watch for Mr. Jack—for my lord. You see, I used to call him Jack when he was a boy, and he likes to have me do so still, when we are alone."

"He loved you, Robert."

"He loved me, and he loves me now,

my lady. He may be coming in at any moment, and I must be at the door."

He did not return. The night wore away, and the following day dragged itself into the past; still he did not come. After that there were weary days and nights, and then there were weary weeks; but there was never a word or a sign of Lord John—never a trace of him after he had passed through the door on his wedding night.

The great house was closed and the servants dismissed. Robert, alone, remained in charge of the mansion, and Robert, alone, knew that its mistress, the beautiful young countess dwelt there in solitude while the world—their world—believed that she and the earl were traveling abroad; and that same world had so many other things to engage its attention, that it soon made up its mind to forget them until they returned.

Robert—dear old Robert—was maid, cook, everything, even father to Mercy, through that awful time.

When he was not attending to her wants, he was wandering the streets in search of his master. He was tireless, almost sleepless, possessed of one idea—that he could and one day would find Lord John.

Mercy never left her rooms; her tearless eyes never looked from the windows, except at night when the room was dark and her white, set face could not be seen from without. But she waited and hoped; and as time went on, waited almost without hope.

Once, and only once, Robert suggested Scotland Yard and the police.

"No," she replied; "we will wait. If he lives, he will return. If he is dead, there is no need to search. In either case we must be silent. The world shall not know when or how he went away, nor when nor how he returns. If he is found, you, Robert, will find him, or he will return to me here."

Thus the weeks lengthened into months, until they were near the end of the twelfth of his disappearance; until time lacked only a few days to arrive at the first anniversary of the wedding; and still the world in which Lord John had lived and moved, believed that he was traveling abroad with his wife; and still Robert and the countess dwelt on alone, in hiding, in secrecy and in despair.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW YORK INCIDENT.

THE date was the same as that of the wedding at the church of the Annunciation in London. The time, allowing for the difference of more than three hours between the two cities, was also the same, for long years afterwards John Ashton figured it out carefully, astounded and awed by the fact that it was so.

The scene was altogether different, for it was the interior of a bank at a time when all banks are supposed to be deserted—shortly after one o'clock in the morning.

The streets outside were as light as they always are in the business portions of a great city, where the frequent points of illumination dispel the gloom, however dense it may be. Humanity strode past the place in either direction, just as it always does wherever it is hived within the confines of a metropolitan center.

It never sleeps; it is always moving, thinning out during the middle watches of the night; thickening up again as the hours tend towards dawn. But it is a heedless humanity, and it rarely looks to the right or the left.

It did not look towards the bank that night, or if it did, it paid no heed, for the man who entered the side door with a key that fitted the lock, paused after he had entered, and stood for a full minute before an open window, where all who passed that way might have seen him. There was one, a policeman, who did see him, but he also recognized him, and so thought no more about it.

The man was John Ashton. Perhaps nobody would have thought of questioning his right to be there; many might have regarded his presence there at that hour as unnecessary, or strange, but his right was unquestionable since he possessed a key and was cashier of the institution.

Presently he passed on into the counting room where he turned up the light, seated himself in the president's chair, and with his chin upon his breast he remained for a long time as motionless as a dead man, so wrapt was he in the disordered thoughts that teemed within his brain.

A physiognomist could have divined nothing from his stony countenance. All that anybody could have observed was that the face was handsome and noble, delicate and patrician, and that the eyes, when their owner raised them, were filled with a settled despair.

Presently he shivered, as he might have done had a cold draft of air blown upon him. Then he rose from the chair and paced slowly up and down the room, still with bowed head, and with his hands tightly clasped behind his back.

Often he unclasped them and clenched his fists, as if the problem upon which he was studying was too much for his brain to master—as if the burden under which he staggered was almost more than he could bear; and after that his hands always returned to their former position behind his back and he resumed the meditative pacing as before.

People who passed along the street outside could not see into the counting room, although the main part of the bank was plainly visible to all—but the bright light shone through the windows, showing that the room was occupied.

While Ashton still strode up and down the room, the electric buzz in one corner gave a sudden alarm, and instantly his whole form changed its attitude. He stood more erect, a glad smile beamed upon his face, despair gave place to pleasure.

"He has come! He has come!" he exclaimed aloud. "I feared that he would not—that he would play me false at this last moment—but he has come!"

He went hastily out of the room to the street door—the one that opened on the side street, for the bank stood on a corner—and threw it ajar, but only a uniformed messenger boy stood there, awaiting the reply to his summons.

"Mr. John Ashton?" he inquired briskly.

"Yes," replied the cashier, as one who speaks mechanically, and without thought.

Then, in silence, he accepted the envelope that was extended towards him, in silence he scrawled his name upon the book which the boy thrust into his hands, and in silence he closed the door and turned again towards the room he had left so gladly only a moment before; and when he stepped again into the full light, his face was gray with a despair tenfold greater than that which had shadowed it before the message came.

He placed the envelope upon the directors' table, and stood regarding it with the same expression that one sees pictured in the face of a child who is fascinated by a venomous snake which is slowly but surely crawling nearer and nearer, preparing to deal its fatal blow.

"My God!" he said aloud, but without being conscious that he did so, "he has failed me! He has broken his sacred word of honor! He has left me to bear this terrible thing for him. He has sent me only this—only *this!*" and he seized the envelope and crushed it savagely in his right hand.

For a full minute he remained thus, with the crumpled letter in his hand, and then his muscles relaxed, and slowly and methodically he broke the seal, permitted the torn envelope to flutter to the floor, and raised the sheet of paper that he had abstracted from it to his eyes. Here is what he read:

My courage is not equal to the task you have set me. I cannot come. I cannot carry out the plan you have made. You will say that I am a scoundrel. Be it so. I am one. I have always been one. I will remain one to the end. I am without honor, but you are not, and I know that you will not betray me—I know that for the sake of others (not for my sake) you cannot, so I leave it there. I can only make you one promise that I can keep; you will never see me nor hear from me again.

Let things go on as they were, Ashton. The old man and Hope believe that I am dead; let them continue to think so. The money that I took from the bank night before last, I will keep. You should not have left me there while you went to keep your engagement, Ashton. The temptation was too strong and I am too clever an expert with lock tumblers for such confidence.

You see it is your fault after all, Ashton, and you must bear the blame. Of course, you can show this letter to the old man, but I know that you will not. You love him too well to do that—and you love Hope too well to let her know that her departed brother has come to life out of a Western prison, an ex convict, to betray your confidence, to rob his father's bank, and—but what's the use? It's done, and I'm going to keep the money.

You'll tell the old man that you took it, and he'll forgive you; and Lord, what a love feast you'll have over it, after all. But I'll keep that last promise. From this hour on, I'm teetotally dead to you all. Brace up, now, and face the music like a man; or, if you are fool enough to do it, go to the wall just as I did when you were—but I won't be mean enough to say that. And now, for the first time in many years, and for the last time in my life, I sign myself,

FRANKLIN HOLLISTER.

Ashton read the letter through twice. Then he laid it upon the table while he produced his pocket match safe, and having abstracted a match therefrom, he struck it, and, holding the letter between his fingers, touched the flame to the edge and watched it while the only earthly evidence of his own innocence was consumed.

When the flame became hot against the hand that held the paper, he permitted it to fall to the table, where it burned on and on, slowly scorching the cloth covering, and wrinkling into a black mass of feathery carbon.

He did not disturb it or look at it again. The envelope on the floor he totally forgot. Then he began again that restless pacing up and down, up and down.

"A hundred thousand dollars," he mused aloud. "He said that he could bring back ninety thousand, and I believed him. Believed that he would do it for his father's sake—for the sake of the sister who was not born till after he went away. I raised the other ten thousand today. I have it here"—and he tapped the breast pocket of his coat—"I pledged all the securities that I had, that were my own, to make the amount good—to make him good—to induce him to make himself known to his father; and he promised. He promised and he has failed—failed miserably.

"My God! What is there left for me? Dishonor, perhaps prison—death! Hope—Hope! What will she say? Must I lose Hope because of the work of this scoundrel? Fool! Why did I destroy the letter? It might—but no, no! It is better as it is. Better that they should both think me guilty than that they should know the infamy of the son and brother."

He sank into the chair in a shrunken heap, but presently he straightened up and looked at his watch.

"Twelve minutes past one," he murmured. "It is time he was here."

Even as he spoke, the electric buzz sounded a second alarm, which startled him into sudden alertness, and after taking a moment in which to compose his features, he went slowly to the door and opened it, but he started back in sudden dismay when he perceived that the man whom he had expected was not alone.

Beside him, in the shadow, was a woman. They were the banker, Henry Hollister, and his daughter. Hope had come with her father from the reception they had attended together. Fate had willed that she should be present to witness John Ashton's disgrace.

For an instant the thought unmanned

him, but he recovered himself quickly, and he stepped aside with a bitter smile as they briskly entered the bank.

"What's the matter, Jack? Has anything gone wrong? That was a queer request you sent to me, to come here as soon as I could after I left Madame Savage's. What is it? What's wrong?"

Henry Hollister spoke rapidly, and with a slight trace of excitement, for it was unprecedented that he should be summoned there at that hour, and by his cashier, who was like a son to him, who lived in the same house with him, and who could have seen him there at home.

"The bank has been robbed of a hundred thousand dollars, sir," said Ashton, bluntly.

He was entirely master of himself now that the crucial moment had arrived, and he spoke calmly, almost disdainfully. He did not look at Hope, but he kept his eyes fixed upon the face of the old banker; and they stood near the center of the room, so that they formed a triangle, with Hope on Ashton's right, and the banker at his left.

Henry Hollister was a passionate man, and Ashton fully expected that he would go into one of his rages when the matter of the robbery was announced, but on the contrary, he remained calm, and instead of bursting out with innumerable questions concerning who was the thief, if the money could be recovered, and all that, he exclaimed:

"Why in the devil did you send for me to come down here to tell me that? Couldn't you have told me at the house?"

"When I wrote the letter, sir," replied Ashton, "I believed that I had an important reason for sending you the note I did, requesting that you would come here from the reception. That reason has ceased to exist, but another, quite as important, has arisen in its stead, so that I am glad that the interview is here, instead of there. I regret, however, that your daughter is present to know all that I have to say."

"Shall I return to the carriage, papa?" said Hope, before the banker could reply.

"No! Stay where you are," was the blunt response. "Now, Jack, what is it?"

Before he could respond to the question, she glided to Ashton's side and placed one hand upon his arm.

"What is it, Jack?" she repeated. "You are in trouble. I can see it. You have not looked at me since we entered the bank. Have you found the thief?"

He drew away from her, resolutely keeping his eyes away, while he replied:

"Yes; I have found the thief."

"Ah!" said Hollister. "Then, perhaps we can recover the money. A hundred thousand dollars is a big sum."

Ashton stepped backward away from them both so that he succeeded in placing the table between him and them. Then raising his head boldly, and looking first at one and then at the other, with white face, but with firm, unwavering eyes, he said slowly:

"I am responsible for the theft. I am the guilty one."

The old banker started back with an oath, and grasped the back of a chair near where he was standing. His face grew white, too, and something of the innate fierceness of his nature glowed in his eyes; but he did not speak. It seemed as if he dared not trust himself to do so.

Hope uttered a cry of consternation and unbelief, and started toward Ashton, but he waved her away; and there was something in his face which compelled her to pause, irresolute, and then to turn inquiringly to her father.

"You do not believe him, papa; you do not!" she cried.

The old man's lips parted in a smile that was ghastly, but his voice was firm and steady as he replied, slowly:

"Once before I heard a confession not unlike this, and from one who was much nearer to me than John Ashton is."

He turned abruptly then, and passed

through the door into the little corridor which led to the side entrance of the bank, and they could hear him pacing up and down the narrow way; they could have heard him, but they did not, for now their eyes sought each other. Ashton's were filled with misery unspeakable, and Hope's with trust that was infinite.

"Hope! Hope!" he faltered. "Must I lose you, my life, my darling? Oh, God, it is horrible—horrible!"

She sprang to his side and, before he could avoid her, threw her arms around his neck.

"No—no—no!" she cried. "It is not true! I know it is not true! You are shielding some one else! I know that you did not take the money! Say that you did not! I will believe! I will believe you, Jack! Say that you did not! I will believe!"

He gently disengaged her arms from his neck and forced her away from him.

"I can say nothing, Hope, nothing!" he replied, so sadly that tears started to her eyes; but she controlled herself, and the next instant drew her form up haughtily, while with a tinge of coldness in her voice she asked:

"You will not deny it, even to me? When I have said that if you will say that it is not true, I will believe, you will not deny its truth, even to me?"

"No, Hope, I cannot—I cannot deny it, even to you."

She backed slowly away from him then, towards the door through which she had entered the room. Neither of them saw that the banker had reëntered the room and was watching the scene with burning eyes, clenched hands, and white, drawn face that had grown older, years older, during the moment or two that he had been absent from the room.

"You will not deny it even to me?" she whispered shrilly, with horror in her face and in her eyes. "My God! It is true, then. You are a thief! You!"

She would have fallen had not her father grasped her arm and held her upright.

"Come away, Hope!" he said, hoarsely, and he led her through the short corridor, out at the door, and almost lifted her into the carriage.

"Home, Albert; take her home," he said. "I will hire a cab when I am ready to come." Then he closed the carriage door and stood for a moment watching it as it drove away, and when it had turned the corner and was lost to view, he straightened up, and with resolute tread, reëntered the bank.

John Ashton had not moved since they left him. He still stood beyond the table, waiting, for what, he did not know. He had forgotten the theft—the money—he only remembered that he had lost Hope—lost her forever.

During a full minute the banker steadily regarded his companion, and at last he broke the silence.

"So," he said, coldly, and his voice, though low toned, cut the air like a cleaver, for there was a latent fierceness in it that is impossible to describe. "You are a thief, John Ashton? You have stabbed me in the back—betrayed my confidence—broken my heart. My God, Jack, is it true? Are you a thief, or did Hope guess aright, and are you shielding somebody else? Answer me, damn you, answer me!"

"You have heard my confession, sir; there is nothing more to say."

Henry Hollister was silent. Nobody but God and himself knew what he suffered in that moment. Once before in his life, he had gone through a scene like unto this one. His heart had broken then, and now it was breaking anew; but he was a strong, resolute man—an iron man—and he knew that he could fight out the battle with himself, and conquer.

Presently he dropped his eyes, and they rested upon the burned letter upon the table. Instantly he darted towards it.

"What is that?" he exclaimed. "What have you been destroying?"

The paper had burned without losing its shape. The ink showed plainly through the blackness, like purple tracings, and he bent over it eagerly, but John Ashton thrust out one hand and crushed the embers into a mass of cinders.

"It is nothing," he said calmly. "I burned a letter, that is all."

"A letter from whom?" he demanded. Then his glance lighted upon the envelope on the floor, and he stooped down and seized it.

For a moment he studied it. Then, raising his eyes, he said calmly:

"This is addressed to you here, and was delivered by a messenger. Did it come since you have been here to-night?"

"Yes."

"Had you an accomplice in this business?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"I cannot tell you that, sir."

"By Heaven, you shall tell me! Who is your accomplice?"

"I cannot tell you, sir.

"Oh, you miserable cur! You dastardly dog! You villain! You ingrate! Was it not enough that you should rob me, without permitting others to do it? John Ashton, I would have forgiven you but for this. I would have bidden you take your place in the bank tomorrow, as if nothing had happened—but for this. I made up my mind to that, while I was out there on the walk watching the carriage while it drove away with Hope.

"Do you remember the story that I told you when you first came into the bank? Do you remember the story about my son who went away while you were a little boy and while yet he was not grown to manhood? My God! Could you recall that story, and the agony that you saw me suffer while I told it to you, and still commit this act? Still consent to break my heart for a second time? Is there no mercy in your heart? No mercy for an old man who has reared you as his own son? Who has loved you, I fear, better than he did his own son?"

"Stop, sir, in mercy, stop! You are killing me!"

"Killing you? I would like to kill you. If you have any manhood left at all, you will kill yourself. I thank God, John Ashton, that you are not related to me—that not one drop of my blood, or the blood of any of my family, flows in your veins."

"What, sir——"

"It is true. You have always believed that you were my nephew, but you are not, thank God! I do not even know who you are. I found you in a basket at my door, one morning when you were an infant, and I gave you the name of Ashton because that name had belonged to a friend of my boyhood—a friend whom I sincerely loved—one who was with me in school and in college, in England. The rest you know. You were reared as a dear son. I have loved you as one. I looked upon your marriage with Hope with delight. You took the place of the boy that I had lost —whose death I thanked God for. You were to have inherited my property. But I nurtured a viper that turned and stung me. You are nobody."

A great calmness suddenly came into the heart of John Ashton. It was sweet to him then to know that he was nobody. Somehow—he did not understand how—it made everything seem simpler and easier.

"I am glad that you have told me this, Mr. Hollister," he said. "Your suffering will be less acute since I am not related to you; my own will be less in proportion."

The banker turned suddenly away. There was a small safe in one corner of the room, and in a moment he had opened it. Presently he returned to the table, and calmly placed upon it, between them, a shining, silver mounted revolver.

"John," he said, and for the first time

his voice trembled, although it was almost imperceptible, "if you are man enough to use that, I can forgive you and remember you with affection. Through that weapon lies my forgiveness. I cannot denounce you. I will not besmirch my own honor by sending you to prison. The money loss I can bear without injury. God knows that I would have given ten times that sum rather than to have lived through this hour. Write a letter offering any reason you please except the right one, and then, with that weapon, follow the only path that is left open to you."

Ashton shook his head slowly.

"It is too late, sir. Pardon me, sir; permit me to finish. I had thought of that before you came, and if I still believed myself related to you, I would do it. As it is, I will not. Besides—and this is foolish and silly, you will say—once, when Hope and I were children, there was a suicide in the neighborhood. We discussed it, and solemnly promised each other that neither of us would ever commit such a deed. It was a meaningless, childish discussion, but for some reason it comes back to me now. I think Hope would like to have me keep the promise that I made to her when a child; I know that she would if she knew all. I refuse, sir. I will never take my own life."

Henry Hollister heard him patiently to the end, but his lips tightened and his eyes became fiercer; and when Ashton had finished, he leaped suddenly forward and seized the weapon in his own grasp. Intense suffering had maddened him for the moment.

"Then, by God, I'll do it for you!" he cried.

John Ashton was younger and quicker than the banker. He leaped forward and seized Henry Hollister's wrist across the table, and thus threw up his arm. The weapon was exploded, but the bullet was imbedded in the ceiling instead of in Ashton's head.

Then, before the maddened man could free himself, the cashier sprang over the table and seized him. For a moment they struggled fiercely, one only to tear the pistol from the grasp of his assailant, and the other to use it again upon the man he wished to kill.

It was all over in a moment. Henry Hollister was old and his once great strength was now only spasmodic. John Ashton was a practised athlete.

The younger man threw the other from him at last, with great force, so that he was hurled bodily across the counting room, and fell against the small iron safe from which he had taken the revolver. The top of his head crashed against the unyielding metal, and he sank to the floor, a shuddering, quivering mass of senseless clay.

There was no sound except that one crash and the dull thump of the body upon the floor; and after that, silence most profound. John Ashton was alone in the room.

For a moment after it was over he stood perfectly still, with his eyes fixed upon the fallen man. Then he crossed over to him, lifted the inanimate form in his arms and carried it to the sofa. Then he got down on his knees, and with one ear pressed against the banker's breast, listened for the beating of that heart that had loved him so tenderly all his life.

But there was no sound, no fluttering effort to denote that life still dwelt there.

Ashton rose to his feet again, and sighing heavily, went to the table, where with steady hand he wrote:

> We quarreled. There was a struggle. I threw him from me and he fell, striking his head against the safe. I had no thought of injuring him, but he is dead, and by my hand.
>
> JOHN C. ASHTON.

Then he turned down the light, crossed to the sofa once again, and bending down, pressed his lips against the banker's forehead; then calmly he went to the door, passed out upon the street, and from that moment John

Ashton disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and ingulfed him.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

It is impossible to describe the emotions which surged within the heart and brain and being of John Ashton when he left the bank and walked through the almost deserted streets of the city. The thought of escape had not yet occurred to him, and when the door closed behind him, he actually paused and stood there upon the steps several moments; paused and waited without any object in view, for he was objectless at that moment.

There was still a number of hours that must intervene between that time and the period when the city would again be astir with the busy life of another day.

He stroked his black pointed beard thoughtfully, and now and then twisted nervously upon the ends of his long mustache. His face was white and set, but it betrayed nothing of the tempest that was raging within him.

Presently he started away up the avenue, aimlessly, not because he desired to go anywhere, but because he found solace in the exertion of walking, and he strode on and on, until he stood at the entrance of the park just as the darkness began to give way to dawn and the birds began to twitter among the trees.

He turned, then, to the westward, wandering onward with the same slow tread, vaguely intending to return to the bank when it should be time for the business of the day to begin; and so, when he arrived at the junction of Fifty Ninth Street and Broadway, he turned southward again, and he pursued that course until he arrived at Sixth Avenue, which he followed for a considerable distance.

A barber was opening his shop—a basement shop, near Twenty Fifth Street—as he passed, and it occurred to Ashton that a shampoo would do much to dispel the confusion in his brain. He entered and seated himself in the chair, and while the barber was placing the towel around his neck, he said, carelessly:

"You may shave off my beard and mustache."

He could not have told why he gave the order. It was not the fruit of consideration. He had not paid the matter a thought until that moment, and when he gave the direction the idea of avoiding recognition by that means had not occurred to him; but when, thirty minutes later he rose from the chair and adjusted his collar, peering at himself in the mirror as he did so, he gave a start of surprise at the change the alteration had wrought.

His complexion, naturally fair, appeared paler than ever now. Where the beard had been removed, and in contrast with the wavy blackness of his hair, it was almost white. His nose seemed larger since the disappearance of the heavy mustache, but it was as straight and clean cut as though it were carved out by the chisel of a master sculptor.

His eyes seemed larger, too, as though the deep blue in their depths were enhanced by the removal of the hair from his face; and the pupils, of unusual size, gave one the idea that they were black. The change, also, brought out the lines of his mouth in all their firmness.

There were touches of humor around the corners, but for the present, sadness and severity had marked them for their own.

"I look like another man," he mused. "If I had cared for a disguise, I could not have thought of a better way than this. Perhaps it is as well that I am shaven. I will let chance decide what I am to do. I will make no attempt to avoid recognition. I will not hide, but if I am not arrested before night, I will leave New York

and America forever. So be it. Chance shall decide for me."

He paid his bill and departed without a word, and all that day he went about the streets of the city, as unconcerned as though he were engaged upon his everyday affairs.

The condition of his mind was remarkable. He scarcely thought of Henry Hollister at all, and if he did, it was only with regret that the man was, as he supposed, dead, not with the feeling of guilt upon his conscience that he had killed him.

That would come later when he had partially recovered from the anguish of his lifelong separation from Hope. The death of her father had severed whatever imaginary link there might have remained, connecting her to him; furthermore, he had not yet wholly forgiven the old man for his ghastly suggestion.

During the day, he met and passed upon the streets, many of his old friends, but not one of them thought of recognizing him, even though his dress was the same as yesterday; but he did not address one of them, nor did one of them attempt to speak to him.

When, years afterwards he looked back upon that day, he realized that he must have been in a semi stupor, irresponsible for what he did, and for what he failed to do. But he did not know it then.

Boys attempted to sell papers to him, and he heard them cry something relative to the bank where he had worked all his life, something about Henry Hollister; but he did not understand what they said, and he would not read the papers, believing that he already knew more than the printed columns could tell him; but he did not know as much. Afterwards when he did know, he regretted that he had not read them.

Afternoon found him at the corner of Wall Street and Broadway, and he realized that he had been walking steadily for nearly twelve hours—that he had not eaten nor rested in all that time; and at that moment, two gentlemen, satcheled and bundled, hurried past him in the direction of the East river. He heard one of them say to the other, in Spanish:

"*Querida Cuba! No mas que tres dias averlo. Me gusto mucho.*"

Ashton smiled. The haphazard words conveyed the suggestion for which his disturbed soul had been longing. Travel.

He acted upon the impulse, crossed the street, and in a moment, without realizing the price he paid, had purchased a satchel. There was a haberdasher around the corner, and he hurried there, filled the bag with whatever the clerk suggested, and almost before he comprehended that he had formed a resolution, he was hurrying down Wall Street toward the Ward Line pier, where the Vigilancia was awaiting the hour to dash into the open sea.

He remembered, when he purchased his ticket, that he might be stopped, but he did not particularly care. The name of Ashton did not belong to him, and when the clerk requested his name for the passenger list, he gave the one he had thought out during the day.

He did not do this to avoid recognition; he did not think of that; but he gave the one that he had determined to adopt. It was the only one to which he considered that he had any right; the name of his college—of his alma mater—and he was registered as John Cornell.

Thus the Vigilancia sailed away with him. He went to Cuba, and for a week wandered aimlessly about the city of Havana, doing nothing; only thinking; always thinking. He constantly hungered for news from home, but he as studiously avoided it.

"It is the only way to forget," he thought, when the longing for information concerning Hope almost overcame him, and he fled from the intelligence that was his chief desire, just as the reformed drunkard flees from convivial friends of the besotted past.

Thence he took ship to Yucatan, and he spent a month in Merida. Thence to Vera Cruz and Mexico; and then on and on, until somehow he found himself in San Francisco.

But that was too near home, and he was not sufficiently far away from John Ashton—and Hope—so he sailed for China and Japan.

His habits were regular. He indulged in no excesses of any kind. He made no friends, hardly acquaintances. Fellow travelers regarded him at first with displeasure, and then with interest, for he was cordiality itself when addressed, but never once began a conversation, and always brought to a close as soon as possible, one that was introduced by another.

After that came other countries of the east. He passed considerable time in India, and he hesitated a long while in Egypt. He went to Turkey, to Italy, to Algiers, to France and to Paris.

In the latter place there were weeks and months of indecision. He had not yet determined what he would do in that future of which he had as yet scarcely thought; but one day he took the train and journeyed to the coast, crossed the channel and went up to London.

The morning of his second day in London brought with it a troop of ghosts. His face was drawn and haggard and whiter than ever, for it was the anniversary of the day which preceded the night of events so tragic in his life.

He rose early in the morning, breakfasted, and started out for a walk. It made no difference to him in what direction his footsteps took him, and he wandered on and on until he was in the country, and on and on still farther, until he entered a village, and recognized the streets of Greenwich. He paused several times in the main thoroughfare to watch the street fakirs at their games, studying the freaks of the educated dogs, and the saber swinging of the retired dragoon with serious interest.

It was noon when he arrived at the Old Ship inn, and he dined on white bait in the open air, lazily and absently watching the tan colored sails as they floated up and down the Thames, envying the rugged boatmen, wishing that he could change existence with the poorest of humanity around him, wondering how much longer he could endure the life that he had lived for an entire year.

In that manner passed several hours, until the afternoon was far advanced, and he bethought himself of returning to London. Presently, when one of the little side wheel steamers drew up at the wharf at the foot of the street, he got aboard and was carried among the maze of craft which crowded the water of the famous river.

The boat landed him in the vicinity of London bridge, and again he walked on and on until he found himself at Piccadilly Circus. There, he paused a little while, and again strode on to the top of St. James Street, and once more halted.

It was dark now, and only the street lights illuminated the scene, but that was sufficient to enable one to recognize friends as they passed.

Ashton was thinking out the problem of returning to New York and surrendering himself to the law. There was no happiness in the aimless, wandering life that he was leading, and during the entire day he had been wondering if it would not be better for him to go back to the scene of the crime that he believed he had committed, and give himself up.

He had about decided that he would do so, standing there on the corner, gazing upon the swarm of humanity that was passing and repassing, but without seeing it.

Suddenly he was roused out of his stupor by feeling a hand upon his arm, and hearing a voice pronounce his name. He had not heard it in so long

a time that he had almost forgotten the sound of it.

"Jack," said the voice. "Jack—Mr. John—thank God I have found you!"

He turned suddenly, to find himself almost in the embrace of a man who was past the prime of life and who bore the unmistakable stamp of a respectable upper servant.

"Oh, my lord, you are alive and well, are you not? I am not dreaming? It is really you? I have searched for you every day all the year; every day; and I knew that I would find you. You will go home with me now, sir? Everything is just as you left it. Do you remember, my lord, that it is just one year ago tonight that you went away?"

The man talked rapidly, so that Ashton had no chance to speak until he had finished; and he was startled when he was reminded that it was indeed the anniversary of his going away.

"Who are you?" he asked the stranger, wondering if he had really mistaken him for another person, or if the man were crazy.

"Ah, my lord—Mr. Jack—don't say that you have forgotten Robert. These old arms carried you when you were too young to walk. Don't say that you do not remember Robert. You will go home with me now, won't you, sir?"

"I have not forgotten you, Robert, if that is your name, for the reason that I never knew you," he said calmly.

"Never knew me? Never knew old Robert? Have you forgotten, my lord, who I am?"

"Robert," said Ashton, slowly, "I perceive that you are in earnest, and that you mean all you say; that you believe it. But you have made a mistake. I am not the man you seek. I am not a lord. You are an entire stranger to me. I have never seen you before. You will have to search elsewhere for your master. I wish that I might help you to find him."

The expression of that wish was like a flood of light upon Robert's intellect. He was positive in his own mind that it was his master who stood before him. He remembered having read of strange cases of men who had wandered away, forgetful of their own identities, of the faces of old friends, of everything, and he felt sure that Lord John was suffering from a malady of that kind.

It explained his strange disappearance; it accounted for the continued absence; and it brought a pathetic happiness to the old servant, for by reason of it he knew that his master had not wilfully absented himself from his home, his friends and his bride.

"If I can only induce him to go back with me," was the thought in Robert's mind when Ashton expressed the wish to assist him in the search for his master, and he grasped at the straw thus thrown out.

"You are so like him, sir," he faltered, finding it hard to pretend to deceive the man before him, whom he so thoroughly believed to be Lord John. "Perhaps you could assist me. Will you tell me your name, sir?"

"Ashton," was the calm reply, for the reveries of the day had decided him to put aside the name of Cornell, and to reassume the one given him by Henry Hollister in memory of a college friend.

Robert smiled, well pleased, for the name was another proof of the correctness of his theory.

"My master is the earl of Ashton, sir. Ashton and Cowingford. Is your given name John, sir?"

"Yes. My full name is John Cowingford Ashton. I was named for an Englishman; perhaps he was a relative of your master's. It is the only way in which I can explain the coincidence. Now what can I do to help you, Robert?"

"Oh, you can do a great deal, I know. Will you come home with me and let me tell you the story?"

"No, no; you can come to me tomorrow. Perhaps it will give me some

interest in life if I assist you in this search."

"Come with me now, sir. It is early yet, and you will see nobody but me. I am all alone in the great house, sir. Will you come with me? It will give me great pleasure."

"After I have eaten I will go to the house, if it will do you so much good. You may tell me how to find it."

"Ah, sir, if you would but come with me now and let me prepare supper for you, just as I would do for my master. You are so like him, that I will feel I am doing it for him. It will make me very glad. You will come?"

Ashton thought a moment.

"Yes, if it will please you so much to deceive yourself, and you are sure that there are not others there."

"There is only one other person, sir, and she never leaves her room."

"Very well. If I can do anybody any good, it will be a pleasant diversion."

Ashton raised one hand in signal to a hansom and motioned for Robert to enter.

"Shall I ride with you, sir?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"By all means. Tell cabby where to take us, and get inside."

Robert was so overjoyed by the success of his efforts that he could scarcely speak and his voice trembled when he gave the address to the driver, but they were soon on their way, and in a very short time were set down at the door of the house to which the young earl had taken his happy bride, one year ago that very day.

"Wait, sir," said Robert, suddenly, remembering that Lady Mercy might be at the window, and recognize his companion as he had done. The shock might kill her, or upset her reason, and it must be avoided. "We will drive to the side door, if you do not mind."

"Anything, Robert; anywhere. It makes no difference to me."

"Shall I take you to my own cozy room, sir, where I pass most of my time, or would you prefer to go to the library?" asked Robert, as they entered the house.

"Your own room, Robert."

"Yes, sir. This way, then, if you please. It is pleasant in here. I am very fond of this room, for it was once my master's playroom. Will you take that chair? We won't try to talk yet, sir, until I have prepared some supper for you. Your presence makes me very happy, sir; more happy than I have been for a year; happier than I ever was in my life, I think. Oh, Jack, Jack, my boy Jack, don't you know me yet?"

Ashton raised his eyes half angrily, but he saw that tears were running down the old man's cheeks, and he did not reply. Then Robert turned and left the room.

(To be continued.)

THE SILENT CITY.

GRASS grew at will in every empty street,
And roses bloomed on every garden wall,
And sweetbrier climbed with dear and noiseless feet;
One almost thought to hear the blossoms fal'
Or the bright moonlight, as it shone apace,
It was so silent in that wondrous place.

From Major Byers' song, "Sherman's March to the Sea," descriptive of Atlanta after the evacuation.

FETTERED BY FREEDOM.

BY ISABEL J. ROBERTS.

The outcome of a matrimonial quarrel, in which is set forth the praiseworthy if futile efforts of loving friends to heal the scar, and the part played by chance in the process.

OUR rooms opened on a small balcony that overlooked a gray stretch of beach with its white border of breaking surf and the vast sea beyond. A tall pine grew close to the wall and threw its aromatic branches half across the balcony.

Amy pushed her chair among the plumey green and said that she felt like a bird on a bough, laughing and looking at Elsa with an air of gentle solicitude.

"We are particularly fortunate in getting these rooms. We have all the freedom of hotel life and yet can be as secluded as if we were at home," I said, also looking at Elsa.

But Elsa's eyes were on the sea, an evasive sadness in their fixed gaze.

Katrina, the rosy, white capped nurse, came presently with her small charge fresh from her bath and dainty as a fairy in her soft white embroideries.

Elsa put out her hand for her little daughter and said, coaxingly, "Stay with mamma a little while. I will show you a beautiful picture book."

"No, no; I want 'Rina," the child cried, and to avoid the threatened outburst, Elsa let her baby girl slip frc n her detaining arm and run to her nurse.

"I wonder if my child and I will ever become acquainted. We have been kept apart too long. Sometimes I think I will send Katrina away and take full charge of her myself. What do you think of it, mother?"

Knowing so well the spasmodic character of her energy I replied, "I should keep Katrina, if I were you. But try to see more of Polly than you do. Why not go down on the beach with her now? It would be a beginning."

Elsa shrugged her shoulders. "It will do tomorrow. I don't feel equal to making sand pies today."

Elsa had made a brilliant marriage, every one said; and a happy one, even her own family believed.

I had always liked Percy Armitage. He was open, generous, chivalrous, always making his wife feel, despite his high social position, that she had been very good to marry him. Three or four years had gone by happily and then came the disastrous summer at Newport.

What those months were to Elsa I never knew, for her letters were brief, impersonal things, and she never referred to that time afterward. The season ended, the fall passed into winter, and still Elsa prolonged her stay at the seashore.

When she came back she came alone—a divorced woman. It was not until then that I understood that her motive in remaining so long at the sea was to establish the statutory residence necessary to accomplish her purpose.

There had been no scandal. The whole matter had been enveloped in mystery. Percy had made no defense and she had obtained her decree of divorce by default.

That is absolutely all that I knew about the catastrophe which had separated the wife and husband and brought back my daughter, my first born, to me.

Elsa's silence concerning the tragedy of her life remained unbroken although more than a year had passed, and gradually Amy and I had made up our minds that Percy's offense was too grave, too enormous, to be put into words.

When Elsa first entered upon her new life her vivacity, her constant activity, misled me, and I thought she was happy. She continually talked of her new found liberty.

"Why, I am free, mother, free! Do you know what that is to me? None know what freedom is except those that have lost it."

She had a sufficiently ample fortune in her own right to make it possible to carry out her proud resolve to have none of Percy's money; and it was in the same spirit that she dropped "Armitage" and resumed her maiden name.

The wrong that he had done her must have been a most cruel one to have driven her to such a complete cutting away of every tie that could hold her to the past.

She reopened her house and began life over again. When I reproached her for dropping her social interests and neglecting her friends, she said, "I will take them up again after a while. It is only common delicacy to let a year go by. Besides, Percy always kept me in such a whirl that I am glad to rest. Polly and I will have a good time together. I want to be very good friends with my baby—I have never had time before. My life with Percy was one mad race from morning till night."

It was not long before Elsa came to me with a troubled look.

"Mother, what did you do with me when I was Polly's age? She is so hard to amuse. I would rather entertain a whole foreign legation than Polly. I cannot say that I enjoy sitting on the floor with her blocks and dolls and woolly dogs. I wonder if I should be thought an unnatural mother if I should flatly declare that I hate blocks and dolls and woolly dogs. Somehow Polly and I put each other out of temper and we are both glad to fall back upon Katrina.

"It may be that I am destitute of the maternal instinct, but really I cannot see how any fully developed woman can find companionship in a three year old baby. If there is anything wrong in such an assertion you must put the blame on Percy, for he was always taking me away from Polly. I suppose all my life long I shall have to suffer for Percy's mistakes."

This was the beginning of Elsa's failures. She began to hate the big lonely house and spent most of her time in the shops or taking long solitary drives.

She went to all the new plays; but they must have interested her little, for she never referred to them. The only object in her new life that seemed to hold her attention was Polly; and her mind continually turned back to her little girl as to an unsolved and tantalizing problem.

"Polly talks such a mongrel language," she said. "I accused Katrina of corrupting her English, and told her that between the German accent which the child has lately acquired and her h's, which she uses like a cockney, Polly was hardly intelligible.

"'The h's, ma'am, Miss Polly haf got from the butler. He is English, ma'am,' Katrina said, with an injured air.

"It would be very funny if it did not make me feel that there is something wrong. I am doing my very best for Polly. Every morning I have her brought to my bedside, and while I am having my breakfast I teach her things.

"I try to teach her her prayers, too, but I do not think she can be a naturally religious child, for she will ask for a lump of sugar or a piece of toast in the midst of the 'Our Father.'"

So Elsa stumbled along in the dark

shadows of her new life, sadly needing the guiding hand that she had so violently thrown aside.

Then suddenly she thought that she had discovered the secret of her failures, and she came to me in a state of elation.

"Mother, dear, the whole fault is with me. I am only partially developed. All my life it seems to me that I have been either married or engaged to be married. I was much too young to be either. I have never had a chance to mature. I am going to make up for lost time and begin my education all over again."

She engaged a music teacher, took up one or two languages, and went into china painting. For a week or so she was very busy, very happy. She even complained that Amy and I came too often and interrupted her progress.

Then her interest flagged. She asked Amy to finish her course in German and Italian, and said that the smell of mineral colors made her ill. Her professor of music became before long an object of terror.

"It is perfectly frightful, the way Herr Stelsau goes on," she said indignantly. "I fairly tremble when I sit at the piano. Sometimes he doesn't say a word, but sits there looking awful. Scolding isn't half so bad. I forget to practice—I forget everything but Polly, little torment that she is! Lately when I have not got my lesson I ask to be excused, and have a bottle of beer sent to him, and as I don't hear him breaking furniture, I suppose my delicate little attention appeases his wrath."

So the long winter wore away, Amy and I ever standing ready to reach out our arms to Elsa whenever she wanted the shelter of our love. But she was proud and bravely played out the part which she had assumed, although each day made it more tragic.

When the spring came she said, "I'm tired of housekeeping. It is horrible to have to do the same thing day after day and to see forever the same stupid faces of your butler and cook and upper maid and nurse, and to be eternally asked the same questions. I will go away with you and Amy to some new place, some place of which I have never heard. Don't consult me; I leave it entirely to you. Engage the rooms, buy the railroad tickets, and take me off as if I were your child again; I am tired of thinking for myself. Percy would never let me think for myself. He was so self willed, so bent upon having his own way, that it was no use."

She was very busy, very merry, while the trunks were being packed and the final preparations made for our departure.

"Packing is such an easy matter since I have not Percy to think of," she commented, hovering over a big trunk. "He had so many things besides mere wearing apparel that had to be considered when we went away. There were his guns and his shooting outfit and his fishing tackle, and he was always in such a fume. We never could agree just how things should be packed, and he was as likely to put a dirty game bag or a greasy cartridge belt among my laces or bonnets as not."

She sighed heavily, and then, catching the dolorous sound of her sigh, ran off to show me a new gown that had just been sent home.

We had not been at the seashore two weeks before Elsa had exhausted her new surroundings. The eager childish delight which she had at first shown in the sea, the hotel, the people, died out completely.

She looked tired and sad. Amy and I could not stand that look; we were always fighting against it.

"Mother," Amy said, "Elsa is very beautiful. It fairly makes one catch one's breath just to look at her. The red of her lips, the cream of her skin, the darkness of her eyes strike me

anew whenever I look at her. It is always as if I saw her for the first time. She was made for love. She cannot be happy without love. It seems hard that she should have to live this poor make believe sort of a life until the end of her days. And she is lonely, mother, lonely even with you and Polly and me."

I knew what was in her thought, but I also knew that she would never allow herself to give more definite expression to her dream of a second marriage for Elsa, conflicting as it did with ideas which we both held as sacred.

Amy was different from Elsa. Of a less striking, less spirited type, she naturally sought the shadow into which the charms of her more brilliant sister cast her, developing, among her books and music and flowers, a character strong and sweet—a nature so full of repose that she was to me as "a pleasant coolness in the heat."

They were equally dear to me, my daughters—all that I possessed was Amy's; but the fatted calf, the gold chain, the heart broken embraces were for Elsa.

Amy came in one day from the beach with a man at her side, one whose form seemed familiar to me. She brought him to me and said, with a placid ring in her voice, "Mother, you remember Mr. Armuth—Philip? I found him on the beach. He must have been cast up by the sea."

Philip Armuth! Yes, I remembered him well, but it was some years since I had last seen him.

Percy Armitage and he had been close friends since their college days, and he, like Percy, had been a frequent caller at the house. After Percy and Elsa had married, I think we rather expected the same thing of Philip and Amy, but he went abroad shortly after, and we lost sight of him and a possible love affair at the same time.

I was glad to see him again. My mind turned immediately to Elsa. She had always liked him in the past—perhaps she would allow him to amuse and interest her again—and I welcomed him as a possible diversion to my heart sick child.

Elsa seemed pleased when she heard that Philip Armuth was at home again, and put on her prettiest gown to meet him that evening. She was laughing when she came into the room and had Polly by the hand.

"Philip, do you remember my baby?" she said, lightly, after greeting him cordially. "She is a big girl now. Go tell Mr. Armuth how old you are."

The little damsel went willingly enough and told him gravely that she was four years old.

"And what is your name?" he asked.

"Polly Armitage," she said, and ran back to her nurse, who had followed her into the room.

"No, baby, your name is Polly Sargent. Katrina," turning to the nurse, "I want you to teach this child that her name is Polly Sargent, every day, over and over, until she knows it," Elsa said, with cold precision.

"Elsa seems to like Philip," Amy said after we had gone to our room at the end of that first pleasant evening.

I agreed with her, and said that it was a burden off my mind to see Elsa really interested in a human being again.

"Philip is a man of wide experience," I went on. "He has seen much and thought much, and I think he will help us with Elsa. He continually reminds me of Percy. But he is Percy with the charm of Philip added, for Philip is of a deeper nature, a more cultured mind."

Amy said, a little wearily, "I am ashamed to say it, but sometimes lately I feel a little tired of amusing Elsa. I am afraid it is getting on my nerves," and putting her head down on her arms she surprised me by bursting into tears.

It only needed this incident to rouse me to the fact that in my absorption in Elsa I had forgotten what I owed to Amy; and a few days later I sent her to the mountains, where she could have entire change of scene and new occupations.

Philip and Elsa were together every day. Often when I looked at them my heart misgave me. I hardly liked to think of the possible outcome of their renewed intimacy.

She was very frank with Philip—very open about herself, disclosing her faults and mistakes in a way that was in itself a charm.

They were seated outside my windows under the balmy pine branches. The distant roar of the ocean as the tide went out made a pleasant accompaniment to their voices.

He had been telling her about his life in Capri, where he had built his studio, for Philip was an artist.

"I should like Capri," Elsa said, eagerly. "The life there is so varied. It is the monotony of my life that is killing me. I cannot bear to do the same thing twice in succession, and here I am forced to do the same thing a hundred times. Why, Philip, if I know that I shall have to do the same thing twice I won't do it the first time, if I can help it. If I take a walk or a drive I always try to return by a different road. I should like Capri if only for what you tell me about the vitality of the air. That would keep one up of itself. I get tired of people—I always did, you know. I come so quickly to the end of them. Even mother and Amy tire me, and sometimes I think that if I should hear Polly's voice another moment I should go out of my mind.

"Do you know, Philip," with a short, dry laugh, "mother and Amy are always trying to entertain me. They tell me everything. Amy tells me even about the cow that she can see from her back window. She tells me how it spends its days and all about its moods. Fancy the moods of a cow! And I try to look interested, for I know her kind intention. And then they are always reading me things and telling me things which they think applicable to my case—and all of us pretend that we don't see the allusion, and it is all a ghastly farce. It is awful having people watch your moods and gauge your feelings. And they bore me so!"

It seemed as if a knife went through my heart.

"Now you interest me without trying," she went on. "You must be like the air of Capri. And you don't bother me about my debts—they are bad enough, Heaven knows—or suggest what my duty is toward Polly. I know it all a great deal better than any one can tell me.

"Philip, they don't know what it is to be torn up by the roots—they don't know the feeling of dire dismay that takes possession of your whole being, or what it is to be afraid to allow yourself to think, for fear that something in your head, that is always at a tension, will snap. Oh, they torture me with their small transparent efforts to make me forget the past! They only make me remember it the more.

"If they will only give me time I will get over it. I am glad to be free—my freedom is very dear to me, but I have not got used to it yet. It is said that a prisoner released from the dungeon where he has been confined for years will languish in the sunshine and pine for his chains. It is so with me. I have not got used to the sunshine yet.

"You remember what a busy life I led with Percy. When he was not at home he was at the other end of the telephone—you remember we had a telephone in the house. He was always ringing me up. Sometimes it was to tell me to be ready for a drive at a certain hour—or that he would bring one or two men home to dinner. Very often I would stay in for hours for a possible message from him."

So she went on from one incident to another that told its own story of a lost happiness, bitterly disowning the past and yet going over it with all the minuteness of a brooding mind and aching heart.

My face was wet with tears, and at last I put my head down on my arms and wept with all the *abandon* that belonged to my children.

Philip took a strong fancy to Polly, and because of Philip's interest and that he would not consider the child in the way, Elsa had Polly with her much of the time.

At first this was from a teasing sense of duty, but soon Polly began to interest her mother through the charms of her own little individuality. Gradually Polly awoke to the knowledge that she had a very pretty mamma—prettier than other little girls' mammas.

"My mamma's pretty hair," the child would say, patting Elsa's thick dark braids; or, "My mamma's pretty frock," when Elsa had on something that pleased her childish fancy; and Elsa, appreciating the fact that she had at last found favor in her little daughter's eyes, took pleasure in all these marks of waking love.

In a burst of more than usual satisfaction I wrote to Amy of the turn affairs had taken, and how much Philip had done to help Elsa reach her present calm. I was surprised at the unwonted bitterness than ran through Amy's reply.

"Mother," she wrote. "Elsa will disappoint you. Her heart is dead; she is incapable of taking up new interests. If Philip should love Elsa I am sorry for him. She has nothing to give him, for she spent her whole nature, her whole life, on Percy, and there is absolutely nothing left. She will tire of Philip as she tired of her housekeeping and her music and her languages, and he is not a man to be dropped lightly. Oh, mother, you have become so absorbed in the one idea of affording Elsa amusement that you do not stop even at giving her human hearts and human lives for playthings."

The summer was drawing to a close.

"Elsa," Philip said one evening, "you have been so good to me in making me feel that you trust me as a friend, that you tempt me to venture into what may be sacred ground. I want to know the cause of the separation between you and Percy."

"No, no; that is impossible," she said, almost angrily.

"I will tell you my motive in asking. Percy and I are old friends. He was my best friend until this affair. I have suddenly awakened to the fact that I am cherishing very hard feelings against him without knowing my grounds. If he is the villain I take him to be at the present moment, our next meeting will hardly be a pleasant one."

Elsa understood the threat thus quietly implied and said, hastily, "Oh, no, no, Philip! There must be nothing of that sort. Perhaps you had better know the reason if you feel like that. Percy was of a jealous, exacting nature. I had to be as careful of my smiles as if they were gold, and once, it seems, he thought that I was specially lavish of them to a man whom in fact I had hardly observed. I was too indignant to deny his charges and retaliated by seeming utterly indifferent as to what he might think of me or my conduct.

"Perhaps I went too far, for suddenly he took me by the shoulders and shook me as if I were a child. It only needed that to transform me into a perfect fury. I don't know what I said, but the next thing that I remember distinctly was that he said that he was sorry that I was his wife and Polly's mother.

"I took him at his word and at once began legal proceedings to give him back his freedom. He never made a single effort toward reconciliation, and it is this that is hardest to bear. He had meant what he said—he was sorry

that I was his wife and Polly's mother."

Before Philip had time to reply or I to express quick condemnation of my daughter's hasty action, a caller was announced and the subject ended abruptly.

It was absurd, unnatural, that a groundless quarrel, a mere misunderstanding, had been allowed to come to so tragic an ending; and I resolved, now that I knew the circumstances, that the last word had not yet been said.

I did not dare to think of Philip. That he loved Elsa I did not doubt. What if she loved him? My heart, my sense of justice, my conscience were on Percy Armitage's side.

The next morning Elsa announced her intention of going to the city to make some necessary purchases. I felt relieved, for I thus gained a day.

I was not ready yet to lay down a line of conduct for my daughter that might be as painful for her to follow as for me to enforce. She returned before the day was gone. There was a new expression in her face—one of quiet, concentrated happiness—and in her movements a quickness and lightness that I had not seen for many a day.

Polly was asleep, and sending Katrina away she took her place at the child's side. She was sitting there in the twilight in an absorbed silence when Philip's card was brought. With a shy look she said, " I cannot see him tonight. You see him, mother dear."

Her unusual manner roused my suspicions and I exclaimed, " Elsa, I cannot—I know what he is going to ask me. Oh, Elsa, how can you permit him to ask me for you—you, Percy Armitage's wife by every right in the sight of God and man."

" For me? What do you mean? " She laughed. " Why, Philip does not want me, mother dear. Let Philip go. I have something to tell my mother that will make her very happy. I have brought nothing but sorrow and anxiety to you and Amy. But, with God's help, I will make up for it in the future."

She paused and, as if to gain courage, bent over and kissed her baby.

" Mother, I have seen Percy. I saw him today. It was purely accidental. I went into a book shop for a new picture book for Polly. And there I saw Percy turning over some new publications.

" His back was toward me. He had not seen me. I don't know what impelled me, but, as he stood there, tall, broad shouldered, his fine head a little bent, he seemed to draw me to him as a leaf is drawn to a whirlpool.

" I went up to him and stood beside him for a moment without a word. His hand hung at his side and I slipped mine into his. He started, and then, turning and seeing me, reeled against the book stand, white and trembling, but holding my hand fast—oh, so fast! "

She caught her breath, and then, with her beautiful smile, said: " It is all made up, mother dear. I think I ought to write to Amy tonight."

" What are you going to do with Philip? " I asked, gravely.

" Philip, Philip—what has he to do with it? Oh, I see! You think Philip is in love with me. Well, dear, it is not your fault that he is not. But he knows that I have been loving Percy as hard as I could all this time. Oh, mother, we have such a joke on you! I think it is time to tell you our little secret.

" Philip loves Amy, but we were afraid to tell you because we saw that your heart was set on Philip's caring for me. There is no use of your denying it, and I am going to report you to your clergyman, my lady, as soon as we get home. You seemed so satisfied with the way things were going that we did not dare to tell you the truth. And we did not dare to tell Amy either, for we knew that she would

feel it her duty to refuse him for my sake as well as for yours.

"I have no doubt that Philip has come tonight to throw himself on your mercy. You dear old matchmaking mamma!"

"I wonder if Philip has gone!" I said, rising impulsively.

Elsa laughed and went out with me on the balcony. But Philip was nowhere to be seen. We sat there in the moonlight, Elsa and I, and talked it all over again, every moment a deeper peace filling our souls.

"And Amy will be so happy, for she loves Philip; I have always known it. And I shall go to church with Percy and take him back at the altar and thank God for him, and beg to be forgiven for having been so wicked."

Polly woke with a little cry, and Elsa hurried to her side. She soothed her to sleep and then came back to me.

"Mother," she said, "did you hear Polly when she woke? She called 'Mamma!' It always used to be 'Rina!' I think my baby loves me now."

THE CAPTIVES OF THE TEMPLE.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A tale of strange adventure in South American wilds. The sequel to a quest for the Great Royal Orchid, involving an escape from one foe only to fall into the hands of another still more relentless.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

On the ship Wing, bound to South America after rare woods, are Oliver Keyburn, son of the owner, and his friend, William Desklit. Keyburn has taken the part of Pedro Gapo, a negro member of the crew, against the cruelty of the captain, Jacob Pence. After they get into the Amazon, Keyburn and Desklit are made prisoners at the captain's orders, and preparations are under way to leave them on an island, when the vessel is wrecked by a tidal wave. Keyburn, Desklit and the negro escape and are picked up by a steam yacht, the Flora, hailing from London and bound for the head waters of the Tapajos, in search of a rare plant known as the Great Royal Orchid. There is a young lady in the party, Professor Wisdom's niece, and when it is no longer possible to navigate the river, all disembark and make their way through the forest.

During a night camp, Keyburn is suddenly struck down by an unseen foe, and when he recovers his senses finds himself on a comfortable bed in a room of barbaric splendor. A young negro is in attendance, and questioning him in the Spanish tongue, Keyburn learns that he is in the house of Padre Jadispiato, the chief priest of the temple. More he cannot learn save that he is allowed to look upon two immense Brazilian cats that guard the doorway and bar off all hope of his escape.

Presently Jadispiato himself appears, and from him the American ascertains that the place is called Ameza and that he was brought there to die.

CHAPTER V.

A DRAMATIC SCENE IN THE TEMPLE.

THE manner of the man filled me with such wonder that the effect of his words was not what he intended it to be. Undoubtedly he had sought to strike me with terror, whereas my strongest emotion was amazement.

Yet I confess to a creepy sort of feeling as the chilling words came like knives from the straight set lips.

"To die!" I echoed. "You say I have been brought here to die! But for what? In what way have I incurred your displeasure?"

"Your question is an idle one," was the stern reply. "You know full well

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the reason of your captivity. You set your face toward this danger when you invaded the confines of our country."

"But this is Brazil," I said. "I was one of a small party that came here merely on a scientific errand. What have we to do with Ameza?"

"Your scientific errand," he said, with a grandiloquent wave of his right hand, "is the crime for which you are to be punished."

"Is the search after knowledge, or the love of nature, a crime in Ameza?"

"No, not as you put it; but your search after the moon flower is a crime in that it infringes upon our rights, which we seek at all times to defend."

"You amaze me more and more. What is this you call the Moon Flower?"

"It is the giant orchid of which your party are in search."

"And do you mean to say that for being a companion of the men who sought that flower I am to be killed?"

"Yes, even so. The Moon Flower is the deity of Ameza."

More astounded than ever, I sat down and stared at him. It began to dawn upon me that I had fallen into the hands of a very remarkable and interesting lunatic, but if the stories he was weaving for my benefit were phantasms of his brain, the splendor of his apparel, the grandeur of his house, and his evident determination to kill me, were not.

"You have but a day to live," went on this strange being, after a pause. "Have you any preparations to make for your long journey into the unknown?"

"I have no wish to make the journey. Is there no appeal from your cruel judgment? Are you the ruler of Ameza?"

"No, Isisora is the ruler. She is virtually queen, though she has not that title, having come to us from the world and not by birth within Ameza. She is called the Priestess of Ameza."

Here was a gleam of hope. If there was a higher power in this strange place to which I might appeal, it was encouraging to know that the possessor of it was not born a lunatic like the priest.

"Am I to see this Isisora?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. All captives are taken before her."

"How comes it that you have a ruler who is not qualified to be your queen?"

"She is richly qualified save by birth. When you see her you will not wonder that she is the ruler of Ameza. But I have spoken more than I should. I meant merely to tell you that you would die in the Temple to-morrow."

"At least tell me if I am the only captive. There was quite a party with me."

"They are all here. The four Englishmen are now within the Temple burning their eyes with the glorious beauty of the Moon Flower they came to steal. That other American fought so fiercely it was necessary to bind him. He is now in another portion of my house. The young damsel is in the hands of Isisora. The negro is the slave of my slaves. Does my answer still your curiosity?"

"Now, tell me where Ameza is situated, and how it comes to be settled by white people who speak Spanish."

"I shall say no more. I have already talked too long and too pleasantly with an enemy."

"But I am not an enemy. I have no desire to take away the Moon Flower. I was shipwrecked in the Amazon—I and my American companion and the negro. We were picked up by these Englishmen, who refused to set us ashore."

"It is all the same. You invaded our territory."

He would talk no further, and with a haughty glance he turned and left me. Again I heard the clanking of the chains as the Brazilian cats were being replaced to guard my door.

When the excitement of the priest's presence was removed I felt exhausted

and depressed. There was little hope that I or any of my companions would escape the fate marked out for us by the stern old man. If Isisora proved to be as firm as he in the determination to punish our temerity with death, what power could save us?

The remainder of the day passed slowly. I remained alone in my gloom save for the occasional visits of the black slaves who passed before the growling cats with impunity.

I tried every art of which I was capable to get them to talk. I thought that if I could once gain the good will of one of these creatures I could bribe or plead my way out of that gorgeous prison. But they knew their duties, and swerved not a hair's breadth from its narrow path.

I was well fed, and all my creature comforts were looked after. But I was there to die.

I slept but little that night. I tossed on my luxuriant bed, wondering what the fateful morrow would have in store for me. Each hour as it dragged along carried me nearer threatened death.

I shuddered as I asked impotent questions of myself. Would these fanatics torture me? Would they give me some of the anesthetic used to overcome me in the forest? Would my death be a form of sacrifice to their strange deity? All these and other questions tortured me till daylight.

Early my questions were to be answered. I heard the growling of the cats and the tread of soft shod feet. A slave entered the room, followed by the priest.

"Come," said Jadispiato, touching me with a golden wand he carried in his right hand. "I am to lead you before Isisora."

"Then my time has come," I said, preparing to follow him.

"You shall learn. I told you what was in store for you. It is now resting with Isisora."

"May she prove less cruel than you," I said; "I am ready."

Outside the door four blacks stood waiting. They ranged themselves on either side of me, and we walked through wide stone corridors and out upon a great stone porch. From this I had a view such as I had not supposed existed in Brazil.

I was in a ruined city, part Spanish and part Moorish. Rude though the architecture had been, in many instances there were the remains of a real magnificence. Towers rose gleaming in the bright sunlight. Great domes on a temple not far distant shone resplendently.

I saw but few people, and most of these were black. I did see a number of white men and women, but these seemed, with the exception of a dozen priests, to be of a degenerate and unintelligent race.

All evinced considerable curiosity as I was conducted along a wide street toward the temple.

The entrance to this temple, though showing decay, was highly ornate. It had broad vaulted and pillared porticoes carved with no rude hand into representations probably of some local legends.

We entered here and I was guided at once into the very body of the place, and my breath almost refused to sustain its functions as I gazed upon the scene before me.

The interior of the temple was a splendid space, much like the audience chamber of any cathedral. Great carved pillars upheld the arched ceiling, and light streamed through windows that would each have brought a fortune in New York.

But the place itself, interesting as it was, sank into insignificance by comparison with the presiding genius of it all.

Within a sort of chancel, clad in garments of snowy whiteness, stood a woman—and such a woman.

Young she certainly was—not more than eighteen. Her hair was of a beautiful golden hue, and was held in some

lovely fashion of her own by diamond bands. Her head seemed a thing of glory as the sunlight, streaming in at a window, sent arrows of vivid color from the precious gems she wore.

But brilliant as were the diamonds in her hair, it seemed to me that her eyes were more brilliant still. They were now resting on me with a sort of melancholy interest, and I felt a thrill of hope as I noted the utter absence of the cruelty so clearly expressed in the high priest's looks.

This splendid priestess raised her right arm, bare to the shoulder, and of marvelously beautiful mold, and motioned for me to take my place before her. I saw then that all the other members of the party were there and were half hidden as they knelt before the priestess.

On either side of her stood a golden jar in which grew the most beautiful flower I had ever seen. The plant itself was about ten feet high, with thick stalks and long, vividly green leaves. Upon each stalk was one flower of magnificent color and size. It was undoubtedly the Moon Flower of Ameza, and the Great Royal Orchid of Professor Wisdom.

Grouped with the captives of these strange people were several priests like Jadispiato, stern, unyielding, cruel.

As I joined the others of my party I became uncomfortably aware that the gaze of one of these priests was resting on me. It was a fixed stare of such power and malignity that I knew, even before I saw him, that here was an enemy to be feared far more than Jadispiato.

I looked back at him. He was a young man, powerfully built, with a cruel and sneering mouth.

Even while I felt the influence of his gaze, I began to feel another. The eyes of Isisora were now studying my face with a mild but searching keenness.

I thought I detected a pleased expression as she turned away. I looked again and her cheeks had gone deadly white—she was looking into the cruel, vengeful eyes of the young priest.

When I had taken my place by the side of Desklit, who silently clasped my hand, Jadispiato stepped before the beautiful priestess and began in a sing song monotone the story of our capture.

"It had come to our knowledge, O mighty priestess of our delight, that two separate bands of men were coming this way to invade our sacred territory. One of these bands was composed of rude and unscrupulous sailors from an American ship that was wrecked in the great Amazon. These men escaped in boats and touched at Santerem, where, as you know, one of our secret emissaries is stationed. Here they mistakenly told the object of their present journey, which was to penetrate to the region called by the ignorant the Devil's Ring, and find the diamonds believed to be plentiful there.

" The other party was composed of a few men from England, who were journeying up the Amazon in a private vessel, also to invade our territory and carry away with them our sacred Moon Flower. The fame of these had been carried to the world by some traveler who chanced to escape us, and these men dared to outrage the sacredness of our lives by intruding here.

" We sent out parties to meet and capture them, preferring to take them alive and bring them here to punish them with death before the very flower of which they sought to rob us. These captives before you, O mighty Isisora, are the flower hunters. The others have not yet been found, but will eventually fall into our hands."

As Jadispiato ceased, one after another of the other priests said:

"Jadispiato speaks truly. The intruders must be punished."

I did not know whether it was fact or fancy, but I really believed the priestess was growing more mournful looking every minute. The priests un-

doubtedly thirsted for our lives, but I did not think Isisora shared the desire to kill.

"It is well, Jadispiato," she said, inclining her lovely head toward the priest. "You have nobly served the interests of our country. The prisoners shall receive the punishment they deserve. Leave me for a time alone with them that I may prepare them for the ordeal to come."

Jadispiato turned to go, but there was a murmur from the fierce looking young priest.

"It used not to be so," he said. "Why does the priestess wish to be alone with strangers?"

"I have commanded, Forresto, and I will be obeyed."

A look of suspicion was now clearly visible on the face of the priest called Forresto. He glanced toward me with venom in his writhing lips.

"What does that fool think of me, anyhow?" I asked myself.

"We have sworn to obey Isisora," said Jadispiato. "Come, let us retire. We can trust our priestess to observe the rites and protect our sacred flower."

They filed out of the temple, Forresto giving me another searching glance as he passed.

No sooner had the entrance doors closed behind the priests than Isisora became quite a different person. Her pale face was turned toward us with every sign of misery upon it. She wrung her hands in despair.

"Oh, why did you come?" she cried and in English. "Why did you intrude upon the seclusion of these people? Was not the whole world wide enough for you without striving for this one little corner of the earth. See what has come of your rashness. For the sake of a flower you have lost your lives. I shall not command your death, but I alone cannot save you. I am priestess here only because these fanatical people called me beautiful and fed their imaginations upon my appearance in this temple.

"Never, since I have been priestess, now only a year, have they brought prisoners before me. I hoped it would not happen, but here is a crowd of them. What shall I do? What can I do? Ah!" she flung her arms around Miss Wisdom as she spoke. "You are as beautiful as I, and I am expected to have you torn by the cats. Oh, why did you come? Why did you come?"

"But we did not know that such a people existed," answered Lottie, with a sob. "I wouldn't have let my uncle come to such a horrid place if I had known."

"No, of course; but was the flower worth so much to you that you must come so far to get it?"

"My dear young lady," interposed the professor, speaking now in English, as she had done, "do you not know that thousands of pounds are spent every year in the search for flowers less beautiful than this?"

I observed two things about the professor. He was not at all impressed with the dignity of Isisora's position as priestess, and he seemed not to fear the death that was so near.

"I really believe," said another of the party, Dr. Twinkle, speaking with earnestness and solemnity, "that this is quite the strangest adventure that ever befell a party of flower hunters. It is amazing. I am not sure that I am not enjoying the thing. Of course this is all a farce about killing and all that."

"No! No!" cried Isisora. "I wish it was a farce. Do you think I'd stand here weeping if it was not terribly real? I tell you these people are fanatics. They are mad as mad can be."

"An entire race of madmen? Who ever heard of such a thing?" exclaimed Professor Turnbell.

"Mad! There never was a race so mad. It all comes, I think, from eating the root of the Moon Flower. It has a strange effect upon the mind."

"Queer, very queer," said Professor Wisdom, taking out a note book and writing this statement down.

"I'm sure I don't know what is to be done," went on Isisora. "I am in terrible distress. Here is a party of seven white people all condemned to die, and not one of the lot thinks it is true. What can I do to save you?"

"Why, yet us go, to be sure," replied the professor. "Open the doors of this idolatrous place and set us free."

"But don't you understand that outside this temple there is no place where you are safe? Here you can be slain only at my command while I am priestess. Outside you might fall victims to some fanatical assassin. There is no escape that I can think of. Oh, if you had only remained where you belong, see what might have been prevented."

"Well," said Mr. Hebard, who was a very matter of fact Englishman, "let us have a complete understanding of the situation. Give us a description of this unholy place, so that we can form some estimate of what is before us. For one, I do not intend tamely to lie down and die before a flower."

"But what can you do? What can we all do? There are two hundred of these people, all controlled by the priests, and at least a thousand blacks. Every entrance into Ameza is through mountain passes that you could not find even if it were possible to set you free. This is indeed a terrible situation."

Suddenly we heard a tremendous uproar outside, in the direction taken by the priests. I distinguished the voice of Jadispiato raised above the others, and then that of Forresto answering.

"Ah!" gasped Isisora, placing her hand to her heart and almost swooning with terror. "They are fighting even now. Forresto reads my thoughts like an open book. He knows I do not intend to order your death. And Forresto is—he is—he wants me to be his wife."

"Heavens! He isn't such a loon after all," said Desklit. "I don't blame him for that."

The doors of the temple were flung wide open and we saw the priests in an uproar striving to crowd in. The foremost of them was Forresto, and he flourished a knife.

"False woman!" he cried, breaking from his companions and rushing toward Isisora. "False priestess! I know you for a trickster now! You will not command the death of these intruders! You looked with favor upon this one who is tall and powerful! I saw the light of friendship in your eyes for a stranger that you have ever withheld from me. I say he shall die, and you shall die, unless you say the words I've pleaded for so long. Now I swear by the Moon Flower that you——"

He had raised his knife and made a dash at me. I stepped to one side, caught his arm in my own far from feeble grip, swung him round and smote his jaw with a good hard fist. Another blow sent him to the floor.

"Quick!" cried Isisora. "Follow me! Nothing can save you now unless one dash succeeds. Come! The priests! The priests!"

And with a bound she led the way into a labyrinth of passages beyond the Moon Flower's altar.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDERNEATH THE TEMPLE.

HAVING been the nearest to Isisora in the temple, I was closest behind her in the flight, and was sensible of the rush of feet behind which told of the coming of the others. I heard Lottie Wisdom panting from the sudden exertion and heard Desklit's calm voice encouraging her.

The four elderly Englishmen were still further behind, their laggard steps bound to cause complications.

To our ears came the wild cursing of the priests as they paused at Forresto's prostrate form.

Then we heard them following in our steps, their angry voices echoing through the great vaults of the temple.

Our beautiful guide turned into a dark passageway and I saw her lay hold on a shining handle, apparently fastened to the floor.

" It leads to the prison!" she gasped.

Her own strength was insufficient to lift the door. I helped her, and a yawning hole gaped at our feet, showing stone steps leading downward.

" Descend!" she said, in a tone of entreaty. " I will close the door."

" But the others!" I cried. " I cannot leave them."

" Descend!"

The needs of the moment were too vivid to permit hesitation. I darted down the stairs with Desklit and Lottie at my heels. Then I heard the door bang after us, and I felt a sickening sensation as I thought that Isisora and the four Englishmen had been left outside.

But by the time I had gone the length of the staircase, not only Desklit and Lottie, but Isisora herself joined me.

" The others!" I gasped.

" They were too slow," replied Isisora. " They were captured by the priests. I had barely time to close the door and draw the great bolt."

" My uncle!" cried Lottie.

" He is in the hands of Jadispiato and Forresto. From Jadispiato, fanatic though he is, we may expect some mercy, but none from Forresto. But the anger of the priests is not so much against those men. The blow that felled Forresto turned all their venom toward the one who struck it. Follow me."

We were in a dimly lighted underground apartment, bare of all furniture. Lottie was weeping and Desklit cursing under his breath. I felt as if I was in a tomb from which I was never to escape alive.

The beautiful priestess again led the way, and from that bare apartment we entered another but little lighter, which, however, contained certain rude furniture and gave evidence of being inhabited. Yet we could see no one.

A rough table stood in the center of this room, and three chairs were ranged at the sides.

" Altama!" called Isisora. "Altama, where are you? It is I, Isisora."

" I come," replied a quavering old voice in a sort of patois half Spanish and half something else. " I come, but slowly, for I am old."

From some darkened recess there appeared an aged crone, black and wrinkled and withered. How old she was I could not guess, and never found one who knew. At least a hundred years must have been her account with time.

Her frame, bent and attenuated, shook tremulously as she advanced. She was dressed in some old faded garments, and her feet were bare.

" You visit me?" she said, querulously. " I am still alive."

" I hope you will live long, Altama," said Isisora.

" But who are these?" demanded the aged hag, glancing sharply at Lottie, Desklit and myself.

" They are friends," replied Isisora. " Listen, Altama. When, months ago, Jadispiato condemned you to a horrible death because you cursed him for his crimes against you, I, instead of allowing the cruelty to be a fact, had you secretly brought here and fed by my own household slaves. You told me then that if at any time the priests turned against me you would help me if it lay within your power. I am come now to beg that assistance."

" So those mad priests have turned their poisoned fangs on the beautiful one they swore to obey!" hissed the old woman. " I warned you, and knew I spoke the truth. Curses upon them! They live in madness. But these are not people of Ameza. I know that, but do not know what they are."

" They are travelers, Altama, who were captured by the priests and brought to Ameza to be sacrificed. They came to find the great flower the priests call the Moon Flower."

"Fools! Fools! Did ye not know the folly? Did ye not know the madness of the Moon Flower?"

"We knew nothing save that there was a large and beautiful flower in this region," I answered. "We did not even know of the existence of Ameza."

The little sharp eyes opened somewhat wider at this.

"All the world knows of Ameza, and shuns it as a curse."

"We have fled from the priests, Altama," said Isisora. "These three, with four old men and a negro, were the party. The negro is a slave in the house of Jadispiato, and will not be injured. The four gentlemen of science were too slow and fell into the hands of the priests. Forresto is incensed because I will not become his wife. He rushed upon me to injure me, and this brave American knocked him down. We fled, as I knew there was no hope of mercy. Our only hope is in the aid you promised me. You are old, and know more of the secrets of Ameza than any other, save Jadispiato and, perhaps, Forresto."

"Aye! I know more even than Jadispiato," mumbled the old crone. "Years before Jadispiato was born I lived in peace and plenty under the very shadow of the temple. All in Ameza were not then mad. The famine did it. Yes, there was once a famine in Ameza, and food was scarce. Of animal food there was none, for there are no hunters in Ameza save the blacks, and they have only spears. The people ate the roots of the Moon Flower, and now all Ameza is mad."

"But how to escape them! That is what we came for," said Isisora.

"Yes, to escape. But it is not so easy."

From this the old woman began grumbling and muttering to herself, and Isisora could get nothing more out of her.

"Tell me this," insisted the priestess, "is there any other way for them to enter here?"

"No. The door from the temple is all."

No more would she say, but went about the place rubbing her hands together and uttering wild incantations to some unseen gods.

"There is no help for it; we must wait," said Isisora. "Here are benches, so rest."

Lottie sank into a seat and buried her face in her hands.

"Be calm and brave," said Isisora. "This old woman has these spells of abstraction, but she will help us."

"While we are here," interposed Desklit, "tell us something about these strange people. Where do they come from? What and who are they?"

"To tell that requires more knowledge than I possess," answered Isisora. "I am not of them myself. Some years ago, when I was a child, and my father a ship owner and trader, he came to the Tapajos to get certain choice woods to carry to North America. I had pleaded with him to be allowed to take a voyage with him, and so my mother and I accompanied him.

"His vessel was not large, and had but a small crew. We were attacked by natives in the jungle and carried far into the interior. We remained prisoners of the savages for a time, but a war was then going on between our captors and another tribe. Our savages were defeated and we were left in the forest. We fell into the hands of these Amezans, who carried us into this country, where my mother soon after died. My father was slain in an attempt to effect an escape.

"I was then taken into the house of Jadispiato, where his wife taught me and brought me up. The wife of Jadispiato was a wonderful woman, but she is now dead.

"These people did not always kill their captives. Even now, though they steadily increase in madness, they sometimes speak of strangers as welcome additions.

"The origin of the Amezans is lost

in antiquity. The wife of Jadispiato told me that she believed they came more than three hundred years ago from Europe, probably Spain, and their language today is Spanish mingled with the native tongue of the blacks. But if they kept their language, that is the only trace of their former condition.

"Undoubtedly the blacks were the original inhabitants of the place, and they are all flower worshipers. The whites settled among them and adopted their form of worship—perhaps voluntarily, to win the favor of the tribe, or perhaps after eating of the poisonous tubers of the Moon Flower. The blacks gradually degenerated and became the slaves of the whites. A priesthood was of course natural among Spaniards, and from the priesthood of the Roman Church it degenerated by degrees to the priesthood of flower idolatry. All these years they have lived quite to themselves, and I suppose the absence of any other blood has had some influence on their condition.

"The priests all marry, and in the house of Jadispiato I was led to look upon myself as destined to be the wife of Forresto, but I abhorred the man, and the wife of Jadispiato shielded me. Jadispiato loved his wife, and my escape from the unwelcome attentions of Forresto is due to the sacred regard he has for her wishes.

"I have eaten at times of the root of the Moon Flower, but dislike the taste so much that I have not formed the habit. It is a habit and perhaps a vice much like the use of opium. Once addicted to it, one scarcely wishes other food.

"The race is rapidly dying out. The men are, save for a few such as Jadispiato and Forresto, weak and incapable. The few strong minds in the priesthood sway them at will.

"Ameza is surrounded by almost impassable mountains, and to that fact alone is due the immunity from attack the people have enjoyed. Until Jadispiato became the ruling priest they lived without knowledge or care of the outside world. But Jadispiato discovered that travelers sometimes came to find diamond deposits along the mountain streams, and has ever since been wary of visitors.

"He has even organized a sort of secret service outside of Ameza, and has black agents at Santerem to send warning of expeditions ascending the Tapajos. It was in that way he learned of your approach.

"The Amezans are almost entirely without arms. They have knives which they make themselves, but these are impotent against the arrows and spears, and even guns, of the people who dwell in the forests and villages between here and the Amazon. If the natives of Brazil were not so incapable and lazy themselves, a small force of them could enter here and destroy the people. There is practically no defense.

"In capturing an enemy the Amezans resort to craft. They have a drug which is distilled from the inner petals of the Moon Flower, which acts like chloroform. They used this on your party.

"Such are the people of Ameza, and you can judge now for yourselves what our situation is. Undoubtedly all the friendship Jadispiato formerly had for me is dissipated by my action today. He is vengeful and cruel. Forresto is even more so.

"These two are virtually the rulers of Ameza, though nominally I have that honor. In fact, I am but a figure, chosen because Jadispiato believed I was good to look upon, and therefore capable of bending the people easily to his will as expressed by me. That is the story of Ameza as I understand it."

"It is a remarkable story," said Desklit. "I have heard of many plants of South America with various narcotic and stimulating qualities. Indeed, we use some every day in the practice of medicine—for instance, quinine. Then there is opium from the poppy, conia

from the hemlock. The fact that a constant diet of the tubers of this flower destroys reason is not strange. It is the romantic and almost incredible setting in which we find the truth, that makes it seem so strange."

"To me it sounds like a chapter from the 'Arabian Nights,'" I observed.

"And to me like a horrid dream," added Lottie. "But it would not be so bad if my uncle was only safe."

"I fancy your uncle, and, indeed, all the gentlemen we left, will not be harmed—at least not at once. Jadispiato is a peculiar man and like all madmen he has a faculty for distorted reasoning. For instance, had the priests caught us, the entire party would have been put to death in the temple, and perhaps our blood sprinkled on the petals of the Moon Flower. But as the chief offenders escaped, it may be the whim of Jadispiato to hold the others captive until he has retaken us and make the executions at the same time."

"By the way," said Desklit, who was more interested in the flower than I was, "where does the Moon Flower get its name?"

"From the fact that it blooms only at the full of the moon."

"After all, the history of the Amezans is no stranger than the stories of the ancient lotus eaters."

"No," I said, "but it has the added interest of being true."

By this time the old woman was again wandering round and talking in some heathen gibberish to herself.

She stopped suddenly before Isisora.

"I can help you," she said in a voice that sounded nothing like any of the tones she had previously uttered. "I can help you."

"I knew you could," said Isisora.

"Your name now is Isisora."

"Yes, that is my name," replied Isisora, turning a wondering glance toward me.

"But your name was once Elna Tarvey."

"Yes," assented the priestess, with a nod at me to signify that the hag knew what she was talking about.

"And you wish to become again what you once were. I, Altama, alone, can transform you. Repeat, after me, these words."

She began to mumble a jargon and Isisora's face blanched.

"Our hope is gone!" she cried, clutching my arm. "This fancied power is not the aid I wished. The old woman has lost her wits. The excitement of our presence, after her long imprisonment, has been too much for her, and she is as mad as Jadispiato himself."

"Mad! Mad! Yes, Jadispiato is mad," repeated the crone. "But he cannot keep you as you are, for I will turn you back to Elna Tarvey."

We stared at one another blankly. Desklit and I, hoping that Isisora, or Elna as I called her from that time, would get the assistance she wished from the old woman, had scarcely realized the seriousness of our position. But now it came to us with vivid force.

We were imprisoned in a cellar and would either starve there or be captured as soon as the priests had succeeded in forcing an entrance. We were unarmed and any attempt to reënter the temple would certainly result in our capture and death.

"Well," said Desklit, "we are in a box sure enough. What shall we do next?"

"I am powerless to advise," rejoined Elna. "I led you to this place thinking it might open the way to safety. Instead I have brought you to a death trap."

"Never mind, don't give way to tears. We'll get out somehow. Did I not understand you to say your own blacks came here with food for this woman."

"Yes, but they came when I held the temple secluded from intrusion."

"There is no doubt the priests know where we are?"

"None whatever. I heard them trying to open the door."

"Do you know the extent of these cellars?"

"No. All I know is that this part was used as a prison for those who were to be killed in the temple. I hid Altama here, and had the bolt changed from the upper to the lower side of the door. I fancied that some time I might need a temporary hiding place. I always distrusted Forresto."

"Jadispiato probably knows more about the place than any one else," said Desklit. "We must get him down here and make his own life depend on his saving ours."

"How will you undertake that?" I asked.

"Well, as we know of only one way to enter here, he will have to come in that way. I am going now to examine that door. It is likely that the priests will take turns in guarding it, if they cannot get it open. Jadispiato will be there alone, perhaps, and we can capture him."

Desklit's plan, wild as it was, was really the only one offering us any hope. We could not live without food, and any risk was better than a weak submission to fate.

We left Lottie with Elna and went together to examine the door. It was a massive piece of metal, fitted exactly to the opening in the stone floor, and so hinged that one strong man could force it upward. It was now held in place by a ponderous bolt which had been shot by Elna when we entered.

"Hark!" said Desklit. "They are working at it now. Do you hear?"

We could very easily distinguish the blows of some iron weapon on the stone floor. The priests were no doubt trying to pry up some part of the flooring, which would be an easier feat than to open the bolted door.

"The best thing we can do is to wait for them," said Desklit.

We sat on the stone steps listening to the heavy blows above.

"A powerful arm is wielding that thing," remarked Desklit.

After we had been there some time a small opening appeared at the side of the door. Pieces of stone and cement fell into the cellar, and the point of an iron bar came through. At the same time we heard a voice say:

"Dat's de hardest floor I ever saw!"

"Pedro Gapo, as I'm alive!" whispered Desklit. "The priests know a strong man when they see one."

The iron bar was withdrawn, and Desklit applied his eye to the hole in the floor.

"'Sh!" he whispered to me. "I can see some distance around, and Gapo seems to be alone with Jadispiato. Suppose we make the attempt now."

"Come on, one time is as good as another," I answered.

We shot back the heavy bolt, and with a quick, united effort, threw open the door. The priest and Gapo started back in astonishment.

"'Fore God, Senor Keybu'n, what you goin' do?"

"Hush! Help seize the priest!" I cried to him. All three grasped the form of Jadispiato. One so covered his mouth that he could not cry out. Another pinioned his arms and legs.

We hurried him into the cellar. I, being the last, again closed the door.

"What means this outrage?" demanded Jadispiato, angrily.

"Shut up, you fool!" ordered Desklit. "You got us into this scrape, and now, if we die, you die with us. If you want to live, you've got to get us out of it."

CHAPTER VII.

REDUCED TO DESPERATION.

Jadispiato was the most enraged and obdurate man I had ever seen. His powerful muscles made him a difficult prisoner to handle, and it was about all that Desklit and I could do to drag him to the lighted portion of the cellar where Elna and Lottie were waiting anxiously for our return.

Old Altama was still wandering around the place, wringing her hands and talking incoherent nonsense.

We left Gapo to guard the door, armed with the same iron bar with which he had forced a hole through the floor of the temple.

Struggling, cursing, beside himself with fury, the priest was at last secured, and sank exhausted on the floor of the cellar.

Elna, who had been quicker to think and act than Lottie, knowing more of the place, had found us an old rope, and with that we bound Jadispiato to prevent further struggles or attempt to do us injury.

"What will you do, accursed dogs!" demanded the priest. "Do you know the penalty for this act?"

"We know," said Desklit, "the penalty of disobedience to our demands. We are in desperate straits here, and consequently in a desperate mood. We came here innocent of all intent to do harm. Had you received us as friends, and told us of the sacredness in which you held this abominable but beautiful flower, we would have turned back and left you in unmolested possession of the botanical monster. But instead you made us captives and threatened us with death."

"And death you shall have, base wretches!" replied Jadispiato with an unpriestly curse. "Death at the altar of the Moon Flower. This outrage upon the chief priest of the temple shall not go unavenged."

"But the chief priest, as you see fit to call yourself," rejoined Desklit, "is in considerable danger. You will do well to listen to us. We are determined to get out of this place with our lives. You control the fanatics above and you alone can help us to safety. Your own safety depends upon your willingness to obey."

"Even were I willing to so disgrace my high office," answered Jadispiato, "I could not help you. I did, it is true, control the priests. But now the younger of them are under the leadership of Forresto, and my aid would be of no avail. But even if word of mine could take you from this place to a haven of safety, I would not speak it."

"Then you will die in this cellar."

"You do not count on Forresto. In an hour he and his associates will be here."

"There is truth in what he says," interposed Elna. "Forresto knows that we are here. All argument with Jadispiato will avail nothing. We must explore the place and find a more secure hiding spot. This old woman, if she had not been suddenly bereft of her senses, could no doubt guide us to one."

At these words the eyes of Jadispiato turned toward Altama.

"Hag!" he cried in fury. "Old witch! Did I not order your death? How is it I find you here? Who has played the traitor?"

At the well known tones of her old tormentor Altama stood a moment as if rooted to the spot. Her face took on varying shades of expression.

"You!" she yelled, pointing a long bony finger at him. "You, whose ruthless hand deprived me of husband and son by death, and a daughter by sorcery! You here in this damned place with me! Ha, ha! It is the fate!"

For a moment there was absolute silence. Lottie, Elna, Desklit and I watched with breathless interest this meeting between the two poor crazed things. Altama looked the mad woman, but the face of Jadispiato was the face of an intellectual man, now distorted with rage.

"How is it!" he demanded again. "I am the chief priest of Ameza, and I commanded your death. Ah! It was the treachery of Isisora! I see it now."

The old woman seemed struggling with some unseen demon. Her face twisted and twitched, her eyes gleamed like coals of fire, and her arms were raised above her head as if to invoke a curse.

"And you think I am still in your power!" she shrieked. "I, whom you sent to this place! And whom you followed here, as was meet!"

At a quick sign from Elna we drew back into the shadows and left these two, Jadispiato lying on the floor, and old Altama bending over him, to fight it out together.

"I curse you!" she said. "I cursed you with my dying breath."

"Heavens!" muttered Desklit. "She thinks she is dead."

"Be silent," whispered Elna. "The old woman has her wits again. I know the signs in her eyes. She is torturing Jadispiato."

"What mean you, hag?" cried the priest. "What do you say with your dying breath?"

"Aye! So I said and mean. Do you not know where you are?"

"Well enough I do. I am in the cellar of the temple, having been brought here by those intruders."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" screamed Altama, and I shivered, for in her madness she had uttered nothing so terrible as that screaming laugh. "The temple! The cellar! See how the minds of the evil cling to their scenes of violence! Cellar! Temple! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Curses on you! What do you mean? Where am I then?"

"You are in hell! Yes, to this place you sent me because I cursed you for the evil you had brought upon me. To this place you sent those who chanced upon Ameza, intending no harm. And to this place you came by the hand of Forresto, who is now ruler of Ameza."

There was another silence.

"He will not believe that nonsense," I said in a low tone.

"My friend, if you had been following delusions all your life, and now, excited beyond reason, if that hag screamed those things at you, you would believe them," returned Desklit. "But what is she trying to do with him? I fail to see the utility of it all."

"No person in Ameza knows Jadispiato better than Altama," said Elna. "They are old enemies."

The priest was glancing round him and in the dim light I fancied his eyes were wild and frenzied.

He saw me first and beckoned for me to come to him.

"Well," I said.

"Is it true what this she devil tells me?" he asked in a voice that was almost stifled with terror.

"It is true," I answered.

"But you! How came you here?"

"I was killed with my companions by your command."

A shiver ran through the frame of the priest, and he closed his eyes.

Old Altama stepped near him again and was about to speak. Elna rushed to her and dragged her away.

"Be silent!" she said. "You have done enough. He is terror stricken. Even if he does not believe the absurd thing, it will act upon his mind. We must leave him alone in darkness to think about it."

"Good!" whispered Altama in a voice that was almost a whistle. "I will show you where."

"Did I not tell you?" whispered Elna to me. "Altama is herself again. Her hag-like looks and manner have a wonderful effect upon a mind so disordered as Jadispiato's. Let us follow her."

At that moment we saw the huge form of Gapo rushing toward us.

"'Fore God, Senor Keybu'n!" he cried. "Dey is comin' like bees. Dey done open de trap doo' an' I kilt three, but dey come, dey come, an' dey keep on comin'."

"We must hasten," said Elna. "Take up the priest."

We lifted the now silent form of Jadispiato, and followed the swiftly gliding forms of Elna and the old woman. Lottie, shivering with terror, kept close to Desklit.

"Leave the burden to Pedro and me," I said to him. "You take care of Miss Wisdom."

He dropped his portion of the weight and took Lottie's hand in his.

That was a wonderful race, now I come to think of it. We discovered that the supposed cellar was really a great subterranean place extending, no one knew how far, on either side, the roof upheld by pillars of rock. Passages led in all directions, and we passed from the lighted region into one of total darkness. Altama alone knew the way, and with her hissing voice she guided us.

It must have been at least ten minutes, and perhaps twice as long, that we scurried through those gloomy caves. Then Altama halted.

"They may find us here, but they must look far and long," she said. "They are cowards, these priests, and will not venture. We are safe for the time."

We laid the priest down on the floor and stood in a silent panting group.

After a while, far away, we heard a faint sound as of voices.

The priests had entered the cellar. They were calling Jadispiato, evidently, for the rising tones seemed like the crying of a name.

"They seem to be calling some one," said Desklit. "They seek Jadispiato first, believing that where he is, there they will find us."

"Perhaps," replied Elna, "but I doubt it. My own belief is that they do not know Jadispiato is here. They may think so, but how can they be sure? From what you told me, there was no opening left large enough for Jadispiato to enter. There was no evidence left that you took him through the door. I rather think they are calling me, for they know I led you this way."

For a long time—seemingly a day, but perhaps not more than an hour—we heard their voices calling. The sound came like slow waves, now increasing in volumes, now receding as they explored some distant portion of the place. Then they stopped altogether.

"They have gone, I think," said Desklit.

"But they will have left a guard."

"I can't see," I put in, that we have gained anything. Even if they do not discover us, what is to keep us alive? We shall starve in this place."

"Our only hope is in Jadispiato," said Elna. "Altama has done all she could. I have had much experience in Ameza, and, not having partaken of the maddening root of the Moon Flower, I have observed. There was once a priest who was as strong in his worship of the flower and his adherence to the rules of the priesthood as Jadispiato. But he grew ambitious, and plotted among the other priests for power. His plan was to overthrow Jadispiato and make himself the ruling priest.

"The plot was discovered, and the priest thrown into prison. He was almost starved, and none of the root was given him. His mind gradually cleared, and at last he became entirely rational, but suffered tortures. He died in fearful agony."

"This is quite possible," said Desklit. "Such a root, possessing so great an influence on the mind, would naturally create a craving for itself that nothing else could satisfy. So it is with opium, chloral, or any other of the deadly drugs to which people even in civilized communities become addicted. The sudden and total loss of the favorite stimulant or food results sometimes in mania, sometimes in death. Now, if such a root as this will produce mental disorder, hallucinations, and chimerical forms of organizaton, why would the loss of it not react and bring about a sane condition just before the death that is inevitable?"

"It sounds reasonable enough as you put it," I said. "I would not have believed that a root existed the eating of which would make a sane man mad."

"Good Lord, man! Whiskey will do it! Any of the drugs taken by dissipated people will in the end destroy

the mind. Look at the effect of absinthe. A very short career of absinthe drinking will produce insanity. I suppose you could find in this very Brazil a dozen plants that will destroy the brain."

The day passed into another, and the priest lay dull and stupid on the floor.

"'Fore God, Senor Keybu'n," said Gapo, "ef dat man don' come roun' putty soon we alls die of dat starvation."

And it did seem that Pedro was about right. Hunger had seized us all. Lottie felt weak and sick from lack of food. Elna, stronger and more hopeful, stood it better. Desklit grumbled a little, and I was sensible of the most excruciating gnawing at my stomach.

Desklit had stolen out once to see if the priests had all left the cellar, but did not dare go beyond the reach of our voices. Elna spoke to Altama, and the old woman sped away in the darkness. She returned as silently as she had come, and we heard her panting breath as she reached us.

"Two are there," she said, "sitting on the stairs."

Thirst became a formidable ally of hunger; but, fortunately, the place we were in was damp, and by placing our tongues on the wet walls we could avoid suffering.

Then Jadispiato began to rave. He went through the forms of the service in the temple. He condemned over and over again certain enemies of his to death. He screamed for his favorite food. He moaned and cried and was on the verge of total collapse. Then, after a number of hours, he began to speak coherently again.

"Where am I?" I heard his voice moan out.

"You are in the caverns under the temple, Jadispiato," said Elna quickly. "We are dying of starvation here. I know that you must be aware of some secret way in which we may leave here—some way beside through the trap door in the temple floor."

"Drink! I want water!" he gasped.

"There is no water here, nor food," said Elna. "The priests are waiting for us, but we do not want to go to them. We must find a way out of the caverns without going through the temple. Do you know such a way?"

"Food! Give me the bread made of the root of the Moon Flower!"

"There is none here. Take us to a safe place—to your house—to any place except the temple, and you shall have food and drink," she answered.

"Go through the temple!" he moaned. "Go quickly, or I shall die. There is no other way."

"The man is certainly sane now," I said. "But our waiting seems not to have benefited us."

"Experiment number one a failure," said Desklit. "Let me talk. Look here, old fellow," he went on—"or at least listen if you can't look. You condemned certain people to death simply because they came into your country after your accursed Moon Flower. Some of those people are here now. Do you still wish them to die?"

"I—I—cannot see you—yet your voice—no—I do not know you. I am dying. Take me into the light. Where am I? Oh, where am I?"

"It is coming," said Desklit. "In another hour or so he will talk rationally, and probably forget all about his animosity toward us."

"Speak, Jadispiato," commanded Elna. "Is there any other entrance to this place except through the temple door?"

"No, none," came in a soft whisper from the old priest.

Lottie gave a gasp and I heard her sobbing. Three days in that dark and gloomy hole would try the nerves of any girl. With the horror of almost certain death added, it was no wonder she broke down. Desklit tried to comfort her.

"What do you think?" I asked Elna. "Do you believe he spoke the truth?"

"I think so," she said simply.

"Then there is but one thing to do, and that is tackle the temple. I'm not going to die like a rat in a trap when there is a fighting chance to win out."

"Nor I," said Desklit. "We have wasted so much time here that our strength is gone. But we must try it."

"Oh, forgive me," cried Elna, and I saw now that she was breaking down. "It was I who brought you to this. I—I—did not know——"

I reached out toward the voice and took her trembling hand in mine.

"You have nothing with which to reproach yourself, my dear friend," I said. "You acted for the best, as you thought, and like many another, you erred. It is nothing. We know our mistake now and must seek to rectify it."

"Come," added Desklit. "There is no time to lose. Have the old woman conduct us back to the stairs."

At Elna's command Altama led the way, guiding us by her voice, till we were in the light.

It was still what would usually be called dark, but to us, just from total blackness it seemed brilliant.

"Look! There is no one on the stairs!" said Desklit.

We hurried forward and, with the powerful negro leading, took the two girls by the hand and led them upward.

"Be ready," said Desklit. "Gapo, kill the first man you see who opposes us."

"'Fore God, I will!" exclaimed the negro.

With a powerful shove he sent the door open. A cry of dismay and amazement came from him. As I went up, leading Elna, I heard his voice saying:

"What! You, Jim Riggles! What dis t'hing mean?"

A startling sight met us when we emerged from the cellar.

On the floor of the chamber from which the door descended, lay the dead bodies of Forresto and six other priests, and near them, with his mute eyes asking for help, was a wounded sailor from the Wing.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE.

We had left Jadispiato and Altama in the dark caverns. A hurried examination proved that there was no living being save Jim Riggles and our own party in the temple. My first thought was for the dying priest, while Desklit, with perhaps a more practical mind, showed more interest in the wounded sailor.

I left the doctor attending to Riggles while I sought for food. Having accompanied Elna to her own house, and obtained from her a supply of food for the two unfortunates below, I sent Gapo down with it.

I was careful to send Jadispiato some of the cooked tubers of the Moon Flower, for in no other way, according to Elna's testimony, could his life be saved.

Elna and Lottie remained at the house of the ex priestess, and I returned to Desklit.

I found that he had so far succeeded with his patient that the wounded man lay quite comfortable on an improvised couch, and was breathing easily while he slept.

"Has he told you anything?" I asked.

"No," was the reply. "I did not ask him. He is not in any great danger, and we will get his story in a short time."

Gapo returned from the caverns and reported that both Jadispiato and Altama had partaken of the food sent them and were much improved.

In a short time a sweet voice called us, and we saw Elna herself beckoning.

"Come to my house and eat," she said. "You have thought first of others, and it is time now you ended your own fast."

Desklit gave a look at Riggles, and we joined Elna.

" It is so strange," she said. " I cannot find one of the blacks of my house. Even the women are gone. Here and there in the street I see dead men, black and white. There must have been a battle. But where are they all now? "

" The thing is inexplicable at present," replied Desklit. " When that sailor is ready to talk he may throw some light on the situation."

" There is something now," I said, as the distant sound of firearms came to us. " There is still fighting. I suppose Pence has stampeded the Amezans, priests, laymen, black slaves and all."

We found a gratifying meal spread on a mahogany table in Elna's dining-room. It had been prepared by her own hands with Lottie's help. We set to with energy, being more than half famished, and Gapo, with his great eyes rolling in ecstasy, put himself outside the best meal of his life—so he testified.

We felt like new men and women when we had eaten as much as Desklit declared was safe. We had been without food so long that to satisfy our hunger would mean to gorge ourselves, and that would be fatal.

We were in a unique position. A few days before we had been prisoners threatened with death by the priests who ruled Ameza. Now, to all appearances we had Ameza to ourselves.

" I am terribly anxious about my uncle and his companions," said Lottie. " Do you think, Elna, that the priests have killed them? "

" It is quite possible," replied Elna, " though they had their minds well occupied looking for us. It is probable that your uncle and his party were rescued by the sailors, and have joined in the fight."

" It would be a great addition," I remarked, with a smile. " Not one of them knows how to shoot."

We returned to the temple, and found Riggles awake and thirsty. Desklit gave him some cool water from a fountain that played near the temple, and the sailor sat up and stared at us as if we were apparitions.

His face, pale before, now flushed. He timidly held out a bandaged hand and his eyes looked pleadingly into mine.

" Oliver Keyburn," he said, " we committed a crime against you that no man could forgive or forget. But I was powerless in the matter. There were a few among the crew—I was one of them, I swear—that objected to the evil course commanded by Pence and Huskway. But they had the majority with them and threatened to shoot all who rebelled. Revolting as the crime was, we could do nothing. Even had we raised objections we would not have saved you and the doctor, but would have lost our own lives. Thank God, you are alive. I don't understand it. Not one man in a thousand would have come out alive after being left on that island."

" God and fortune favored us," I replied. " But that is not the interesting thing now. What we want to know is what has happened here. We have been hiding in a cavern for three days, and when we left this place these priests were in control and very numerous. There were, so I understand, about two hundred of the white Amezans and a thousand black slaves. Now there are none to be seen save a few dead men in the streets."

" It is a short story," said Riggles. " We ascended the Tapajos in boats we got at Santerem. We were camped on the trail leading from the river to this place when we were attacked. It was a strange sort of attack. There were about a dozen in the party, and they had no firearms. They seemed to have some kind of a drug that stupefied people. We kept a good guard, and about ten men were always awake. These people did not succeed in drugging all, and the alarm was given.

"A fight took place, which of course was short, as we were all well armed. We killed all but two, and compelled those two to tell who they were. Pence appeared to have more information about the country than any one else, and he seemed delighted to think we had captured them. He compelled them to guide us right to this place. None of us knew—unless Pence and Huskway did—what sort of place it was. All we knew, and all we cared, was that Pence said there was a country here guarded by mysterious people who had rich diamond deposits. We wanted diamonds, and were ready to go to any lengths to gain them.

"At the point of the sword the two prisoners guided us to a difficult pass in the mountains, and we entered this country, whatever it is. We numbered about forty from the Wing, with about twenty more desperadoes Pence had picked up in Santerem. We were well armed, had plenty of ammunition, and were easily a match for all the people here. Most of the men had knives, some had spears and bows, but there was not a gun in the place.

"The people fled before us to this temple, and we attacked it. I was fighting side by side with Pence, and we made our way to this spot because the leader—that fellow there" (indicating Forresto)—"was here. He was killed, and I was wounded by our own fellows in the rear of us. The people broke away and fled.

"We found help even after we got here. Those blacks you speak of—most of them—joined our party. If they were slaves, as you say, then that accounts for it. Slaves will always fight against their masters.

"I don't know where they are now. I suppose the fight has been a running one, and our people have driven the others to the hills to annihilate them."

"Did you see anything of four elderly gentlemen when you got here?" I asked. "Four Englishmen, I mean, who were prisoners."

"Yes. They were in the temple bound before those big flowers. Pence set them free and compelled them to join his forces."

"Thank God, then, they are safe," murmured Lottie.

The firing still continued at a distance.

"Well," said Desklit, "we don't seem to have anything in our way now. What shall we do? Try to escape?"

"I cannot go without my uncle," objected Lottie.

"Pardon me—I forgot," said the doctor quickly. "No, of course you cannot. I was a brute even to suggest it. But since there is nothing for us to do, I think I will take a look at our friend Jadispiato. The poor old devil is harmless now, and there is no use letting him die if we can save him."

"No, I would not like to have his death on our hands," I said. "If the tubers of the Moon Flower really unseat the reason, he was not responsible for what he did."

"I will go down with you," said Elna. "Will you not come, Lottie?"

A warm friendship had sprung up between these two beautiful girls, and they were happy in each other's sweet companionship.

We went down together, leaving Pedro Gapo to stand guard and notify us if anything occurred or if the fighting parties returned.

We found the priest lying on the floor in the lighted portion of the cellar where we had first found Altama. The old woman was crouched near him, crooning softly to herself.

An idea struck me, and I returned for a bed. We then made Jadispiato comfortable, and Desklit spoke to him.

"How do you feel now, my friend?" he asked.

The priest looked weakly up at him and a grim smile played around his mouth.

"Do you call me friend?" he asked.

"And why should I not?" replied Desklit.

Jadispiato sighed.

" It all seems very strange," he said. " I seem not to be the same man I was, yet I am. Was it not said that I was dead and in hell? "

" It was said, but that was when you were obdurate, and we needed a ruse to compel you to obey. It was done to frighten you."

" Nothing could frighten me. But it seems that I have lived two lives. Do I not remember ordering your death? "

" You condemned us to death, and we fled from the temple to this place. You were endeavoring to break through the floor when we captured you and brought you here."

" It caused my death, for I shall not live. I should still be an enemy, but do not feel hatred."

" The long period of abstinence from the food you have been accustomed to has no doubt caused you much suffering," replied Desklit, " but our action has really saved you from a violent death."

Jadispiato looked up wonderingly.

" What do you mean? " he asked. " I was not afraid of Forresto."

" No, it was a more dangerous enemy than Forresto. Forresto is dead himself."

" What! Forresto dead? You killed him? "

" No, we had nothing to do with it. Do you not remember telling us that you had information of two parties coming here? One was our party after the Moon Flower, and the other was a party of rough sailors after diamonds."

" Yes, yes, I remember."

" They have come. There were forty of them, well armed, and twenty more ruffians from Santerem. Your attacking party did not succeed as it did with us, and they were killed, all but two. At the point of the sword they were compelled to guide the intruders to Ameza. Fighting took place at once, and the black slaves joined with them against your people. The priesthood is annihilated and the city is deserted. There is still fighting at a distance, and no doubt all will be slain."

For a moment a look of grief distorted the features of the old priest. Then he raised his hand feebly and took that of Desklit.

" I thank you for taking me by force," he said. " I thank you for giving me the opportunity to die peacefully."

" But I hope to save you," responded the doctor.

" No, it is impossible. I have seen many die who had been deprived of their food. The root of the Moon Flower produces strange results when eaten, and one is the impossibility of living more than two days without it. I have been longer than that, and, though I have so long survived, the mischief is done, and I shall not live."

" I regret it," said Desklit.

" We all regret it," I added. " Here is Isisora. Do you not remember her? "

" Ah! " a happy smile lit up his features. " Ah! Isisora! I loved you well. Like a beautiful daughter you were to me, and I made you priestess. Your father taught you to hate us, and, though you ate not of the Moon Flower, you were a good and lovely priestess. The others believed in you. Many a fight I have had with Forresto about you. He knew the influence I had over you, and wished me to compel you to become his wife. I refused, because you did not like the man. A bold conspiring man was Forresto. And so he is dead. Well, at least you are rid of his attentions."

" It is our opinion," said Desklit, speaking for us all, " that you should remain here for a time. It is not an inviting place, but if we took you to your own house, and these enemies of your country return, flushed with victory, they might, in their bloodthirstiness, kill you in your bed."

" Ah! They are wicked men. I will remain here and die in peace."

We stood around him a short time looking down upon the worn cheeks of what had once been a handsome face, each one of us feeling a real sorrow that the old man could not be saved.

He looked from one to another, and we saw that he was growing weaker, even after the food I had sent him.

His voice was faint, and he raised his hand to indicate that he wished to whisper. We bent low over him.

"You are all very kind," he said. "I thank you before I go for what you have done, and for what you would have done had you been able. And now I ask that you leave me alone with Isisora, the priestess. I have something of importance to tell her. She will be the only living representative of our once proud country, and though she is not born of our blood, she is perfect, and therefore we accepted her as one of ourselves. Leave her with me."

We withdrew to a distance, leaving the lovely girl bending over him. We saw the gleam of excitement in his dying eyes as he whispered his message into her shell-like ear. We saw her nod and caress his hand as she listened.

The whispered conference lasted but a short time, and she rose and beckoned to us.

"He is dying," she said.

And he was dying. The strange, misguided man, whose mind had been wrecked by the fatal food of Ameza, and the inheritance of its effects from his parents, who also ate it, lay quite still and smiling with his bright eyes looking up at us.

Several minutes we stood there in silence. Then, in a strong voice, he said, "I go. My time has come."

Elna knelt weeping beside him. Desklit took his hand and bade him farewell. Then I took his hand in mine.

"You are strong and young and manly," he said to me. "These other two have their affinity. I know that Isisora looks upon you with friendly eyes. I have loved her since I first saw her—with the honest love of a father who wishes for his beloved nothing but the best and worthiest. There are enemies in Ameza, and our people are no more. I leave Isisora in your keeping. Swear to me that you will protect her life and her interests even at the risk of your own."

"At the sacrifice of my own if necessary," I said warmly. "It needs no oath to bind me to it. I swear to please you, but it would be my pleasure without an oath."

"I believe—I know," said Jadispiato. "And now my beautiful one—I go—kiss me."

With a sob Elna bent and kissed him, and with that kiss still warm on his old lips his life went out.

We were about reverently to arrange him when we heard the fog horn voice of Gapo calling.

"Senor Keybu'n! Senor Oliver! Dey's comin' fur suah now, an' I hear dem shrieks an' yells like de debbil!"

"Come!" said Elna with a flash of intuition. "Let them find us above. It will not do to let them know of this place. We may need it again."

Recognizing at once the wisdom of her remark, we filed up the stairs, carefully closing the trap behind us.

"Where shall we meet them?" asked Lottie. "Don't forget how anxious I am about my uncle."

Desklit pressed her hand.

"I suggest," I said, with what I thought was a flash of genius, "that Elna still remain Isisora, the priestess of Ameza, and meet them as a queen."

Desklit laughed.

"It would be a fine scene," he said, "but that would scarcely be obeying the commands of Jadispiato. The first thing you knew some of Pence's cutthroats would slay her. My idea is that she should appear to be one of the professor's party, and know nothing about this place more than we do."

"Good!" I said. "But her garb is different."

"We have been here long enough for her to have exchanged."

I acknowledged the better wisdom of his plan.

We now heard the sounds that Pedro Gapo had heard, and it was much like the return of a drunken mob. In fact Pence had discovered some native liquor and had drunk deeply of it.

The swaggering, roaring company came into the street before the temple where we stood waiting.

The drunken gaze of Pence lighted upon us. His face lit up with vulgar admiration when he saw the two girls.

"Ho! Two more beauties to become our companions. Ho! What! Here is the one for me. I'll take the best!" he cried coarsely.

He made a stride toward Elna, but I placed myself beside her.

"Hands off, you scoundrel!" I cried. "I'll throttle you like a dog."

He looked—he recognized me, and his face grew purple.

"You! Oliver Keyburn! Great God, is this a place for spirits?"

"It is a good place for vengeance!" I said, my rage getting the better of my judgment.

I sprang at his throat to strangle him, but before my fingers could clasp his windpipe I felt a blow on the head and fell backward to the ground. I heard Elna and Lottie scream, and the voice of Huskway saying:

"Two can play at that game. We'll make good the job this time, or know the reason why."

(To be continued.)

BROTHER DUNSTAN AND THE CRABS.

BY CAROLINE WILDER PARADISE.

The strange duty that fell to the lot of the "flower of sanctity," and the remarkable obstacles encountered in the discharge of a seemingly simple task.

THE summer evening was beautiful, with the full moon shining on the hedgerows, but the hour was so late that all honest and God fearing folk were abed.

Cottage doors were locked, and the inhabitants snored lustily. The village was as silent as the churchyard, and the only sounds to be heard by intent listening ears were the katydids in the trees, and the stealthy footsteps of Brother Dunstan, as he came down from the monastery on the hill and, passing over the fields, entered the village like a ghost.

What Brother Dunstan could be doing at this hour of the night it was difficult to imagine.

His frock was kilted up about him in unseemly fashion, and his head was bare, and he carried a large basket; and altogether he presented an uncommonly worldly appearance for one who was regarded among his brethren as the very flower of sanctity. No one among them all could make so many spiritual exercises daily and nightly as he; and I doubt if ever before in his life he had been outside the monastery walls after sunset.

Brother Dunstan had an honest, pure, and abstracted young face. His eyes were as winning as a child's, and he had fair hair, with whose wavy locks the summer breeze took profane liberties as he strode along in the moonlight.

His basket seemed heavy, and he shifted it from arm to arm. Once he lifted the cover cautiously and peeped in, standing discreetly in a corner of the hedge.

What could be his errand? Could one so pious be intent on adventure or

intrigue? But why choose so bright a night, and why carry so mysterious a basket?

Had there been any one about to see, Brother Dunstan's spotless repute might have been called in question.

* * * *

I suppose that never was man more soundly asleep after the day's labors than was the farmer, Giles Aubrey, on this very evening. The sun had been still high above the horizon when he ended his work and, returning to his cottage, fell asleep over his bowl of porridge, roused himself to smoke his pipe, and falling asleep over that also, gave up the struggle.

Barring his windows and locking his door, he pulled off his smock and fell upon his bed, muttering a prayer while his eyes closed; for Giles was a religious man, and a true son of the church. At this late hour, then, he was so far sunk in slumber that it would have taken a mighty effort to arouse him even into partial consciousness.

It was totally without his calculations to be called up for any reason in the night. When the sun blazed into his face through the little window, he would stir, and grunt, and stagger up —but now! It was six good hours before the sun would rise!

Brother Dunstan, however, paused outside the door of this heavy dreamer, and addressed himself to the task of rousing him. He rapped loudly upon the shutter, and, gaining no response, he thundered still more loudly upon the door.

He called Giles Aubrey's name loudly; and it may be that the voice of the church carries more penetrating insistence than any other, for, as Brother Dunstan persevered, Giles Aubrey did finally stagger to the door, and unbarring it stand there stupidly, with the moonlight on his blinking eyes.

It took him one dazed moment to recognize the brother, and then he hastily crossed himself and began stammering.

"Holy mother, what have I done? I have confessed. I have fasted. What is amiss?"

But Brother Dunstan held up a warning hand.

"Do not alarm yourself, my good man," he said, quietly, "I have not come to accuse you of sin. I have roused you for a different reason, and I must ask your pardon for having come thus late. You are a faithful son of the church, and," went on the brother, with some embarrassment, "I have brought you with my own hand a little gift. It is in this basket. I beg you to accept from me a lot of very fine crabs newly out of the water."

Giles Aubrey's eyes fairly goggled as the priest uttered these words; and indeed one in a more wakeful condition than he might well have been surprised.

That a monastery brother, in kilted frock and hatless, should call him out of bed at midnight to present him with a basketful of live crabs was the most astonishing thing that could well be conceived. And Giles' honest soul delighted in crabs more than anything on earth, and his soup pot had not seen them for many a long day.

"I will set the basket inside your door," said Brother Dunstan, hurriedly, "and return. It is late. I hope that you will find their flavor good; and so good night."

But as he turned away, Giles, still petrified, caught at his sleeve.

"Ah, unfortunate man that I am," he stammered, and he raised the heavy basket from the ground.

"How can I tell you? And they are so good, the saints know, and I have not tasted one since Michaelmas!

"But take them back, for I am under penance for venial sin, and nothing but my bread and my porridge must pass my lips until this day month."

He thrust the basket upon the retreating priest, and as he did so a particularly lively crab pushed up the lid and wriggled out. Giles thrust him back with a hand that twitched.

He was so fat and juicy, and the odor of sea water about him was so strong and delicious!

"Take them away," he repeated, stammeringly, "I cannot break my fast. I am under penance. I would give my best cow to have them in the pot, but I cannot."

The tears fairly stood in the simple fellow's eyes.

Brother Dunstan reluctantly took the basket once more upon his arm.

"God be with you," he said. "You must not break your penance; though I regret——" and his mysterious figure melted into the moonlight, and the wonder of his visit with his basket of crabs was still unexplained.

Miracles did not take place every day at the monastery, but on this day there had been a surprising miracle.

At vespers the Father Superior, praying fervently, had been endowed with supernatural power; and lo, all the unholy things that existed among the only partially sanctified gathered there had been transformed. There were, I regret to say, even in those hallowed walls, spite, and envy, and malice, and evil speaking, and jealousy, and suspicion, and back biting, and irreverence, and a thousand and one highly objectionable things that the brotherhood would be well rid of.

These elements had been transformed. They were changed, through the wondrous efficacy of the superior's prayer, into an army of fighting, scuttling, diabolical crabs! Once realizing what had happened, there was an unseemly scramble among the brothers to collect these hateful creatures and put them safely under cover, and then the world must be rid of them for good.

The monastery soup pot was no place for them, obviously. But boiled they must be, and eaten; and there were poor folk in the village to whose Sunday dinner they would be a welcome addition. This very night the community must be clear of them, and they would cast lots as to which brother should carry them into the village and bestow them upon the deserving. As we know, the lot fell upon Brother Dunstan.

Giles Aubrey went back to bed, to forget his disappointment in slumber, and Brother Dunstan trudged away with his heavy load. He would rouse no more of these honest folk from their sleep, but would sit down under the hedge and wait for morning; and accordingly he sat down.

But morning was long in coming, and his eyes became very heavy. Moreover, the crabs were continually popping out of the basket, and he must exercise vigilance to keep them under cover.

A nightly vigil in his cell was a very different thing from this vigil in the open fields; and, finally, leaning both arms heavily upon the covers of the basket, to keep them closed, he yielded to slumber.

* * * *

At the earliest possible moment he proceeded on his way, and stopped at the cottage of Dame Jessamy, which was just at the other side of the village from Giles Aubrey's.

Dame Jessamy was a joy to the eyes as she stood at sunrise at her cottage door, the cheeriest, neatest, rosiest old woman in all the kingdom.

She bobbed a most reverential courtesy to her guest.

"God bless you," she cried to him; "and are you about doing good so early in the day?"

"I have come," explained Brother Dunstan, gently, "to bring you a little gift. One sometimes is glad of a new flavor on the board, and I have here a basketful of fine fresh crabs;" he was

about to say "just out of the water," but could he say so conscientiously?

He hastened to set the basket down within the cottage, as he had done at Giles Aubrey's, but the old woman checked him. On her bright face a shadow came.

"Crabs, your reverence, crabs?" she faltered. "It is good and kind of you, but I cannot take them, or anything else that comes out of the sea! I am a foolish old woman, I know, but my boy was drowned, perhaps I have told you, and lies at the bottom; and since then anything from the sea has given me that creepy feeling! I could not eat them, asking pardon, your reverence; but there are many others, poor souls, who would be glad."

"Your feeling is, as you say, a foolish one," said Brother Dunstan, with a touch of severity, "but since sea food offends you I will not press my offering. Good day and God be with you."

"Will you not step into my little house, and let me give you a draft of milk, or a bunch of grapes?" said the good woman, anxiously, being painfully embarrassed by the situation.

The brothers from the monastery were not folk with whom one could feel on easy terms, and she could not possibly imagine any reason why this young saint, known to be the nearest perfection of them all, should have stopped at her door with this strange offering.

The basket, however, was once more lifted to the brother's arm, and he courteously but firmly refused her hospitality.

She watched him pass out of sight, bewilderment on her face.

"I would have taken a bottle of wine," she said to herself, pensively, "or a basket of the monastery fruit, but crabs—nay, I could never have tasted them."

* * * *

A little house a bow shot away from Dame Jessamy's, with hollyhocks about the door, and mossy shingles on the roof, was all too small to contain the happiness of Reuben and Isabel, who had been wedded a fortnight.

On this day, a half hour after sunrise, they sat at breakfast. There was upon the table a brown loaf, and a dish of wild strawberries, and an earthen pitcher of milk; and they had a tangled bunch of wild flowers in an old jug; but they had nothing else, save perfect happiness and content, and a complete absorption in each other.

They talked gaily and laughed much; and it was a rare pity that no poet chanced to pass that way to see them, and write an idyll on love and springtime and sweet country joy.

The parting which lay before them, when Reuben should go out to his work in the fields, leaving the young wife to play at tidying the house, until in an hour she should fling on her pink bonnet and follow him, seemed a grievous thing, and they put it from them as long as possible.

Presently Isabel looked up, and saw in the window, framed in a tangle of honeysuckle, the wistful, unworldly face of Brother Dunstan. He had stood there for many minutes, lost in a dream, his fresh young manhood, which the frock could only conceal, not kill, all astir.

There was a curious pain and jealousy in his heart as he watched them.

Had he been conscious, he who had never even touched a girl's slight fingers, that he was envious of these wonderful possibilities in the lives of other men of his years, he would have wrestled with the feeling and cast it out; but he hardly knew what he was thinking.

As Isabel saw his face, with its sad young eyes, she sprang up, light as a fawn, and throwing open the door bade him enter.

Brother Dunstan hesitated on the threshold. It seemed scarcely right for him to come into this house where the honeymoon was new.

"Pray, accept this simple gift," he said, earnestly. "These chanced to come in my way" (a chance indeed!) "and I shall be glad if you will accept them. Pray do not thank me. I am only too glad to be able to bestow anything, I who have so little," and he fairly hastened from the door.

* * * *

At last the burden was off his shoulders. It was well worth the trouble to rid the brotherhood of such evil things. How such trifles can disturb peace!

And now they should have no more of Brother John's malice, and Brother David's laziness, and Brother Solomon's petty spite—ah, and his own self love! It had been a blessed miracle which had changed all these bitter elements into the bodies of hideous, crawling things, to be boiled and eaten, and so done away with forever.

Meanwhile, Reuben and Isabel opened the basket.

"Poor creatures," cried the girl, "and to think that I must put them alive into the pot! I love every living thing too much for that. Sweetheart, I shall give them to little Paul, and if he likes he may sell them for half a crown."

So little Paul, who was a sturdy lad of ten with a cheek like an apple, and a mercantile instinct that was well developed already, was summoned, and took the basket, and staggering under its weight strode off to find a customer.

"Pray, Peter Simple, hast a crown to give me for a basket of fine live crabs?" he cried to the first whom he met.

"A crown! And where should I get a crown?" returned Peter Simple, a clumsy sixteen year old, putting his hand cautiously into his pocket to feel that his half dozen crown pieces were safe.

"'Tis a pity," said little Paul, "for they are worth thrice that, so fat and so lively as they are."

The two stood under the summer sun, the basket between their feet, and at length the bargain was concluded, and Peter carried away his purchase in triumph.

"Peter!" cried his mother, who was as simple minded as he, and a pious, grateful soul, to whom the pleasures of the palate were nothing if one might do a deed of generosity and grace, "Peter, remember, my son, how good the brothers of the monastery have been to you. You would never have known your letters if they had not labored faithfully with your slowness, and now you shall carry this basket of crabs to them as a token of your gratitude."

Peter Simple raised the basket, with gloom in his heart, and betook himself to the monastery. When he reached his destination there was no living soul in view, but a sound of singing came from the chapel, telling him that every member of the brotherhood was there, rigidly observing some feast or fast.

He would not disturb them at their devotions; so Peter, quietly stepping within the corridor, left for once unguarded, set down his burden.

"I can tell them it was a token of gratitude from me when I come for the catechism on Sunday," he reflected gloomily, and strode away.

* * * *

And ere the brothers had finished their devotions in the chapel, the lid of the basket was pushed up, and one after another the army of crabs wriggled their way out.

They scuttled about the corridors, they hid in the corners of the cells, they scrambled here and there, and engaged in battle with one another, seeming to be everywhere at once. There were fifty of them, but there seemed to be a thousand; and it was the biggest and most malignant of the number that caught Brother Dunstan by the skirt, as he passed, rapt in devotion, to his cell.

THE AMERICAN SYNDICATE.*

BY FREDERICK R. BURTON.

A sturdy fight against heavy odds. A narrative setting forth the devices resorted to by an enterprising New Yorker who goes into Porto Rico with grit, thirty three odd dollars, and a sign board.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Joe Barber, down on his luck in New York, borrows two hundred dollars from a friend, and armed with a signboard reading "The American Syndicate, J. A. Barber, Manager," sets out to Porto Rico to make his fortune by his wits. Customs dues on the signboard reduce his capital on arrival to thirty three dollars after paying his passage, but Joe puts on a bold front. By his assurance of manner he succeeds in hiring an imposing office, and chance brings him the acquaintance of a native, Don Octavio Valla del Rey, the chance in question being the precipitation into his arms of the don's beautiful daughter, owing to an accident to her carriage. Joe talks trolley line investments with the don and hires for his office assistant a young man of the don's recommendation, who announces his name as Miguelo Marto, but whom Joe decides to call Mike, which, he adds, is all the English he wishes the fellow to know.

After looking over the field, Joe elects to get up a corner in the ice cream freezer market, and begins by buying up the entire stock of a restaurant keeper, giving him the privilege of using them for a week longer. Meantime he arranges by wire with Seeborg & Company, St. Thomas, the nearest point where freezers are obtainable, to purchase the thirty seven they have on hand at their own terms. Joe is asked to dine with Don Octavio, and over the cigars explains the proposed trolley line to the don's friends, who, to his great satisfaction, are deeply interested; Joe also is much impressed by the beautiful daughter Sylvia. Hearing, the next day, that the Ponce caterers are all going to St. Thomas, he decides to accompany them; and by allowing the don to think he contemplates closing the trolley deal with others, he so alarms the Spaniard and his friends that they put up one thousand dollars forfeit money. When the young manager walks into Seeborg's store, in St. Thomas, to pay for his freezers he finds the Ponce caterers there in excited talk over his corner on the market.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CATERERS COME TO TERMS.

WITH an evident air of reluctance, Seeborg intimated to the caterers from Ponce that they had better withdraw. When they had done so, Joe asked at once whether any attention had been paid to his request for second hand freezers.

"Yes," said Seeborg, "and with those we have in stock, we can supply you with forty one altogether, but——"

"How long," interrupted Joe, "will it be before you can get any more?"

"A month, I suppose, but I was going to say that in view of your being unknown to us, while these gentlemen who were just in, are established customers, I am in doubt as to whether we should be held to our agreement. We don't find any mention of the American Syndicate in Bradstreet's."

"How should you expect to?" demanded Joe, sharply. "The Syndicate was not even organized until the end of the war was in sight."

"True," replied Seeborg, cautiously, "but your own name, Mr. Barber, surely that ought to appear in Bradstreet's, or, if you represent such a con-

**This story began in the November number of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

cern as you appear to, there must be the names of some of your associates there. You know perfectly well that it is not customary to give credit except when there is a commercial rating, or satisfactory references."

During this speech Joe had been figuring with a pencil on the back of an envelope. He had foreseen what was coming, and the one thing of all that he wished to avoid was an unanswerable question as to the names of the American capitalists who stood back of the great Syndicate.

"Forty one freezers," he said, referring to his figures, "at $15 each amount to $615. What discount do you propose to allow for cash?"

"Spot cash, Mr. Barber?"

"Certainly. As long as there is any disposition to question the standing of the American Syndicate, it will incur no bills."

"Well," said Seeborg, who was evidently struggling with a serious doubt as to whether it would be good business to give offense to this cool, new customer, "I presume you will be satisfied with ten per cent off."

"Perfectly," responded Joe, "and deducting ten per cent off $615 we have a balance of $553.50 which I shall be glad to place in your hands as soon as I see the forty one freezers loaded on the steamboat bound for Ponce."

To make certain that no effect should be lost, Joe drew from his pocket the roll of notes that the Porto Rican capitalists had given him in the morning.

"Nothing could be more satisfactory to us," said Seeborg, "and I hope that you will not regard us as unduly inquisitive, Mr. Barber."

"Not at all," Joe answered, grandly; "you are simply exercising ordinary business precaution, and there is no fault to find. When can the freezers be shipped?"

Seeborg told him that the freezers in stock would be conveyed to the steamboat wharf at once, and that the others that were to be picked up from various parts of the city could be got together the following day.

As Joe meantime had learned that a boat was going back to Ponce at noon of the next day, he desired Seeborg to hurry the cargo, and being assured that this would be done, he left the office to go to the hotel.

The Ponce caterers had waited for him at the door of Seeborg's office, and when he came out they surrounded him with angry words and fierce gesticulations.

"We see through you now," they cried, "you would rob us of our business, but we shall get even with you. We shall yet find a sufficient number of freezers in St. Thomas to enable us to supply the demand in Ponce, and we will give you an American trick in payment for your own. We will sell ice cream at less than cost, so we shall get all the ice cream customers, and you won't have any."

This ultimatum they presented incoherently, all five talking together, and when at last Joe understood it, and was able to get in a word on his own part, he said:

"Gentlemen, when you have bought up your freezers, come to me at my hotel, and perhaps we can make an arrangement that will be mutually satisfactory."

They looked at him with amazement at his effrontery in suggesting any more dealings with them, and in that condition of mind he left them.

"These Ponce fellows," thought Joe, when he was where he could think uninterruptedly, "have really got a hold on me that they don't dream of. I am bound by my contract with them to pay cash for their freezers when their week of free use expires. The necessity of keeping Seeborg from instituting too many inquiries about the American Syndicate has made it impossible for me to keep my contract with the Ponce caterers. Give me two weeks of ice cream making, and I will

be flush, but that I can't have, and I shall have to think out another device, for, of course, it won't do to touch Don Octavio again so soon."

In the evening the Ponce caterers turned up at Joe's hotel, more wrathful than ever, but less excited. The bitter facts of the situation had chastened them. Not one freezer in all St. Thomas did they find that had not been gobbled up by their Yankee rival.

They came now, not because they expected to gain anything by it, but because it was the only desperate course left for them, and they had some little hope that by threatening Joe with an adverse public opinion which they might arouse in Ponce, they could induce him to retreat somewhat from the strict terms of the contract.

Joe did not give them time to voice their feelings.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I read in your faces that you have learned the whole truth. The means to pursue the most profitable part of your business has been taken from you. The whole matter is one of straightforward business transactions; and we won't discuss it, for I have got another matter to lay before you.

"Properly handled, gentlemen, there is business enough in ice cream for all of us, and I propose that you gentlemen, and your associates, all become my agents. I will give you a good, reasonable commission upon your dealings. I will add freezers to your stock rather than take them away, and thus enable you to keep the patronage that now makes your business profitable. You understand, of course, that if I take your freezers, and you are thereby unable to supply your customers with ice cream, many who come to you for cakes and other such things will be driven away. Now I want you to keep all their trade, and there is no reason why we should not work together."

The Porto Ricans listened to him open mouthed. They could not grasp his proposition at first. It seemed to open to them possibilities happier than they had dreamed could exist since they had discovered how he had cut their resources from under them. On the other hand, anything Joe said was now viewed by them with suspicion.

"What devil's design has he hidden under this offer?" said one to another.

Joe heard the question, and answered it in perfect good humor, going rapidly into details, and showing them how his scheme was not only not going to ruin them, but was likely to place them on a much better business footing than they had occupied before.

He talked as readily as if he had had this plan in mind from the beginning, instead of having to hustle it together as a desperate expedient late that afternoon. Miguelo Marto, his secretary, would act—he said—as his inspector, collector and general agent. Marto would keep the accounts of the dairy men and others who furnished the materials for making ice cream.

He would have an eye each day upon the output and would also exercise an authority to see that the supply was kept up to the demand constantly.

The Ponce caterers listened in silence until Joe had finished. Then they asked a few questions.

They thought they knew Marto. Was he the poverty stricken relative of the great Don Octavio? They believed they could trust him, but was Don Octavio back of it? They had seen the don, or one of them had, in Senor Barber's office.

"Don Octavio," said Joe, emphatically, "has nothing whatever to do with this business, and knows not the first thing about it."

The upshot of the conversation was that the caterers said they would think it over. They felt inclined to accept the arrangement, for unhappily, they could see no other way to avoid ruin. Joe was content enough to let them think it over, for he was positive that they would have to come to his terms.

Seeborg managed to get all the freez-

ers to the wharf in time for loading upon the next day's boat. Joe and the caterers, therefore, returned together.

On the way they had another talk about the proposed arrangement. One of them, who had become spokesman for the party, cautiously suggested that they might accept his terms provided he carried out strictly his part of the contract, and paid them the actual cash for their freezers.

"Gentlemen," said Joe, suavely, "there is to be here either a monopoly of the ice cream business absolutely in my hands as manufacturer and dealer, or there will be the more sensible division that I have suggested. If it is to be a monopoly, I shall require the delivery of your freezers and pay you for them. Then I shall establish cafés of my own. One is already in course of preparation. In a week I can have a dozen. You may operate the freezers now in your respective places on commission from me, subject only to this—that if you do not do business enough to satisfy me, I shall then pay you the contract price for the freezers and take them away."

This view of the case staggered the caterers. They felt that Joe had them, and that it was useless for them to squirm. They thus reported the situation to their colleagues at home with the result that during the day after the return to Ponce, Joe was largely occupied in drawing up new contracts, the effect of which was to make every caterer in Ponce subject to him, so far as the ice cream business went.

Meantime the preparation of his own café, which was to be in charge of his secretary's mother, went on, and there also went voluminous letters to New York relative to the prospects of organizing a street railway company in Ponce.

Joe gave his friend Wolcott, a chance to make a dollar in this matter. With all his audacity, with all his unscrupulousness, if you will, in playing upon the greed of Ponce capitalists to provide for his immediate necessities, there never had been an iota of insincerity in Joe's advocacy of a railroad.

He believed in it thoroughly. It appealed to him as the most promising field for immediate investment that he had seen in the island, and that his game was not all bluff could have been seen plainly enough if the local investors had been privileged to read his letters.

If they had read them, to be sure, they would have demanded their forfeit money, and would have cut Joe's acquaintance, even if they did not go so far as to tar and feather him, or banish him from the island. But there was as yet no danger to Joe of suffering such outrageous consequences.

As young Marto was busy every hour now in completing the arrangements for the ice cream monopoly, and as moreover the letters had to be written in English, all the correspondence was conducted by Joe alone. It was no sooner off his hands and in the mails than he began speedily to bethink himself as to whether there might not be some other opportunity in or near Ponce awaiting his magic touch to be developed.

Nothing occurred to him in that line at once, but another thought of a very different nature did. He had not been through all this exacting pressure of critical negotiations without being troubled from time to time by a vision of lustrous eyes and the memory of a melodious voice.

Now and again he got so far as to be conscious of a faint desire awakening within him to go again to the don's house, and more than once his commercial thoughts were distracted while he was upon the street by the sight of a bright colored dress in a carriage. Once he went actually out of his way a few paces in order to get a glimpse of her who wore the dress, only to find himself staring at the face of a stranger.

At last, one day it struck him that social etiquette demanded a party call

at Don Octavio's. He wondered he had not thought of it before. These people upon whose willingness to invest his whole career depended, were people of fashion, and with very rigid ideas in regard to etiquette.

Strange that he had been so absorbed in his negotiations as to forget the obligation imposed upon him by having once been Don Octavio's guest.

It was in this subtle way that Joe's business ambition and the affair of his heart were harmonized. Of course the plain fact was that Joe was interested, but when he set forth to call at the don's, he was quite certain that he went simply because it was business policy to do so.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEPHEW VICTOR.

Don Octavio was not at home. That worthy man of affairs, having been plunged after years of idleness into what he conceived to be the whirl of business activity, spent many of his evenings nowadays at the house of Vilamil, or some other of his associates in the street car enterprise, discussing the scheme, and counting with them the profits they felt sure they were to make.

Acting on a suggestion from Joe, the don and his friends had interviewed the alcalde, or mayor, of Ponce, with a view to learning whether the municipality would interpose any objections to the use of the highway for the street car line. The alcalde, naturally enough, viewed the matter as a public improvement, and was quite ready to do whatever he could, officially, to help it along.

Knowing this, Joe was well content to wait patiently for a reply to his letters to New York. He was certain that Wolcott would manage to interest somebody in the scheme, if his own efforts failed to do so. Meantime, too, the ice cream business was in full swing, and there were daily receipts in cash at the office of the Syndicate.

It was too early yet to figure the actual profits from his undertaking, for there were many current expenses that had to be met promptly, but that the business of catering was on a firm foundation admitted of no doubt.

If Joe felt the slightest disappointment when the porter told him that Don Octavio was away, he was immediately solaced by information from the same functionary, that the ladies were within. Out came Joe's cards, and the porter rising, struck twice on the gong over his head.

If the don had been at home, the porter would have struck but once, one stroke signifying that there is a caller below to see the gentleman of the household, and two strokes telling the ladies that they are favored.

The servant who came down the *patio* stairway to take Joe's card, returned quickly and ushered him up to the reception room.

Donna Anna, a little more portly, it seemed, than before, and certainly more languid, advanced with a smile partly hidden in the folds of her cheeks, and gave him a flabby hand in welcome. Sprightly, vivacious, and glowing with her young beauty, the Senorita Sylvia seemed to glide across the room, and when she took her visitor's hand it was with a warm, hearty grip, that gave the American extraordinary pleasure.

It seemed homelike—funny word for him to use even in his thoughts—but of course all he meant by it was that an honest handshake was more American than Spanish in character.

"I must apologize for not coming sooner," said Joe, almost interrupting her words of greeting, "but perhaps you can forgive me, ladies, in view of the pressure of business that I find upon me here. I am too much a stranger to your beautiful island as yet to fall into its more leisurely and more sensible ways of doing things."

"We were quite sure you had forgotten us," cried the senorita, giving him one of those flashing looks that seemed to cut clear through him. "The Donna Anna and I have said more than once that the American senor had thoughts only for business, and eyes only for old men."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Joe, deprecatingly.

"Hush, Sylvia," said the duenna in an indulgently reproving tone, "Senor Barber does not need to be assured that we never said anything of the kind. I fear the child will make you think you are not welcome, senor."

"Madam," responded Joe, "nobody enjoys frank personal raillery better than an American. I assure you, senorita, that I treasure every one of your shots at me as if it were a flower that you had plucked from your hair."

The girl's eyes sparkled at the visitor's ready gallantry, and the conversation promptly fell into conventional channels. As long as it remained of that nature, there is nothing in it worth quoting, and nothing to be said of it, except that shortly after it began, it put the duenna to sleep.

Donna Anna, well filling the comfortable chair into which she had sunk after greeting the American, sat with her hands placidly folded upon her lap, her mild eyes closed, and the audible token of slumber issuing at irregular intervals from her pudgy nose.

Joe glanced at her on one occasion when the nasal trumpeting was more pronounced than usual. Fully occupied as he was in listening to the charming senorita, he had not observed that the duenna had withdrawn so completely from the conversation, and when it dawned upon him he could not repress a momentary smile. The senorita giggled outright.

"Isn't it kind of her?" she exclaimed. "Good old Donna Anna! I think poor Victor would have nothing but solemn hours now that the island has been captured by the Americans, if it were not for the fact that she sleeps throughout every moment of his calls."

"Happy Victor," said Joe, lugubriously.

The senorita smiled, while she gave him another of those significant glances, and then she became suddenly serious.

"No, poor fellow," she said, "he is not happy, and really I can't blame him. I feel that I must apologize to you for him, Senor Barber. I know you will be generous enough, opposed though you are to him, to forgive, even if you do not sympathize with him."

Joe was a bit mystified by this remark. A light reply was on the tip of his tongue, to the effect that no man in Victor's relation to her had a right to be unhappy, but he suppressed it, particularly in view of her suggestion that he and Victor were opposed to each other.

That seemed an extraordinary statement for the young lady to make, and he waited with a great deal of curiosity for her explanation.

"My cousin," she said, "was a minor officer in the Volunteers, and was one of the most devoted to the Spanish cause. Inexperienced as he is, and you must see yourself, senor, that he is a mere boy in years; he really believed that the Spaniards would resist the American invasion successfully. It broke his—I was about to say heart, but I will say pride, when city after city surrendered to your splendid General Miles. When he saw that there was to be no serious resistance to the American arms, he resigned in disgust, and he is one of the few men in Ponce who cannot bring himself to accept the changed situation."

"So Victor is one of the irreconcilables?"

"That is just it, senor, and that, of course, accounts for his apparent lack of cordiality when you were here to dinner."

"Oh, I assure you," said Joe, "that

I took no offense at it. I was here simply as a business caller, and I presumed he, looking on me as such, felt himself entirely out of my atmosphere. I shouldn't have given it another thought."

"You are kind, as always, Senor Barber, but Victor behaved very badly, nevertheless."

"I thought," said Joe, mischievously, "though perhaps I made a mistake, that you yourself did not take the greatest pains to make him comfortable."

The senorita colored deeply, and then laughed.

"There are times," she said, "when Victor is so stupid that I—there! I think he comes now."

Two strokes had sounded on the gong below, and a moment later Victor stalked moodily into the room.

The Donna Anna did not so much as open her eyes, and the newcomer gave her not a glance. His eyes were first for Sylvia, and then with an ill disguised start, he bent his looks upon the American.

Joe hardly knew what course to take. He really had a profound respect for any loyal Spaniard who found it difficult to accept the new order of things, and with such a one he would have been at great pains to avoid anything that might be interpreted as being overbearing, but this young irreconcilable was so fiercely unbending that Joe was driven, partly by a cynical amusement at the situation, to display extreme cordiality.

He stepped forward, seized Victor's unwilling hand, and wished him "good evening" with as much warmth as if they had been long separated school fellows.

Victor evidently was a young man of good breeding, and barring a hasty glance of resentment which he directed toward the senorita, his response to Joe, though colder than an icicle, was not lacking in terms of politeness. In fact Joe shortly felt that the other's politeness was aggressively and offensively pronounced.

Naturally enough the conversation lost that pleasant air of abandon that it had before Victor came upon the scene, and presently, Joe, having stayed longer than the demands of rigid etiquette required for a party call, took his departure.

The senorita slyly awakened the duenna, in order, evidently, that her invitation to Joe to repeat his visit might gain the official sanction of that portly guardian of the household morals. It was equally evident that the senorita was as disturbed as before with regard to Victor's demeanor, and as Joe went out to the street he smiled grimly at the thought of the unpleasant half hour that was likely to follow for poor Victor at the hands of his capricious, self willed and altogether charming fiancée.

As for himself, Joe felt that he had had a pleasant call. His desire to bask again in the glowing light of those lustrous eyes had been gratified, and those who have been careful students of the progress of love will not be surprised to learn that he regarded the call as a definite conclusion to the fancy that he feared had been awakened in him.

He felt now that he could meet the Senorita Sylvia at any time and anywhere without a heart throb, and his smile took on a cynical twist as he thought of that morning in the little back room when he was fighting with what he thought was an incipient attachment.

"All men are fools where women are concerned," said Joe to himself, sagely, "but I guess I am safe. The senorita is certainly the most beautiful woman I ever saw, and there is a pleasant fascination about her that makes it altogether agreeable to be in her presence for half an hour, but as for getting entangled—bosh! My folly lay in thinking it possible."

It was the day after this that Joe was in his own café, taking ice cream at a

table, like any ordinary customer. He rather enjoyed doing this, and paying his *peseta* like the rest, while he felt, also, the sense of proprietorship.

Senora Marto was proving to be a most excellent manager. She kept herself rather more discreetly in the background than Joe would have fancied to be best for business, but in view of the generous receipts that came from her establishment, and the fact that the tables there were occupied at almost all hours of the day, he could not feel like complaining, the more especially as he knew how her Spanish pride must quiver at undertaking such public work.

He had finished his cream and had risen from the table, when in strode Victor. Joe tried to catch his eye, but failed, for Victor, with evident obstinacy, looked another way.

Nevertheless the late volunteer went straight toward Joe, and would have collided with him, if the American had not stepped hastily to one side.

"Good afternoon, senor," said Joe, with an assumption of pleasantness that he did not feel, for there was that in Victor's manner which showed only too plainly that the cut was intentional.

Somehow, Joe, who was in most matters a remarkably good humored man, became instantly roiled.

Victor wheeled about, looked Joe insolently in the eyes, and asked: "Did you address me?"

"I believe I did," responded Joe, indifferently, "but you are not obliged to answer, of course."

"You are offensive, sir!" Victor exclaimed hotly.

"Offensive?" repeated Joe, and what more he might have said can be guessed by one as well as another, for Victor, advancing suddenly, completely turned the current of Joe's thoughts by bringing his heels squarely down upon the American's toe.

Joe was intensely disturbed. He was sufficiently man of the world to understand the full purport of this insult. Victor had sought a quarrel with him, and when a Spanish military man seeks a quarrel, it is with but one purpose: that the matter shall be fought out on the so called field of honor.

Joe's brain fairly reeled with the various impulses and considerations that leaped to light there. The fact that Victor was a member of Don Octavio's family; that he was an irreconcilable Spaniard; that he was a younger man; that business interests, common sense, and all the influences of his own early training, were opposed to the criminal absurdity of a duel; that he was nevertheless in a community where the code prevailed; that, above all, he had been insulted.

Without attempting to so much as trace the arguments that half formed in Joe's mind, these were some of the elements that battled there, and under stress of the unexpected emergency, the American's face became deathly pale.

"Coward!" hissed Victor, observing this. "You are no better than the rest of the American dogs that come here, who would be afraid to meet the Spaniards in a fair, evenly matched fight."

"See here," began Joe, raising his arm with his hand open, and then he let it fall again.

It had been his impulse to cuff Victor, or to pull his nose, in token of the contempt he felt for the unreasonable insult; then his blood seemed to boil from the bottom of his heart, as he perceived that the insult was not only directed at him, but at those noble fellow citizens of his who made up the magnificent army of invasion.

"Business be hanged!" thought Joe, "I can't stand this."

"Senor," he rasped aloud, and by this time everybody in the café was looking on and listening interestedly, "I could ignore the offense you give me personally, but when you undertake to insult my country and her soldiers, I cannot let it pass."

"Then you will receive a friend whom I will send to you?" asked Victor, quickly.

"The sooner you send him the better I shall be pleased," was Joe's answer.

"I had not thought to find you so valiant, senor," sneered Victor.

Joe shut his jaws together, and made no retort to this parting insult, and as impressively as he had stalked into the café, Victor stalked out of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

RIVALS.

About this time two men, each carrying a traveling bag, were walking slowly along the Calle Real. They were about as dissimilar in appearance as two men well could be who evidently were traveling companions.

Save that each carried a bag, and an unmistakable atmosphere of strangeness to his surroundings, they had nothing apparently in common. One was tall and spare; the other short and portly.

The complexion of the first was dark. He wore eyeglasses, and his upper lip was fierce with a stiff mustache. The second cultivated no beard on his round face, and his blue eyes, sharp and observant, were unprotected and unaided by glasses.

The first marched along with a set, statuesque expression that it seemed would yield to no stress of physical fatigue, or emotional emergency. A portly man's face is ordinarily expressive of placid good nature, and so in repose the countenance of the second might have appeared.

At present, perspiring with the heat and the strain of his burden, his brows were wrinkled into an expression of discontent.

It was as plain as could be that these two men had no very definite idea of where they were going. Everybody has seen their like in a city street, and everybody jumps at the conclusion, properly enough, that they are new arrivals on the lookout for an attractive hotel.

"By thunder!" exclaimed the portly man, who was slightly in advance of his companion, "there ain't any mistaking what this town needs most."

"Yes, Haskell," responded the other, with a guttural accent, "there's no doubt that the first thing we'd better do for the good of these people and ourselves, is to teach them the benefits of a well organized street car system."

Haskell, too much occupied with his burden to waste breath in talking, nodded his assent and they trudged on. A moment later Haskell set his grip on the sidewalk and stared at a building opposite.

His companion, with immobile face, turned about and stared too, but he did not at first set down his grip.

"Great Scott, Van Dorn, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Haskell.

"Tausend Teufels!" responded Van Dorn, stirred from his iron repose to such an extent that disagreeable surprise vibrated in his tone.

Then he set his bag upon the walk and tugged fiercely at the ends of his mustache.

"The American Syndicate," repeated Haskell, slowly reading Joe's impressive signboard. "'New York and Porto Rico.' Humph."

"Joseph A. Barber, Manager," went on Van Dorn, concluding the reading. "Who the devil is he, Haskell?"

"What in thunderation is he here for? is more to the point," snapped Haskell, by way of reply.

"I shouldn't think a Yankee would find difficulty in guessing that," retorted Van Dorn.

"I have guessed it," said Haskell, hopelessly; "darn the luck. I was sure we would be first in the field."

"Perhaps," said Van Dorn, "the concern has been here a long time."

"Stuff! Look at the freshness of that signboard."

They looked their fill, and the more they looked, the more unhappy they became. The glittering letters held them as by a spell, and for two or three minutes they stood there, gazing at it, muttering their disappointment, and evidently at their wits' end with discomfiture.

" Oh, well, hang it," said Haskell at length, " there was bound to be others sooner or later, and it's going to be a nip and tuck fight to see who comes out on top. I guess you and I ain't going to be downed just by the sight of the first rival we come across."

He picked up his bag with one hand and flicked the perspiration from his brow with the other.

" Come on," he added, " let's find that American hotel the purser told us about."

Van Dorn lifted his bag, but they stood yet a moment before resuming their march, for just then down from the near by plaza came a young man at a swinging gait whose dress and manner proclaimed him instantly as anything but a Porto Rican. The two strangers glanced at each other significantly, and waited until their suspicions were confirmed.

This happened when the young man turned into the office of the American Syndicate with an evident air of proprietorship.

" That settles it, I guess," said Haskell, " and by gum, I think I know the fellow. We'll find out about this, Van, before we're an hour longer in this hot hole."

Thereupon they proceeded, and after the varying fortune of all who have to inquire their way in a strange place, they arrived at the American hotel.

" Simon Haskell, Boston, U. S. A.," was the way the portly man registered. The other, with a huge flourish, put himself down as " Heinrich Van Dorn, New York and Vienna."

Experience in his new quarters had led Joe some time before this to make a rearrangement of his office outfit. The little back room was no longer a barely furnished closet, sacred only to the manager's private communings. As business grew he found it essential to separate his callers. Accordingly the main office was now more in the nature of a reception room.

The manager's desk and the iron strong box, with one or two other necessary appurtenances, had been removed to the back room, and the door thereto was embellished with the words " Private Office."

Thither Joe went as soon as he returned from the café where Victor had provoked a quarrel. He wrote a brief note to Captain Tooker of the regular army, apprising him of the fact that a quarrel was afoot.

Tooker and Joe had been friends in boyhood. They had not met for many years, until chance brought them together in Porto Rico. As is always the case, when acquaintances meet in a foreign country, such ties of friendship as they formerly recognized were intensified, and Joe therefore had no hesitation whatever in calling upon the captain to perform what might prove to be a delicate service for him.

The faithful secretary was in the main office, busy with ice cream accounts. Joe gave him the note to Captain Tooker, with instructions to deliver it at once, and not wait for an answer.

" On the way back," he said, " you may call at the post office and wait until the mail has been sorted. A boat got in from New York a while ago, and it is pretty likely to have letters for me that I shall want to see at once."

After the secretary had gone, Joe busied himself in looking over the books relative to the ice cream venture, until he was interrupted by a caller.

His first impression was, as the door opened, that Victor's friend had come to deliver his formal challenge, but a glance showed him that this was a mistake. It was an elderly man, plainly a civilian, who entered.

"Senor Barber, I believe," he said, presenting a card.

José Pino was the name on the card, and with his habitually quick estimate of strangers, Joe decided that this was a business man to whom should be granted every consideration that would be expected by a person of importance; so he ushered him forthwith into the private office.

With a good deal of characteristic Spanish circumlocution Senor Pino announced the purpose of his visit.

He was a man of means, anxious to take his share in the rising business of Ponce. He had heard of the energetic American, and was hopeful that matters might shape so that he could be interested eventually in the projected street car line. Meantime, as investment in that quarter might not be possible, owing to the fact that his friend Don Octavio and others might see fit to retain all holdings for themselves, etc., etc., he had himself hit upon a possible field for investment which he would like to submit to the Syndicate with a view to getting the manager's opinion on it.

It had seemed to this worthy and observant capitalist that, with the advent of men from the States, and the consequent growth of enterprises, there should be provided for the newcomers as well as for Porto Ricans themselves, a well appointed office building.

"I have been in New York, Senor Barber," he said, "and nothing impressed me more, I think, than the immense structures erected there for the uses of lawyers, bankers, agents and so on. We have nothing in Ponce that even approximates to an office building such as you Americans are familiar with, and I am inclined to think that perhaps one of comparatively modest proportions would not only prove an ornament to the city, but in course of a year or two become a handsome investment."

Joe listened with the utmost deference until Senor Pino had concluded. Then he remarked: "I commend your judgment, senor. The same idea has been in my mind for a considerable time."

Pino evidently did not know whether to be pleased or disappointed. There was no doubt that he had made his introduction of the subject roundabout and long, largely because he believed that the idea was new, and doubtless he shrank a little lest the manager of the Syndicate should condemn it as visionary.

Now it appeared that it brought nothing new to the Syndicate, and he feared that some other eager investors had got ahead of him just as Don Octavio had with regard to the street car enterprise.

"Then I suppose," he said, hesitatingly, "that I am too late."

"I am not so sure about it," Joe answered. "The Syndicate is very busy, and it cannot bring all its affairs to a head at once. This matter of a fine office building, although it has been under consideration, has not yet been put in such form that local investors may not have an opportunity to share in it."

Remarkably veracious this, for the high consideration given the scheme had been confined solely to the cranium of the Syndicate's manager.

"I am delighted," began Senor Pino, when the opening of the door to the main office caused Joe to rise and look in.

He thought it might be his secretary returning with the mail. A young man stood near the door, hat in hand, shoulders squared, heels together, the very embodiment of military punctiliousness.

"Have I the honor to address Senor Barber?" he asked, in a tone that seemed to reduce the temperature of the room twenty degrees or so.

Of course Joe knew what he was there for, and it was a serious enough matter, too; but the American was overcome by a sense of repugnance to

the *code duello,* and by an intense desire to take down this martinet who had come from that other martinet, his principal.

" My name is Barber," responded Joe, briskly. " I am very busy at this moment. Pray take a seat. I will attend to you as soon as possible."

With this he was about to close the door and withdraw into the private office, when the newcomer, with a most horror stricken look of amazement, exclaimed:

" But, Senor Barber! Is it possible that you do not realize that this is an affair of honor?"

" All my affairs are affairs of honor," Joe retorted.

" But this will admit of no delay, senor."

" Neither will my present business."

The young man fairly fumed with rage, and was altogether so wrought up, that Joe, foreseeing the possibility of a second challenge, concluded that it would be best to receive the message without subjecting the messenger to further delay. Really, he had no choice in the matter, for the young man stalked across the room and handed him a sealed envelope.

" I decline to be put off in this way," he declared savagely.

Joe glanced at the envelope and responded: " I really can't take the time to read this at present, but if it comes, as I presume it does, from Senor Victor Valla del Rey, its purport is sufficiently known to me."

" It is from Lieutenant Valla del Rey," said the caller, stiffly.

" Very well, then," returned Joe. " Permit me to refer you to Captain Gabriel Tooker, U. S. A."

" You are evidently unfamiliar with the code," sneered the caller, " and I wonder that Lieutenant Valla del Rey deigns to give you the privilege of meeting him upon the field of honor. Captain Tooker, I trust, will know better. I have the pleasure of taking my departure."

The door banged behind the commissioner of honor, and with a profound sigh, Joe returned to his caller and resumed the discussion of an office building.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN TOOKER.

" SEE here, Joe, this really won't do. Great Guns! To think that I should have come across the sea with no better hope than to fight the Spaniards, and yet that I should stand here feeling bound to oppose the best fight with that race that it has yet been my privilege to strike! All the same, Joe, my personal desires must be sacrificed. This duel ought not to take place."

" You're quite right," Joe answered languidly.

" But can't it be arranged?"

" I hope so, sincerely, captain, and that is properly your function, isn't it?"

" I suppose it is, but damme, I never saw a young buck who gave so little promise of pliability in my life as that Montoro, who is acting as your adversary's second."

" Is his name Montoro?" asked Joe, wearily.

" Well, by the sword of my grandfather!" cried Captain Tooker, " you don't seem to be half awake to the situation. Do you realize, man, that you have been challenged to fight? Do you know that all Ponce is aware of it? Do you know that, unhappily, the remnant of the pro Spanish population here now looks upon you as the embodiment of American courage and honor?"

" Well, confound it, captain," interrupted Joe, a little wrathfully, " I'm going to meet the emergency. American courage and honor isn't going to suffer through me, and if you fear that it is, I'll get my secretary to act as my second."

" Oh, here, here," and the captain

brought his heavy hand down upon his friend's shoulder, " don't you get huffy with me, Joe Barber. I know you're not lacking in courage, but Lord! Lord! why couldn't this fire eater have seen fit to pick a quarrel with a military man? It isn't right, I tell you."

" Old fellow," said Joe, with an amused smile, " are you objecting to this duel simply because you are jealous that a civilian has the opportunity to face a Spaniard? "

The captain cleared his throat.

" No, no," he replied, " I admit a feeling of jealousy, but my opinion with regard to the duel is based upon broader grounds. You are embarking on a business career here, in a time, not exactly of peace, I suppose, but certainly at a time when all hostilities should properly be confined to the military. You are not a fighting man. You don't believe in the code, and neither do I for that matter, and in short, Joe, you are risking your life and career by accepting this quarrel."

" The quarrel was forced upon me, old fellow. Arrange it if you can, but understand I will not recede from my position, such as it is, unless Victor apologizes unreservedly for his aspersions upon American character."

" In other words," put in the captain, " for his insult to the army? "

" Yes, put it that way if you like. His personal affront to me I should like to ignore, although if it came to that, I would dearly love the privilege of cuffing him, or kicking him out of my establishment, but as you yourself have said, I am looked upon as a representative American, and upon me unfortunately devolves the duty of upholding my country's fame. I'll do the best I can, and if you plead commercial reasons in opposition to my course, I can only say that it is my profound conviction that if I should fail in my duty as what these people call a man of honor, I should lose every iota of advantage in a business sense that I have so far succeeded in gaining."

Senor Pino had been sent away from the Syndicate office with much the same ideas with regard to an office building that Don Octavio and his friends had received from Joe with regard to a street car line. In other words, the erection of a fine new building was in a fair way to be accomplished by Porto Rican capital brought into activity by the Syndicate, and working in conjunction with capital that Joe confidently expected to interest in New York.

Mike had delivered the letter to Captain Tooker, and the latter, having had his first interview with the punctilious Montoro, had become more excited over the situation than he had been when his command faced the prospect of a battle with the Spanish army on Porto Rican soil.

" I think you're right," said the captain now, in a tone of regret, " but I fear for you. Your courage and spirit are all right, but what do you know about fighting? "

Joe did not answer.

" As the challenged party," continued the captain, " it is your privilege to choose the weapons for the combat. This, of course, on the supposition that I shall fail to bring about an amicable settlement. As your second, you will permit me to suggest in such a contingency, that you choose pistols."

" Why? " asked Joe.

" Well, I don't want to see you slaughtered. I remember that when you were a boy you were a very fair shot, and the Spaniards, you know, haven't got the best reputation in the world for marksmanship."

" On that theory," suggested Joe dryly, " I should think you would have me choose Krag-Jorgensens at a range of a thousand yards, or, better, six inch cannon at three miles."

" Don't talk tommyrot to me! " exclaimed the captain, flushing, for his sense of the fitness of things was offended by Joe's levity. " We'll call it pistols, shall we? " he asked.

" I presume Victor is a better shot than I am," Joe responded.

" I doubt it, but even so, look at the chances. He's bound to be nervous, and he'll probably miss you at the first fire. Now this matter isn't so confoundedly serious as to require a fight *à outrance*, and it will be very strange to me if we cannot persuade the bloodthirsty little wretch that an exchange of shots, however harmless, has satisfied his honor."

" You look forward to a duel *à la Paris*, then? "

" I hope to make it so, if there must be a duel. Come, shall it be pistols? "

Before replying Joe waited for his secretary, who had just come in with the mail, to lay several letters upon his desk. Picking up one of these, he opened it in an absent minded way and read it through. It was from a man whom Wolcott had interested in the trolley line.

" Hold your men," it said in part, " until I can get there. If the situation is as you represent it, I will back you, but I cannot go at once. If there is anything in it, you will be able to keep your men interested until I arrive."

" Well," observed the captain, a bit impatiently as Joe laid the letter down.

" Oh," said Joe, in a surprised tone, " about that duel. Well, we will fight with swords."

" What! " yelled the captain.

" Swords," said Joe.

" Barber, you're crazy. You shan't do anything of the kind! "

" Cap, old chappie, who is running this duel? "

" Thunder and Mars! As your second I ought to be, but you don't seem to give me my privileges."

" According to the code, as your principal, I have the privilege of vetoing any of your arrangements, haven't I? "

" I suppose you have," admitted the captain, groutily.

" Well, then, understand, it must be swords, if I have to fight."

" And that same you won't, if I can prevent it."

With this the captain departed from the Syndicate office to confer with Montoro, with a view to bringing about an amicable adjustment of the matter.

He would better not have tried. His very effort to establish terms of peace inflamed the hot headed young Spaniards the more, and also gave rise to no little unpleasant gossip concerning the unwillingness of the American business man to satisfy an injured Spaniard's sense of honor.

There was altogether too much publicity about the affair to suit anybody who had the slightest regard for the requirements of the code, but the publicity was no fault of the American's, and after the captain had vainly endeavored to prevent a fight, the actual arrangements for the combat went forward with due secrecy.

It was late in the evening when they were completed, and Captain Tooker went down to the American Hotel to tell his principal about them. He found Joe in the hotel office, leaning back in a chair, with his feet on another, his hat on the back of his head, conversing interestedly with a portly gentleman who sat on one side of him, and a lean, dark, spectacled man who sat on the other.

If he saw the captain when he entered, he pretended not to, and even when Tooker put his hands on Joe's shoulder, the manager of the Syndicate remarked: " Just one minute, old fellow. As I was saying, Mr. Haskell, the opportunities in Ponce were seen by me and my friends long before the invasion. I said to them then 'the army is going to get to that island first and make it ours. Then the cohorts of business must invade it and complete the capture, and we,' said I, 'must enlist in the vanguard.' Eh? what is it, captain? "

" Really, Joe," said Tooker, in a low, serious voice, " you must give your

mind to this affair that you have intrusted to me."

"I suppose I must," Joe responded, slowly taking his feet from the chair in front of him, and getting up. "Gentlemen, you will excuse me, I am sure. I have a prior appointment of an important nature."

Haskell and Van Dorn said, "Oh, certainly," and both kept their eyes fixed on Joe as he walked away arm in arm with his military friend.

Then they looked at each other. There was inquiry in Van Dorn's glance, and Haskell replied:

"Bluff, Van; bluff from start to finish. I thought I knew who he was. He took two or three flyers in Wall Street, and got thrown down on every one of them. I don't believe there's a business man in all the States that would back him to negotiate for the purchase of doughnuts."

"But he talks pretty well," suggested Van Dorn, dubiously.

"Of course he does, but he doesn't say anything. What have you and I learned about his operations here? Nothing from him. He hasn't mentioned one name connected with his Syndicate. He has been giving us just what he has been giving to the Porto Ricans, a great big empty volley of wind. He is a bluffer, Van, and just as soon as we learn what his bluff is, we'll call it, you and I, and you mark my word there won't be any American Syndicate after that."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIELD OF HONOR.

"COUPLE of fellows down from the States to whoop things up in a business way," said Joe to the captain. "I think they are rather surprised and disappointed to find anybody on the ground ahead of them. There's going to be room enough though for all who come, and I can conscientiously wish them good luck, for the more energy they stir up among the Porto Ricans, the easier it's going to be for me to float my schemes."

The captain made no reply whatever, and did not open his lips until they were in Joe's sitting room.

"Now, Joe," he said most impressively, "I admire your *sang froid*, and I've no criticism to make for your manifesting it in public, but in private, with me, Joe, it is time for you to look this thing in the face seriously."

"It's going to be a fight, is it?" asked Joe, dropping into a chair and crossing his legs.

"It is. I've done my best to make those young fellows reasonable, but it is no use. It seems that your adversary was desperately ambitious to fight the American army, and he seems to look upon this affair as his only way of satisfying his disappointed spleen. You have somehow managed to give him offense——"

"I don't see how," interrupted Joe.

"Isn't there some question of a lady in the case?" asked the captain.

"Did he tell you so?" demanded Joe, quickly.

"Not in so many words, but I couldn't help inferring it."

"I guess Victor imagines that I have crossed his path in the matter of a lady," said Joe, after a moment of silence. "I wasn't aware that I had, and on the contrary, I feel that if there were a question of honor in the matter, it is my own that should be satisfied. I was outrageously insulted, but no matter. If there's got to be a fight, I've got to fight, and that's all there is to it. When and where will the interesting event take place?"

"Half an hour after sunrise," replied the captain, "in a little valley between high hills a few miles east of the city."

"That's right," said Joe, approvingly. "It's quite like what we read about; a misty morning, grass wet with the dew, half a dozen solemn faced individuals, stalking about with intense regard for decorum, and two of them

eventually pulling off their coats and jabbing swords at each other to a contrasting peaceful accompaniment of song birds; solemn surgeon standing by with his case of instruments opened, and in the background a squad of newspaper reporters with kodaks and note books scrambling to get the first account of the private affair into their respective papers. There isn't a roadside café within easy reach, is there, where the reconciled principals can discuss coffee after the gentle tilt is over?"

"Now, Joe!" exclaimed the captain. There was an actual suspicion of tears in the warrior's eyes, and he swallowed his empty throat before he continued: "I don't like this—really, I don't. There is such a thing as courage and there is such a thing as bravado. Please, dear boy, don't put on any of this affected indifference to me."

"Good God!" exclaimed Joe, jumping to his feet, "I am not indifferent. I don't want it. What do you suppose I want to poke young Victor in the ribs with the point of a sword for?"

"Joe," said the captain gravely, "to answer in your own terms, it is a question with me as to whose ribs are going to get prodded. I am informed that the young lieutenant is a finished swordsman."

"They always are," said Joe, sitting down again. "That's quite right. It wouldn't be right if it wasn't so. An American fight a duel with a Spaniard who isn't the most expert handler of the sword in the whole Spanish contingent? Why, it's unthinkable."

The perspiration stood in beads on the loyal captain's brow.

"Joe," he said, "the relation I occupy towards you at present is too sacred to permit me to exercise anything but patience with you. I beseech you, man, to consider the possibilities, if the probabilities have no terrors. I ask you not so much as your dutiful second, as your friend, whether your business affairs have been put in shape to meet any fatal contingency."

A broad grin lighted up Joe's face for just an instant, but when he saw how pained the captain was, he speedily became grave.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but my business affairs—well, it's a bit funny. I'm not so certain that they would suffer if Victor should run me through."

"I suppose you know best about that," returned the captain, evidently mystified, "but you have relatives in the States, and friends there. I assure you that if there is any communication you wish to make to them, or have me make to them, now is the time to arrange it."

"Well, I don't know," replied Joe, thoughtfully. "I might write Wolcott a hurry up letter with regard to the trolley scheme, but I haven't a doubt that he is pushing it for all it is worth anyhow. I guess there's nothing to say. The fact is, old chap," and, rising, he put his hand upon the troubled captain's shoulder, "you are wasting your splendid energy in trying to make me view this thing as I ought to. You go to your quarters and get some sleep. Tell me where and when to meet you, and as you go out give the clerk an order to have me called at whatever hour you think is best."

The captain drew a long breath.

"I have done my best to prevent this fight," he said, "and I have also done everything I could for your interests. My conscience is therefore easy. I won't say anything to the clerk, but will call for you myself when it is time to start."

They parted with a hearty handshake, the expression on Joe's face indicating no more serious view of the immediate future than he had already taken, but rather a profound sympathy for the captain's disquiet.

(To be continued.)

WITHIN AN INCH OF HIS LIFE.

BY PAUL C. SCHAFFER.

A hunting experience in South Africa, in which the pursuer is suddenly left at the mercy of one of the most dangerous denizens of the jungle.

IT has been my fortune to meet a number of professional hunters in my life, to be quite well acquainted with them in fact, as I have engaged them in several of the wild countries of the world to assist me in obtaining specimens for natural history societies, museums, and the like.

And one whom I esteemed most highly, and still am proud to call my friend, was Paul Hartridge, who accompanied me in my long up country jaunt several years ago, when I was in South Africa.

Hartridge's experience was invaluable to me, for he was an early colonist and not only thoroughly knew the animals indigent to the territory, but the country itself and the people who inhabited it.

A man who had led the wild life he had led for so many years must have been through many exciting experiences and I asked him one night, after we were settled about the campfire—the chattering Totties on one side and ourselves on the other—what animal he considered most to be feared, considered from his experience.

I half expected a lion story in reply to my question, and was therefore somewhat surprised when he replied promptly:

" A buffalo bull."

Being pressed for his reason he told me the story I am about to relate.

In speaking of the buffalo, Hartridge meant an animal far different from the so called buffalo that was once found in such numbers upon our own Western plains, which is really no buffalo at all. This American animal, the bison, is terrible indeed in appearance, but it has neither the fierceness nor the energy of the true buffalo.

There are two species of the true buffalo, the *bos bubalus* of India, and the *bos caffer* of South Africa. Old hunters, both native and white, consider the bulls of both these species among the most dangerous denizens of the jungle and plain.

An old bull has been known to charge upon an elephant with such savage momentum as to overturn the larger beast, and when fully aroused nothing can exceed his fierceness of temper.

The African buffalo is fond of wallowing in the mud, and in the Kaffir country they congregate in immense herds, much after the manner of the bison. But the bulls, as they grow old and gray, sometimes withdraw from the herd and adopt solitary habits, becoming thus " old rogues," as the natives call bull elephants who do likewise.

They then grow very fierce, and will attack anything that comes in their path, either man or animal, throwing down their victims and kneading them with their horns and frontlets until every bone is broken.

Hartridge told me that he was a good way up country at one time where elephants were by no means unknown, and where game of all kinds was most abundant.

He was not the only white man in the party, but was evidently the one most familiar with the country, for his European companions were an English gentleman and his two nephews, aged respectively twenty and twenty five.

They had been kindly received by the natives, who are always willing to hunt and "pack" the game and provisions for the white men, and had good success.

Arriving at a Kaffir village one evening Hartridge heard recounted at the campfire, the story of a fierce old bull buffalo that had fairly devastated a neighboring district. The beast had, indeed, in a seemingly wanton display of courage, charged directly through a small village, scattering the affrighted inhabitants and bearing away one unfortunate man upon his horns.

Hartridge listened to the natives and determined to have a try at that bull. He was not unfamiliar with the buffalo and well knew his savage nature; but hitting upon what he decided was the safest method of procedure, he started the very next morning for the haunts of the "old rogue."

He secured one of the few elephants belonging to the village and with a native driver set out for the next district. There was nothing but a pad on the elephant's back, for in Africa the elephant is not dressed up in gorgeous blankets and houdahs as is its Indian brother.

Hartridge went alone with the driver, for he did not want to risk the lives of any of his companions in the hazardous undertaking.

One of the young fellows, however, Eugene Carruthers by name, was very desirious of accompanying the older hunter—in fact kicked up quite rusty about it when both Hartridge and his uncle denied him the privilege.

A couple of hours after Hartridge had started, however, as previously arranged, the others set off with their carriers for the village near which Paul expected to find the old buffalo bull.

The elephant driver was acquainted with the "beat" of the "old rogue" and the great strides of their huge steed soon carried them to that portion of the brush plain in which the bull was supposed to be lurking.

Hartridge was armed with a rifle that threw a ball large enough to kill an elephant and from his high seat could obtain an extended view of the brush covered country.

Most of the ground over which they passed was covered with shrubs of more or less height, but occasionally there would be a small glade, entirely free from brush, covered with luxuriant grasses which furnished food for herds of herbaceous animals.

Antelope there were here of many varieties, and even a few buffalo; but the old bull was not with them.

"'Old rogue' hide in brush," declared the Hottentot driver. "No see um till he run."

And his statement of the case proved true. It was past noon ere they came upon their game, and on the elephant's back had "beat up" a vast extent of country.

Hartridge had just remounted after having quenched his thirst at a spring, when a crashing in the underbrush apprised him of the approach of some large animal, and an instant later the old bull appeared.

He was a formidable looking beast, and instead of retreating from the hunters, stood his ground. Evidently he had approached the spring for a drink and was unwilling to go away without quenching his thirst.

The driver of the elephant was nervous and begged Hatridge not to miss the beast.

But he was in a most unfavorable position for a sure shot, and as the buffalo refused to move first, shaking his head angrily and throwing the loose earth against his sides with his fore feet, the European told the Hottentot in a low voice, to change the elephant's position that he might get a better view of his quarry.

The first movement of the elephant seemed to inspire the buffalo with fury. He uttered a fierce bellow and charged out of the brush and across the glade toward the enemy.

His position was still bad, but Hartridge dared not await the shock of the bull's charge, and hastily sighting along his rifle he fired.

So near was the creature that he heard the thud of the ball as it struck its hide, but at the instant of his shot the elephant swerved to one side and the ball struck much higher up on the bull's body than he had intended. In fact, as he afterward discovered, the ball had passed through the hump just above the buffalo's fore shoulders.

The recoil of the weapon, together with the sudden movement of the elephant, which had seemingly caught some of its driver's fear of the charging buffalo, cost Hartridge his seat on the pad, and ere he could recover himself he slid off the elephant's back, landing on the side farthest from the "old rogue."

The elephant passed by him, barely keeping from stepping upon his body, and after him came the savage buffalo.

Enraged as he had been by the sight of the hunters, the beast, stung by the slight wound, was now furious. His eyes blazed, the froth flew from his mouth and he was indeed a terrible sight to the prostrate man.

For an instant Hartridge hoped that he had been unnoticed, but this hope was futile. The charging beast passed him indeed, but his wicked eyes saw the man lying in the grass, and turning about with a celerity surprising in so huge a beast, he bore down upon the defenseless hunter.

Not waiting for the creature's arrival, nor striving to run from him, Hartridge quickly rolled over upon his face and feigned death.

The buffalo, seemingly surprised at this circumstance, hesitated a moment, as though undecided what course to pursue. As the man continued to remain motionless, he endeavored to push his nose under him, so as to toss him on his horns.

But before he could accomplish this design, or could trample upon his fallen foe, he was interrupted. There was a crashing in the bushes on the opposite side of the glade and the clear voice of Eugene Carruthers, the youngest of his companions, reached Hartridge's ear.

"Lie perfectly still, captain," exclaimed the young man, and almost simultaneous with his words came the report of a heavy rifle.

The ball plowed its way through the animal's thick hide and flesh and sought a vital spot. Roaring with rage and pain the bull backed away from his prostrate victim and after an instant fell to the earth, unable to rise again.

Carruthers ran hastily across the open and assisted Hartridge to rise with as much nonchalance as though the occurrence had been of the most trivial kind.

The track Carruthers and his companions had followed on their way to the village had taken them near to the spring at which Hartridge had come upon the buffalo bull, and having wandered some yards beyond his uncle and brother, Eugene had happened upon the scene just in the nick of time.

It was indeed an honor for an inexperienced youth to have brought down such a formidable beast as the old bull, but young Carruthers bore his laurels very modestly and seemed surprised that his friends should make so much of the shot.

"The boy was a born hunter," said Paul Hartridge, upon telling the story to me, "and although I saw him in several trying situations afterward, I never saw him flinch. As for myself, however, I considered that I was never so near losing my life as when I lay in that African glade, with the old bull nosing me over. The experience is one which I hope I may never repeat, and since that time I have never tried shooting buffaloes from the back of an elephant."

"HIS LORDSHIP."

BY HORACE G. SMITH.

An account by the colonel of an experience of his youth going to show that he who laughs last laughs best, and that donkey ears may sometimes belie their possessor's qualities.

"IF a fellow *has* any personal peculiarities and parades them before his fellow men," began the colonel, "the Southwest is the worst possible division of the hemisphere for him to go to. You take a gang of the general run of 'cow-punchers,' young fellows from all parts of the United States, most of 'em, with a sprinkling of old rangers who are as keen as they make 'em, and it's a bad crowd for an eccentric man to round up.

"I took to herding like a duck to water," he went on with a smile, "and managed to forget most of my college studies and get rid of all the tomfoolishness of civilization in a wonderfully short time. I was rather given to Mexican jackets, big sombreros, and huge spurs, but these eccentricities were looked upon with favor by most of the boys.

"But none of us could put up with 'His Lordship.' That was the nickname he went by, but whether he had any real title or was connected with any noble house, I am not prepared to say. The part of the name he went by around there was Chumley. He didn't spell it 'Chumley,' but in some outlandish way that would have broken the jaws of a Pueblo Indian to pronounce according to its spelling.

"The first occasion upon which 'His Lordship' dawned upon my vision was when I was taking my first few lessons in herding from old Bill McGreggor. We were riding slowly 'round and 'round the herd of feeding cattle when 'His Lordship' rode by with a groom, bound on a shooting expedition among the hills.

"I tell you, he was a sight for gods and men. He was dressed in the approved English hunting costume of the day, black stiff hat, leggings and all, and carrying across his saddle a little silver mounted popgun that wouldn't have thrown a ball big enough to kill a prairie dog.

"The get up of the flunkey, poor fellow, was quite as wonderful, and included a brilliant crimson coat. He also carried what the cowboy considered the greatest piece of foolishness of all—'His Lordship's' umbrella.

"Fancy an umbrella on horseback. Oh, it was rich! Even the herd horses used to shy at the outfit as it passed. and the boys used to say that one sight of the Englishman and his servant would scare a mountain cat into fits, and that since 'His Lordship's' arrival the Apaches hadn't once crossed the border on a cattle raid.

"The fellow had slews of money—fairly *swatted* it around. He had purchased a small ranch next to my uncle's and had hired a good man to run it, showing that he had sense in one direction at least, for he never bothered his overseer by trying to understand the business of cattle raising, being contented to handle the profits without questioning *how* they were obtained.

"His ranch house was quite near the town and was furnished in a style which would have made a New York millionaire envious, Chumley having had all the things brought overland from Galveston.

"He was alone, except for several servants who were 'kept up' in the most approved English manner, and

seemed to have no friends or acquaintances near enough to visit him. With the other ranch owners he had very little to do; on their part they couldn't stand a man who wore a single barreled eyeglass and dressed like a monkey.

"We herders were a wild set, and the sight of 'His Lordship' was like a red rag to a bull to us. We openly scoffed at him as he rode by, and finally, after a very hilarious meeting one night on the range, Terry Braddock and your humble servant were appointed as a committee to interview the Englishman.

"It was a most impudent thing to do, but Terry and I were about of an age and as rattle brained a pair as you could find.

"We rode over to his ranch the next day, dismounted at the door, and knocked. Chumley had a doorbell rigged, but we ignored that, and rapped loud enough to raise the dead.

"A solemn looking old fellow—a typical English butler, who aspirated his 'h's' in a truly wonderful style—answered our summons, and without betraying the least surprise ushered us into the reception room.

"The furnishings were something gorgeous—that is, for a Southwestern ranch—and I thought I was back in Boston again. But Terry and I determined not to appear overawed.

"He rather overdid the matter, I thought, for he planted himself at once in a great stuffed chair, rumpling up the rug under his boot heels.

"'Your cards, sirs,' demanded the butler stiffly.

"'Don't carry such weapons. It's against the law,' Terry said, with an insolent laugh. 'Just tell "His Lordship" to trot in here, that's all, mister.'

"'Yes, tell His Royal Nibs that we want to see him,' I added, as the astonished flunkey continued to stare at us.

"'Sir!' exclaimed the scandalized butler.

"'Come, friend, you git and find your master,' I said, more sternly, advancing a step toward him.

"At that moment the door opened and the master of the ranch appeared.

"He was dressed in a suit of clothes that looked as though they had just come out of a London shop, and the everlasting eyeglass was carefully screwed into place.

"'Aw—Jerome, you may go,' remarked 'His Lordship,' staring coldly at us, but speaking to the butler.

"The old fellow obsequiously withdrew, and the Englishman addressed us again.

"'What can I—aw—do for you, gentlemen?' he inquired, without turning a hair.

"'We came,' I said, determined not to be put down by his calm stare, although the steely glare of that eyeglass made me involuntarily shiver, 'as a committee from the boys to place before you several resolutions which were drawn up in solemn conclave last night.'

"I warmed up as I continued. 'The resolutions are as follows.' I drew a paper from my pocket and pretended to read:—

"'Whereas we, the assembled ranchmen and "punchers" of the Three X, Montmorency, and Big Canyon ranches, in session assembled, believing that "His Lordship," Archibald Chumley, is making himself a nuisance, and a menace to the public peace, by certain articles of dress, it being dangerous to pass him on the road with anything but a blind army mule, as a view of his outfit is sufficient to totally ruin the temper of any decent beast, be it therefore

"'*Resolved*, that this aforesaid "Lordship" be and is hereby commanded to leave at home, when he goes on subsequent hunting expeditions, certain articles of dress, namely, one dwarfed stovepipe hat and one white silk umbrella, and also,

"'*Resolved*, that he shall paste alternate stripes of blue and white over his

flunkey's red coat, as this is a strictly American community. Unwillingness upon " His Lordship's " part to comply with these commands will place us under the painful necessity of making a pepper box of the hat and a total wreck of the aforesaid umbrella.'

" 'And we're all—aw—dead shots,' drawled Terry, from the depths of his chair, in an exaggerated imitation of 'His Lordship's' tone.

" Almost any man would have gone fairly wild at the cool insolence of this harangue, but it didn't phase Chumley a bit. He might have been an Aztec god as far as his face expressed any emotion.

" He listened to us in silence, and bowed coldly, remarking in a most aggravating tone:

" 'Aw—thank you. I will—aw—consider your propositions.'

" Well, there wasn't anything for us to do then but to get out, and we did so with something of the feeling, and a good deal of the appearance, I am afraid, of the dog that met the tomcat in Jerome K. Jerome's story. I rather think that 'His Lordship' had the best of us there.

" Our report was received by the boys with little enthusiasm. Recount the story as we might, we could not completely hide the fact that 'His Lordship' had fairly routed us.

" The next time Chumley appeared with his usual outfit, however, a fellow by the name of Gregson met him—a hard case Gregson was—and he stopped and coolly took a shot at the hat, sending it into the dust with a big hole through it. But uncle bounced him for that, and that rather deterred any of the rest of us from following his example.

" I understand that Chumley had to send 'way to England for another hat like that.

" Well, a cowboy's life isn't all fun and horse play," continued the colonel, changing his position slightly and puffing away steadily at his cigar. " Some weeks after this affair, just before the 'annual drive,' Terry, Bill McGreggor, and I were out on the range alone with a big herd of cattle. I shan't forget the occasion, for it came pretty near being the last time I ever herded cattle.

" The beeves were quite wild, and it took mighty little to scare them. About the middle of the forenoon something startled 'em, and they started off on the prettiest kind of a stampede. I was some distance beyond them, and the only card I had to play was to run my pony right down their front and try to head them off.

" As I put spurs to my horse I saw that there were two other horsemen in their track—Chumley, dressed as usual, and with the great white silk umbrella raised to defend his head from the rays of the sun, which was shining directly down upon the plain, and his satellite, the red coated groom.

" The latter, seeing the stampede, had whipped up his horse and got out of the way in short order.

" At that instant my pony played me a trick which he had never done before. He stumbled and threw me directly in the path of the charging animals.

" I sprang up to escape, but found that one ankle had received such a strain that to run was impossible. I dropped back to the earth, shut my eyes, and listened to that terrible thunder of approaching hoofs.

" Then I opened my eyes and found Chumley beside me. He had seen my danger and ridden his horse directly toward the charging herd. But the animal was not a cattle horse, and acted abominally, rearing up and bucking fearfully as he faced the stampede.

" Before I could shout out my directions to the Englishman he had slipped from his horse's back, and the animal immediately broke away and ran like the wind.

" 'Run, you fool!' I yelled, forgetting my own danger, as I saw him stand there looking after his mount. 'Run, or you'll be trampled to death!'

"He coolly picked up his umbrella and did run—but toward me, not from the beeves. The herd was almost upon me when he arrived, and he plumped down on one knee in the alkali dust and commenced opening and shutting that umbrella with a rapidity that was wonderful.

"An instant before I would have been willing to swear that nothing under heaven would have broken that line of charging cattle; but they did break, with loud bellows of terror, and fled to right and left, leaving us there untouched, the fluttering umbrella proving a safeguard for us both.

"They passed us like the wind, and then Chumley rose to his feet, brushing the dust carefully from his coat and trousers.

"'You see that my umbrella is—aw—good for *something*, sir,' he remarked coolly, and walked off to where his frightened groom sat on his own horse, holding his master's steed, which he had captured after a mad race in the opposite direction as that taken by the cattle.

"Bill and Terry came back and picked me up, and I was laid up at the ranch for a fortnight with my ankle.

"Everybody's opinion of 'His Lordship' immediately rose, especially my own, but we couldn't get near enough to the fellow to thank him. He was as cold and stiff as ever.

"But I tell you what it is," continued the colonel, tossing the remains of his cigar into the grate, "I ceased from that time forth to trouble myself about the eccentricities of people I met. In fact, I don't consider it any of my business how many peculiarities a man may have, for I have discovered that their possession doesn't necessarily make a man either a fool or a milksop."

DOLLY GRAY.

'Twas a winding woodland way,
Where I met you, Dolly Gray,
And you passed me with a glance
Of your hazel eyes, askance.
But you never blushed nor turned,
While the heart within me burned;
Oh, you knew not how I yearned,
Dolly Gray!

Just a year ago today,
Since I met you, Dolly Gray;
And the slightest word I speak
Paints a rose upon your cheek,
As we wander 'neath the shade
Of the winding woodland glade.
What a change a year has made,
Dolly Gray!

James Buckham.

BEYOND THE GREAT SOUTH WALL.*

BY FRANK SAVILE.

Being some surprising details of the voyage of the steam yacht Raccoon on a trip undertaken by her owner with a full consciousness of its foolhardy nature, but without the faintest conception of the extraordinary happenings that were to become part and parcel of it.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

CAPTAIN DORINECOURTE and his friend known as Gerry are disconsolate over the mandate of the mother of the girls they love, Gwen and Violet Delahay respectively, which puts them aside as ineligible beside the Earl of Denvarre and his brother, the Hon. Stephen Garlicke, booked among the passengers on the steamship Madagascar for a winter's cruise around the world, and for which cruise Mrs. Delahay forthwith books herself and her daughters. While Dorinecourte is bemoaning the poverty which condemns him to his fate, he reads of the death of his uncle, Lord Heatherslie, which gives him the title and estates.

The uncle was a noted collector of coins and met his death while investigating an inscription on one of them pointing to the colonization of an unknown region by a certain people called Mayans, a purpose which he leaves as a legacy to his heir. Dorinecourte is inclined to poohpooh the idea, but finally is induced to seek out Professor Lessaution, a Frenchman with whom his uncle had been associated in his researches. He finds that the explorations will take him near the Falkland Isles; and, as the Madagascar is scheduled to call at Port Lewis, the new Lord Heatherslie equips the Raccoon for the voyage and embarks with Gerry, the professor, and a picked crew.

They steam south until further advance is blocked by a gigantic wall, and after three weeks spent in vain endeavor to scale it, they start for the Falkland Isles. During a storm, it is their good fortune to rescue Lady Delahay, her daughters, Denvarre, and his brother. On account of accidents to the Raccoon, they must fly before the furious gale which blows them south, to nearly the same locality as before. That night there is a volcanic eruption, and a towering tidal wave sweeps the yacht over the Great South Wall into a lake which ebbs away, leaving it on the rocks. They can find no other means of escape but to hoist the cutter in sections to the top of the wall, rebuild it, and swing it down to the sea. This is done after days of stupendous labor, and when it is properly provisioned, Waller and a crew of six set sail to the nearest port for aid. The rest of the party explore an underground temple, where they find evidences of prehabitation, and have another narrow escape from the awful monster that they encountered once before. While they are all engaged in taking provisions from the ship to their improvised shelter on the rocks, Gwen's dog, Fidget, begins to sniff and bark savagely. Suddenly, to the horror of all, the frightful beast appears; Fidget flees, and slips into a small fissure where Gwen follows to rescue her pet. Dorinecourte tears frantically in pursuit, reaching her just as the monster lumbers towards them, only a furlong away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HORRIBLE IMPRISONMENT.

I LOOKED up the quarter of mile of steep rock escarpment that lay between us and safety, and knew that I, at least, dizzy as I was, could never mount it before he would be upon us.

And Gwen might fall. Anything might happen. No, the cavern beneath the ship was the only chance. I staggered forward and caught her elbow as she ran.

"It's no good," I said. "We're done. The cave beneath the ship's the only possible place."

"Can't we run for it?" she gasped.

"I can't, at any rate," I answered sadly, "and I don't think you'd better try."

"Oh, you're hurt—you're hurt," she whispered pantingly as we raced towards the ship. "And it's my fault. But I couldn't stand the screams of the poor little wretch—I couldn't have seen her torn and mangled. Hadn't we bet-

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ter get into it," and she pointed to the ship's side above us.

"No," I answered, as I handed her swiftly on to the ledge, and helped her down into the cave beyond, "he might manage to break in upon us. Here we're safe for the present, at any rate. He may try to starve us out, but it isn't likely. After a bit, when he finds he can't get at us, he'll shuffle away as he came."

Fidget was barking furiously, and bristling up her hair, but at the farthest end of the cavern a sludgy, dragging movement became audible, and the murky odor of the Horror clouded down to us.

Looking out from under the overhanging roof I saw a single shining claw project over the edge of the cleft. Then the half of the pad came into view, the rock dinting its podginess.

The brute swung his head over me, and parted his thin inquisitive lips almost to a sneer. For one halting second the head was poised motionless. Then, swift as a dropping stone, it smote down at me, and I flung myself back, the evil eyes flashing past not five yards away.

There they hung and balanced, glinting evilly at us, while the long pendant neck strained into the cleft from above.

The huge body made twilight in the cavern, swelling eagerly into the space between the rock and the ship. The muscular fore arms kneaded and crumbled the edges of the fissure. So were we desperately imprisoned, and such was our jailer.

At the farthest limit of the cave we leaned upon the rock, and looked at that wicked, weaving head. Twice before had I seen it, but never in such circumstances as this.

On both occasions we had been men alone. The peril had been distributed, so to speak, among us all. But with a girl, and a beautiful girl moreover, with whom I happened to be desperately in love—to have that outrageous atrocity mouthing upon her and me alone, and to feel that any accident might send her into its bestial maw—Good God! it might turn any brain.

I stood between Gwen and the entrance and tried to smile into her face.

"I wouldn't look that way, if I were you," said I persuasively. "He'll take himself off directly, I hope."

Her lips were very white and they trembled unrestrainedly, but she smiled back into my eyes—a ghostly uncertain sort of smile, though, I must confess.

"I don't mind. Not much at least." Then with a strained attempt to look at the humorous side of it she added, "What an opportunity for M. Lessaution and his squirt."

I loved to see the pluck of her, and answered cheerfully.

"Garlicke will be distracting the brute's attention directly with that Mänlicher rifle," said I. "I happen to know he took it up with him when we moved camp, for use in just such a possibility as this. He'll be trying the effect of the bullet with the top bitten off," I added to keep the light side of the question uppermost, though it was a watery sort of sprightliness at the best.

From the edge above, where the weight of the great body was pressing, a lump of granite fell, and splashed into splinters in the narrows of the gulf. It widened the mouth of the fissure by a foot or more.

The horrible trunk surged forward a yard or two, and one of the huge legs, dropping from between the belly and the rock, slid into the opening. The five white claws waggled and gripped at empty space, and the gloom in the cave increased.

Fidget was beyond barking now, and backed against the uttermost crevices with a sort of bleating gasp. I think that never have I seen unadulterated terror more plainly expressed on an animal's features.

With the increased room for the

body, the long sinuous neck came forward a like space. The thin snout was now fairly in the cavern. The nauseous breath hissed at us in gusts—sickening as a plague wind.

Suddenly the lithe neck stiffened. The evil eyes concentrated their gaze upon Gwen. Their stare seemed to go past my cheek with the searing directness of a flashlight. In an instant the memory of the power that lay in that wicked glare came back to me.

I dashed forward and clapped my palms upon Gwen's face, calling to her wildly to close her eyes. I gathered her to my bosom—and oh, the ecstasy of it, even in that desperate stress—and stammered incoherently of the fatal trap that lay in that terrible, unwinking gaze.

She was content enough to bury her face in the folds of my loose jacket, and thus for a moment we stood shuddering. Fidget crept and fawned shiveringly about Gwen's skirts.

I kicked my foot against an object on the floor. It was the tin of mustard Gwen had been carrying when she started on that mad race down the boulders.

It was new and shining, just out of store. I held it before my face to look at the reflection therein.

Finding his efforts unavailing, the Monster was drawing his head back into the outer part of the cave, relaxing his tense glare. We turned to face him. He curved his neck into a half circle, his great throat muscles working with swallowings. Then with a sudden dart he flung it out upon us, gaping wide his mouth.

With a rasp and a roar his breath burst upon us, and upon the wall of rock at our back, hissing stridently like a gale through taut rigging. It beat us back almost irresistibly in the return draft, thrusting us out from the back of the cave towards his waiting lips.

For one desperate moment we swayed in that noisome gust, and my free arm—for one still encircled Gwen's waist—whirled in the air frantically as I braced myself to meet it. But as its first strength died down I flung myself with Gwen upon the ground, and grasping at a ledge hung on with despair's own grip.

In the case of Fidget the Monster's wile defeated his object. The back swirl of his breath whisked the little dog like a leaf past the lowering head and on into the outer cleft.

With a sound half bark, half squeal she leaped upon the unwieldly body before the neck could coil itself out of the inner cave. We heard her yapping pass swiftly out among the boulders, and die away up the empty lakeside.

There was the thud of a bullet on the thick hide, and the crack of a rifle followed smartly on the shot. A flake or scale of parchmenty skin floated past the cave mouth, and rustled slowly into the depths below; not by so much as the flicker of an eyelid did the brute show that he had felt anything.

Another shot followed, with the same result. They clattered on—above a score of them—but they worried him no more than the buzzings of mosquitoes. Finally one must have hit a wartlike excrescence on his shoulder. A lump about the size of my fist fell with a flop upon the stones, glanced ruddily for a second, and bounced on into the depths below.

But it left a telltale smear upon the granite, and scarlet drops trickled down the hanging neck, dripping in a small pool at the threshold of the cave. Yet the Monster lay unheeding, and we began to gasp with the unutterable murkiness of his breathing, which filled the air.

CHAPTER XIX.

A HOMELY MISSILE.

At Gwen's request I passed her the tin of mustard, and she held it like a smelling bottle to her nostrils, to get relief from the disgusting fog. We

began to pass it backwards and forwards to each other, and it was then that an inspiration—I think I may justly call it that—flashed into my brain.

With the tin in my hand I turned to face the great head again, waiting till the thin lips parted in one of their deep drawn breaths. Then I tossed my missile accurately towards the open jaws, and like a flash of crimson the gums gaped wide and the yellow teeth closed upon it. For a single instant we saw it gleam brightly between them.

There was a scrunch and a grinding sound among the great fangs, and then the yellow powder sank bitingly into the saliva. The brute opened his mouth, and a bellow pealed out of the strained throat, enveloping us in a volume of merciless sound and hot putrid air.

The long pink tongue slavered and twisted between the burning gums, showing ruddy streaks where the metal had gashed it. In one such ragged wound a remnant of the bright tin was still sticking; the flaming paste of powder and saliva was filling the torn veins with agony.

He beat his head desperately from side to side, slamming it on the hard rock walls of the cavern. His unearthly screams threatened to burst our ear drums. He beat the air with his great clumsy foot, and we could hear the thunderous boom of his great tail against the timbers of the ship.

Finally with the swiftness of an escaping bird the tortured head fled out of the cave mouth, and we heard his great carcass drag and rustle from the cleft. The blessed sunlight began to flow down to us again.

I let go my grip upon the rock, and, more unwillingly, my encirclement of Gwen's waist. I looked inquiringly into her eyes as I helped her up. She staggered as she rose, and for one delightful moment clung to me.

I felt that mere courtesy bade me tender again my support, and so for two or three delicious seconds we stood. Then she found her voice and the ghost of a smile.

"I think you're quite the cleverest person I ever met," she said gratefully. "How on earth did you come to think of the mustard?"

"I really haven't the least idea," said I honestly. "His mouth was there and I had the tin in my hand. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to throw it in. The effect was more than I dared to hope for."

She drew herself unostentatiously away from my arm as she spoke, and leaned against the rocks behind her.

"Well," she remarked, "we've saved poor little Fidget, at any rate. Even if we're doomed to be devoured we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that."

"We!" said I rebukingly. "Should I ever have been such a sentimentalist as to risk a horrible death for a dog!"

"I rank above Fidget in your opinion then, as you have chosen to accompany me into this trap. You do me too much honor," and she bowed to me charmingly.

I couldn't quite command myself to answer this in any ordered phrase, but I suppose the expression on my face must have spoken. At any rate Gwen blushed delightfully, and continued rather hurriedly, "Don't you think we might make a run for it now?"

"I'll reconnoiter," said I, "and see if he's really taken himself off or not."

I climbed gingerly out of the cleft, and very cautiously raised my head above the edge.

No, by no manner of means was he gone. He was lying about fifty yards away, and banging his head upon the ground and lashing the boulders with his tail; some of them were smitten to splinters as I watched.

His mouth still dripped yellow saliva, and his teeth were meeting with resounding cracks. His tongue still lapped itself about his tortured lips, and in his agony he rolled over, writhing

upon his back and beating his four great limbs convulsively towards the sky.

Lumps of his scaly skin were scattered about on the granite as feathers scatter from a shot bird. His nails clattered as they swept an overhanging mass of granite in one of their aimless gyrations. Finally there was one last angry flurry of legs and tail, and he rolled back upon his belly; his horny eyelids closed; his head sank wearily upon his forearms.

As I turned to tell Gwen I kicked a stone beside me. It fell with a metallic clang, and in a moment the green eyes were open and staring at me.

He lifted his head, and his huge limbs began to shove his carcass back towards me. There was a revengeful glare in those baleful eyes, and I popped back into the cleft like a rabbit into his burrow.

I heard him come dragging along above. Then, looking up, I saw the thin snout just overlap the edge and lie still. Evidently he was settling down to his sentinelship.

Afraid of another dose of the biting pain we had inflicted, he did not dare to venture his head again into our cave. He meant to starve us out.

Gwen looked up hopefully as I returned, but I had to shake my head at her glance of inquiry.

" No good just at present, I'm afraid. He's like the hosts of Midian —prowling and prowling around."

" Well, I suppose it can't be helped. But I do wish we'd had something a little more nutritious than mustard, useful as it's been. I'm simply starving. It's more than lunch time by half an hour."

" That can be arranged," said I airily. " I'll nip up the other side of the ship and get aboard. I can get hold of plenty of stuff in the pantry."

" As if I should allow it for a moment. I forbid it absolutely," and she brought her little foot with a stamp upon the rock floor.

I still edged towards the cave mouth, explaining that the danger was practically nil, though well did I know the contrary. Still a man can't sit still to watch a particularly sweet woman starve, even if he has to risk a bit to bring her victual.

" I cannot stand the ignominy of starvation," I assured her, " not to mention the discomfort."

She came towards me with her eyes so sweetly appealing that I felt sick with temptation.

" If you go," she said almost tearfully—there really was a humid look in her blue eyes—" I shall simply die of fright. I won't be left alone."

I hesitated and was lost. She put her hand upon my sleeve, and looked up searchingly into my face. " Please, please, please, don't go. I really am very frightened."

Goodness knows what I should have done next. Probably taken her in my arms and sworn neither to leave her then nor ever again, regardless of Denvarre or any question of mere honor. But fate took matters out of my hand.

CHAPTER XX.

A DESPERATE BETROTHAL.

THE brute above us gave a hiccough; I believe he meant it for a sneeze, but as a minor explosion of sorts it might have held up its head with cordite cartridges or an oil motor car.

Gwen, whose nerves were, as you may imagine, a trifle beyond control by now, gave a cry and fled into my arms, which opened of themselves to receive her. And so for a minute we stood silent and listening, while my pulses rioted within me.

After a moment or two we were aware that the fetid odor of the great Beast was being overpowered by a resistless smell of sulphur. This was doubtless giving our friend a sore throat, and titillating his nostrils. I

hoped devoutly that the unpleasantness of it would be too much for him.

He snorted once or twice again, and then a faint steam began to rise from the depths, as I had seen it do in the morning. Far below us I could hear the faint lap of water upon the stones.

Then a horrible fear took possession of me. The water was rising, hot from some volcanic spring. Shortly it would gurgle out at our feet and flood our refuge.

Then we should have the necessity before us of deciding whether we would drown—or perchance be parboiled—or step resignedly into the jaws of the Monster outside.

I looked fixedly at Gwen as these terrors hunted each other through my brain, and I suppose my thoughts shadowed out upon my face.

She turned her eyes to mine as I held her, looking questioningly at me, as if she would read my very soul. A sob and gurgle from the rising water sounded out bell-like and clear, moaning distinctly across the silence.

I knew by the shudder that ran through her that she was realizing what must happen when it lapped up to us. Her face fell upon my breast; her hands rose tremblingly to my shoulders; so for some few moments we stood, and silence hung between us.

The white clouds of steam began to weave and whirl fantastically across the mouth of the cave. The warm damp air played about us. The suck and splash of the waters sounded ever nearer and clearer from below.

Above we could hear the wheeze and the occasional gasp of the watching Monster, and his feet moved restlessly, sending down showers of little stones into the abyss, where they no longer chattered into emptiness, but fell with splashings into the growing flood. Then a thrill pulsed through the rocks, and we could feel the sickening heave and roll of the earth as a new eruption shook the crater.

In a second or two the roar of it came dully down to us, drowning the sound of the rifle shots which still pattered at intervals on the rocks, or thudded on that sensationless hide.

Finally the water rose to view, creeping with slow, silent tide up the rocks, gaining inch by inch upon the sides of the cleft. A wreath of steam hung mistily upon its surface.

I bent and touched it with my finger. It was warm—about eighty degrees I should imagine—but not unbearable.

I stepped again to the cave mouth and peered up. The cruel snout still projected over the edge above, waiting, waiting remorselessly. As I watched the triangular head moved forward a space, and turning sideways, looked down at me with hot revengeful eyes.

I stepped back into the shadow of the cave, and down flashed the head, hanging in eager swaying motion before us, gloating for the moment when we should be thrust out to it by the rising flood.

I slushed back to the end of the cave—the water was now at our knees—and took Gwen in my arms, shielding the gruesome sight from her with my breast. She drooped into my embrace again, trembling, but with a little thankful sigh for companionship in this last desperate pang.

"It'll soon be over," I said as steadily as I could, while my hand brushed her hair smoothingly. "Just a little struggle and then a dream that carries you right across the border, and—and I shall be there to meet you. Do you see, dear?"

I had no right to call her dear, I know, she being Denvarre's and not mine, but it was the last time, and, poor little soul, she wanted comfort for the final wrench.

She looked up at me, and I could see that her lips were parched and dry, though there was a curious light shining in her eyes.

"Is there no chance at all? Are you sure?" she whispered, and for all the

horror that was closing down upon us, a smile shone in her eyes.

"None, I fear," said I; "but—but I don't think it'll be bad—people who have been nearly drowned say——"

"Ah, I don't mean that. Only I wanted to tell you before the end—I meant to tell you in any case, but it's easier now. Vi only found out this morning that mother had led you to think that we had accepted those two—but—but it isn't so. Lord Denvarre asked me, but I told him I didn't think I possibly could—only—he wanted me to wait six months and see—and then we met again, and—I knew—then——" but my lips upon hers stayed her, and my arms went fiercely about her again.

"My darling, my darling!" I cried, "and I thought you'd forgotten me utterly, and taken Denvarre for all he could bring you. And now, sweetheart, now—Oh, my God," I groaned, "what can I do, what can I do?"

Her voice was quite steady, and she leaned forward to put her face up to mine.

"Then you still want me, dear?" she whispered. "Well, I'm yours till—till the end," and a tiny sob shook her voice for a moment. "But I want a gift from you before we part, my darling," and she touched my cheek with a little soft caress.

"A gift?" I stared back into her eyes, devouring with hungry gaze the sweet face that was mine, but to be lost to me again.

"Yes, dear. You have your revolver."

I thrust her back from me wildly. My God, how could she ask it? I, to send the bullet into that dear heart that beat for me. I, to give her death, who longed with every passionate impulse of my being to give her life, who would have periled not only my unworthy body but my very soul to save her pain.

The thought of it was more than could be borne; the doing of it—Merciful God! it was impossible.

"*Please*, my darling. I should only struggle when the last moment came, and fight out into his jaws." She pressed back close to me again, looking up at me with a pleading that was terrible. "Just one embrace, my own, and then——" and her hands rose round my neck, and for one delicious instant her dear lips pressed passionately against mine. Then, with a little triumphant smile she drew back, and repeated quietly, "Now, dear."

The water was at my shoulders, and it was only by holding Gwen tightly to me that I kept her face above it. There was but a bare three inches between my pistol hand and the roof.

I looked at the cartridges with some faint hope that they might be wet, and that this last terrible duty might be yet taken from me. But the brass cases had held only too well.

I raised my revolver, pointing it downwards, and looked into those dear eyes. Her eyelids drooped as the steel barrel shone, and I felt her fingers tighten upon my arm. The water was at my lips, but with one supreme effort I raised her to me.

One last look into the dearest face in all the world—one last kiss—one touch of that golden hair—then——

Crash—crash—crash—outside was a grating roar, and caught by the rising tide the ship surged forward. The bulge of it swung against the cave mouth, and in an instant caught and gripped the pendant neck, sawing and grinding its flesh against the jagged edges.

The prisoned head in its agony beat frantically against the surface, and the water shot right and left in angry ripples as the breath of the Monster's scream burst upon it.

The revolver dropped from my hand. I snatched Gwen to me, and dived into the hot turbid flood—down beneath the struggling head, down beneath the ship's keel, out into the warm stillness of the cleft beyond.

Gasping and choking from our sud-

den immersion I dragged my darling over the edge, and half led, half carried her up the rocky slope, leaving a long wet drip upon the granite.

The enraged and baffled yelling of the captured Beast rang out piercingly among the cliff echoes; the lashings of his great tail smote upon the empty hold of the ship as upon a drum. In his vain attempts to draw his neck from the trap he drove and spurred at the boulders frantically, and the clatter of his long nails upon the pebbles sounded like the scratchings of some monstrous cat.

Our clothes were sodden and heavy, and our nerves unstrung from terror and excitement. We were in no condition for a swift escape. My own state of mind I can in nowise describe, such a confusion of fright and ecstasy raged therein.

Firstly, the horrors of a hideous death still hung over us, though for the moment passed by. My pulses still tingled with the sick despair of that last terrible moment. Death had been my betrothal gift to my love—death to save her from agony. Another second, and she would have received it at my hand.

Thank God that there are few who can realize the eons of torture that swelled into those few instants of good by. Death was still at our backs, and might follow hard upon our footsteps, but I was so uplifted in the knowledge of my darling's love, and in learning that no point of honor stood between us, that I scarce gave a thought to remembering that we might yet stand together in the valley of the shadow.

Up the slope we toiled, and very like one of those terrible hills that we climb in dreams did it appear. Gwen clung to me desperately, her dear eyes hunted and shining with affright. Her knees trembled—she strove to run, but her dripping skirts caught her limbs and made her stumble.

Still up we reeled, the pebbles spinning from our unsteady feet, the smooth rock silt churning to mud upon our shoes. From above came cries of encouragement, and from the heights I seemed to see dark forms speed down towards us.

Another crash echoed from behind. I threw a quick glance across my shoulder. The Raccoon was slanting back from the cave mouth, and the Monster was free. I saw him turn and crawl slowly from the pool in which the ship was beginning to right herself and sit swan-like.

He lifted his head, and I saw the blood flow in streams from his gashed throat. It steamed as it made puddles upon the cold rocks.

He sniffed the breeze. Then his evil eyes settled their stare in our direction. The huge body began to waddle and slide towards us.

I caught Gwen up in my arms and fled upwards, terror thrusting me on. She gave one gasp of protest; then she settled into my embrace with a little sigh of relief as she nestled to me. So the race for life began.

I ran almost unseeingly, the great pulses throbbing and thrumming in my bosom. Now and again I stumbled; once I nearly fell. Gwen's arm came with a jolt against a boulder top. I cursed my awkwardness, hurrying on and trying to pick my way among the great, loose lumps more carefully.

Some rubble gave beneath my feet. I rolled over sideways; somehow—though how I can't say myself—I managed to fall upon my elbows and save my burden from harm. I rocked up to my feet, and saw as in a dream the cliff foot two hundred yards away, and upon it the forms of men who ran towards me.

I turned my face over my shoulder again. The Brute was a short half furlong away—his tongue lolling from his wide, expectant jaws. He strained his neck towards us, his eyes aglint; he seemed almost to trot rather than waddle in his greedy haste.

Determination and despair drove me

forward as with a goad; I panted with the horror of his oncoming.

Above me sat Garlicke, rifle in hand, breaking the clean outline of the ridge against the sky. The rifle was silhouetted thin and delicate as a needle against the brightness. A spurt of blue smoke burst from the muzzle, and the crack of it rang across the hollow.

I heard a thud as the bullet struck the mass of hungry desire behind me, and glanced again quickly, hoping for effect. A red weal shone upon one of the horny eyelids. He stopped, blinking stupidly, and half stunned by the shock. But the ball had not penetrated, and with a puzzled swinging of the wounded neck he resumed his scrambling, ungainly gait.

Still a hundred yards, and my eyes grew dizzy. A red mist seemed to close upon them, which, lifting now and again, showed me surrounding objects defined as on the slides of a magic lantern. My breath rasped with such a wheezing whistle that I looked wonderingly to see whence the sound could come.

My arms were like wire ropes, strained to the breaking. My legs shuffled painfully under me. I felt the strength going out from me as water leaks from an unbunged cask. The sound of Garlicke's shots struck fainter and fainter upon my ears.

I stumbled again, and only saved myself from plunging forward by an instinctive straightening of my shoulders. The sunlight was shadowing to a night —a black darkness that could be felt.

Then, dimly, a familiar voice broke upon my ears; I was conscious of a hand seizing my arm; of some one struggling with me for Gwen. Yet, thought I, we will die together. Then the friendly hand, leaving this useless striving, dragged me forward; behind me some unseen power was thrusting me with mad shoves up the Titan steps of the cliff face.

Suddenly came clearness of vision, and I knew Denvarre and Gerry, who were hauling and jerking me up the crevices of our rock of defense. Gwen was still in my arms, and below, the great Monster scrabbled at the cliff foot, reaching up his neck in raging, ravenous disappointment.

So, Denvarre dragging and Gerry butting like some benevolent goat, from niche to niche I stumbled with my burden, the little stones rattling down in their thousands upon the Beast below.

Upon the top I staggered forward into the shelter of the tarpaulin, and laid Gwen down upon the rocky floor. Then, in the sudden impulse of her love, and in her revulsion from that great dread, she flung her arms about me as I stooped over her, and before them all had kissed me on the lips. And who was I that I should not kiss back once and again.

So my love and I came to an understanding, and sealed our betrothal as the shadow of death passed from us—passing as a cloud when the breeze is strong and outleaps the sun; while above us the mountain still belched fire and molten stone, and below the Beast prowled, and sought hungrily for our blood. And I take it that never have man and maid plighted troth in stranger circumstance.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WONDROUS BREACHING OF THE WALL.

A GOOD man all through is Denvarre, as I said before, and like a good man he took the failure of his hopes. And they had never been anything more. For as he explained to me, when we had changed our dripping clothes and joined the others on the ciff top, he had no knowledge of Lady Delahay's very distorted rendering of the situation. And he shook my hand and looked me straight in the eyes, and then like the gentleman he was, went away to leave my sweetheart and me to say all we had to say to each other behind a

ledge of rock that screened us from the others.

And he took with him my unstinted admiration and esteem.

My future mother in law was in no condition for the exchanging of ideas or reproaches. The horrors of the situation crowded her understanding, leaving no room for such trivialities as the arrangement of her daughter's welfare.

Apathetically she took the plain statement I thought it only my duty to render to her, making no remark thereon save that "Nothing mattered when we should all be dead before the day was out."

And to this pessimistic view of the situation we had perforce to leave her, while we all waited for what should betide us at the hand of fate.

In the corner apart Gwen and I held each the other's hand, and sought each other's eyes. And in the bliss that was mine I thanked God, nearly sparing a blessing for the great Beast who still prowled below, for how but for him should I have come into my kingdom of delight.

So in happiness that even the great smoke pall could not overshadow we sat to watch the day die, and the blood red glow of the mountain wax scarlet on the dark cloud above us, while the pulse of the undying fires vibrated across the heavens, after each succeeding roar and shudder of the melting rocks.

As we watched the travail of the hills, across the edge of the crater where it was lowest in the lap of the peak, a thin line showed. Faint it was at first, then thickening to a broad scarlet, where the range of ringing rocks dipped lowest.

For seconds it hung there, a red bar of palpitating, blood-like flame. Then with a roar it broke over the barrier and swept on headlong down the spur of the hill, ingulfing the smaller rocks, and laving the bases of the larger ones that stemmed its current island-like.

After the first mad burst the roaring spate of fire slowed on a slighter slope; then rolled massively, grimly down upon the glacier head through the vale of granite.

As the lava drained to the bottom level of the rent in the crater the flow lessened. Finally it ceased. Ere half a mile of the distance between the orifice and the glacier had been covered, the crimson glow began to fade.

The surface of the flood dulled to a dark crimson, then to a living blackness as of velvet. The crest of the advancing flood sank down sluggishly and stayed, its bosom curving menacingly, the advance of an army irresistible.

A flaring pillar of flame dyed, guttering stone shot skywards again, the splashes of it thudding about us heavily. One molten lump, stiffening as it fell, smote on our tarpaulin roof, slashing through it to the stone floor.

A shriek went up from Lady Delahay as she shrank back from its still living glow, and the tarpaulin burst into sudden flame. A dozen willing hands tore it down and wrapped it together, smothering the fire in the folds.

Poor little Fidget—utterly cowed by terror fast following on terror—came slinking towards me, and nestling in between Gwen and myself, hid her little nose deferentially in my sleeve. My darling gave her a little friendly pat, and I cuddled the little dog gratefully myself.

But a shudder followed fast on the caress as I thought of what might have been when she had been kicking and screaming in that death trap in the cleft.

We peered down at the Beast. He was still rambling restlessly about, snuffling now and again at the cliff foot, aimlessly pawing and snatching at the boulders that banked the rock face.

Once just below us, where the sheer crag melted into a more slanting angle, he rose clumsily upon his hind limbs, leaned forward and stretched his head towards us, pricking out his long

tongue. As it licked across his lips the jag of broken tin flashed redly in the glow, and we could hear it grate as his teeth closed.

His head reached up to within forty yards of us as he swarmed against the cliff, and Garlicke aimed carefully for his eye. The bullet only grazed the unscarred eyebrow, giving it a curious uniformity with the other one. The brute merely blinked impatiently as the ball thudded on the shell-like lid, but did not twitch a muscle. As it splayed out its feet on the bank of loose stones, seeking purchase to strain higher, the rubble gave way, and it rolled back with a thump upon its side. Its green belly shone a loathsome pink in the glare from above, and for a moment it lay prone, its great legs kicking convulsively.

Then with an effort it righted itself and crawled sulkily away to resume its sentinelship at the cliff foot. It continued to ramble to and fro unceasingly, casting ever greedy eyes at us, the hideous snout lifted to the breeze, the long tongue lolling from between the yellow teeth.

Down in the hollow a growing sheet of water spread. On it the ship floated lopsided and aimlessly. Long widening ripples welled from where the cleft was submerged, and a steam cloud was hazy upon the surface.

The hull was all untrue upon its keel with the shifting of the ballast, and as the ripples swung her, drifted in slow circles. With her lost topmast she looked like nothing so much as a wounded wild duck.

The fire glow gave the increasing water the effect of blood issuing from a wound in the bosom of earth. On it were reflected crimson throbs from the arch of ruddy fog; they were as pulses across an opened vein.

Another quiver rocked our pyramid of granite, and the glacier was riven across. The following roar gushed down to us deafeningly. The lane showed dark and mysterious across the ice field, clean cut as by an axe blow, and this new made canyon ran with scarce an obstacle nearly to the foot of our refuge. We seemed to get a vision swift and fleeting as a lightning flash, of the hidden mysteries of the ice.

I could have declared I saw the yellow façade of the buried temple show up against a black background of rock. Then as the flying lava sank back again into the bath of fire, darkness closed over this half seen apparition.

Once again the red bar glowed across the dip in the crater brim. For one tense moment it hovered, and then crashed down upon its dying forerunner, covering it anew with living fire.

Along this smoothed path it rushed headlong, leaped down from the lava crest upon the stones, and rolled with measured grandeur down the groove the earthquake had riven. Blocks of ice, fallen from the glacier sides, lay in its course and were swallowed in a moment.

Like the roar of a bursting shell the steam bubbles smashed to the surface, and floated up in white circling clouds to lose themselves in the fog above. Unhalting the torrent ran, ingulfing all before it; stones, ice and the rock itself disappeared.

Then in slow growing blackness it stayed, sank and died, even as its predecessor. But this time the wave reached to the end of the fissure, and the heat of it beat up to us, lapping us in a bath of sultry, stifling air.

The Beast shifted his sentry walk uneasily, stretching out his neck towards the lava wall, and snouting at the warm draft suspiciously. For a moment he seemed to waver. His nostrils dilated curiously. Then he glanced towards the rising lake, and we thought he would give over his seeking for our lives.

As he hesitated, now looking lakewards, now peering up to us, another crash resounded from the mountain. Like the tearing of a sheet of paper, the glacier canyon split further shorewards and opened beneath his very feet.

Half his bulk rolled into the cleft thus riven; his tail and one hind limb disappeared.

Slipping and spurring frantically, he managed to support himself on his huge elbows, but lost ground with every rock of the shuddering earth. The cleft yawned, then half closed again. Thus as in a vise he was held, his leg and tail mangled in the nip of the fissure. He looked like some stupendous stoat caught in a gigantic gin.

The bellow of his agony pierced even above the thunderous roll of the mountain. The blood spurted from his sides, bathing them in a darker tinge than the flame glow.

His fore feet beat and thudded on the stones, sweeping them into ridges with the convulsions of his agony. He swung his neck across his shoulders, tearing rabidly at his wounds.

The sight was almost too much for human eyes. Gwen had already buried hers against my coat. The breathing of the sailors behind me grew stertorous, as their chests rose and fell in unconscious sympathy.

Speech was taken from us by a very paralysis of horror. But worse was to come.

The fiery matter that fevered the volcano burst forth again. Again the mountain shuddered, belching forth its flames.

Down the dead waves another living torrent rushed, roared in the deep channel through the glacier, and foamed—yes, foamed—into the widening split. A scream, anguish born and like the crowded wails of ten thousand souls in torment, rose from the prisoned Beast. A pungent, choking smell of roasting flesh rose up to us.

Then the red tide flowed on over the charred carrion, and burst asunder again, a gout of steaming gas shot up, sole remnant of the tissues of that enormous carcass.

The stream touched and laved lightly at our refuge.

Then slowly it dimmed, and the velvet surface grew up on it again. The current halted and grew still. Its force was spent.

The heat beat up to us scorchingly. We felt, but saw it not. Our faces were averted, and nausea had us by the throat. As the great Beast had died, so might we come to die, and that right soon.

The realization of the matter was more than we could see and not blench. For some half minute no one spoke, and dread hung over us thick as the cloud of cinder dust that filled the sky.

(To be concluded.)

HUMILITY.

I ASK not a life for the dear ones,
All radiant, as others have done,
But that life may have just enough shadow
To temper the glare of the sun.
I would pray God would guard them from evil,
But my prayer would bound back to myself;
Ah! a seraph may pray for a sinner,
But a sinner must pray for himself.

Charles M. Dickinson.

ANNIS DENHAM'S SUBTERFUGE.

BY ALMA CARLTON.

The expedient of a lonely woman, who made use of a vivid imagination to trick out a commonplace visit with the trappings of social conquest.

FOR a quarter of a century Annis Denham had been waiting.

It seemed to her now, when she came to think it over, that her whole life had been one constant looking forward, an ignoring, or perhaps a patient enduring of the present for the sake of the future.

Yet the years went by, and the realization seemed as far away as ever. At forty five she was still waiting.

She had not had an unhappy life. There had been always that hope, and hope is sometimes as satisfying as reality. At least hope never disappoints—the realization sometimes does.

Annis Denham had married young, and the cares of life came to her as to other wives and mothers. The ambitions of her womanhood were put aside for the duties of every day life.

She had not fretted; it was all as it should be, she told herself. She would do her duty now, and the future would bring the desire of her heart.

She had talents of a certain order, which in her girlhood had been cultivated to some extent. They were neglected now; but never mind! She was young, and that glorious future was coming!

She possessed a sweet and well trained voice, a literary power that had already brought her notice—these would be attended to when the time came, but home and family first! That was her motto, but in living it she had perhaps been over sensitive.

It had not occurred to her that there were duties to herself and her own nature that she was wrongfully neglecting. She denied herself that her loved ones might have all that life could give.

Her husband and her sons came to feel that her chief happiness lay in ministering to their wants, in resting quietly in her home. They turned to her for sympathy and appreciation in all their plans. John Denham was not unkind. He loved his wife, and if he had thought of her as being unhappy or dissatisfied, he would have been sorely grieved, but he never thought. She had food and raiment, a comfortable home; what more could she want?

True, she had always worked hard, for money had never been plentiful. She had little social life outside of her home. What should she care for it when home was so restful? John himself was always glad of a quiet evening at his fireside, but he had to go out more or less.

He persuaded himself that it was not pleasure that called him from home so much. He must meet his friends on business, said business often being discussed at a fine dinner, between the acts at the theater, or at the house of some friend, where social pleasures helped to make the duty less tedious.

He was rarely seen in public with his wife, and Annis came to feel that he did not care for her society; that he was perhaps ashamed of the plain, quiet woman her monotonous life had made of her. She grew morbid and unhappy, shrinking more and more into herself.

There came a time when a neglected talent was taken up with renewed interest. Annis began to write again. She had a fuller experience of life, a maturer vision. She felt sure she could say something the world might like to hear. If no more, she must write for the very love of it.

In her girlhood she had had dreams of great things; these she laughed at now. She would try only to be true, true to herself and to her own ideals.

Success came in small measure, bringing contentment and congenial occupation. It did not last. The cares of home, which must be always first, caused the pen to be laid aside; but she smiled even as she sighed over the unfulfilled desires.

So the years passed, and there was more of duty—duty to others. She calmly accepted whatever came, but always with the hope that her time would yet come.

It came at last, but too late! The loved work was taken up again, but the narrow shut in life had dwarfed the plant of genius, and the fruit refused to ripen.

She had starved herself, mentally and socially. She could not go forth in search of material, for home duties had strong claims still, and a certain selfish element had gradually grown up about her.

While she remained at home, her husband and her sons had been out in the world, enjoying its pleasures, never thinking the wife and mother might have longings outside beyond the domestic hearth.

John Denham forgot that his wife had been gifted with rare social qualities. He had come to think of her as did others, as a quiet little woman who never cared for society.

It was years since he had seen her in evening dress. Indeed she had no use for one. Her voice of song, which he had once admired, was never heard now. It had gone, he supposed, with the other things which had belonged to youth.

He told her sometimes of his friends, of the bright people he met from time to time. She listened passively and kept back the bitterness that crept into her heart. His friends—and she, his wife, was unknown to them!

If he had read her thoughts he would not have understood. That she could possibly care for the frivolities of life, for the fine gowns and jewels of the women he had met at the houses of his friends, would have surprised him.

Was not the aim of her life to keep the household machinery in running order? Society was tiresome. Why should she care for it?

Annis had one connection with her girlhood days—an old school friend, whose marriage had occurred soon after her own. They had kept up a correspondence, though the letters had been few and far between, yet they served to keep the old friendship alive. They had met several times in the quarter century that had passed over their heads. Eleanor Bray had lived abroad many years. Annis had written bright, cheerful letters, keeping back much of her real life through pride.

The friend of her girlhood should never know that the bright girl of years ago, with her capabilities of enjoyment and rare social qualities, had settled down into a dull, spiritless woman hovering over the ashes of her own life.

Many a time the longing came for just one dash out into the world of brightness and sunshine, but it was only momentary; at heart she felt it could never be; she had lost the power of social enjoyment, and shrank painfully from the thought of meeting the world again.

It was a pitiful condition, and she realized that she had brought herself to it through her own sensitive nature; yet she was not wholly to blame.

She might have asserted her right to a place in the social world and have gone forth alone; there were women who did it, forced life to give them its fill of pleasure; but Annis could not. She came to feel that her husband did not want her, now that she had grown old and plain and had forgotten the ways of the world.

John Denham would not have acknowledged this, but it was in a measure true. His friends' wives were hand-

some, well dressed women, who took life easy, and he took no trouble to explain why his own wife was never in evidence.

* * * *

One summer John was called to London on business. Annis might have gone with him, but he never thought of that. Affairs at home could have been arranged, and the trip would have satisfied one of the great longings of her life, but she was too proud to mention it.

If he had asked her to go she might have refused, for she had grown morbidly sensitive as to putting her husband to shame on her account, and she had a feeling that after all these years she could not bring herself up to date, as it were, so that his pride might not be hurt at her appearance.

So the opportunity slipped by and John went alone, feeling that he was doing his full duty in leaving his wife comfortable in her home.

He had been gone but a few days when Annis received a letter from her old friend Eleanor. She had not heard from her for more than five years. The letter told of the gay life she was leading, of the many places she had seen in her travels, and of the brilliant people she met, until Annis Denham's heart ached with envy and loneliness.

If she could make a dash for liberty, if she could snatch a bit of some other life than the one she was living, she would be content afterwards to bear patiently her humdrum existence. The wish grew to a longing she could not control.

In the midst of her longing came a thought that almost took her breath—but the thought grew and strengthened.

The boys were away, one at college, the other traveling on business. She had a cousin in Washington from whom she had not heard in many years, but she would take this occasion to make her a visit. It would be something!

True, the cousin lived quietly in the outskirts of the city, but there would be the travel, the sight seeing, which she had not enjoyed for years; she might rejuvenate and freshen her life, her looks, her feelings, her ideas, so that when John came home he would not be ashamed of her; he might be willing to take her out into his own life once more. She would try it!

* * * *

John Denham was enjoying himself fully. He had written several letters home, but they told little of himself or his doings. He was combining much pleasure with business, and he wrote briefly of the business, saying little of the pleasure.

He had been invited to the homes of friends, and had met many agreeable people. He was greatly pleased and surprised one evening at a dinner to meet his wife's old friend, Eleanor Bray. He had not seen her for nearly twenty years, and he did not recognize her at once, but she knew him.

He was surprised at the brilliant, handsome woman before him, and could not help contrasting her with Annis, yet in their young days Annis had been the prettier, the more charming in many ways. He wondered at the change.

"Mr. Denham," she said to him, "I have had a long letter from your wife recently. I wrote to her a few weeks ago. I have been so remiss lately, but I wanted to know how my friend was faring. She appears to be quite her old self."

"Yes," he answered, but in his heart he felt it was not true. "I have had but one letter since I left home," he went on; "she has not answered my letters regularly, but I suppose she is busy."

"Oh, she is having such a gay time in your absence—she can hardly find time for letters. Come and dine with us at the Langham tomorrow."

"What could she mean?" he asked himself, when he found time to think over her words.

The thought was amusing. That Annis should be having so gay a time she could not attend to letter writing! This fine woman of the world could not realize what a quiet home body Annis had become. Of course she was talking lightly, for talk's sake, but it sounded queer to him. Still another thought obtruded itself. Why was Eleanor Bray young and fresh and charming at forty five, while Annis had become a plain old woman? The thought was a bit troublesome, but it never occurred to him that he might have a share in the blame—if there were blame anywhere.

On his way to the Langham the next evening he thought over these things. Once he chanced to consider how pleasant it would be if Annis were going with him now to visit her old friend; but what a contrast there would be between the two women!

He tried to imagine his wife in the dress Mrs. Bray wore last night, and almost laughed at the idea.

"Poor Annis! She has grown old fast; she does not care for fine clothes even if she could afford them. She never goes anywhere to wear them—why?"

This question was just forming itself in his mind when his thoughts were interrupted. He had reached his destination and was soon chatting pleasantly with his hostess and her husband.

"Now tell me of Annis," Mrs. Bray said after dinner, when they had settled for a chat in her pretty parlor. "Does she look as she used to in the old days when we had such lively times together? I should judge so by her letters. I received another today, and I think she is the same old Annis. I have not had a picture of her for years. Here is the one she gave me twenty years ago. Has she changed much?"

She handed him a small photograph. He had almost forgotten that his wife was once a young and pretty girl like that. What had wrought the change?

He looked up with a forced smile as he handed back the little card.

"She has changed some," he said; "you know we are all growing a little older, Mrs. Bray."

"You have not grown old, Mr. Denham. I think Annis has taken good care of you. You have done the same for her, I have no doubt. Judging by her letters she enjoys life as much as ever, but if you have not heard from home recently perhaps you would like to read these letters. Take them with you and return them at your convenience."

An hour later John Denham was walking the floor of his room in a state of perplexity. Had he been dreaming, or had he really read those two long letters signed "Annis Denham"?

"I am enjoying everything here to the utmost," the letter ran on. "Washington is a beautiful city, the people are delightful, and you know I am fond of society as ever. Of course I wish John were here with me, but friends are very kind and I am accepting everything that offers itself.

"I am not going to mope because John is away, I assure you. I am busy every moment, for I spend my forenoons in sight seeing, while afternoons and evenings are fully taken up with receptions, theaters, the opera, etc. A reception at the White House last night! I wore white silk with diamonds and some of that rare old lace that once belonged to Aunt Emily; do you remember? You used to say it was so becoming. I wore it about my neck, for my dress was low—I hesitated about wearing it so; I am getting old for that, you know, Eleanor, but Cousin Annie insisted, the foolish dear. She says my neck is as pretty as ever and that I must show it sometimes. It's nonsensical of her, but I yielded. So many women older than I am think nothing of it.

"I was really vain when I looked in my glass, Eleanor, vain enough to wish I could send you a picture of myself. Last Wednesday night a reception at Senator Low's, one of the most bril-

liant I have ever attended. I wore my pearl gray with a wealth of pale pink roses; such beauties they were. Senator Wyeth sent me a large basket of them. He has been very kind to me, has sent me flowers several times and has taken me to ride all about the city; says he used to know my husband quite well.

"I have just ordered a dress for the affair at Professor Baer's. It will be a beauty—a yellow silk of the palest shade, the color we used to wear in our girl days, Eleanor; you remember? I wonder if it will be as becoming now. They tell me my complexion is still good. I have some of my old color left. I shall wear a great bunch of Marie Louise violets; I have just set my heart on that, and no jewels except the great amethyst crescent in my hair. I shall look stunning, Eleanor; don't you think so?

"I have been taking singing lessons of Professor Baer, and my voice has improved wonderfully under his training. I sang twice last evening. Senator Wyeth says my voice is the finest contralto he ever heard. Of course that is only a bit of nonsense, but he is not the only one who says so. If I were younger my head would be turned with so much flattery. As it is, I am only glad to be able to give a little pleasure."

The second letter was in much the same strain, except that toward the last there was a little note of regret that she was so soon to leave Washington.

"I shall go home next week," she wrote. "I have had so good a time I am reluctant to leave, yet I shall be glad to get a little rest; society life is so wearing. Of course I shall have more or less of it at home; indeed, I could never settle down quietly after all this. I shall keep quiet a little while, until John comes home, then I suppose he will want me to go out a great deal with him. We shall entertain more or less.

"I am going to bring out my young niece, Edna Willis, next winter. She is a little blonde beauty, and will be one of the prettiest of society buds. So you see life is very full, but you must not think it is all fashion and frivolity, Eleanor—we do sometimes think of other things, you know."

"Annis seems to be having a fine time," Mrs. Bray remarked, as she took the letters from John Denham's hand. "She was not a society bud very long; she married so young, but she has developed into a magnificent society blossom. I am glad she has not settled down into a demure little home body. I used to fear she would, and she never said much of herself in her letters."

Mrs. Bray remarked afterward to her husband that John Denham was not feeling well; "he seemed a little confused and said he should not stay in London much longer. He will start for home in a few days. Perhaps he is a little homesick."

Two weeks later John Denham crossed the threshold of his own home. His wife came forward to meet him with a warm, glad greeting, and for a time he forgot all but that he was at home once more.

He was weary of travel and sight seeing, and the dear home was sweet and restful. Annis' face was bright and happy with the joy of his return, but when he found time to think he realized, not with regret, but with more or less of surprise, that he had not found just what he expected.

Here was Annis, sweet and restful looking, her face lighted with happiness because he was with her again, but the same quiet, plain little woman he had parted from three months before—her gray hair drawn plainly back from her pale face, her dark dress neat and trim, but devoid of style or beauty. Where was the dashing woman of society that had been photographed on his mind from the reading of those letters? Could she have so completely settled into herself again after all that gay Washington experience?

He could not understand; he must have an explanation.

"Annis," he said, when they were alone together and she had seated herself in her favorite corner with a bit of fancy work, "I saw your friend, Mrs. Bray, in London. I dined with her one night. She said you had written her."

Annis bent over her work, but he saw her hands tremble, her lips quiver, and when she lifted her eyes they were full of tears.

She started to say something, but suddenly rose and started to leave the room. He intercepted her.

"Annis, what is the matter, dear? Something troubles you!"

"Oh, nothing, John—at least a mere trifle. What did Eleanor say about me?"

"She was delighted to know you were enjoying life so well. She gave me your letters to read. I hardly knew what to make of them, they were so unlike the few you wrote me."

"You read my letters, John—my letters to Eleanor?"

She shivered, clasped her hands together nervously, and the next moment she lay in a heap at his feet.

He lifted her gently to the couch, rubbed her cold hands, and bathed her head; when she came to herself, she looked up piteously.

"John, let me tell you," she murmured, but he would not let her speak.

"Be quiet, Annis, you are ill. Do not talk any more now. Your nerves are upset and you must rest."

She was very ill for days, and there were moments when they almost feared for her reason.

"There is something on her mind," the doctor said. "If you can find out what troubles her, we may be able to save her a long and serious illness. She is very unhappy. Do not excite her; get this real or fancied trouble out of her head, if possible."

One day she called him to her.

"John," she said, as the tears rolled down her face, "Oh, John, how you will despise me—but that was all a miserable lie—those letters! And you read them, John! I cannot bear to think of that! I did not want Eleanor to know how unhappy I was; that I had become a miserable, lifeless old woman; that my life had nothing in it, while hers was so full of what I once dreamed mine would be—and in an unlucky moment I thought of that; some evil spirit took possession of me. I took a fierce delight in writing those letters. I let my imagination run wild thinking how glorious it would be to make a brief dash out into the gay world.

"Such a silly, wicked piece of vanity. I wanted to make Eleanor think things were more as she would naturally believe they would be with me, and so I wrote those letters. It was all a lie, John—an awful lie!"

"And you are not the woman of those letters at all? You are just my quiet little wife?"

"I am afraid that at heart I am the woman of the letters! At least, there have been times when I have wickedly rebelled at the thought of being my quiet, miserable self; but it is over now. I have been sadly punished and I am repentant and subdued. I shall never rebel again!"

"But the Washington trip, Annis?"

She smiled sadly.

"Perhaps you wonder if that was not a lie, too! No, John, I really went to Washington. I found my cousin living very quietly just outside the city. She is an invalid and rarely goes out, and I did all my sightseeing alone.

"As I went here and there in the street cars I smiled to myself as I thought of Senator Wyeth's carriage. I saw his name in the paper one day, and remembered you had spoken of him as being a friend of yours, but you know, John, I would never have intruded myself on your friends.

"As to the dinners, receptions and other fine things, I only read about them in the papers. My evenings were

spent quietly with Cousin Annie, and really my Washington visit was a very tame affair compared with the description in the letters."

"So this is the trouble that has caused you all this worry and illness. You dear, foolish little woman! Never mind; you shall not stay at home brooding and lonely. You must go out and enjoy life. You must realize some of your dreams!"

"No, John, it is too late! I am satisfied now. I have lived within myself so long that I should shrink painfully from meeting the world again. I can never be the woman of the letters; let me stay quietly at my own fireside."

She was right. For her husband's sake she made the effort, but it was a sad failure. She belonged to a day that was past, and there was more of pain than of pleasure in creeping out of her hermit-like personality.

Still, it was not quite the same. She gradually let a little social sunshine into her life, blaming only herself for the morbid state in which she had lived so long; she determined to be happy in the life she had made for herself.

John Denham was too kind at heart not to understand, and his conscience told him he had some share in the warping of this woman's life.

Yet she would not let him blame himself. It was her own fault, she said; she had allowed herself to drift into a state of mind that might have ended seriously, but the little trip to Washington had turned the current of her thoughts and benefited mind and body.

Her husband smiled to himself sometimes as he thought of that awful lie, the lie that had almost cost his wife her life, and he was glad she was just herself, the quiet little home maker and not the woman of the letters.

THE WATCH DOG.

GR-R-R! Bow! Wow!
  Get out of that!
You can't come now,
  I tell you flat!
You'd better go
  Before I bite—
I have a glo-
  Rious appetite!

I'm left in charge
  When night is here;
No folks at large
  Had best come near.
And if they do
  I'll make 'em spin!
What! Only *you?*
  Just come right in!

Charles F. Lummis.

CALL TO DUTY.

WHENE'ER a noble deed is wrought,
Whene'er is spoken a noble thought,
Our hearts, in glad surprise,
To higher levels rise.

Longfellow.

IN THE TRAIL OF DEFEAT.

BY MAUD HOWARD PETERSON.

What one woman did when appealed to for mercy by the man who had done her a grievous wrong. A story of wartime and treachery.

I.

THE eagle of France had been grievously wounded; its proud plumage dyed in the blood of Weissenburg and Wörth. The legions of France were broken on the fields of Colombey-Nouilly, Vionville, Gravelotte; and the all conquering Prussians, like a stern shepherd, were forcing the broken band into the fold of Sedan.

The throne of a too ambitious ruler was tottering to its fall; the birth of a republic was at hand, and still France bled and bled.

The gray mist that had hung over the little French border town all day lifted slowly about sundown, and the heavens, as if to affirm their loyalty, were reflecting the colors of Napoleon—the colors of France.

A boy of some ten years, and two or three white haired men—too young and too old to render help to the stricken army—and as many women, hung around the doorway of Clarisse's vine clad cottage, situated on the outskirts of the village. Below them in the valley the voices of the peasant women, shrill and incessant, and the laughter of the children, hushed as by the grim reality of the time, came up to them.

Clarisse, ever industrious, was weaving, nor did she pause as the whispered comments of the loiterers reached her, though an angry glow stole across her face and was lost somewhere beneath the kerchief at her throat. Deftly she drew the shuttle back and forth and little by little the linen grew beneath her skilful fingers.

"*Ma foi*," one of the women in the doorway remarked in a loud whisper, "look at her! One would think she was a queen for all her proud ways, or a—Prussian," she added bitterly.

The shuttle dropped. Clarisse turned from her weaving and faced them.

"Leave my house—all of you," she commanded; "I did not ask you here. I do not want to see you! I only want to be left alone. Go!"

Her voice, strangely enough, lacked the shrill quality of the peasant women and her speech was free from the *patois* of the province. Her tones rang out clear and defiant.

The boy clung to the hand of one of the old men and looked up into his withered, derisive face, wondering what was the matter with Clarisse and why every one laughed at her, as *grandpère* was doing now.

Clarisse was always good to him and Marie and Macaire and all the other children. The group in the doorway did not move.

"Go!" said Clarisse again.

There was a warning in her voice. One or two began to move away; only the large, raw boned peasant woman who had first spoken, paused long enough to look back over her shoulder and call after her.

"Is that the way you used to send Monsieur l'Artiste from you! *Ma foi*—how cold he must have thought you!"

The cackle of the old man joined in with his younger companions' deeper laughs and the shrill amusement of the women. The child alone hesitated and remained silent.

Something in Clarisse's face made

the heart under his small blouse ache painfully, although he knew not why. He slipped his hand from his grandfather's and stole back to her. He pulled at her skirt as she stood defiantly in the doorway, watching her tormentors move slowly down the hill.

"Clarisse?" he said timidly.

She did not seem to hear him, or even know that he was there, until the grandfather, missing the child, looked back and seeing him with her called sharply:

"Make haste, you little stupid! Don't you remember that your mother forbade you talking to Clarisse!"

And then it was that Clarisse pushed the boy from her, as if his innocent touch had hurt, and went inside. For a moment she stood in the center of the bare little room, her hands to her head.

"*Dieu*," she murmured, "am I never to forget!"

The taunting laughter and the taunting voices came more indistinctly to her ears and finally melted quite away. Outside Napoleon's heavenly banner became faint and fainter still. Clarisse moved slowly across the floor and leaned against her loom.

Below in the valley echoes of a great excitement reached her; wild voices and shouts and cries.

"The courier has come," she told herself, going on with her work.

She would not join the eager crowds that always marked his coming. She could not bear to meet their smiles, their laughter, to watch the peasant women draw their children away as if her touch would wither. She pushed the shuttle back. She would hear before long. She could wait.

But time passed and she did not hear. The echoes from the valley still reached her, wilder, more incessant. There were hoarse cheers and the sound of the hurried tramp of soldiers —the hurried tramp of retreat.

Clarisse left her loom and went down the slope into the village. No one heeded her. No one even smiled at her or laughed derisively, and women forgot to draw their children from her as she passed.

"Defeat!" she heard on every hand.

The men called it, and calling, cursed. The women cried it, and the children echoed it in awe struck tones. The straggling, broken and crushed portions of France's once proud legions hurrying to Sedan, shouted it in voices still strained and dust laden from the battle. "Defeat! On to Sedan!"

Clarisse slowly climbed the hill and entered the low doorway of her cottage. Inside it was quite dark, and in the furthest corner the loom stood specter-like. Outside Napoleon's colors had faded from the sky that rested over France, dark and starless.

Clarisse shut the door and drew the white curtain at the window.

II.

THE sun rose slowly and Clarisse, who had spent the night in the shadow of the still loom, watched it as it came gloriously into sight. Below in the valley the army of the French was still retreating to Sedan.

Now and again a straggler passed her doorway in search of a protection that the long, open, dusty highroad did not offer. None of them paused to speak to her and she did not attempt to question them.

One or two had turned haggard faces to her and had looked at her with bloodshot eyes in which there was no sign of recognition of her presence, only an awful overwhelming suffering and despair. As the sun reached its zenith the numbers increased, and she noticed that all sense of order in the retreat had vanished. Every man was for himself. Every man was for— Sedan.

"The pursuit!" some one called down in the valley at her feet, and the

peasants took up the cry, "The pursuit! The Prussian dogs are in pursuit!"

Clarisse looked down the steep path. A man was struggling up the incline. He was dressed in the uniform of France and bore the insignia of an officer.

His coat was thrown back showing his shirt open at the throat on which the heat of the day and the baptism of Prussian fire had left their mark. His head was roughly bandaged, and the dust soiled strip of linen was stained with a red glow that spread and spread even as Clarisse looked.

She looked at him again and then turned sharply, went inside and crossed over to her loom. The officer appeared in the doorway and leaned heavily against the jamb, panting painfully, with one hand at the wound in his throat.

"Clarisse," he faltered.

The woman in the far corner of the room turned and looked at him but did not pause in her weaving, and the incessant whir whir of the shuttle as she pushed it from her and drew it back in place was as an echo to the shouting in the valley.

"Clarisse!" and he staggered to the middle of the room and half fell across a bench.

She pushed the shuttle from her and came and stood in front of him.

"Well?" she said.

"Clarisse—don't you know me? Clarisse, they are after me! I am wounded. I can't go another step. Clarisse, hide me somewhere—anywhere!" His voice rose harshly.

She stood silent, her hands, callous from the long years of weaving, pressed tightly together.

"Clarisse! Why do you look at me so? Clarisse, don't you know me?"

"I know you. I knew you as you came up the path," said Clarisse.

From the valley the sound of the retreat came to them and the cry of the pursuit.

"Clarisse, what are you going to do with me? Clarisse, you must save me!" he cried in a sudden panic of unconquerable fear.

She looked into his face again. No word for her! No word of her wrong or of the past! A strange inscrutable smile crept around her mouth.

"Clarisse, if you won't do it for me—because I am for France!" he cried, crawling from the bench to a heap at her feet. He clutched at her skirt wildly. "For France——" his voice trailed off.

"Do you think," said Clarisse bending over him and touching the uniform he wore with one finger, "do you think that I don't know it is the French you are running away from—not the Prussians? Do you think I didn't hear you were in Von Moltke's army? That I didn't know you were a——"

"No, no!" he cried raising himself to his knees and trying to silence her, "Don't say it, Clarisse—*don't!*" He looked about him fearfully, the old abject fear returning.

"A spy," finished Clarisse calmly.

His grasp relaxed and he shrank away from her.

"What are you going to do with me?" he whispered again.

"Why did you come to me for pity?" asked Clarisse.

He did not answer. The valley voices sounded nearer. A squad of French soldiers were coming up the path. They were calling relentlessly something—his name!

Behind them pressed the women and the children, with their taunting voices, echoing that something—his name!

The man crawled over to her where she stood by the quiet loom and raised his ghastly face to hers, seeking some compassion.

"They are coming, Clarisse! Don't you hear them? They are coming! They won't retreat to Sedan without me! They vowed to have me, dead or alive. Clarisse, they're coming!"

Clarisse roughly forced away the fingers that clung to her skirt. Then she lifted the pile of linen that lay in a dim corner.

"Here," she said. It was as if a wild torrent had been covered with ice, her voice was so cold, so out of keeping with the throbbing of her heart. She went back to her weaving and the squad of soldiers blocked up the door. Behind them peered the faces of the village women.

"They say they tracked him here, and won't go to Sedan without him or the money he'll bring," called one in the broad *patois* of the district.

Somewhere in the crowd a woman laughed derisively.

"It's likely he'd come back here—to her! Isn't it?"

"Or that she would hide him!"

The officer in command turned.

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply.

The old derisive laugh beat again on Clarisse's ears.

"Ask her."

"Yes—yes! Ask her!"

Clarisse left her spinning and came forward.

"They mean," she said addressing the senior officer, "that I'm a Frenchwoman and would not hide a spy!"

"No—no, we don't mean that," called back the taunting voices.

"Make haste," said the officer to the squad, "we've no time to lose. The Prussians are close behind. Search the house—we've tracked him here."

Still the incessant noises in the valley, and far off the steady measured tramp of countless feet, cruel in their purpose, relentless in their tread.

"The Prussians!" whispered the women.

"The Prussians!" said the officer, looking at his men.

"The Prussians!" cried Clarisse, her voice ringing out sharp and incisive as one of the drum beats that were sounding ever nearer. "Don't waste your time here," she went on, going up to the French officer. "He was the man who wronged me! I hate the Prussians but I hate him more! I hate him—do you hear?" She threw out her hands passionately, "*I—hate—him!*"

Below in the valley there rose a column of smoke—the smoke of the Prussian pillage—and the cries of women and the sobs of peasant children. The squad moved restlessly.

"We're not going to stay here to be shot or captured," they said among themselves, "We care more for our own skins than we do about the spy. He isn't here. Look at her eyes flashing!"

III.

When the squad had joined in that last forced retreat to Sedan, the man crept from beneath the pile of weavings, to find Clarisse standing in the doorway defiantly watching the Prussians as they passed.

"Clarisse," he whispered, "God will——"

She let her eyes wander from the band of invaders that was marching by her door, long enough to turn them on him fiercely.

"I don't want any of that!" she said. "And who are you to call on God? Go back to your wife and to—your country!"

She looked at him scornfully. It was as though the legions of France had conquered instead of the army of Prussia.

She watched him as he slipped into the ranks that were passing. She watched the file steadily, proudly, as though it held the men of Napoleon that she was sending forth to victory. It was only when the last line of alien faces had vanished that she dropped her eyes in shame.

"*Dieu*—that he should have fought with such robbers!"

She turned and went into the house and back to her loom.

TRAIN AND STATION.*

BY EDGAR R. HOADLEY.

A railroad story in which the exciting experiences that befall a railroad man are related with vivid faithfulness to facts by one who knows whereof he writes. The quest of Dashwood Dykeman in search of a name that was more rightfully his and the strange happenings that marked his pathway to the goal.

CHAPTER XLI.

FORSDYKE UNMASKED.

MIDWAY across the trestle an enormous tree swept down the torrent and under the structure, and added a new peril. At one moment its branches tore at Dorothy's clothing, and she clung desperately and in terror to the ties. Then the boughs parted, and with a final swish the tree swept onward.

At last Dorothy reached the end of the bridge, hands and knees torn and bleeding, and every nerve so tense and quivering that her limbs almost refused to support her, and she feared she could not reach the station after all. But once more her indomitable will and courage came to her aid, and she fought back the weakness.

She gathered strength, and, tearing her clinging and torn skirt from about her knees, she hurried forward, faster and faster, until she reached the Madrid depot platform. She looked wildly about—there was no one there. Were her brave efforts to avail nothing, after all? Where was the operator?

"Help! Help!" she screamed, in hoarse and panting tones.

There was an instant's silence, and then, distinct from the noise of the storm without, she heard a muffled groan in the direction of the door leading to the baggage room.

With fear and trembling, Dorothy approached the latter and pushed it open. A dark form was revealed, huddled up near the door, and, as the light fell upon it, she gave a wild cry, and fell upon her knees beside it. It was Dykeman, bound, gagged, and helpless.

"Oh, heavens! what does it all mean?" she gasped, as she tore at the cruel bonds. "Dash! Dash! save the express! The South Bridge is down!"

Fnding her efforts to loosen the cords were unavailing, she bethought herself of the pocket knife she knew Dash possessed. In a moment she had it out, the ropes severed, and the gag removed. Then she became once more the frail young girl, and fell over in a death-like swoon.

Dykeman instantly stepped over the motionless body, into the office, to warn the express. Then he remembered, with a chill of horror, that the robbers had taken away the keys to the instruments, and he was helpless to send a message.

A moment's hesitation, and he tore the line wires from the binding posts in the relay, and, clicking the ends together, he made the call of the station on the other side of the South Bridge. He then instantly clapped the ends back to the instrument to await a possible reply.

Oh, the terrible suspense of those few seconds. But it came, and then he

This story began in the June issue of THE ARGOSY. *The seven back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 70 cents.*

spelled out the warning on the bare copper wires, repeating it to make sure it was received. Then came the "O. K.," and he knew the express was saved.

But Dorothy Orloff had done more than save the lives of those on the express that night; she had unearthed a vile plot, discovered the real robber of the express company's safe at the station, and prevented forty thousand dollars of treasure, being carried by the express train, from falling into the hands of a band of savage and unscrupulous train wreckers.

To account for Dorothy having found Dykeman alive, and comparativly uninjured, in the baggage room, it is only necessary to return briefly to the moment when the masked robber was about to pull the trigger of his revolver a second time, to carry out his intention of killing the bound and insensible agent.

"Are you crazy, Pete?" cried one of his companions, grasping his arm and turning the pistol to one side. "It'll go hard enough with us any way if we're caught. What's the use of killing that man? There'll be enough of 'em sent to kingdom come this night without him."

"I tell you he blocked our game at the Rock Cut," returned the other fiercely, "and he'll do it again. What difference does another one make? It's a hanging business, any way?"

"Hanging or no hanging, there's no use in it. He couldn't help what he did at the cut, and there's no danger of him taking a hand here before the job is done."

The speaker was evidently a man of some authority, or had considerable influence over his companion, for Pete growled:

"What'll we do with him then?"

"Put him in the baggage room as he is, and as we intended to do, and he might as well be dead for all he could do there."

Dykeman's limp and senseless form was lifted from the chair and carried into the baggage department of the station. He was laid on the floor and the door closed upon him.

When the agent came to his senses the full horror of the situation he had been in, and the discovery he had made, came back to him, and he wondered where he was. Then his straining ears detected the faint ticking of the relays in his office, and he knew he must be in the baggage room.

The time from that period until he was startled and amazed by the appearance of Dorothy, was spent in speculating as to the object of the masked men, and dwelling upon the fact that he had again met the outlaw who had been addressed as Orloff, and had again been in peril of his life at the man's hands.

He could not account for his second escape from death. He could only conclude that they were after the money in Forsdyke's safe; and as for the outlaw named Orloff, he was as far as ever from being able to decide if the man was his father or not.

The old depression of mind and spirits, which had been occasioned by the possibility of the outlaw being his father, but which had been thrown off to some extent since the attempted train robbery, returned with renewed force.

As soon as he was assured that the express train would be stopped at the station below South Bridge, Dash returned to the baggage room, and bore the unconscious form of the brave young girl into the office.

Pulling off his own coat, and using several others that hung in one corner, he quickly arranged a rude couch on the floor, and placed Dorothy upon it. Then, with ice water from the water cooler, and a saturated handkerchief, he devoted himself to restoring her to consciousness.

The young girl was a long time in "coming around," but at last he was relieved and happy to see her open her eyes.

Assuring her he would return in a few minutes, he flew over to the boarding house to summon Kinney. He did not think of Forsdyke, and even if he had, he would probably have decided that that young gentleman had not reached his bed.

In a few minutes he returned to the depot with the express assistant, and the latter got the cot from the room back of Forsdyke's office. Dorothy was made more comfortable upon this, with clothing brought from the agent's room, as it was out of the question to think of moving the young girl from the station till the storm subsided.

An examination of Forsdyke's safe showed it had not been tampered with, and it was becoming a mystery as to what had been the motives of the masked men.

In the early morning the orphan girl was taken to her home. It was found that the bridge on the old country road had been burned early the evening before, which was the reason Mrs. Handiford had not been able to return home, and the prostrated girl had to be taken to the cottage by the railroad.

As several engines and crews had been stopped at Madrid on account of the wrecked bridge, Dorothy was placed in a coach on the cot, and the car was run down opposite the cottage. Brawny railroad men carried her tenderly to the house, and as they had all heard of her venture, they looked upon the girl with admiration.

Mrs. Handiford and Need returned home the same way, and Dorothy commanded their immediate attention, for she was at once taken with a serious attack of brain fever.

Superintendent Layard was about the station early in the morning, looking over the situation after the great storm, and Dykeman took the very first opportunity to hand him the package of money he had received from Dorothy, and to repeat her story, together with an account of the other events of the night.

The superintendent was amazed and humiliated at Forsdyke's villainy, and he could hardly wait till the latter showed himself at the office.

Forsdyke was rather late, as usual, and had a piece of court plaster deftly placed over the black and blue contusion on his forehead. He was about to greet the superintendent, when he paused and stared at him in surprise. He had never seen such a look on the official's face before.

"Forsdyke," said the superintendent, sternly, without prefacing this remark, "you might as well confess. We know all about it."

Forsdyke opened his eyes in feigned amazement, and gazed at the superintendent as if he did not understand him.

"Black Sam, who was here night before last, and went down to take his engine, saw you put that money on the shelf in Dykeman's closet," continued Mr. Layard, as Forsdyke's dignity and nerve fast forsook him. "I don't wonder you're pale and tremble. You can save yourself a term in prison by handing over the rest of that four thousand, for you robbed the safe yourself, and know where it is."

The superintendent's clerk could not say a word. The rapidity of the agent's vindication, and the way it had been accomplished, almost stunned him. And if he had been aware that Dorothy Orloff had been the instrument of his undoing he would have been completely crushed.

The disappearance of part of the money he had put in the closet had filled him with alarm, and what he then feared had happened—some one had seen him put it there, and after stealing one of the packages, had confessed.

"Here's the balance of the money you put in the closet," said the superintendent, bringing forth the second package of $300. "Now you can return the thirty four hundred dollars, or be arrested. Take your choice."

Forsdyke sank into a chair, and cov-

ered his face with his hands. Then, going to a pigeonhole in his desk, that had the false back, he put in his hand and pulled out a large roll of bills, which he handed to the superintendent.

The latter counted it. There was the exact amount, which added to the six hundred dollars already recovered, made up the sum taken from the safe.

"All right," he announced. "Now open that safe and give me the key."

Forsdyke did so, and after depositing the money therein, and making sure the other six thousand dollars was still there, the superintendent shut it on a new combination.

Forsdyke retreated, crushed and beaten, but instead of gratitude for his superior's leniency, his heart was filled with bitter hate. But it was really the last the agent or the superintendent ever saw of him.

How doubly bitter would have been his humiliation could he have known Dorothy Orloff's part in the affair, and have heard the next words of the superintendent, as he said:

"Dykeman, you will take charge here, and as soon as we can get a man to take your place, you can resign your position as agent. You will be my assistant from this date, at a salary of one hundred and fifty dollars a month."

The agent was so astonished he could say nothing for a moment, and when he found his tongue, the superintendent had gone out.

Later developments made the superintendent regret he had let his subordinate off so easy. It was discovered that Forsdyke had been using the agent's cash remittances, for which he receipted, to cover his losses in gambling. When he made a winning at cards, he would replace the amount and forward it to St. Louis, which was generally a week or two after the package was receipted for. Thus Dykeman's remittances were kept continually behind.

Forsdyke had been practicing this scheme at the time the agent received the inquiry from the auditor about the remittances, but doubtless the superintendent's clerk had got wind of the investigation that was going on, or had been unusually lucky at gambling, and had promptly replaced and forwarded all the packages he had appropriated, which stopped further investigation. But later, no doubt, finding himself again hard pressed for money, he had begun to use the money packages, intending to replace them as before, and then the scheme of abstracting a portion of the ten thousand dollars in the safe, to cover the remittances he had used, and provide himself with a large sum besides, and at the same time throw suspicion on the agent as the robber, had occurred to him.

It was found that he had used over four hundred dollars of remittances belonging to the company, which was never recovered, and the last heard of him was that he was in Central America.

Investigation at South Bridge revealed the fact that the structure had been weakened by sawing some of the beams in two, and the conclusion was that it was the dastardly work of train wreckers, who expected the express would be thrown into the creek, when they could secure the forty thousand dollars in the company's treasure chest, and rob the dead and wounded passengers.

The action of the three robbers at the Madrid station in securing Dash was simply a precaution to provide against a possible miscarriage of their plans by the operator sending an alarm, in case any one discovered their designs. But they had not calculated on such a violent storm on the night set for their inhuman work, or on a pilot being sent ahead of the regular train.

Dorothy had indeed covered herself with glory by her daring deed—she had saved many human lives, prevented a serious loss to the express company, and vindicated the agent's character all at the same time, but there is no doubt

that the latter gave her the most satisfaction.

For weeks the newspapers of the country rang with praises of the brave girl's deed, and Dykeman was indeed proud.

Mrs. Handiford and the niece, refusing all offers of a monetary reward, the express company presented the latter with a gold medal, fittingly inscribed, and a deed of gift was made to the aunt by the railroad company for the land on which the cottage stood, which it owned.

CHAPTER XLII.

ON THE CONTINENTAL AND GREAT DIVIDE.

It was a spring day in the following year that we find Dykeman "at the front" on a new railroad, which was pushing its way into the mining regions of Colorado.

If anybody had told him, only a few months before, that he would be among the rugged peaks of the Rockies, taking an active part in the construction of a railroad, which was a marvel of engineering skill, he would have laughed at them.

But it all came about very simply and naturally. Mr. Layard, who was a civil engineer of high standing, had received a flattering offer from the projectors of the Continental and Great Divide Railroad to take charge of the construction of their road, and when he accepted it and resigned the superintendency of the St. Louis & Pacific, he insisted that Dykeman should accompany him.

As the position would be of more importance than his present one, and would command a larger salary, besides offering a better chance for promotion, the young railroader accepted it.

He was at once installed as a sort of resident engineer, and had full charge of all accounts, pay rolls, and the distribution of supplies. Mr. Layard and himself lived in a coach, which was fitted up as a complete house, and also used as an office, and which was pushed ahead as the construction progressed.

The rough life was fascinating, the rarefied atmosphere of the mountains invigorating, and Dykeman thoroughly enjoyed his work, though he did sometimes pine for civilized haunts and a maiden's smile at Madrid.

On the day we come upon him, he had planned a horseback ride over to Grand Ledge, twenty miles distant, as some of the track supplies had failed to arrive, and many of the men were idle.

Grand Ledge was the county seat of the county in which the land covered by Dorothy's deed was situated, and he intended to examine the records and decide if the return deed to that property had been recorded.

He started out early, taking a lunch with him, and covered the distance before noon. He at once went to the county clerk's office to transact his business.

The clerk only glanced at the deed, and without referring to his books, said:

"That's no good, stranger. The deeder of that land was here only yesterday with the deed that conveyed it back to him."

"What!" gasped Dash, who was prepared for the statement that a later deed had been recorded, but not for such an announcement. "Did he say his name was Petroff B. Orloff?"

"That's it exactly."

"Whew!" thought Dash, "here's a discovery. Dorothy's uncle is alive, or this fellow is an impostor."

"What did he look like?" he asked aloud.

"Tall, muscular fellow, pretty good looking, gray hair, black beard, mustache and eyes. Would be taken for a gambler or a road agent in these parts."

"Do you know where he is now or where he went?"

"No, do you know him?"

"I never saw him in my life, but I should like to."

"Done anything crooked?"

"Not that I know of," and Dash slowly turned away and walked out of the office.

"I suppose I might as well destroy this thing now," he thought, looking at the paper which he still held in his hand, "but no, I'll return it to Dorothy, and tell her about what I have just heard. It would be odd if he was alive after all."

As soon as he had rested and fed his horse, as well as himself, Dykeman started on the return journey.

He took it leisurely, taking in the full grandeur of the scenery about him. He judged he had covered half the distance back to the railroad camp when he came to a lonely cabin on the side of the trail, and dismounted to ask for a drink of water.

He saw no one about but a large, motherly looking woman, who said that if he would wait a few minutes she would get him some fresh milk. As he had a special fondness for the lacteal fluid, and it had been a scarcity in the railroad camp, he was only too glad to accept the offer.

Securing his horse, he entered the cabin, and the woman left by the rear door with a tin bucket in her hand.

He had hardly looked about the apartment, and the noise of the departing woman's footsteps had scarcely subsided, when Dykeman heard the sound of rapidly moving horse's hoofs. He stepped toward the door, and even as he did so the hoof beats became more distinct, as if the animal was quickly nearing the cabin.

He had scarcely reached the door, when a panting mustang was reined in before him, and its rider hurled himself from the saddle. He was a tall, fine looking man, even though his black beard and gray hair were disheveled, and the dust of a hard ride was on his clothes.

Dykeman instantly surmised that something was wrong, and the next instant he had some decided evidence of it.

The horseman sprang toward the cabin without stopping to fasten his steed, and an expression of annoyance escaped him when he discovered the young railroader in the door.

"Up with your hands, young man," he cried, in low but determined tones, as he whipped a Colt's revolver from its sheath and presented it in Dykeman's face.

The latter lost no time in obeying the injunction, and involuntarily fell back a few steps into the room.

The man instantly closed and fastened the front door and, keeping his eyes on his prisoner, he did the same with the back door.

"Now, then, young man, I'll take that gun of yours," he continued, as he stepped close to Dykeman and withdrew the latter's weapon from its holster. "I might need it. All I ask of you is to keep out of this scrimmage, and you shan't be hurt. The old lady will tell 'em you had nothing to do with me."

The fellow stopped, coolly examined his pistol, and then went on with a laugh:

"I borrowed a horse, you know, and some of my fellow citizens are angry because I don't return it. There they are now."

There were the sound of other horses' hoofs, as if a number of mounted men were approaching, and then they ceased. Dykeman instantly understood that the man was a horse thief, though he could not help admiring his cool courage.

"The ball is going to open, stranger," the pursued one said, with a smile; "and as Missouri Pete will never be taken alive, you'd better get where you won't stop any bullets. Down behind that stove is a good place."

But Dykeman disdained to avail himself of such protection, and only

gazed at the outlaw with a fast beating heart, awaiting, with a sort of fascination, the beginning of the contest.

"Hallo! the house!" came the hail from without, the pursuing party evidently fearing to approach the cabin.

"Hello, yourself!" responded Missouri Pete through the window.

"It's no use, Pete; we've got you surrounded, and you might as well surrender," returned the same voice, evidently recognizing the tones of the outlaw.

"Well, now, do you know I think there is just a little use," drawled Pete; and then he shouted defiantly: "If you want me, you'll have to come and take me, but the first man who comes near this cabin will pass in his checks. You know me."

They evidently did know him. There was the report of a rifle, and a bullet crashed through the window, but no one showed himself.

Pete glanced through a crack near the window, and then raising his revolver, he fired through the opening.

"Got you that time, my man," he chuckled, as a cry came from some one who had evidently been hit.

"I know you, young man," went on the outlaw, motioning towards Dykeman with his hand and keeping a sharp lookout through the crack near the window. "You've been a Jonah to me—a hoodoo; but I'm not going to blame you for this fix. Here, take this, and if I'm killed it's yours. You'll find a claim on that land that'll pan out your fortune," he concluded, extending behind him towards the other a paper which he had taken from his pocket while he was speaking.

Dykeman's heart gave a great thump as he stepped forward, took the paper, and asked:

"How was I ever your Jonah?"

"Back on the St. Louis & Pacific."

"At the attempted robbery at Big Cut?"

"Yes."

"Is your name Orloff?" pursued Dash eagerly; and even as the man answered him he glanced at the paper in his hand and saw the name Petroff B. Orloff on the back.

Only a hasty scrutiny was sufficient to convince him that the document was the return deed from Dorothy's mother for the land in Colorado. The outlaw was evidently Dorothy's uncle.

The revulsion of relief, produced by this evidence that the robber was not his father, was so sudden that it almost took Dykeman's breath away.

"Yes, my name is Orloff. Why do you ask?" responded the outlaw.

"Petroff B. Orloff?" persisted Dash, that there should be no doubt, since he had just seen the name on the paper that had been handed him.

"Yes; but I was never called Pete till I came to this infernal State. The name I'm most known by is *Basil Orloff!*"

"My father!" gasped Dash, weak and faint at the announcement.

At the same instant there was the explosion of a rifle from the outside, and Missouri Pete pitched forward against the logs of the cabin with a bullet in his brain.

He never spoke another word. In talking to Dykeman he had become careless, and had incautiously exposed himself before the window.

Was the outlaw his father after all, and also the Orloff who had been lost at sea? Dykeman asked himself these questions in bewilderment. If his father and Dorothy's uncle were one and the same, then the young girl must be his own cousin.

Weak and full of the horror of it all, Dash thrust the deed into his pocket and staggered to the door to admit the pursuers of the outlaw.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A NOBLE DEED.

In the absence of more positive evidence, or any information to the con-

trary, Dykeman was forced to conclude that Missouri Pete, the outlaw, who had been killed in the cabin, was both his own father and Dorothy's uncle.

He realized, when it was too late, that there was probably one thing that could have made the man's identity more certain, and that was a scar on the head, which Conductor Orloff no doubt possessed, as the result of the injury he had received in the collision at Lonewood years before; but when he thought of this, the outlaw was in his grave.

The conviction that Missouri Pete was his father was both stunning and astonishing to him, and it took several days before the shame and humiliation of the discovery came upon him in full force.

He had seen Missouri Pete buried, near the little cabin where he had fallen, but had not hinted to the pursuing party what had passed between him and the outlaw. The attackers on the cabin had noticed his intense agitation and pallor when he threw open the door to admit them, but they attributed this to fright. They readily believed that Dykeman had no hand in the defense, and permitted him to continue on his journey after the outlaw had been interred.

He retained possession of the deed Pete had handed him, for he now felt that the paper and the property it represented, was not only his by deed of gift, but by inheritance. The two deeds were now together, and it was a source of wonder to him that this was the case after a separation of nearly twenty two years, and that they had been the instruments of revealing such an amazing mystery.

Then it occurred to him that he could never take possession of the property as a gift if the deed was not regularly assigned to him in writing; and to do so as the son and heir to the outlaw he would have to reveal his relationship to the man, prove his disgraceful death, and establish his own identity as the son and his right to the name of Orloff.

He felt that he could never do these things for all the wealth the paper might represent, and the latter seemed as worthless to him as the original deed, transferring the land to Mrs. Orloff, was to Dorothy. He would rather the shameful secret should never be revealed, and go with him to the grave.

He decided he would send the original deed back to Dorothy and tell her it was made void by the record of the latter one transferring the land back to her uncle, and that the valid paper was doubtless then in the possession of the latter's heirs, which was true; but he would make no mention that the uncle had been alive recently, that he was his own father, and that she was his cousin.

To do these things he would have to reveal the whole disgraceful business, and he determined he would not darken the happy and innocent young girl's life with such a shadow.

From the day of his ride over to Grand Ledge he became silent, gloomy and despondent, and even his health began to fail. Mr. Layard and others noticed it, but no amount of questioning could get anything from him.

They tried to rouse him out of his lethargy, joked him about being in love, and suggested numerous medical remedies, but all to no purpose.

He plodded along for weeks and months, doing his work well, but showing no improvement in his spirits. He seemed to have merged into middle age, with a tinge of settled melancholy.

He received letters occasionally from Dorothy, but he did not read them with the old eagerness and increased heart beats, though they were as full of girlish trust and artlessness as ever.

Time passed till it was the fall of the year. Dash had gone to Colorado, and the Continental and the Great Divide Railroad had pushed its way around lofty mountains, and across dizzy canyons for twenty miles.

One day a sick man, coming to the end of the track to go prospecting for gold, as many had come before him, was taken from the train. When it was discovered that he had unmistakable symptoms of smallpox, there was a semi panic in the railroad camp and signs of a stampede.

He was hurried off to a shanty-like structure on the other side of the valley, which was thereafter designated as the "pest house." For a day and a night no one went near the afflicted man, and no one could be induced to do so. It soon became evident that if the man would not die of the disease itself he would certainly succumb to hunger, thirst and neglect.

Finally the facts of the case came to Dykeman, and he instantly decided that if no one else would go to minister to the sick man's needs he would do so himself.

Mr. Layard tried to dissuade him, but it was no use, and the chief engineer agreed to take care of his work while he was gone, because if he once went to the pest house he would have to remain there till the patient died or recovered. And if he himself took the disease, there was no telling what the result would be.

Consideration of these things did not deter Dash from his purpose in the least, and after arranging that food, water, medicines and such other things as he should need, should be left at a certain point in the valley, where he could go by a particular route to get them, he bade good by to Mr. Layard and walked over to the pest house.

He felt perfectly indifferent to the danger of taking the contagion, and indeed there seemed a sort of fascination about courting it so boldly that stimulated his drooping spirits.

The man was in a burning fever and was muttering in delirium. As soon as he had made the patient comfortable, Dykeman applied effective remedies.

He then inspected the man's features and general appearance. His head and face were large, the former covered with gray hair, and the latter with a dark beard only streaked with white.

He possessed a tall, bony frame, and was evidently a man of fine physique when in health.

There appeared to be something familiar to Dykeman about the face or the form, he did not know which. But there was nothing on his person to indicate who or what he was.

That day and the next night were passed in lonely vigil by the young railroader. The second morning he was sitting in the doorway listening to the unintelligible mumblings of the sick man, when the latter began to talk in a disconnected way.

Dash listened attentively and then sprang to the side of the cot, his face flushed and his heart beating tumultuously. The sick man was slowly and laboriously referring to the incidents that had happened on the express train on the Chicago & St. Louis Railroad, just prior to the wreck at Lonewood nearly nineteen years before, with which Dykeman was so familiar.

Dash stepped quickly to the man's head, and eagerly began searching for a scar hidden by the gray hair.

He found it!

"Father!" he sobbed, with joy and pity in his tones, as he sank on his knees and clasped the burning hand.

He felt assured that this man was his father indeed, in spite of the fact that Missouri Pete had said his name was Basil Orloff. The outlaw might still be Dorothy's uncle, but he certainly was not his father.

If Dykeman was not perfectly convinced that he had found his long lost relative, all doubt was removed when he heard the agony and remorse expressed by the delirious one, as he again went through the experience of ringing down the engineer of the express, after the break in two, and realized too late that his act would produce a collision, in which the woman he had just recognized as his wife would probably be

killed. These ravings removed any possible suspicion that the conductor had intentionally caused the fatal wreck at Lonewood. How terrible had been his punishment, Dykeman thought, with tears in his eyes!

Then how eagerly the young railroader treasured every word of the wandering mind as they gave hints of dissaster at sea, gloomy prison walls, shackles, slavery, privations and perils! And how happy he was the day his patient finally opened his eyes to consciousness, after a long and deep sleep, and asked:

"Who are you? Where am I?"

And he had replied:

"Your son, and in good hands."

The sick man had not been startled by the announcement, but went off to sleep again almost immediately.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the patient awoke he was considerably stronger, and after admitting that his name was Basil Orloff, he evinced much curiosity to hear how Dykeman had arrived at the conclusion that he was his father.

As Dash told of the revelation, by which he learned that the elder Dykeman, whom he had regarded as his grandfather, was not so in fact, and that he did not know his (Dash's) real name, because his son had married a widow with one child, whose name he had never learned, the sick man's face lighted up.

And then when the young railroader told of the letter that had led him to St. Louis, to discover his own identity if possible, related the discoveries he had made at Mrs. Fedmore's, and exhibited the locket and the old letter his mother had written so many years before, tears came into the convalescent's eyes, and he pressed Dash's hand.

"Thank God, Dash! How mysterious are the ways of Providence! If I had known you were my boy at the time of the wreck at Lonewood, I should have claimed you, no matter what was to be the result. Why didn't I get that letter, or learn that I had a son when I went to Mrs. Fedmore's? It was indeed strange I didn't think it was odd she should ask about my son. But I was not myself, and no doubt supposed she was asking about you, whom she called my son, and answered as I did, without dreaming you really were my boy."

"These trials and separations, and our final reuniting in this way, must be for some good purpose, father," commented Dash, tenderly.

"No doubt of it, my boy," said the father solemnly, and it was a grand thing for him to say, after all he had been through.

Dash continued briefly, with a recital of his railroad experiences, told of both of his encounters with the train robber, who had been called Orloff, the tragic death of the outlaw, and finally the part the two deeds had played in establishing Missouri Pete's identity as Dorothy's uncle and possibly as his father.

"And he was neither," said his father, with considerable energy; "he was a lying impostor, whose right name it is not hard for me to guess. I had a lawyer, Peter Grimes by name, to attend to my business in St. Louis while I was abroad, and I have no doubt he assumed my name to get possession of the land covered by that deed, which he could do with safety, as I was no doubt supposed to have been lost at sea, and I really didn't know the land had been re deeded back to me. I knew he was a cool, shrewd fellow, inclined to sharp practice, but I never dreamed he would develop into such a desperado. I am your father and Dorothy Orloff's uncle, if her father's name was Oswald."

"It was," replied Dash, who had been told it, "and she remains my cousin after all."

"And I suppose you are not sorry, if she's a pretty girl," smiled the father.

"No," replied Dash slowly.

He was not yet ready to reveal, even to his father, the state of his feelings for the young girl, or that he considered the relationship a barrier to a closer one.

"Do you think that there was anything in the outlaw's statement that there was a gold mine on your land?" he continued.

"There must be," replied the father. "He had no object in deceiving you, and that was no doubt what induced him to assume my name. Besides, you know, there's quite a gold fever in this region now."

Then followed Mr. Orloff's wonderful story, which you may be sure Dash listened to with breathless interest and which was briefly this:

Basil Orloff and his brother Oswald were the only sons of a well to do Russian residing in St. Petersburg. Their father had invested quite extensively in American securities and lands.

When the sons had passed their majority, all of the father's Russian property was confiscated for some political offense, though he was not exiled, and the two young men came to America to look after their possessions there.

Soon after their arrival they both fell in love, as it happened, with two sisters, and eventually married them. Their father turned over all his American property to Basil, to be equally divided with his brother, but when Basil came to deed half of the lands in Colorado to Oswald, the transfer was made to the latter's wife, on account of some complications the brother was in.

Why this land had been deeded back to him, Basil did not know, as it was done after he had sailed for Russia. Soon after the division of the property, word was received from the father that he was very ill, and wanted one of his sons to come to him at once, but that he must make the journey very secretly, as the country was in a turmoil. and he was under the serious suspicion of the Russian police.

Basil started at once, arranging with Portereff, Steffen & Co., of New York, to forward his mail, and leaving a sum of money with them for his wife, whom he had just married. The latter understood that after her husband reached St. Petersburg she would hear from him rarely, if at all, as it would be exceedingly dangerous for him if his identity was discovered.

The steamship on which Basil sailed was wrecked in a storm, and all on board were supposed to have been lost, but he and one or two others had been picked up by a vessel bound for one of the Baltic ports. He eventually reached his destination, only to find his aged father dead. He had expired when the police came to him and announced he was under arrest, to be exiled, by special *ukase* of the Czar.

Basil was arrested at the side of his father's dead body, and hurried off to Siberia, without the shadow of a hearing or a trial. What he passed through in the next two years would fill a volume and make a stone weep.

Meanwhile the wife had heard of the loss of the steamship on which her husband sailed, with all on board; and nearly two years later, feeling that her husband was indeed dead, was married to Mr. Dykeman.

Finally, after untold hardships, Basil Orloff escaped, and reached America again. He had some means, which he had carried from the mines with him, and immediately made inquiries about his wife.

He lost trace of her at Mrs. Fedmore's, but if he had received the letter his wife had written him, which had been in the dead letter office so long, and fallen behind Mrs. Fedmore's mantel, he would have known he had a son. He then went to railroading, thinking that there he would have a possible chance of meeting his wife some day, and finally became a conductor on the Chicago & St. Louis R. R.

Dash's conclusion that the conductor had recognized his wife in Mrs. Dyke-

man, and that the latter had known him at the same instant and fainted, was the correct one. And the wreck that followed was the result of Orloff being unnerved by the unexpected meeting, and a conflict of emotions as to what further actions he should take in the matter. After the wreck, when he was hurt in the head, the conductor's memory was dim and confused, and he could not say how he had existed during the following six or seven years.

Mr. Orloff recovered rapidly from his loathsome disease, and Dash did not contract it. The relation between the two was announced, and the railroad men listened in astonishment to the wonderful story. Dash at once assumed his rightful name of Orloff.

The father immediately took a position with the new railroad, and continued with it for some time. Investigation of the land, so strangely returned to the father, revealed a gold deposit of unusual richness. A mining plant on a small scale was put on it, and it became known as the Orloff Mine.

When the Continental and Great Divide Railroad was completed, Dash Orloff was made a division superintendent, and two years later he was superintendent of the entire road. But the Orloff mine increased so greatly in value that he finally resigned, and he and his father devoted their entire attention to mining, and the investment of their fast increasing wealth.

Dash was married to Dorothy in due course, and he is one of the most loving and devoted of husbands. He counts as the most lucky and valuable experiences of his life those he had during a railroad career of nearly four years, in connection with TRAIN AND STATION.

THE END.

SHE MIGHT BE.

SHE might be queen or princess
With that regal poise of head,
Or she might be just the mistress
Of three millions cold instead,
Or she might be—but she isn't;
Expectations I must crush
When I say she's just my model
And she's posing for my brush.

R. D. McKay.

THE NOBLER PART.

WHAT is nobler? 'Tis the finer
Portion of our Mind and Heart;
Linked to something still diviner
Than mere language can impart;
Ever prompting—ever seeing
Some improvement yet to plan;
To uplift our fellow being,
And, like man, to feel for Man!

C. Swain.

NEMESIS ON HIS TRACK.

BY RUSSELL STOCKTON.

The mysterious passenger who boarded an Atlantic liner without the formality of procuring a ticket beforehand. The strange manner in which fate willed that his identity should be revealed.

I.

THE mammoth transatlantic steamship Bavaria lay at her dock in the North River one Saturday afternoon in June. A thin stream of smoke rising lazily from her three funnels and a great volume of steam roaring in a harsh diapason from her escape pipe betokened her imminent departure.

But these were the least signs of that event. Up one steep gangway toiled many steerage passengers laden with trunks of hide, and metal, and skin; some carried, besides, mattresses and tin porringers and a hundred different articles of convenience in their dark, narrow, ill smelling quarters.

There was another gangway for the cabin passengers—opulent looking men and fashionably dressed women, who bade farewell to a legion of stylish friends on deck and below, the babel of whose high pitched voices drowned even the roar of the escaping steam.

A deep toned whistle suddenly uttered a long blast. The babel of feminine voices grew shriller in the short last effort to say farewell.

The gay friends filed down the gangway and the hawsers were cast off under the commands of the officers and the shrill " bo's'n's " whistle.

" Cast off the gangway, there!" roared the second officer from the bridge.

There was still a crowd upon it pushing down the steep incline, and the deck hands laid hold of the ropes and gave a warning tug on the pulleys to hasten the tardy ones.

A cab had dashed up to the pier entrance and a man in a slouched hat had sprung out, pulled two capacious satchels after him, flung a five dollar note to the driver and was elbowing his way through the jam.

The stevedores were on the very point of hoisting the gangway clear of the vessel, when the late comer sprang upon it and rushed up and aboard.

He crowded through the press of passengers, descended to the main saloon, and, selecting the darkest corner, flung his bag under a settee and sat down with his back to the light from the port, mopping his brow and face assiduously with his handkerchief.

The steamer was already backing out into the stream. Further and further forward crowded the passengers, waving handkerchiefs, huzzaing or screaming last messages to their friends on the pier.

At length the Bavaria was clear; she swung around with her prow to the south and a gentle vibration trembled through her frame as she plowed her way cautiously down the bay.

The passengers dispersed to their staterooms to arrange their baggage, doff bonnets and silk hats and rich apparel for the more plain and comfortable costume of an ocean voyage.

Quarantine was passed and that portal of the sea, the Narrows.

The pilot was at length taken off by a strolling pilot boat, " full speed " was rung on the gong, and the ship for the first time felt the full power of her mighty engines as she headed straight across the vast Atlantic, E. N. E.

Then only did the tardy passenger move. He rose, went forward past the pantry almost to the hot kitchen and stopped before the purser's cabin.

It was open and the officer within.

" The purser? " he asked.

" Quite right! "

" I want a berth—full cabin preferred."

" Can't you show a ticket? " demanded the English officer.

" No; I had no time to procure one."

" You're the chap that came aboard in such a bloomin' 'urry. Why in thunder do you wait till we're out o' the 'arbor before you open your 'ead? You knew it was against the rules to sell a passage on the ship, now didn't you? "

" That's neither here nor there—I'm here, and what are you going to do about it? "

He spoke ill temperedly, but suddenly changed his tone as he observed the florid purser grow even redder yet.

" Pardon me, I'm all upset with excitement and worry. It was only this morning that our house received a cablegram that requires my immediate presence in—in London. I had only time to pack a bag or two and jump into a cab."

" Really! " ejaculated the other.

" So please put me down for the best you can under the circumstances, and for heaven's sake ring for the steward, and let us have a bracer."

A few minutes later the purser had booked " Mr. J. Meredith Cozzens " for the only remaining cabin—No. 97.

Mr. Cozzens, alone in this cubbyhole at last, paid no attention to its small dimensions or its uncomfortable berths curving along the ship's bow.

He sank upon the cushioned settee under the single port and murmured:

" That *was* a close shave, but—but the end is not yet! "

II.

SUCH a day! Cold, gray, heavy, creepy! A thick, almost suffocating blanket of fog pressed down over the waters, so dense and so soggy that one could almost wring the moisture out of it.

Mrs. Mountain, dressed in deep mourning, was assisted up the broad stairway by her two manly looking sons, also in deep black.

" Really, mother, you should not be on deck in such weather! " protested Guy for the third or fourth time.

" Anything, Guy, to get out of that sickening atmosphere. Where have you put my chair, Schuyler? "

" As far away from the boilers and that roaring——" a fearful blast like the roar of a giant interrupted the elder son's sentence.

It was the powerful steam fog horn, but even its vibrating note seemed muffled, and while it made the very ship tremble, one could almost feel its vibrations beaten back by the arras of mist and moisture that hung round the slow going vessel.

" This is indeed a frightful fog! " exclaimed Mrs. Mountain, when they had emerged on the deck. " I cannot even see the quarter—Oh! " again that fearful blast that issued as suddenly as a thunder clap.

" Here is your chair, mother," said Schuyler. " Spread that rug on the seat first, Guy. There! Now sit down, mother, and let us tuck these others in around you."

" I really have never experienced such a dense fog off the Banks before in all my ten or twelve voyages, and—but why haven't you your overcoats on? Go right down and get them."

" All right, mother, directly. But see over by the rail—that man with his back toward us. That is the peculiar fellow I was telling you about—the one who rushed on board at the last moment and who keeps so much in his cabin," said Schuyler.

" Isn't it queer? I have never seen him since we started, except at night, and then he has always been in some corner all alone," added Guy.

" There, he's going below again," exclaimed Schuyler. "There is some mystery about him. I got a look at his face last evening in the passage way, and I've seen it somewhere before. It isn't so rough as his dress would lead one to expect, either, though he does wear a week old beard."

" Where could you have seen him before?" queried Guy, doubtfully.

" I can't think for the life of me, but I will go below for our coats, Guy, while you stay by mother. Are you quite comfortable, mother?"

" Quite, thank you," replied Mrs. Mountain, opening her eyes.

Schuyler had hardly moved a dozen steps when a tremendous shock threw the passengers to the deck. The mighty vessel stood stock still for an instant and trembled from stem to stern, at the same time heeling far over to port; then she started forward again impetuously, at the same instant keeling over to starboard without righting.

Such as were near the starboard rail saw a ghostly schooner sweep by with falling masts, while frantic beings waved their arms wildly.

Then arose screams and shouts from every side, as the passengers, male and female, poured up and out on deck.

The officers added their hoarse commands to the hubbub, and the crew and stewards came running amidships to the bridge, some to be sent rushing forward and below to close the iron bulkheads, while the others sprang to the davits, and with flashing knives cut the lashings of the suspended boats.

The captain, from the top of one of the deckhouses, roared out to them to come down, there was no danger, the bulkheads were fast shut, and the ship could never sink.

Meanwhile, a forward boat was already manned by a crew, and as her tackles creaked in the blocks she dropped quickly into the water and was pulled back into the fog to look for the crew of the colliding and doubtless sunken schooner.

Order and confidence were at last restored. The listing ship turned toward the north and crept under half speed, like a gigantic cripple, toward the coast of Newfoundland.

When the fog lifted a little that afternoon, a private yacht was fortunately sighted and signaled.

She hove to, and her captain, with his sailing master, came aboard. He gallantly made an offer to the Bavaria's captain to steam ahead to Halifax and advise the authorities to send some escorting steamboats. The offer was accepted.

The gentleman captain was just about to go over the rail, when two passengers emerged on deck and pressed through the crowd toward him.

One was the mysterious unknown.

" Now is the chance of a lifetime!" he exclaimed, under his breath, as he took in the situation.

" It is of vital importance for me to get ashore," said he eagerly to the yachtsmen. " I am due in London this very minute and *hours* are precious. Will you allow me to accompany you?"

" Really," said the other, " my yacht is crowded as it is, but I could manage one if it is of such vital import——why, Guy Mountain! You here?" for Guy had just managed to push into the crowd.

" My dear Mr. Simms!" exclaimed he in turn. " I knew you were cruising hereabouts; but I never—— but see here! Mother and Schuyler and I are aboard. Mother is prostrated by the shock, and she is actually dying, I believe, of nervousness. For heaven's sake, Mr. Simms, can we arrange to get her off this infernal tub? She's aging, you know, and I really believe it will kill her to remain aboard. Come! What can we do?"

" Do? Go below at once and get your traps together. I'll fix matters with the captain."

" You're a brick!" cried Guy, and he turned to go.

This whispered conversation had been overheard by the stranger, Mr. J. Meredith Cozzens by the ship's books.

"I will get my traps, too; it will not take me a minute," said he.

"Oh, I remember," said Mr. Simms. "I am sorry, but my friends here will really tax the capacity of my yacht."

"What do you mean? You withdraw your offer?"

"I am afraid I must withdraw my assent to *your request*."

"See here! I *must* get ashore. I will give you a thousand dollars——"

"You can as soon purchase good breeding as me, sir!" was the reply.

Twenty minutes later Mr. Cozzens saw Mrs. Mountain swung over the side in a cradle and lowered to the yacht's dingey, while Guy and Schuyler dropped into it from the rope ladder.

He said something fiercely under his breath, then shrugged his shoulders philosophically.

"What odds? They *can't* know for a week yet—or a month. I can be in—in Greenland by then."

III.

THIRTY SIX hours later the Bavaria was laboring along still many miles from Halifax harbor. Her list had not increased owing to her stanch bulkheads, that divided the ship into almost hermetical compartments.

It was clear for a wonder, and a thin line of black smoke on the horizon denoted the approach of a steam craft. Others, too, were soon similarly betokened, and at length quite a fleet was observed to be coming, with the "yacht Petrel, Simms, of New York" well in the lead.

Again she hove to and her boat put off. Mr. Simms was the first on board; he was followed by a big man with a large auburn mustache, and last on board, to the surprise of some of the passengers, came Schuyler Mountain, who, in company with Mr. Simms, disappeared in the captain's cabin.

The big man with the red mustache being left on deck, circulated for a few minutes among the passengers, spoke to one or two of the officers and the deck steward and then disappeared down the grand stairway, while the passengers all crowded forward to view the relief fleet that was now near at hand.

When the four conferees came out of the captain's cabin on the deck, they, too, made their way below, and, led by the purser, filed forward and opened the door of No. 97.

The first thing they saw was Mr. J. Meredith Cozzens calmly biting off the end of a cigar as he handed another to the man with the fiery mustache.

"Ah! got to business already," said Mr. Simms, addressing the latter, while they all eyed the mysterious passenger curiously. "It's all right," to the captain; "we'll leave at once."

"I'll see you in New York, Silver," was Schuyler's remark to the big man, who answered as he held the match to his cigar:

"All right. So long!"

"Yes, I remember now," said Schuyler to Mr. Simms, "I have seen him once or twice before at Uncle Peter's."

The captain shook hands heartily with Mr. Simms and Schuyler at the rail.

When the unknown and mysterious individual went ashore with the big man of the mustache, doubtless none guessed that the latter had taken the first train from New York on receipt of the telegraphic news of the Bavaria's mishap; but a few may have had a notion of the identity of the passenger, they having read the following under its startling headlines, in the newspaper dropped by Schuyler:

ANOTHER TRUST BETRAYED.

$50,000 IN BONDS TAKEN FROM A SAFE DEPOSIT VAULT AND HYPOTHECATED.

The Mountain Estate the Sufferers.

It will be remembered that when the death of the late head of the Knickerbocker family

of the Mountains, Archibald Van K. Mountain, occurred seven months ago, he appointed as his executor his brother, Peter G. Mountain, the eminent lawyer, whose offices are in the Justitia building.

In the course of his settlement of the affairs of the estate, Mr. Mountain has been investing certain large sums in various securities under the provisions of his brother's will and these he has been placing in the safe deposit vaults of the Justitia Company in the basement of the same building.

Or rather, with the negligent fatuity too common with wealthy men of affairs, he has been in the habit of turning these securities over to his oldest and most trusted employé, Constant J. Spencer, together with the key of the vault, which this clerk would return to him after he had put such bonds, stocks, etc., behind the steel doors.

Yesterday (Monday) Mr. Mountain having occasion to visit the vault in question, found the key to be mysteriously missing from the ring. To add to this annoyance his chief clerk, the aforesaid Spencer, was not at the office, he having wired Mr. Mountain on Saturday afternoon that he had been suddenly summoned out of town for a few days.

Not the ghost of a suspicion entered any one's mind to connect these two events until by chance the missing key was found upon the floor of the office close to Spencer's desk.

Hastening at once to the vault, Mr. Mountain found to his horror that every marketable security was gone.

Detectives were at once put to work, and before evening it was ascertained that an individual answering Spencer's description had for days been going among the brokers and banks hypothecating under a variety of names, thousands of dollars' worth of bonds, etc., for cash—supposed to be no less than $50,000.

Detective Silver ascertained also that a man about tallying with Spencer in appearance boarded the Bavaria but a moment before she sailed on Saturday last.

It could not be found that any one answering the description of this person (or of Spencer) had purchased passage at the company's office, but his description has been cabled to the other side, and the late passenger will be arrested on suspicion, Spencer's offense being, of course, extraditable.

What adds a peculiar interest to the supposed presence of the thief on board the Bavaria is the fact that the late Mr. Mountain's widow and her two sons occupy cabins on the same vessel, which fact would seem to have escaped the knowledge of Mr. Spencer, if it be, indeed, he who boarded her in such unseemly haste.

A ring at the doorbell of Mr. Archibald Mountain's residence in Steuben Square, brought a man servant who said that Mr. Schuyler declined to be interviewed—etc., etc.

THE STRANGE STORY OF COUNT BARENZIK.

BY ROBERT BARNES CRAMER.

A tale of a Christmas Eve in Russia. The startling experiences called to mind by a long barreled pistol.

I FIRST met Count Barenzik in my father's banking house, to which place he came one day to have cashed a bill of exchange on a Russian bank. He was a very good looking man, with pleasant manners, and an unmistakably foreign appearance and accent.

His visits thereafter were quite frequent, and we became acquainted within a few weeks, and fast friends before many months had gone by.

He resided in an up town hotel when I first met him, and in conversation one day I learned that he had been for several years an exile from his native land.

We were sitting in his comfortable parlor, he with his legs crossed before the fire, smoking a cigar and stroking his long black mustache, and I lying full length upon a lounge close by. Two other of his friends completed the group, and joined with me in urging him to tell us a story.

"Give us something about Russia," Dick said, taking from the mantel a queer, long barreled pistol. "Is there a history connected with this piece of artillery?"

The count nodded, smiling slightly.

"That is one of the few things I

brought with me from home," he said. "It helped to save my life not long ago, and played a very important part in an exciting adventure which befell me in Russia."

"Tell us about it," I said, and both Dick and Jack joined vigorously in the request.

"In Russia," the count began, lighting a new cigar from the remains of the old one, and then puffing away briskly, "I held a position under the government in what you would call here the State Department. I stood pretty near to the political heads of the country, and at one time possessed considerable influence in state affairs. I lost it all, however, by siding on an important question against the Czar, and afterwards by opposing one of his favorite measures in the Russian government council."

The present narrator will not take upon himself the responsibility of vouching for the truth of Count Barenzik's story, but it is, to the best of his belief, perfectly accurate and reasonable. I desire to say this at the outset, for fear the reader may think otherwise before the story ends.

"The Czar," he went on, while his three listeners shifted themselves into the most comfortable positions possible, "holds absolute sway in my country, as I suppose you know. I think he has more power, personally, than any other monarch now existing, and that he knows less regarding the use of it than any of his fellow potentates—but let that pass. He and I were never friends, and my criticism may arise from that fact. At any rate, I do not need to go into the details of our political differences, since my story is simply the result of them."

Jack's mouth had begun to open in an unmistakable expression of surprise at the commencement of the narrative, and when the count spoke carelessly of his intimacy with the greatest crowned head of Europe, the lower portion of his face entirely disappeared

"Y—you don't really mean that you k-know the Czar," he said—"not the *real* Czar of Russia?"

Our noble friend nodded.

"I knew him to my sorrow," he said slowly. "It was he who banished me from my home, and who has made it impossible for me to return. But, as I said before, this is all incidental, and I will proceed with my story.

"One Christmas Eve, not a great many years ago, I was being taken to Siberia, a political prisoner, at the command of the Czar. If you will look at a map of Russia, you will see near the northwestern border the location of a town called Kischkoff. It is on the route to the great Siberian prisons, and we reached it on the evening of December 24th, after a long day's journey.

"There were a score of prisoners beside myself, all in charge of a man by the name of Beershodek. This latter was a fellow whose friend I had been previous to my conviction, and during the trip from Moscow he made several advances to me.

"They were all to the effect that if I cared to do so, I might purchase my escape. I had with me quite a quantity of money in gold, and by the time we reached Kischkoff he had entered into an engagement to supply me with means of escape during the succeeding night.

"For so doing he received a monetary consideration which I hope recompensed his widow and orphans for the subsequent loss of his position and head.

"Omitting the recital of my friend Beershodek's plans, I will only say that two hours before the dawn of Christmas morning I was mounted on a powerful horse, speeding through the wildest forest I have ever seen or heard of. I had a double barreled pistol—the one you have just seen—in my pocket, and my rescuer had told me that by reaching a town ahead before daylight I could catch a train for the coast.

"I forced my horse into his swiftest gait and sped on through the bitter cold air. It had been snowing all day, and huge banks were piled up, occasionally in the very middle of the roadway.

"The latter was not very distinct at best, and I had not ridden a mile before I was in grave doubt as to whether I was in the woods or the 'king's highway.'

"Then, as suddenly as I tell you of it, there came to my ears the far away, thrilling, echoing yelp of a wolf. My horse heard it and shot forward like an arrow. My heart began to beat as it only does when its owner is thoroughly frightened, and I leaned forward to tighten my grip on the reins.

"Again!

"I could hear the shuddering cry just as the clouds broke away from the moon and the gloomy forest became illumined by the strange, white light. The banks of snow flew apart before our onward rush, and the trees beside me seemed to be wafted backward by an invisible power. There was a slight breeze, and I remember now that it moaned among the barren pines and added intensity to the cries of the wolves.

"They seemed to come from no single direction, and for aught I knew I might be running into their very midst. But for all that I kept on, determined to get out of the terrible forest before —I shuddered at the thought of the alternative.

"I think it must have been half an hour after I first heard the yelping brutes, that one cry sounded behind me with such awful shrillness that I turned my head.

"And then I saw what I hope no other man will ever see under similar circumstances—a pack of wolves, eager for my blood, and straining every nerve to overtake me. I used my revolver and the foremost brute fell back dead, but there would have been use for a score of bullets before that yelping horde could be brought to bay.

"They came rushing on, gaining at every leap, and keeping up their infernal howling until my ears rang and my brain whirled.

"The horse needed no further urging. He ran as I had never seen a horse run before, and the flakes of white foam flew back upon his jet black breast. I was not more than ten yards in front of the foremost beast when my last shot was fired, and he was gaining rapidly.

"The road was quite well lighted by the rising moon, and in the distance ahead I saw, just as the echo of the discharge had died away, a large black object which I at first thought was a rock. A second glance brought to me the welcome intelligence that it was a log building, the door of which stood invitingly open.

"One sharp, quick pull of the rein to the right, and I had left the roadway and was dashing toward the building. Another instant had not passed before horse and rider were inside, the latter slamming shut the ponderous door and and former sinking on his knees to the earthen floor with a pitiful whinny.

"As soon as I could collect my thoughts somewhat, I struck a match and held it above my head, thereby illuminating the interior of the cabin for a space of sixty seconds.

"The walls were bare of adornment and the furniture consisted of a pile of cut firewood near the stone chimney. I lit another match and then discovered a tallow candle on the floor, which being lighted, I was enabled to scrutinize my surroundings more closely.

"My escape had been little less than miraculous, and I could hear my pursuers howling an invitation for me to come outside. But this, I need scarcely say, I did not do.

"The door was fastened by a slight wooden catch, and fearing that the wolves might break this down, I began to pile against it the logs of firewood. They formed a barricade which I knew was impassable, and I had just lifted

in my hands the last stick, when I made a discovery that astonished me greatly.

"On the floor lay a small, strong wooden box, which had been covered up by the logs. It bore on its upper surface in bright red letters the single word—Dynamite!

"I gazed at it for a moment in speechless wonder, and then, throwing aside the sticks, knelt down on the floor by its side.

"The lid worked in a groove and I easily slid it off, disclosing on the inside a number of round, black balls packed in cotton. On the top of them lay a card, covered with writing in the Polish language. This is what it said:

SUNDAY EVE.

K. K. B.:

Each one of these will kill, if rightly thrown, a dozen Czars. Present them with the compliments of the season, from

CARSHOSSE.

"I understood full well the meaning of this mystic writing, for the name of Carshosse was borne at that time by the greatest Nihilist of Europe.

"For a moment my mind was too full of conflicting thoughts to think of acting in the strange and unexpected emergency in which I found myself. Then it occurred to me suddenly that the discovery of the Nihilistic bombs, would serve a better purpose than that for which they had been intended, and when I thought of this all other considerations vanished from my mind.

"The wolves were still howling without, and it seemed to me as if their number had increased twofold.

"The chimney was nearly two feet wide and ran directly through the roof. It appeared to offer a convenient means of exit, and I determined to undertake its ascent.

"Very carefully I deposited in the side pocket of my coat three of the little black balls. Then I stooped down and raised my head and shoulders into the wide flue. The sides were roughly built, and offered numerous footholds, whereby I was enabled to climb up into the open air.

"Having reached that position and grasped the bombs, I steadied myself with an effort, took aim into the very midst of the snarling pack, and let drive the explosives."

The count's cigar had gone out during the recital of his story, and he now proceeded to relight it with a deliberation that was anything but agreeable to his interested listeners. When he had resumed his smoke he went on:

"I think it was daylight when I came to myself, something less than a quarter of a mile from the scene of the explosion. Most of my clothing was gone and for half an hour I thought that each and every bone in my body was broken.

"But as the sun came up I realized that I was a fugitive from justice—or rather injustice—and that I must make an attempt to reach the coast, if I cared to make good my escape. I managed to do so within a few days, and—here I am!"

Dick was looking hard at the count when he concluded, and ventured the inquiry:

"You didn't see anything more of the wolves, did you?"

"No; they disappeared into space."

"But how is it that you didn't——"

The count interrupted the inquisitive youngster by a glance at his watch, and announced that it was time for dinner. So we all went down stairs together.

A CHOICE.

THIS difference twixt the optimist
And pessimist you find—
One notes the clouds, the other talks
About the light behind.

THE CHERRY PARASOL.

BY OWEN HACKETT.

The story of a tiger hunt which was unconventional in the sense that the tiger anticipated his cue and appeared on the scene without waiting for the beaters to rout him out.

THAT scar? You see only the end of it. Fortunately by wearing a high collar I can just conceal it; but it extends from the neck (close by the jugular vein, too, my boy!) down over the shoulder quite to the breastbone.

A tiger did that—a royal Bengal—and a beauty he was, I tell you! You can see the skin any day in my married sister's sitting room.

But it's a story quite worth telling and it has a funny side, too, that was thought quite worth repetition at the time in the English papers, though they did not get at the inside facts of the adventure.

It was the period of the hot season stagnation when we were in the consular service at Madras, you know.

The English society (including the few Americans there) were doing little else than sleep and yawn to pass the time.

But everybody, the men especially, were galvanized into excitement when the news came that a tiger had carried off first a woman and then a child during the previous week from a station about fifteen miles in the interior, at the foot of the mountains.

Time was when this would have been a sort of every day announcement in India; but of late years these monsters have been killed off except far in the interior wildernesses, and it had already become a rare event for one of these royal fellows to issue from his jungle kingdom.

At any rate, things have got to such a pass of mental torpidity that we needed only the slightest straw to grasp at for the sake of excitement.

In half an hour a hunt had been agreed upon and servants were flying everywhere about the town to arrange the details and secure the accessories, such as teams and wagons, native porters and beaters; and in the cool of the evening fifteen or twenty gentlemen sportsmen were engaged in oiling gun locks, swabbing out rifle barrels and preparing generally for the morrow's expedition.

It was just dawn on the following morning when we started—a curious cavalcade of fifty or more, in which the white faces were largely in the minority. Some were on horseback, some in carts drawn by bullocks, which in that country were very different from what are known as such at home.

Here they use the small and slender gray zebu with its curious hump, and known to the menageries of the west as the "sacred bull of India" and said to be regarded with veneration in the east.

There is little to tell of that hunting expedition. We arrived at the station or plantation and found that not only was the descent of the tiger true, but that since then he had maimed and all but carried off an able bodied cooly, who had been rescued only in the very nick of time.

We therefore spread our beaters out in a circle covering a wide bit of the neighboring jungle, while our party distributed itself in a line that formed the chord of this arc, towards which the native beaters were gradually converging.

There was no result, however, in the way of tigers, during the two days in

which we continued these operations from one locality to another in the neighborhood around the station.

True, we bagged innumerable game, both feathered and four footed, but of a kind that was only commonplace for Indian sportsmen. It was therefore with acute disappointment that we gave up on the second day all hope of our quest, and early on the following morning turned our faces homeward, calculating to arrive at Madras that afternoon.

Of the party, big Major Gallanton of her majesty's Fusiliers stationed at Madras, seemed the most disappointed. As was this big hearted fellow's wont, he vented his chagrin in a great deal of blustering with his deep bass voice and used much expressive language, in a way calculated to impress a stranger with the belief that words and not deeds were the major's strong points.

But in this regard Major Gallanton was anomaly and a surprise. Loquacious fire eater in times of peace and quiet, in the moment of responsibility or danger, he had no word to utter except that of incisive command or wise direction—calm, silent and ready for any emergency.

About a mile from Madras there was a little bungalow, commanding a view of the sea, which had become a sort of house of public entertainment, popular with the better class of residents as a resort for tiffins and such little excursions as we would call picnics.

The surrounding groves and forests had been improved for a short distance until it was a sort of wild park, and on this little point of land was to be had the full benefit of whatever zephyrs might happen to be wafting over the bosom of the torrid Bay of Bengal.

The resort lay almost in our path; and, tired and nearly overcome with the heat of our long journey, the suggestion to diverge thither for some refreshment was welcomed by all and the line of march was therefore diverted.

We had hardly entered the grove when a silvery feminine laugh greeted our ears, coming from the direction of the native house.

The major, beside whom I was riding, perceptibly started at the sound and glanced at me. I in turn looked inquiringly at him.

"Don't you recognize the voice?" he asked.

"No; I can't say I do," I answered. "Whose is it? Surely none of mine host Singh's family have such a sweet thrill."

"I should say not, decidedly!" assented the major. "But I must be wrong, if you don't recognize it—I thought it for all the world like Miss Bradford's voice."

I could not help looking quickly and keenly at the major; Miss Bradford was my sister and the major had certainly been very attentive to her during the few months of their acquaintance.

If he could recognize her voice in an Indian jungle when her brother failed to do so, there must be something serious on the carpet.

I therefore had a peculiar interest in the developments of the next few moments.

"It is positively cruel of you!" said another and a petulant voice. "You make *no* allowance for my extremely sensitive organization. But I simply *cannot* go back over that road; the mere thought of it is killing! Hark! Don't you hear something creeping out from the grove?" and there arose a shrill scream which became hysterical as it seemed to diminish, as if the feminine speaker had flown into the cottage.

She had doubtless heard us breaking through the thicket; in an instant the head of our cavalcade came in full view of the place, and there, sitting calmly on a seat before the door under the overhanging boughs, and looking expectantly but undismayed toward us was—my sister.

"You here!" I exclaimed, really surprised. "And Miss Blithedale, too; I need not ask that," I said, glancing at

an open parasol of flaming cherry that lay a few feet away on the ground where the fair and nervous owner had dropped it in her flight.

That parasol! In defiance of all the scientists from Ben Franklin down, Miss Blithedale must needs import from the west a sunshade of the color which above all others reflected least the rays of that very orb.

This she imperturbably carried, a shining mark for derisive jokes, or, perhaps, as an incentive to well born subaltern bachelors in the arena of love, she the matador and they the quarry.

"How penetrating you are!" was my sister's ironical reply. "Major, you are just in time. Miss Blithedale has just declared that she will not return to town without the escort of the whole garrison—or of Major Gallanton, perhaps."

The major looked almost pained at this allusion to the dead set that Miss Blithedale had been making at him to every one's amusement.

"And so," my sister continued briskly, "you have had all your hunt for nothing! The royal quarry seems to know something about flank movements and strategy as well as your own gallant selves."

"Really, I don't understand, Miss Bradford," said the puzzled soldier. "What is all this about escorts and flank movements! Ah, Miss Blithedale," as that lady appeared, apparently nerved again to a welcome encounter with the major; "this is a most charming coincidence. But, explain, please, Miss Bradford."

Then my sister narrated as follows:

The two ladies in question, bored to death at the absence of the only object of interest—the men—had decided on a little expedition of their own.

They had hired one of the native "jaunting cars," as we called them, with its zebu team and native driver, and stowing a luncheon hamper in the "boot," had driven out before the noonday heat for the "park."

Already in sight of the grove, they had been horrified to see the sudden appearance of a great tiger, who stepped out from the undergrowth, beside the road, disclosing his superb proportions and brilliant coloring as he first gazed curiously toward them and then lowered his head and began to stalk after them in long strides.

Miss Blithedale uttered a terrific shriek; the driver, turning, saw the beast, and, wild with fear, first whipped up his bullocks and then incontinently fled into the jungle.

Meanwhile, in the same moments, my sister had been equally appalled. But Belle is a girl of pretty strong nerves, as you may know, and though white with fear, she uttered no cry, but silently if wildly looked around for a weapon.

There was none, of course—but stay! the cherry parasol! She snatched it from the nerveless hands of her companion, opened it with a vicious snap and thrust it sheer into the face of the beast, who was no four feet away.

At the same time she closed her eyes from sudden faintness, but recovering instantly, she looked again and—he was gone! She could just see the tail disappearing rapidly as he crawled among the leaves in dire fright.

Without an instant's hesitation, my sister sprang to the "box," whipped up the slow bulls, drove the few rods to the bungalow with Miss Blithedale clinging to her and alternately moaning and screeching, as we learned in private.

That was five hours before; Miss Blithedale had absolutely refused to return with the cowardly native driver who had arrived before them, and my sister had laughingly vowed that, in that case she would go back alone, asking no better protection than the cherry parasol.

"You have revolutionized the tiger hunt for the future, Miss Bradford," said the major, with his eyes full of admiration at the tale which my sister

told so lightly and laughingly as to rob it of any trace of egotism. " Hereafter we may expect to see long lines of beaters file through the jungle armed with red umbrellas, and flaming cotton stockades about the villages."

There was some discussion as to the identity of this particular beast, but it was generally allowed to be the same we had been hunting, if for no other reason than to turn the joke against ourselves, the empty handed Nimrods.

We started back to town and jokingly made a great show of surrounding the car as a protection on every side.

But it turned out to be no joke. When half way back (the major and myself riding beside the car) there arose affrighted cries ahead, and the leaders of the cavalcade came tumbling back upon us in the wildest fear.

The major and I dashed to the front. There, in the middle of the road, stood his kingship, glaring at the procession with blazing eyes.

We flung ourselves from our horses, unslung our rifles and—— He had been creeping slowly toward us; now, he sprang at me just as the major's rifle cracked.

The bullet could not stop his advance. I felt a terriffic shock as the tiger fell at my feet with outstretched claws. One paw dug into my neck as he descended, and tore down over my breast deep through the clothing and into the flesh, pulling me down with terrific force upon his own body.

I sprang to my feet and saw that he lay dead.

The major's shot, true to the mark between the eyes, had caught him in mid air.

As he lay there the type of ferocious beauty and brute power, we all marveled that such a magnificent beast should have been frightened off by a mere parasol, even though it flamed like the fires of Ætna.

We were met at the edge of the town by a piece of news that went far to explain this improbability. He had satisfied his hunger on a low caste Brahmin only an hour previous to the road side encounter with the ladies.

The major claimed the skin, and no one thought of denying it to him. But he only wanted it to present to Belle, and as they were married the following year, he got it back again.

My sister, however, backed by all her friends, made a demand on Miss Blithedale for the cherry parasol, and she has it yet, as her peculiar trophy.

Indeed, Miss B. was quite resigned to parting with it, as she at the same time procured a substitute in a gay scarlet jacket that covered the noble form of Lieutenant the Honorable Algernon Binks, H. M., 97th Fusiliers.

THE SILENT WOODS.

THE lone abode of Twilight and Repose
  Is this deep forest of my western land.
  In the eternal hush the slim ferns stand;
Above, the cedar and the hemlock doze
In velvet robes of green the dank moss throws
  From mighty bough to bough; on either hand
  Time's drapery shrouds all, and weirdly grand
Are these dim aisles the sunshine never knows.
The frail white lilies glimmer in the gloom
  Like feeble stars within the thicket's night,
Or slender tapers which the wood nymphs keep
Faint burning in each close, dusk haunted room
  That their wan glow, perchance, may serve to light
The feet of Silence through the halls of Sleep.

Herbert Bashford.

A GOLDEN VENGEANCE.

BY EVERETT McNEIL.

A story of New Mexico, concerning one known as Black Pedro, a strange youth of sober countenance, and Don Alva de Vargas, a grandee whose god is gold.

I.

THE quaint old town of Santa Fé heaved an almost audible sigh of relief as the western mountains interposed their grim and giant forms between it and the fiery sun. The day had been unusually hot, and man and beast welcomed joyfully the shadows and the cool breeze which heralded the coming of night.

In a few minutes the broad plaza, which had been nearly deserted during the heat of the day, presented a picturesque scene. Tall, greasy looking Mexicans, swarthy Indians, and dark eyed Spaniards swarmed from out the low surrounding adobe buildings and were soon lounging about in every conceivable position that laziness and a love of ease could induce their limbs to occupy.

A troop of sturdy little donkeys, almost hidden under immense loads of firewood, cut from the neighboring foothills and strapped upon their backs, crossed the plaza and passed in through the wide entrance to the old adobe building known as the "palace."

The golden haze of a southern evening hung in the air, and the charm of an almost measureless antiquity cast its glamour over the ugly, flat roofed structures and dirty streets.

"*Los Americanos!*" "*Los carros!*" "*La entrada de la caravana!*" shouted a number of men, who from the house tops had caught sight of a long line of wagons slowly winding their way over the rough trail toward the city.

Instantly all was bustle and excitement. Men, women and children rushed helter skelter in the direction whence the caravan was approaching; and soon the plaza was deserted by all save a few decrepit old men and women, who were too feeble to join in the rush.

The men of the caravan cheered loudly and fired off volleys from their rifles as they drew near. To them the sight of Santa Fé was as joyous an event as was the first glimpse of the walls of Jerusalem to the longing eyes of the Crusaders.

Above the weather stained cover of the van wagon floated the Stars and Stripes. The wagoners were all dressed out in their best attire in honor of the occasion; and, as they drove through the streets of the city and on into the *plaza publica,* each tried to outvie the others in the loudness of the cracks of his whip.

At their head rode a man well known in Santa Fé, Don Alva de Vargas, though he had now been absent from the city for over two years.

Just at the moment the caravan drove into the plaza a young man entered from the opposite side and, resting the butt of his long rifle upon the ground, paused to look upon this motley scene.

At first he glanced about carelessly, with the indifference of one long accustomed to such sights; but the instant he saw Don Alva de Vargas his tall form straightened up with a jerk, his black eyes flamed, his thin lips twitched, and his long sinewy fingers gripped the barrel of his rifle as though they would crush the solid metal.

Then, as suddenly, his agitation vanished; and when Don Alva's eyes rest-

ed upon him an instant later, he was again quietly leaning on his rifle.

Black Pedro, the young man, evidently knew Don Alva de Vargas, but there was no answering look of recognition in Don Alva's eyes; nor did Black Pedro again exhibit any signs of the agitation which his first sight of Don Alva had aroused.

Don Alva de Vargas had wealth and power. How he secured his wealth none knew.

Some five years previous to the events here narrated he had returned from one of his frequent expeditions a rich man. He gave out that he had fallen heir to a great inheritance, but few who knew the man and his evil ways credited the story.

This wealth furnished his cunning and unscrupulous mind with the means of securing an almost unlimited power, and soon no man in Santa Fé held his head so proudly and commanded so numerous a following as did Don Alva. Now he had returned from a two years' visit in the "States," laden with merchandise, and more wealthy and powerful than ever.

Black Pedro had made his first appearance in Santa Fé some two years before the opening of this tale. Whence he came no one knew. He never spoke of his past; he made no friends.

He did not look to be over twenty years of age; and yet not a trace of the joyous warmth of youth could be seen in his stern countenance. He stood over six feet in height, with a frame as lithe and graceful as a panther's and as straight as an arrow. His dress was characteristic. Whatever had pleased his fancy in the clothing of the Spanish gentleman, the hunter, or the Indian, he had adapted to himself, and the result was like an appropriate frame to a wild bit of scenery. It served to bring out more clearly his striking personality.

He was wont to disappear periodically: whither, or for what, none knew. This singular reticence in one so young, together with his mysterious and unnatural manner of living, caused the superstitious to look upon him with awe and fear.

They regarded him as one of those terrible beings who, for the furtherance of some evil design, purchase a short lived supernatural power of the devil at the price of their immortal souls.

The wagons of the caravan drew up in a circle within the plaza. The teams were quickly unhitched, and, in a short time, the men, all but those who had been detailed to guard horses and wagons, had set out in search of the various resorts, there to drown in wine the remembrance of the hardships of their long and dangerous journeys.

Don Alva, after waiting to see that everything was properly cared for, dismounted from his horse and, followed by Black Pedro's eyes, disappeared through the entrance to one of the adobe buildings.

A few moments later Black Pedro himself left the plaza, mounting his fleet pony, and was soon speeding on his way, with the swiftness of a bird on the wing, toward the western mountains. Steed and rider vanished rapidly in the fast gathering darkness.

On the third night Black Pedro returned, and those who came early to the plaza next morning were astounded to find him engaged in earnest conversation with Don Alva de Vargas.

He had never before been seen talking familiarly with any one. Don Alva was greatly excited. His small eyes sparkled and his sallow face flushed as he listened to the words Black Pedro poured into his ears.

"Riches, greater than mortal ever knew, will be thine and mine, Don Alva, if thou wilt go. Gold? Thou canst sleep on gold, eat off gold; aye, if thou wilt, thou canst pave the streets of Santa Fé with gold, and 'twill be but like removing a cobblestone from the sides of old Baldy! Wilt thou go, Don Alva?

"'Twill be a glorious sight to feast

thine eyes on; but 'twill try thy courage to the uttermost. Yet thou canst enter the golden chamber I have told thee of, if thy brain be steady, thy hands strong and firm, and thy feet sure, though thou seem to look down into the very pits of hell. I will lead; darest thou follow, Don Alva?"

"I would follow, if need be, between grinning lines of hideous fiends for such a golden prize," replied Don Alva, while all the greed of his miserly soul looked out of his eyes and flushed up into his bronzed face. "But play me no tricks;" and his keen eyes were bent upon the youth with an intensity that sought to read the motives and thoughts behind the cold impassive face before him.

"Few men would care to trust their lives into thy keeping, Black Pedro. They tell me," and he waved his hand scornfully toward the crowd which was fast gathering in the plaza, "that thy heart is evil, that thy soul has the black mark of the devil upon it, and that thy blood is cold; yet I will go with thee, Black Pedro, though thou be all and more than report makes thee, and the dangers be such as mortal never faced before."

"It is well," replied the youth, unmoved; "I had need of a brave man and I have found him. Make thyself ready and meet me at the appointed place an hour before sunrise. And mark me, tell no man; no, nor prating woman, whither we go or for what. There is no more need of words. Already fierce eyes note our meetings; and it will not do to feed their curiosity longer, lest they scent gold. Don Alva, adieu until tomorrow morning, an hour before sunrise," and Black Pedro turned and walked carelessly away as though the conversation he had just held had been one of very little importance.

Don Alva could not so well repress his excitement. The marvelous tale he had just listened to had stirred his avaricious nature to its deepest depths. Gold in unlimited quantities, and power as limitless as the gold, would be his if Black Pedro's tale proved true.

Already greed rebelled against the thought of division. He would have all this gold to himself alone. Black Pedro must serve his end and then—well, dead men need no gold.

Something of the workings of these sinister passions one might have read on his dark face as he also turned and hastily sought the quiet of his own home to make preparations for the fateful journey.

II.

The day wore slowly away; night came; and at last morning began to dawn.

An hour before the first shaft of sunlight struck the flat roofs of Santa Fé, Black Pedro and Don Alva mounted their horses and rode swiftly and silently from the city.

None noted their departure, save a few wakeful dogs that barked dismally as the two horsemen began their journey. Few words were exchanged, for the darkness and the rough road over which they were riding demanded that all their attention be given to their horses.

The face of Don Alva looked anxious and worn, like the face of one who had passed a sleepless and restless night; and from beneath the broad brim of his hat his dark eyes glanced frequently and suspiciously in the direction of his companion.

Black Pedro looked not to the right nor to the left, but kept his eyes bent continually on the dangerous road before him. His face was thin and haggard and his eyes glowed with an unnatural brightness. Otherwise his countenance expressed nothing of the intense excitement that held sway within him.

On and on they rode; and when, at last, the sun shone down upon horses and riders, it found them at the en-

trance to a deep canyon with nearly perpendicular walls rising hundreds of feet above their heads on either side.

It was now near noon, for in those deep defiles and dark gorges only the midday sun darts its rays. At their feet, along the rocky bottom of the canyon, flowed a stream of thick, yellow tinted water, and the air was heavy and laden with a disagreeable sulphurous smell.

Before them opened a wild and awesome scene. Great black rocks, piled upon the other in indescribable confusion, rose high above their heads; and the walls of the canyon were scarred and seamed with innumerable fissures, as though a river of fire had once flowed between its heat cracked sides.

Not a plant, not a green thing of any kind, relieved the somber colorings of the banks. The men and the horses were the only living things within sight or hearing.

They stood on the banks of Sulphur River at the entrance to Beelzebub Canyon. Unpoetic, but suggestive, were the names the rude hunters and trappers had given to this stream and chasm.

"We must leave our mounts here," Black Pedro said, as he sprang to the ground, "for no horse can bear us over the path we are now to travel."

Accordingly the two men dismounted.

"Don Alva, had we not better eat before we go further? It will probably be hours before we return and we cannot carry food with us;" and Black Pedro's eyes dwelt inquiringly for a moment upon the face of his companion.

Don Alva acquiesced, and in a few minutes they had finished their scant meal.

Black Pedro now took the long lasso from the pommel of his saddle, wound it carefully around his waist, and with a number of pine torches under his arm, led the way down into the gloom which even at midday enshrouded the Beelzebub Canyon. Their rifles and pistols they left behind as useless encumbrances. For about a mile their path lay along the rocky bank of the river, sometimes even forcing them to wade waist deep in its swift, yellow current.

Then Black Pedro turned aside from the stream and entered a narrow chasm, cut as if with the chisel of the Almighty, out of the solid walls of the canyon. The sides of this chasm approached each other as they neared the top, until, at the summit, they appeared to be only a few inches apart, so that a bright, narrow ribbon of light, shining high above their heads, was the only glimpse of the blue sky they were able to obtain.

As they cautiously advanced into the gloom of this gorge, the darkness grew more intense; the air became warm and damp and was laden with an odor like that of burning sulphur.

At last even the narrow ribbon of light above disappeared and they stood in utter darkness. Black Pedro paused and, lighting a couple of the torches, gave one to Don Alva.

As the flames of the torches flared out brightly Don Alva could not repress an exclamation of horror, for at his feet yawned an opening apparently as deep and as black as the bottomless pit. The third step forward would have plunged him down into it.

Black Pedro picked up a large stone and tossed it into the gulf. The stone vanished swiftly into the blackness, but gave back no sound. The silence was ominous. It told of the awfulness of the depths into which the stone had disappeared.

"A safe place for an enemy, Don Alva," Black Pedro said, with a peculiar smile, as he pointed downward into the dark abyss.

Don Alva started and glanced quickly up into the face of his companion. Had those piercing eyes read his thoughts? The words seemed to indicate as much, for, at the moment of

their utterance. Don Alva had been thinking how slight a push would be needed to send his companion down after the stone, and how, on their return, here would be the place to despatch his dark soul to its final reckoning.

However, he learned nothing from the impassive face of Black Pedro, which, in the glare of the torchlight, would have looked statue-like had it not been for the brightness of the eyes.

"Aye, a safer place than bars of iron or locks of steel can make," Don Alva answered. "But I trust that our path runs not long by the side of this awful chasm, for I confess that my head grows dizzy at the thought of the appalling depths beneath us."

"Gird thy soul with courage, Don Alva, for this is as nothing to what is to come," Black Pedro said, as, holding the torch high above his head, he began to pick his way along the narrow ledge of rocks.

Don Alva, summoning to his assistance all his fortitude, followed along the perilous shelf which was at times not more than a foot in width.

They had advanced cautiously for some few rods, when their further progress was apparently barred by a deep cleft, as if a portion of the roadway had fallen into the depths below.

The breach was about ten feet in width, and the light of the torches showed on the opposite side a narrow shelf of rocks, like the one on which they were standing, protruding some three or four feet from the perpendicular wall, which vanished downward into darkness.

Don Alva shuddered at this evidence of the frail nature of the rocks which formed their support and which might, at any moment, give way under their additional weight, and plunge them down into the unfathomed blackness below.

"And what now? Does our journey end here?" he inquired, turning to his guide.

"No," replied Black Pedro. "Our way lies yonder," pointing to the opposite side of the cleft, "and we near the end. Listen. Thou canst hear the forces of nature at their work." As he spoke a sound like the roar of distant flames fell faintly upon Don Alva's ears.

"I hear," he replied, "but I see not how we are to cross this black hole."

"Leap it," Black Pedro replied, coolly, poising himself on the edge of the cleft. Suddenly, with the agility of an antelope, he sprang out over the hideous depths and landed safely on the narrow ledge on the opposite side.

For a moment Don Alva's heart stood still; and he would have turned back had not the greed of gold nerved him. Then he approached the edge and prepared for the leap. Twice he bent his knees and twice his heart failed him, as he thought of the depths below, the distance across, and the narrowness of the landing place.

But the third time he gathered spirit to jump. His feet struck the ledge; but his body did not have sufficient momentum, and with a ghastly face, he fell backward, clutching wildly at the air. Then, just as he gave himself up for lost, he felt his right arm gripped as with a hand of steel, and himself drawn from out the fatal grasp of the power that was dragging him down.

The next moment he was safe at the side of Black Pedro. But he was all atremble, and great beads of sweat stood out on his forehead.

"Had not my hand caught thee, Don Alva, thou wouldst not have come again out of yon black hole till the crack of doom sounded. Thou must put more strength in thy limbs and more courage in thy heart; for the end is near and the worst is yet to come."

"Aye, thou hast proved a friend in need, Black Pedro," Don Alva replied, as soon as he recovered from the horror of his near approach to death. "Hadst thou delayed but an instant longer, not

all the powers of earth could have wrested me from the grip of the fiends below. But let us on. I need the sight of gold to drive the chill of death from out my heart."

"Thou shalt soon have thy fill of gold, Don Alva," the youth answered, as he led the way again.

The ledge now widened until it made a pathway comparatively free from danger. However, the descent, which had heretofore been gradual, now became steep, almost precipitous, as though it led down into the very bowels of the earth.

Down and on the two men hurried, the light of their torches flaring wildly about their heads, now darting high among the jagged rocks of the roof, now plunging down into some measureless chasm; but never revealing aught but black heat scarred rocks and inky darkness.

And ever, as they penetrated further into the cavern, the roar of the flames sounded louder, the air became warmer, and the smell of sulphur stronger.

At last Black Pedro paused, and pointing down, far down, to where a faint light shone through the darkness, said: "Don Alva, gird thy soul about with courage and nerve thy form with steel, for where yon light glimmers burn the fires of hell; but beyond is the home of the yellow god, where everything that his breath falls upon turns to gold. Gold! Don Alva, gold! Thou canst there look upon gold until thy heart grows weary."

"Fear not, Black Pedro," replied Don Alva; "for a sight of thy golden treasure, I will dare all that man can dare. Lead on; I will follow."

III.

Black Pedro turned and again led the way down the steep decline.

Soon they felt the ground grow warm and tremble beneath their feet, while the hot air rushed by their faces, like the breath from a mighty furnace.

Now the path made a sudden turn; and then upon their eyes burst the most appalling sight ever seen by mortal man. A chasm fully fifty feet wide opened at their feet and extended on each side as far as the eye could reach. A glance down into its awful depths revealed a sight that made the head reel with horror.

A thousand feet below, rolled and boiled and thundered a mighty river of burning sulphur. The blue flames rose and fell, like waves of grain under the whip of the wind, for a hundred or more feet, and the weird blue light struck the roof of the cavern high above their heads and thence was reflected in every direction.

The sound of the flames was deafening, and the earth trembled as trembles a man with the ague. The faces of the two men looked ghastly in the bluish light. The air was rendered almost suffocating by the heat and the fumes of sulphur.

Black Pedro tossed his lighted torch into the abyss. Instantly it was caught and borne, as if by the hands of some unseen spirit, swiftly to the right and downward until swallowed up by the roaring flames.

Between the walls of the chasm and above the flames rushed a mighty current of air. Even at the surface, where the two men stood, a hand thrust out over the abyss felt the wind cut it like a knife.

It was vain to attempt to speak. In the roar of the flames the loudest shout could not be heard.

Don Alva looked at his companion and his face expressed the awe and dread that filled his soul.

Black Pedro quietly laid the torches down and began to unwind the long lasso from about his waist. As soon as this was accomplished he stepped to the edge of the abyss, fixed his eyes on a sharp point of rock which projected up some four feet above the floor of the cavern directly across from where he stood, and whirling the lasso

swiftly around his head, attempted to cast it over the point of this rock.

Thrice he failed on account of the swift wind; but the fourth time the loop fell over the point and a quick jerk fastened it firmly. Near the spot where he stood a similar point of rock protruded.

Around this he wound the other end of the lasso, drawing the line taut, and tying it securely. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he seized hold of the line, let himself down so that he hung at full length, and began rapidly to advance, hand over hand, toward the opposite side of the chasm.

So great was the force of the wind that it swung his body far out to the right, while the strong lasso curved under the strain like a bended bow.

It was an awful scene; and even Don Alva, accustomed as he was to looking upon sights of horror, shuddered, crossed himself, and instinctively muttered a prayer.

Should the lasso break, or the stout heart fail, down, down would shoot the body into the blue flames and rolling flood of sulphur a thousand feet below. But Black Pedro's heart and arm did not fail him.

For a couple of minutes he swung in mid air over the terrible gulf and then drew himself up safely.

Now it was Don Alva's turn to make the perilous venture. Had he the courage of heart and strength of hand to accomplish the crossing?

He approached the verge of the chasm and looked down. Far below thundered the awful river and its bright flames leaped up, like long waving arms of blue, longingly toward him. A moment he paused on the brink, peering down into those frightful depths to steady his soul and to accustom his eyes to the scene; and then, with white cheeks and tightly drawn lips, but with steady hands, he seized hold of the rope.

How frail the line looked as his eyes glanced along its trembling length over the fiery gulf to the opposite side! Would it be able to support his weight? Might not Black Pedro cut the rope when he hung midway between the two sides?

No; for that would leave himself with no means of returning. Besides, had he not already saved his life once? What cause to distrust him?

But his own strength might fail him. True. To the might of his arms and to the strength of the rope he must intrust all.

His arms were knotted with muscles, and the lasso had already safely withstood the strain of one passage.

On the opposite side Black Pedro stood, beckoning him to make haste. In the weird light his tall form had a spectral appearance and the beckoning hand seemed the hand of fate.

Don Alva dared not disobey its commands longer. The gold must be his.

Don Alva reached forward as far as possible along the lasso and swung his body out over the dizzy depths. Like a strong armed giant the wind seized hold of him and tugged and strained to tear him from his frail hold.

The heat was great and the fumes of sulphur suffocating. The stout rope gave under the strain until it seemed as if it must part asunder, while ever from below the roar of the river sounded in his ears and the blue flames leaped before his eyes.

On and on he struggled, not daring to pause for a moment. Now he hung midway. His face looked down the stream and living soul never looked upon a more awesome spectacle.

Straight as the flight of an arrow rolled the river between mighty walls of solid rocks; on, and on, and on, till the blue flames seemed to mingle with the jagged rocks of the roof. Whence its source and into what subterranean sea of horror it poured its fiery billows, who can tell?

As Don Alva neared the opposite side the grip of his hands began to weaken, and the cords and muscles of

his arms felt like hot bands of steel. His breath came in quick gasps, and flashes of fire shot before his eyes; but still, with the strength and courage of despair, he struggled on.

At last he had not the power to move his body another inch, only to cling to the rope. The wind seemed a fiend, shrieking in demoniacal glee, as it sought to wrest him even from this support.

Stronger grew the arms of the wind demon and weaker his own. He felt his fingers begin to loosen and now only their ends clutched the rope. In a moment more all would be over and his body would plunge down into the blue flames and seething sulphur.

He seemed to see it making the fatal descent. How black, and cracked, and shriveled, and horrible it looked as it sank into the glowing mass! Don Alva closed his eyes to shut out the fearful sight, and attempted to pray.

For a moment he thus hung, 'twixt life and death, and then his fingers slipped from off the rope and he would have made the dreadful plunge had not Black Pedro suddenly reached forth, and, gripping him by the wrists, hauled him up in safety on the rocks.

Once again Don Alva owed his life to Black Pedro.

After the rest, which Don Alva's weak condition rendered necessary, the two men continued their journey.

The cavern now took the form of the interior of a gigantic funnel, lying on its side and with its apex from them and pointing downward. They had no need of lights. The bluish glare from the burning sulphur gleamed behind, while from below a light of dazzling brightness shone through the narrow apex and streamed up toward them.

"Don Alva, in yon glittering radiance is the gleam of gold. Gold! Gold! I promise thee that even thou shalt see gold till thy heart grows sick of the sight."

"Nay, nay," replied Don Alva, excitedly, "though I saw naught but gold from the day of birth till the hour of death my heart would not grow weary. But let us haste; for I long to look upon this wondrous place you tell of."

The other did not reply, save by a peculiar smile—a smile that makes the heart that sees it shudder, and the face that wears it like the face of a fiend.

But Don Alva was too excited now to note the face of his companion. The greed of gold held sway over him so that he was blind to everything else. His eyes sparkled, his face flushed, and he hastened forward as fast as his limbs could carry him.

By his side strode Black Pedro, silent as a shadow, and grim as death.

The funnel narrowed down until at the opening it was not over four feet in diameter. The two men were obliged to proceed in a stooping posture for some few rods; but at last they passed through and stood upright in the presence of as grand a spectacle as the eye of man ever looked upon.

An oval chamber, fully three thousand feet in height and two thousand feet from side to side, with floor, walls, and ceiling of pure gold, rose sublimely around them. The floor sloped gradually in all directions toward the center, where it was pierced by a round opening some fifty feet in diameter.

Through this opening burst the dazzling light which illumined the place and ever rose a wondrous cloud which was not smoke but gold, transformed by some mysterious alchemy of nature into the marvelous mist that filled the room. Wherever this mist floated fell a thin film of gold.

Thus through unnumbered ages had the walls of this mighty chamber been formed. What was the original size of the room and what the present thickness of its golden lining, who can tell? Wealth, measureless wealth, was there.

For a moment Don Alva stood silent, awed by the deep grandeur of this lonely cavern; then, as he began to comprehend that all this vast mass of metal which surrounded him was gold,

pure gold, he gave way to the wildest transports of delight.

He yelled, he danced, he sang. He kissed the golden floor, the golden walls; and, at last, flinging his arms around the neck of Black Pedro, he wept like a woman, because of the madness of his great joy.

Black Pedro, with a look of hatred and loathing on his face, flung Don Alva's arms from about his neck, as though they had been the folds of a serpent, while his eyes gleamed like the eyes of the deadly cobra.

"Don Alva," he said—his voice was low and intense—"this is but the anteroom to the palace of the golden god. If you would see the god himself, sitting upon his throne and breathing forth gold, one more danger yet you must brave."

"Talk not to me of danger," Don Alva shouted, "for a sight of the god of this glorious world I would brave hell itself. Point out but the way, and if the might of man can encompass it, I will get a glimpse of this god, aye, and ever afterward he shall be the only god I worship."

"Come, then; I promise thee thou shalt have time to worship him to your heart's content," Black Pedro replied, as he led the way toward the center of the magnificent chamber.

IV.

Now, for the first time, Don Alva noticed that a strong rope had been stretched across the opening whence rose the golden smoke, and firmly fastened to opposite sides.

From this rope swung a sort of cage of a sufficient size to allow a man to be seated comfortably within, and formed out of heavy wires closely woven together. The entrance to the cage was through a small door in the side, so arranged that, when closed, it could not be opened from within.

The cage was attached to the rope by means of a large wooden pulley. A second rope, fastened to this pulley, and also running through a fixed pulley on the opposite side of the hole, and thence back through a small opening into the cage, enabled the one within to draw himself out to where he could look directly down into the pit below.

Already this machinery was covered with a thin layer of gold, though it had evidently been there only a short time.

"Yonder, from those depths, came all this mass of gold," Black Pedro said, as he pointed toward the opening. "Aye, even now, like smoke, the precious metal is floating upward. Don Alva, if you have courage to look down into depths such as even fancy never pictured to you, and upon a sight the grandeur of which has not its equal elsewhere upon the earth, enter this cage and draw yourself out until you hang over the center of the hole. Directly beneath thee thou shalt then see the throne room of the yellow god," and with hands that trembled, Black Pedro threw open the door to the cage, while the eyes he bent upon Don Alva glowed as with flames of fire.

Don Alva was too much excited and too eager for a sight of this wondrous scene to note the looks or acts of Black Pedro, and, without a moment's hesitation, he entered the cage, and, seizing the rope, began to draw himself out over the opening.

No sooner was he in than Black Pedro quickly closed and fastened the door; then folding his arms upon his breast he stood silently watching Don Alva, as he slowly pulled the cage out along the rope. At length the gold crazed man reached the center and looked downward.

It is not for me to attempt to describe adequately what he saw. Language of man has no words with which to picture such a scene justly. If I can but give a faint idea of its awful grandeur I shall rest content.

The network of wires offered but

little obstruction to his view. The mist was not so thick but that his eyes could penetrate it.

Round, as the barrel of some enormous gun, the whole opened downward. Down, for a thousand feet ran its glittering sides of solid gold and there abruptly ended. Thence down, down through miles of luminous space, the eyes flashed until they rested upon a sea of gold. Great waves of many colored flames rose and fell and darted hither and thither over its glowing surface.

Even as Don Alva looked, a tremendous explosion occurred. Vast sheets of yellow, gleaming metal were hurled hundreds of feet upward, and, in a moment the air beneath was filled with a dense luminous haze, of a golden color and more beautiful than pen can tell.

The glorious sight fascinated Don Alva. He forgot where he was, who he was—everything but the rolling ocean of gold beneath. He would have flung himself down into it had not the strong wires restrained him.

Suddenly the stern voice of Black Pedro recalled him to himself. With a start, like one abruptly awakened from a dream, he turned his flushed face and flashing eyes toward his companion.

"Don Alva," the cold, quiet voice said, "from death in the black hole and the burning gulf of sulphur I rescued thee, because of my great hatred. I saved thee then that thou mightst perish here, in the presence of thy helpless god—might perish as is befitting one who worships only gold. Call upon thy god, Don Alva, and see if he can save thee from the fate my vengeance has doomed thee to."

As he spoke he drew the long, keen bladed hunting knife from his belt and hurled it toward Don Alva. The bright weapon gleamed as it hissed through the air, and then its keen edge struck and severed the strands of the rope just where it entered the cage.

With a thrill of horror Don Alva saw his only means of return fall from his grasp, while the knife, its mission ended, rattled against the opposite wall and then plunged down into the depths below.

As the rope parted a low laugh came from between Black Pedro's lips, a laugh that chilled the soul of him who heard it.

Don Alva sat speechless, motionless, for a few minutes, his heart and brain paralyzed by the suddenness of his peril.

What did it all mean? The strong wire cage, himself securely entrapped within and left hanging over those fearful depths? What meant Black Pedro's wild words of vengeance?

He had never done aught to him that called for revenge. He must be the victim of some mistake.

He clutched the wires of the cage with his hands, and pressing his blanched face against them, shouted to Black Pedro. The sound of his voice gave him courage.

He demanded to know what Black Pedro meant by his wild words and insane acts. He commanded him to release him at once. He cursed and threatened; and finally, giving way to a paroxysm of rage, he shook the cage with all his strength.

Black Pedro stood silent and grim, with his arms folded upon his breast and his black eyes bent upon his victim, until there was a lull in the storm of passions; then, with a commanding gesture, he said:

"Be still, Don Alva, and listen. I have a tale to tell, and when I am done thou wilt know wherefore and for what I brought thee hither."

The ring of steel was in the cold, clear voice of Black Pedro.

"Five years ago I had a mother, father, home, wealth, happiness. In one night I lost them all. Don Alva, my parents were murdered, murdered for gold, as they lay peaceably sleeping. I never can forget that night.

I laid in my chamber, tied to my bed by a broken leg. Near the hour of twelve I heard a knock on the door and a stranger craved permission to rest beneath the shelter of our roof for the remainder of the night.

" I heard my father give him a hearty welcome, and my mother arise from her bed to set food before him. The stranger, after eating, made his bed upon the floor of the main room, and soon all was dark and silent again. My leg pained me so that I could not sleep. Two or three hours had passed when I heard from the room below mine, where my parents slept, the sound of a dull thud, followed by a low, gasping moan; then another thud and another low moan, and all was still, but for a noise like that made by water falling upon the floor.

" With a heart quivering with horror, for I felt that some awful deed had been done, I cautiously crept from out my bed, and despite my broken limb, crawled noiselessly to where there was a wide crack in the floor and, putting my eye to it, looked down. Don Alva this is the sight I saw: the moonbeams falling through the broad, uncurtained window, fell upon the bed directly beneath me, and showed the scene in all its ghastly hideousness.

" Over the bed stood the stranger. In his right hand a knife raised high above his head and dripping red with blood, showed that he stood ready to repeat his blows if there was need. In the bed lay my father and my mother. The quilts had been turned down so as to expose their bosoms. From the left breast of each gushed a torrent of blood. Already a dark, red stream was running over the floor. My father's face was set in death; but I was in time to see my mother's eyes open spasmodically once, twice, and each time they seemed to stare straight up into mine; then her features, too, grew rigid and I was motherless as well as fatherless.

" The murderer lowered his arm, satisfied that his bloody work had been well done, and began to search the room for the gold he somehow knew was hidden there. Under the bed he found the oaken chest which contained all my father's great wealth, and drew it forth. It was stained red with blood.

" At this moment a low moan escaped my lips and reached the ears below. The man started violently and glanced upward. As if with hot irons, that look branded every feature of his face upon my soul. What the man then did I do not know; for I fainted, overcome with horror and pain from my broken leg.

" When I came to, morning was just beginning to dawn. The murderer had fled with his blood stained gold. Somehow, I managed to creep to the red bedside. There I knelt in the blood, and placing a hand on each cold forehead, I vowed to live only for revenge.

" Don Alva, from that moment to this I have had but one purpose, revenge. As soon as I was able I began to search for the murderer, and I never faltered until I found him.

" Don Alva, thou art the man. And listen; in this manner thou shalt die and my great vengeance shall be satisfied. This golden chamber shall be thy sepulcher, the wire cage thy coffin, and the gaunt specters, Despair and Starvation, shall stand by thy side at the hour of death. Gold! Gold! Don Alva, I promised thee that thou shouldst have thy fill of gold; and see, have I not well redeemed my promise?

" For look whither thou wilt, thine eyes can behold naught but gold. Never had mortal man a grander place to die in, nor a costlier tomb in which to lay his bones. Soon thou shalt swing, a golden mummy in a golden cage high over a sea of gold; a fitting death and a suitable resting place for thee, Don Alva, who stained thy hands with blood for gold."

Don Alva's face had grown livid and he had remained silent and motionless like one in a trance, as he listened to the story of the death of Black Pedro's

father and mother and heard the awful doom pronounced upon him; but when he saw Black Pedro turn to depart the sight broke the spell.

His mind became preternaturally alive to all the terrors of the situation, and a thousand idle schemes of deliverance rushed through his brain. Only one gave him a small measure of hope. As a drowning man seizes hold of anything within his reach he grasped this.

"Black Pedro," he shouted, "pause but a moment and listen. I will purchase my life even with my dearest treasure."

Black Pedro turned and again bent cold, impassive eyes upon his victim.

"I have a daughter," continued Don Alva, "more beautiful than tongue can tell, a being fit to dwell among the nymphs of Paradise. Her I will give thee to wed, to love, if thou wilt but bring me safe back to Santa Fé again. Leave vengeance to the gods. Live for love. Its joys bridge the way from earth to heaven. In my daughter's arms——"

He would have said more, but here Black Pedro interrupted him.

"Spare thy words," he said, coldly. "They are vain. Love! What know I of love? What care I for love? The fickle god never reigned within my heart, never ruled my brain, nor fired my blood; then how can I think on love?

"Can I summon it to make its dwelling place within the cold chambers of my heart? Can it be purchased at the public mart? Where shall I find love? I have never seen it, felt it, nor yet longed for it. Then why should I do aught with love, or love with me? Sworn enemies we have ever been.

"Love's looks are fair; this I know; but her heart is as ashes. Love's eyes seem flooded with the glories of Paradise; yet their glances, like lightning's glare, light the way but to destruction. Love's lips are more tempting than the ruddiest wine, more sweet than the dew kissed violets; but 'tis death to touch them. Love's breast is softer than the silky down of the eider duck; yet to many a resting head it hath proved more cruel than the bloody guillotine.

"Talk not to me of love. In my heart there is room only for my great vengeance. Waste not thy breath upon me, Don Alva. There is not a joy great enough, even in Paradise, to tempt me to rescue thee from thy golden tomb. Here thou shalt hang, incased in gold, till the crack of doom summons thee to meet thy God. My vow is fulfilled, my father's and my mother's blood avenged."

Again he turned to go, without one look of pity on his dark, handsome face or a throb of compassion in his vengeful heart.

But, even as he turned, One was near he dreamed not of, who has said: "Vengeance is mine. I will repay."

All this time Black Pedro had been standing not over six feet from the brink of the whole, just where the slope made an abrupt curve downward. As he turned to go he placed one foot inadvertently below this point.

The metal, smooth as glass, afforded his foot no hold, and he slipped and fell flat, his face toward the floor. The next moment he felt himself sliding downward.

In vain he clutched at the smooth, glittering gold beneath him. There was nothing for nails or fingers to catch or to grasp. For a brief moment he struggled violently, and then his body glided over the brink and shot downward.

The dark soul uttered no cry, and the face that for an instant looked upward before it vanished forever, had a smile on it.

A year afterward three hunters found the skeletons and the moldering equipments of the horses of Don Alva and Black Pedro lying, where they had left them, at the entrance to Beelzebub Canyon; but mortal man never looked on the dark faces of these two men again.

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IN DANGEROUS QUARTERS.

BY JARED O. WINDERMYER.

Setting forth the varied adventures of two Americans who attempt to break all records by descending a river of South America that has persistently baffled exploration.

(***Complete in This Issue.***)

CHAPTER I.

A MAD SCHEME.

IT was in the early part of 1899, that, while engaged in making a South American tour, I drifted into the little Bolivian town of Sucre. This town stands on the northern bank of the Pilcomayo, about a hundred miles from its source near Lake Autlapas, in a spur of the great Andean range, which form the mighty western wall of South America, all the way from the Caribbean Sea to Cape Horn.

I was sauntering in a dreamy mood through the half civilized collection of huts, flimsy dwellings and primitive streets, with the lazy negroes, mongrels, half breeds and original natives lolling lazily in the sun. I was wondering how many centuries would have to come and go before these Bolivians would earn the name of being civilized.

Like most of the people in the interior, the Sucreans are indolent, stupid and in many instances vicious. Were they not so cowardly, a traveler would never be safe, for the police force such as it is is as corrupt and treacherous as those whom they pretend to govern.

I had traveled sufficiently through Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay to understand the inhabitants. Not only did I carry two of the best Smith & Wesson revolvers, but I made sure that a good supply of cartridges was always in my possession.

These weapons, being in holsters at my hips, the dusky miscreants always had fair notice of what they were up against when they attacked me. I had winged two or three of them in the course of my wanderings, could speak their gibberish, whose basis is the Spanish tongue, and understood their nature so well that I was rarely in danger from even the lowest classes, among which are to be included the sullen, scowling negroes.

But it was fully a year since I had left New York, and I will not deny that I was homesick. I had become so tired of looking upon and meeting the mongrels and unclean natives that I would have jumped with delight at the sight of a man from my own land.

To appreciate your own country, you must go abroad, and it matters little where.

As I said, I was sauntering along the narrow street, which was unpaved and in places sloped like the roof of a house, when to my amazement some one slapped me on the shoulder and called out in unmistakable English:

"How are you, old fellow?"

Turning my head, I was startled into momentary speechlessness by the sight of a man who could never be mistaken for any other than a genuine American. His appearance suggested the caricatures that were common some years ago of "Brother Jonathan," for he was tall, thin, with a sharp nose, bright keen gray eyes, and wore a tuft of yellow whiskers on his chin.

His coat was of blue broadcloth, with brass buttons and swallow tail, his trousers were tight fitting and reached but little below his boot tops, while an immense gold chain dangled from his yellow vest.

The only points that varied from the caricatures I have spoken of was that, like me, he carried a revolver at each hip and his small waist was spanned by a belt that was full of cartridges, and, instead of wearing the tall plug hat of his country, his small head was sheltered by a broad Panama, of such fine material that it must have cost a big sum of money.

His long sandy hair was brushed behind his ears and the expression of his face was keen, inquisitive, alert and good natured.

No wonder I was astonished to meet him in this out of the way corner of the world. I should add that he was smoking a huge cigar, and before I could reply to his salutation, he drew its mate out of an upper vest pocket and thrust it toward me.

"Try it, friend; their weeds in this country taste better than they look. I knew you were an American the moment my eyes rested on you and I tell you it did me good to see you. What's your name?" he added as he extended his hand, which I cordially grasped.

I was as delighted as he and told him who I was.

"I never dreamed of meeting one of my own countrymen," I added, as we faced each other and I lit my cigar from his; "and I need not tell you that I am as glad as you. May I inquire your name?"

"Higgenbottom — Percy Higgenbottom. I am from New Haven and left home last summer."

"I cannot understand what brought you to this miserable country."

"It does look odd, but I might say the same of you."

"Well," I replied, "I set out to do the principal parts of South America, but I have grown sick of the business and intend to get back to God's country as soon as I can and to stay there hereafter."

My new acquaintance laughed in his peculiar, chuckling way.

"I think it's on you, Windermyer; you came for pleasure and that is more than I can understand, for I'm here on business."

"If that is more creditable to your common sense, it is still more wonderful as a fact, for what do these miserable people know of business?"

"Mighty little; they are the laziest folks on earth; the only able bodied man that I have seen doing anything was one that was asleep and falling off a house. But I'm dealing with the government, and have just made a contract with President Señor Severo Fernandez Alonzo, whose long reign began in 1896—two years ago."

"You have aroused my curiosity."

"Come with me to the Waldorf Astoria of Sucre and I'll tell you all about it."

The leading hotel of this Bolivian town might serve as a respectable stable in our own land. Like all the buildings in countries subject to earthquakes, it was low and flat, consisting of only two stories, with a broad, cov-

ered piazza extending around three sides, screened by climbing vines and flowers. There were a few rickety uncertain chairs, wretched, untidy and scant furniture and provision in the way of drink and food which only a man in sore straits could make palatable.

The landlord sat in one chair with his bare feet resting in another, his dilapidated hat on the porch beside him, his eyes shut and his mouth open, while his snoring could be heard a block away.

Not another person was in sight about the miserable hostelry, and, though Higgenbottom purposely stumbled against his chair while we were passing to the further end of the porch, the landlord was not disturbed. At the angle of the piazza, we seated ourselves, after some careful experiments with the wrecks of chairs, and resting our feet in true American fashion, puffed our cigars and conversed without disturbance.

"I suppose," said my friend, "that you know something of the many attempts, all ending in failure, to trace the Pilcomayo river from its source near us, to where it joins the Paraguay?"

"Yes; naturally I informed myself before coming to South America. It is strange that though some of the parties were large and well armed, not one succeeded in pushing through the country of the Tobas Indians."

"I don't see anything strange about it, when you bear in mind the character of the people who made most of the attempts. They were Spaniards, who knew no more about fighting than Admirals Cervera or Montojo. What fun it would be for a party of Americans like Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders to waltz from Sucre to Asuncion!"

"No doubt; and that is the only way the job will ever be done."

"I don't know about that; *I think I shall get through!*"

I stared at the fellow in amazement.

"You get through! What do you mean?"

He closed one eye and looking quizzically at me, with his big cigar still between his lips, he drawled:

"I have made a contract with the Bolivian government to run a steamer down the Pilcomayo right through the country of the Tobas; I have the boat ready and the crew engaged; we are to start tomorrow and if you will go with me, I will make it worth your while."

"But, Higgenbottom," I rejoined, "I am astonished beyond measure. Knowing that you must be familiar with the history of all these expeditions, your enterprise is suicide."

"Perhaps it is and perhaps it isn't, but all the same I start tomorrow."

"Tell me something about it."

He was pleased to gratify my curiosity, and sinking down in his chair until his head was lower than his boots on the railing, he smoked and said:

"You can understand how anxious Bolivia is to find the Pilcomayo navigable for steamers, all the way down to the Paraguay, for if that is the fact, Bolivia will have what she has never had—an outlet to the Atlantic. The Argentine Republic is hardly less anxious, for such an outlet would prove a vast advantage to her. She has joined Bolivia several times and President Alonzo gave me to understand that she shared in the expense of my enterprise."

"Were you induced to come all the way from Connecticut to Sucre to undertake this strange contract?"

"By no means; I never heard of the Pilcomayo until I reached Buenos Ayres. You are traveling for pleasure, which I can't afford; my father has seven boys, and the farm near New Haven won't support his family, which is still growing, with no one able to say when it will stop. So, when we become old enough to vote, each one has to shift for himself.

" One of my brothers is digging for diamonds in Kimberley, South Africa; another is helping to run things in the Congo State; two others are pegging away in the Klondike. I decided to try South America. I learned all about the Pilcomayo business in Buenos Ayres, while looking around for a job, and made up my mind to show that some things can be done as well as others."

" By what route did you reach Sucre? "

" I went up the La Plata, Parana and the Paraguay to Caimbra, thus flanking the Tobas Indians, and then with three guides cut across the country to Sucre. The three natives who came with me will make up my crew in going back. They are far better fellows than you can find in this part of the world. We have been here less than two months, and they have averaged a fight a day with the miserable Sucreans, and every time," added Higgenbottom with a grin, " they have broken a half dozen heads and received only a few trifling bumps themselves. I build great hope on them."

" Your steamer must be a small one."

" It is barely thirty feet long; the engine is ten horse power, and since we cannot carry much coal and couldn't get it any way, we'll burn wood, of which there is no end on the banks of the river."

" That is well enough, but what about the Tobas, who have defeated every attempt thus far? "

The coolness of the Yankee was unique in its way. He crossed the ankles resting on the railing, took two or three puffs at his cigar and drawled:

" Well, likely enough we may have a *little* trouble with them, but we shall have plenty of firearms."

" So had all the expeditions that preceded you."

" You forget they were Spaniards, and couldn't hit anything they aimed at."

" Captain Page was an American."

" And a good fellow, but his boat drew too much; ours is light enough almost to run where there is a heavy dew; then," said Higgenbottom, coming suddenly to an upright position and showing more animation than before, " I've got an idea that is Yankee clean through; I am depending more on that than anything else."

" What may it be? "

He glanced around to make sure he was not overheard. The landlord was still snoring, and the only other person in sight was a brawny half breed, stretched out full length in the full glare of the sun on the other side of the street, also sound asleep. Besides, what odds could it have made, if we had been overheard, since we spoke in English? Nevertheless, Higgenbottom sank his voice to a half whisper and uttered the single word:

" *Dynamite!* "

" I was not aware that they knew anything about that stuff in this part of the world."

" They don't know much, but they do in Buenos Ayres and Rosario; you know considerable gold has been found in Bolivia, and a few years ago a party of Americans, with two good engineers, came over the Andees, bringing a quantity of dynamite with them. They stowed it away, where the natives weren't likely to get to fooling with it and used a part for blasting purposes. Before half was gone, the party became disgusted and went back, leaving the dynamite behind them.

" When I found that out, I rigged up an old brass Spanish field piece, probably two hundred years old, with a powerful spring, which will throw a dynamite cartridge several hundred yards. I have twenty odd good cartridges ready, and if the Tobas get too gay my gun, which I have called 'Uncle Sam,' will cough a few dynamite pills among them, and they won't care about asking any more questions. My

only fear is that they won't give us a chance," and Higgenbottom chuckled again.

"I fear they will give you too many chances. But of necessity you will often have to go ashore to gather fuel, and your dynamite gun will then be less useful than you seem to believe."

"I have considered all the chances," he said more seriously, "and nothing would persuade me to back out. The sum of money which I am to receive, as soon as I reach Asuncion by way of the Pilcomayo, is equivalent to twenty thousand dollars in our country. I think that is better than digging in the Klondike."

"But much more dangerous. Then it is now April, and the rainy season is at an end."

"The date couldn't be more favorable. We shall have pleasant weather and at the same time all the advantage to be gained from the rise of the river. I told you I had been here for two months making my preparations. I could have started a week ago, but determined to wait until everything was thoroughly ready. It is only a little way to the river; come with me."

He rose briskly from his chair and we hurried off the porch and to the southern outskirts of the town, where the Pilcomayo is no more than a moderately sized creek. Several canoes lay partly drawn up on the bank, and secured with a rope was the boat to which Higgenbottom referred, and which had been constructed, as he informed me, under his own supervision and mostly by himself.

He had all the remarkable mechanical ingenuity for which his people are famed, and had made a boat some thirty feet long, six or eight feet in width, of a pretty, graceful model, and strong and serviceable. The sides were bullet proof, the small engine (a relic of the visit by the Americans several years before) was well protected, and indeed everything was made as perfect as possible for this expedition.

Painted in large black letters on each side of the white prow were the words:

HAIL COLUMBIA, OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

I surveyed the boat and the patriotic name and looking at my friend with a smile, said:

"Higgenbottom, I'll go with you down the Pilcomayo."

CHAPTER II.

"IF YOU STIR YOU ARE A DEAD MAN!"

PERCY HIGGENBOTTOM was a genius in more than one respect. I never met a man who possessed his mechanical ingenuity.

Closer examination of the craft, which he had christened the Hail Columbia, proved it to be a model in every way. The small engine at the stern was so screened by planking that nothing less than a cannon ball could harm it. The pilot house, near the bow, was equally strong, and a band of heavy glass on all sides allowed the occupant to peer out in every direction without fear of being hit by any missiles such as natives would be apt to hurl. The bunks forward effectually screened the sleepers from any hostile shots.

Each man was furnished with a Winchester rifle, and there was abundance of ammunition. I was the only one without a weapon of this sort, and there was no means of procuring one in Sucre.

I looked upon this after all as a small matter, since it was not likely that all five would ever be so placed that they could use the guns with advantage at the same time.

In such a warm country as the plateaus and lowlands of Bolivia and Argentine, fruit constitutes the principal food, though elk and deer are frequently met. We took with us a goodly supply of cocoa, rice, coffee, tobacco and sugar, all of which grow abundantly in the region.

Besides this, there are immense herds of horned cattle, horses, asses and mules, which roam over the succulent, grassy plains.

Further down in Argentine, the *cinchona*, or quinine bark, abounds, besides sarsaparilla, *jalap*, cedars, the American pine, *algaroba* or carob tree, whose fruit affords not only nourishing food, but the refreshing drink *laaga*.

From Sucre southeastward for three hundred miles, the Pilcomayo flows through a wild, rocky section, growing less hilly until at the point named the character of the country has gradually changed to a level plain or lowland. This is the beginning of that vast pampa known as the Gran Chaco, where the untamable Tobas roam, on the alert to attack every stranger that dares enter their country.

The three natives who composed the crew of the Hail Columbia were partly of negro blood, docile, obedient and given to few words. The one who had been taught to manage the engine was the eldest and was in middle life, quite wrinkled and, like his companions, had immense bushy hair and wore no clothing except a breech clout.

He was named Padro, and the others were Hernandez and Armetia. They reminded me of the meek Chinamen, as they toiled willingly, silently and patiently.

A striking evidence of the shiftless character of the people in that part of the world was that when we started early the next morning after the interview I have described, there was not a single man, woman or child on the bank to watch us, even though the little steamer was a novel sight to them.

Since the course of the Pilcomayo for a considerable distance is very rough Higgenbottom was wise in making his craft draw the least possible water. He knew that boats of greater draft had preceded him and he was confident that with the high water he could safely make the descent to the level country below.

I had no intention of being a simple passenger on this voyage, which was to prove the most eventful of our lives. I had given my friend to understand that I would not consent to share in the price he expected to receive for making his venture, and I meant to give him all the help I could. After watching him for some time managing the wheel with a skill I could not hope to equal, I remarked that I would wait until the stream became broader and smoother before taking my trick, and in the mean time would serve as engineer for a part of the time.

The engine worked with perfect smoothness. We had piled enough wood aboard to last us throughout the day, it being our intention to lie to at night, after replenishing our supply, for it was altogether too risky to plunge down the narrow, boisterous stream except by daylight.

It will be noted that for the time most of the work devolved upon Higgenbottom and myself. He gave his whole attention to the steering, while I manipulated the engine.

This proved so monotonous after a time that I turned it over to Padro, who had been acting as fireman, and, going forward, entered the pilot house, which was just large enough to hold both of us and still give my friend freedom in managing the wheel.

There was no lack of excitement in my new position. Little was attempted in the way of conversation, for Higgenbottom's wits were occupied and I was deeply interested in watching him. There were deep, impenetrable woods on the right and left, the rocks often towering to the height of ten, twenty and even fifty feet. The rushing torrent was crested with foam, whirling in eddies about boulders, plunging swiftly forward for several hundred yards, like a raceway, then broadening out into triple its usual width, with a more sluggish flow, and again spinning between obstructions, the sight of which caused me to catch my breath.

"It only needs one collision with some of those half sunken rocks to wind up the career of the Hail Columbia,' I remarked, and my friend nodded his head without speaking, as he gave the wheel a quick turn.

For hundreds of miles after leaving Sucre there is no village or settlement of whatever nature on either bank of the Pilcomayo. Some of the natives occasionally approach the stream, but this takes place so rarely that neither Higgenbottom nor I gave it a thought.

We knew there was little peril of that nature to be feared until we approached El Gran Chaco, which had been fatal to every explorer who attempted to force his way through it.

The noon had passed but a short time when the captain pulled the cord attached to a little bell over the engine as a signal for Padro to shut off steam. This was done, and the craft was turned to the right and run close to land, where Hernandez and Armetia, in obedience to orders, sprang ashore and made a rope fast to the trunk of a tree. The landing could not have been effected more easily.

"Anything the matter?" I asked, as the captain left the wheel and passed out of the pilot house.

"I think not, but it is better to examine the engine; it is new and there is probably friction in some part."

He passed aft and made a careful inspection of all the bearings and machinery. He carefully re-oiled every portion, after which we stepped ashore, on his suggestion that we might as well take our dinner there.

We placed our fruit upon a broad, flat stone, close to the edge of the stream, Percy and I by ourselves, while the crew sat a short distance off, similarly occupied. The water was clear and cold, and we used each his tin cup in making our coffee.

"It is risky business," I remarked, "but you could not have guided the boat better had you spent your life on this stream."

"My heart was in my mouth more than once," replied the captain, with a grin and shake of his head; "the river is clearer than I expected to find it, but some of the sunken rocks I could not locate until the boat was almost over them. I felt it scrape them several times, but," he added with a sigh of relief, "matters will improve as we get further down."

"Yes, in that respect, but they'll be much worse in another."

"You have the Tobas in mind; won't they be surprised when *she* sneezes at them?" he asked, winking toward the slim brass piece at the bow. "I should have liked to use compressed air, but hadn't the means of working it, and the spring will do the business well enough."

"You won't let any of the crew handle that gun?"

"Not much; I won't let even you, for no one besides myself understands the full construction of the piece and how to aim it."

"The trouble with those things is that they are sometimes as dangerous to those at the breach as at the muzzle."

"Not when one knows his business, but——"

My friend, sitting crossed legged on the other side of the stone, the same as myself, was in the act of raising his tin cup filled with steaming coffee to his lips, when he abruptly stayed his hand, and instantly a look of horror came into his eyes and overspread his face.

At first I thought he was looking at me, but immediately I perceived he was staring at something behind me. By a superhuman effort, he regained his self control and in a husky whisper said:

"Windermyer, keep your nerve! If you stir you are a dead man!"

I was petrified as much by his looks and manner as by his words. I felt the cold perspiration break out over my body, but I fixed my eyes upon him, as if I were a drowning man and was watching a boat approaching.

I heard nothing, felt nothing, saw nothing but him, and yet somewhere behind me and within arm's reach and steadily drawing nearer was death in one of its most horrible forms.

"For God's sake," I gasped in an appalled whisper; "end the suspense in some way, Percy, for I cannot stand this more than a second longer."

"You must!" he whispered in turn; "keep your nerve; don't move hand or foot; act as if you were a dead man; don't take your eyes from my face!"

CHAPTER III.

ONE OF BOLIVIA'S ANIMAL PRODUCTS.

At this moment I perceived that my friend, who was sitting as motionless as a statue, was slowly lowering his right hand to his hip, where one of his revolvers reposed. He did not change the fixed stare at the object, whatever it might be, which was behind me.

He was about to draw his weapon, but why such frightful deliberation? Evidently he was afraid of startling my enemy into lightning-like action, by some abrupt movement of his own. Summoning all the power I possessed, I compressed my lips, held my breath, and fixed my eyes unalterably upon Higgenbottom's face.

I saw his muscular fingers close around the butt of his pistol, which began tardily creeping upward until the shining barrel rose to view. Then with the same dreadful slowness the arm commenced straightening out, with the revolver so pointed that I saw the reflected sunlight gleaming in the muzzle.

The man was aiming at my foe, though any one standing ten feet distant would have sworn he was about to shoot me. In that fearful moment, I watched his forefinger gradually increasing its pressure upon the trigger and then, unable to hold my breath longer, I gave a gasping, half shriek and pitched forward on my face.

At the same instant the crack of the pistol rang out and my friend's cheery voice called:

"It's all right, Windermyer! That critter will never hurt you!"

Quickly rallying, as my comrade sprang to his feet and fired a second shot, I leaped over the broad flat stone between us, and as I placed myself at his side, looked behind me.

A serpent no more than two feet in length was threshing the ground, rolling over, twisting and doubling upon itself so rapidly, that it was half a minute before I perceived it was headless; but its frantic struggles suddenly ceased and it lay motionless, dead as dead could be.

"What has become of its head?" was my nonsensical question, for I was still dazed and hardly conscious of what I said.

"I suspect it will be found somewhere in the Gran Chaco or the Argentine Confederation," was the characteristic reply; "at any rate, it vanished when I pulled trigger the first time, so my second shot was wasted."

Assured that all danger was over, we stepped closer to the body and looked at it more critically.

It was beautifully marked with dark red and yellowish stripes running transversely the length of the reptile, upon a background of brilliant black. Two proofs of its venomous nature were noticeable, or rather had been noticeable. The tail was obtuse and the triangular head, as my rescuer explained, had two deep pits in front of the tiny eyes. The latter peculiarity is an invariable sign of a poisonous serpent.

"I don't know the name of the infernal thing," said Higgenbottom, "but if there ever was concentrated deviltry and the essence of death wrapped up in one package, it is there. I told you that when I tramped from Concepcion to Sucre I had three native companions—the same that are with me now. I started with four, but one

of them was stung in the hand by that sort of serpent, while sitting at dinner just as you were, and ten minutes later he was as dead as a door nail."

"Why didn't it strike me?"

"Because it was a little slow. You saw me start, the moment before I warned you not to stir. Where the devilish thing came from I couldn't tell, but just then I saw it coiled not more than a foot from your elbow, in the exact position to strike. Its head lay in the center of the coil, for all the world like one of our own rattlesnakes, and its crimson forked tongue was darting in and out, and its beady eyes were fixed upon you in a way that meant business from the word go.

"Providentially you were listening to something I happened to be saying at that moment, and the serpent seemed to be in doubt whether you were a live target and fair game or not. It was waiting to settle the question before striking, which was why I warned you not to stir. My voice seemed to attract its attention for a second or two to me, and I should have been glad could I have drawn its attack, for I was prepared and in no danger. Probably it confused your voice with my own and your rigid position kept up its doubt.

"My fear was that any abrupt movement on my part would precipitate its attack upon you. That explains the care with which I drew my revolver. The abrupt action came when the trigger was pulled."

"You couldn't have made a better shot."

"Bah! how could I miss, when the target was less than ten feet distant?"

"I always supposed the deadliest snakes were in India."

"That land has more than any other part of the world, but every tropical region has its share. The *cobra di capello* is ranked by scientists as the most deadly serpent in the world, but I think this species runs it a close second. I wonder whether our headless enemy has a mate near," and Higgenbottom, revolver in hand, began looking about him.

The possibility of such being the fact sent a shiver through me, and, whipping out my own weapon, I glanced at my feet and here and there around, ready to fire and retreat on the first warning.

Our flurry had thrown the three natives, sitting a short distance away, into a state of mind. They bounded to their feet on the instant the captain's weapon was discharged, and were hurrying toward us, when Padro uttered a terrified cry, and seemed to leap fully six feet from the ground. His companions bounded in different directions as if a bomb had exploded between them.

"There's another!" exclaimed the captain, running toward the spot.

But Padro anticipated him. Retreating before the serpent, which showed its amazing audacity by gliding straight toward him, he caught up a fragment of rock that must have weighed eight or ten pounds, and hurled it fiercely at his enemy, and the thing was crushed to a pulp under the formidable missile.

"Captain," said I, "we seem to have struck a settlement of these pests; I favor a change of base."

"There's no need of waiting longer," he replied.

The rope was unwound from the tree and we sprang aboard. I took charge of the engine for a while, and we were speedily spinning down stream with Captain Higgenbottom at the wheel as before.

The character of the country through which we were passing underwent no perceptible change for a considerable time. Rocks and boulders lined the bank and the dense forests, composed of an endless variety of woods, walled us in on both sides.

One gratifying fact was beyond dispute: the upper Pilcomayo was becoming broader and smoother, good

reason for believing our boat would find less and less difficulty in speeding down stream.

Still there could be no assurance on this point. In truth, the presumption was that we should encounter more than one dangerous, if not impassable portion, for many miles of mountainous region were before us, and it would be strange if the river were not broken by canyons, rapids, cataracts and waterfalls.

During a discussion of this phase of the question, before we started, I asked Higgenbottom what he would do, in the event of being confronted by such a state of affairs.

"There's only one thing that can be done," was his reply; "we'll take the Hail Columbia apart, carry it piecemeal below the impassable place, and put it together again."

"What a task!"

"There's nothing so tremendous about it; these three natives and I built the boat in the first place, and since every part has been fitted, there may be a good deal of hard labor, but nothing impossible of accomplishment. All the same, I hope the necessity may not arise."

"So do I," was my fervent response, as I recalled the small but heavy boiler, and other portions which would prove a cumbersome burden for the five of us.

Turning over the care of the engine to Padro I went forward and entered the wheelhouse beside the captain, who showed his unruffled mind by smoking one of his black, heavy cigars.

"Now if the Pilcomayo will only behave itself," he said, with his keen gray eyes scanning the bubbling current ahead, "I can't see why this excursion of ours to Asuncion may not prove a pleasant picnic."

"What do you mean by the river 'behaving itself'?"

"Why, doing as it is now doing—broadening out and growing smoother until it becomes the most pleasant kind of stream for the Hail Columbia to navigate."

"Whatever its course and condition, the men who have attempted its passage during the past century and a half and more, had the same advantage that you will have."

"You persist in overlooking one of the most important factors in the game, which is the slight draft of the Hail Columbia, which allows it to travel where mighty few craft in the world can go."

"What do you mean to do when the Tobas attack you, as they certainly will?"

The gray eyes flashed as he replied:

"I shall be disappointed, if they let us alone. In the first place, this boat can outrun any of their canoes and it will be high old fun to dash among them at our topmost speed. You commented this morning on the sharpness of our prow, which may prove more useful than you suspected. Then, too," he added with his grin, "I'm anxious for Uncle Sam to have a chance to say 'Howdy?' to a few hundred of the inquiring aborigines."

It was impossible for me to share the hopefulness of my friend, but I said nothing to cool his ardor. We were in for it and all that was left for us was to push ahead, trusting to Providence and our pluck and good luck.

Looking down stream, we saw that the river, which was fully fifty yards in width, was fast growing narrower. At the same time, the massive walls became more lofty and a comparatively short distance in advance, they towered two or three hundred feet above the surface, the wooded crests approaching so close in some places that it looked as if a man might leap across, though obviously such could not be the case.

"Captain," I said, after a moment's scrutiny of the river, "it looks as if we are approaching a canyon."

"There isn't any doubt of it," he calmly replied; "I don't know how ex-

tensive it is, but we must go ahead, hit or miss."

CHAPTER IV.

A PERILOUS PLUNGE.

I WAS terrified, for surely this reckless, headlong style of going forward must bring disaster.

"Why don't you stop and make an examination of the canyon?" I asked, laying my hand on his arm.

"It's too late; we're going too fast, and there's no place to land, even if we cared to do it; brace yourself and trust to heaven."

He was right. The current was plunging onward with the speed of a race horse, and the most furious reversal of the screw would not check the boat. Each side of the narrow stream was a solid wall of dripping rock. We must dive forward, and, as he had said, it all rested with Providence whether we should emerge alive or be dashed to death.

The next moment, the craft, as if aware of its fearful peril, plunged into the narrow passage and shot ahead with dizzying speed. I held my breath, while the captain smoked his cigar, grasped the spokes of the wheel and remained as cool as an iceberg.

He had signalled to Padro to shut off steam, and we were now at the mercy of the resistless current, which tossed us about as if the Hail Columbia were an eggshell.

It was like the Maid of the Mist careering through the whirlpool below Niagara. Now we shot upward on the crest of an immense wave, then were whirled sideways, again spun clear around like a top, and all the time we were speeding forward with a swiftness that fairly took away one's breath.

I involuntarily closed my eyes when certain that we were about to crash against the rocks in front, and be shattered to a thousand fragments, but I opened them again when I heard and felt the grating of the sharp prow against the dripping mountain wall. The captain was tugging at the wheel, though all his efforts were useless, since we were wholly helpless.

Mist and spray were everywhere. Glancing through the open window behind me, I saw all three of the natives on their knees, hands clasped and their ashy lips trembling with petitions to the saints to save them from impending death.

It was indeed a time for an appeal to Heaven, and I never prayed more fervently, as I stood with feet apart and holding on for dear life to each side of the narrow pilot house.

The coolness of Percy Higgenbottom was not the least amazing feature of the awful drive through that canyon. Never once did he remove his cigar from between his set teeth, and the occasional puffs which showed through the whirling mist proved that he was extracting some sort of a solace from the nicotine.

He kept turning the wheel to the right or left, but he must have known it was labor wasted. Perhaps it was a relief to his tense nerves.

The seconds were minutes in length. The tunnel-like passage wound in and out, turning one way and then another so abruptly that it was impossible to see plainly for more than a hundred yards in advance and oftener not that far. Why the craft was not shattered to atoms is more than I can ever understand, but suddenly the voice of my friend rang out:

"Hurrah! That was well done!"

We were through the canyon and gliding into the broadening and comparatively smooth waters below. All danger for the time was over.

The captain rang for Padro to give the craft steam, but he had to repeat the signal several times before the dazed fellow understood what was required of him. Then I heard the screw churning the waters, and as the captain whirled the wheel over, the boat cir-

cled about and headed up stream, as if it were about to try to force its way back through the canyon.

Before I could understand the meaning of this strange action, Higgenbottom called to me:

"Here, Windermyer! Take the wheel and hold her nose just as it is!"

As I took his place and gripped the spokes, he opened the little door in front and hurried to the bow. The dynamite cartridges reposed in a box beside the gun, the box being nailed in position, so that it could not be displaced by any violent motion of the boat.

I saw him pick up one of the cartridges and carefully push it into the throat of Uncle Sam, forcing it gently to the breach, with the swab or ramrod provided for that purpose.

The captain was about to discharge the piece and I looked around to discover the target.

There it was on the crest of the high bank just behind us, in the form of the largest jaguar upon which I have ever looked. The animal, known as the American tiger, is found from Texas to Patagonia.

It is robust, stouter than the leopard and powerfully built, its tail barely reaching the ground when it stands erect, and it is one of the most dreaded of all the wild beasts of the American forest.

The animal before us was standing on the edge of the rocky bluff, fully a hundred feet above, and double that distance away. Although the species is noted for its curiosity, this one was evidently surveying the craft with wondering amazement, for it surely had never seen anything of the kind until then.

Its somewhat clumsy form was outlined against the clear sky beyond, as if painted thereon with a brush, its head being high, while it stood as rigid as a statue in bronze.

Having adjusted his dynamite cartridge, Captain Higgenbottom held the cord connected with the spring in the base of the gun, calmly waiting till the tossing stern should be at the right elevation before he discharged the piece. Carefully studying the motion of the craft, he suddenly gave the string a sharp jerk. I heard the rattle of the released spring, a peculiar whirring, coughing noise, and then saw the oblong missile leap out of the muzzle, and describing a graceful parabola, the conical point impinged fairly against the solid rock, some twenty feet below where the jaguar stood.

The explosion that followed was terrific, fragments of the stone dropping on the Hail Columbia like hailstones, while the jar of the hull was perceptible beneath our feet. The wonder is that the boat did not suffer injury.

But the jaguar—oh, where was he?

Through the tempest of splintered rock that flew high in air, I saw him seemingly leap to a prodigious height, but, coming down, he missed the rock, his elongated body tumbling end over end through the misty space into the foaming torrent, where it sank as if it were so much lead.

The captain snatched off his Panama and swung it above his head.

"What do you think of *that?*" he called, turning his grinning countenance toward me.

"I did not see that he was struck."

"He wasn't; the concussion simply *raised* him and when he came down he missed his footing; the miserable critter was scared to death."

"Scared to death!" I repeated; "if he had not been desperately hurt, he would have swum to shore."

"He was too frightened to swim," insisted the captain, reëntering the pilot house and bringing the bow of the boat down stream. "I sent that shell by way of experiment and it worked beautifully."

He was as delighted as a boy over the incident, but I could not join him in his reiterated wish that the Tobas would attack the boat.

For the following ten or twelve miles our progress was smooth and even. The Pilcomayo maintained its increased width as compared with the portion above the canyon, and the current was not only deep, but comparatively free from rocks and obstructions such as kept us in suspense and peril earlier in the day.

The dangerous passage had been effected when the afternoon was about half gone, and at the end of the distance named, the captain began studying the banks on either side in quest of a suitable place to lie to for the night.

It did not take him long to find a favorable spot, and running the boat to the right, the rope was again fastened around the trunk of a tree, and we went ashore at a place similar in many respects to the one where he had halted for lunch.

About three fourths of the fuel had been consumed, and the crew, each with an axe over his shoulder, entered the dense woods, where some of the trees grew so close together that a man had to move sideways to force his way between them.

The great dread of the natives was of poisonous serpents and wild beasts. Fortunately, it was not necessary for them to go more than a short distance from the boat, and Padro took his Winchester with him. They completed their task without molestation from any of the denizens of the wilderness.

While they were thus engaged, the captain and I started a fire underneath the trees near the stream and prepared our coffee. Higgenbottom had brought a quantity of jerked or dried deer's meat with him, which suggested the pemmican, so popular in cold latitudes. This with our black, hard bread, our coffee and delicious fruit, made as palatable a meal as one could wish.

Since indeed a considerable supply remained, and we had brought a small barrel of the coarse native flour, and sugar and cocoa, it looked as if we should not be compelled to use our firearms very often to secure additional provisions. Milk and butter, of course, were out of the question. Both of us had learned long before that it is no hardship to go without them when one has an abundance of the other necessities of life.

By the time our evening meal was finished and the boat was heaped up with all the wood it could conveniently carry, night was closing in. Not a serpent or wild animal had disturbed us, though they might appear at any moment. The peculiar cries of birds, some strangely musical and others harsh and discordant, sounded from all portions of the forest, and it is remarkable how soon one becomes accustomed to them.

It was arranged that the crew should sleep on board the steamer, where they seemed to feel more secure than on land, while the captain and I were to spend the night ashore.

"We shall have to keep to our cramped quarters on the boat so much of the time," he explained, "that we shall often yearn for a place to stretch our limbs; let us, therefore, use the chance while it is ours, for it won't do to try anything of the kind in the land of the Tobas."

CHAPTER V.

A STARTLING AWAKENING.

CAPTAIN HIGGENBOTTOM was too wise to think of sleeping on the ground in a South American forest, where the wealth of animal and insect life renders exposure dangerous and often fatal. Moreover, as is the case in Cuba, the heavy dews are almost sure to cause illness, often followed by fevers and death.

It is a fact, however, regarding the Argentine Republic, Bolivia and many other countries, that while the climate is unhealthful to the last degree during the rainy season, it is generally the

reverse at other times. The rainy period, the reader will bear in mind, was well past, and we had entered upon a term during which the rain was not likely to fall for months. From April to October is the winter to the south of the equator.

My friend and I brought two strong, grassy hammocks from the little steamer, which with some labor were suspended between the branches of the trees, at a distance of nearly thirty feet from the ground. The ropes were tied with care, for a fall from such a height was likely to be unpleasant to say the least.

We were thus beyond the reach of any serpents or creeping things, our only peril being possibly from jaguars, which are expert climbers. The same perhaps could be said of leopards, though they are less to be feared than the American tiger, which, of course, is much the inferior of his Asiatic brother.

Having adjusted the hammocks we carefully crept into them, each taking a Winchester with him, though neither expected to need the weapon. The space between us was about a dozen feet, and our aerial couches dipped almost parallel.

Having settled comfortably into position, we each lit a cigar and talked for half an hour before we began to feel the approach of drowsiness. What was said was not worth recording.

Before climbing to our perches, we threw a mass of wood on the blaze below, so located that if either of us should fall we were in no danger of being burned.

When I had finished my cigar and flung the stump away, I asked my comrade if he was asleep. Since he made no reply, I received the only affirmative answer possible.

A few minutes later his heavy breathing showed him to be in the land of dreams, where I expected soon to join him, and probably would have done so, but for an unexpected interruption.

That which I first noticed was a queer chattering sound below me. Leaning over the rim of my hammock, I saw a grotesque sight.

Gathered around the fire and plainly shown in the reflected light, were eight or ten monkeys, moving nimbly to and fro in their vivacious fashion and evidently stirred with curiosity, not only by the fire itself, but by the sight of the hammocks suspended far above them. I could see their comical faces turned upward, while they chattered as if exchanging views over the odd invaders of their domain.

As partially revealed in the broken light, they resembled the monkeys seen in the shows and museums of our own country, though under the full glare of day it is probable I should have detected more than one difference.

They were in continual motion, passing back and forth, looking aloft, their faces reminding me in the firelight of a number of dwarfed old men, and the ceaseless action of the jaws suggested that all were chewing gum, after the manner of their superior brethren, or rather sisters.

Suddenly two of them bobbed off toward the boat, as if they had been appointed a committee to investigate that strange creation. In a few minutes they returned and then there was more chattering.

An instant later, as if in obedience to their leader, all scattered and disappeared, but they had not departed. Instead, they nimbly climbed the trees, and the odd sounds showed they were among the limbs around us.

Now and then I caught a glimpse of one of the comical creatures, peeping among the leaves at me or at my companion. When one of them crept timidly out on the big limb which partly supported my hammock, I suddenly circled my hat and called "Shoo!" He whisked away in a flash, and the next minute all were chattering again, just far enough off to be invisible among the dense vegetation.

Of course nothing in the nature of danger was to be feared from these creatures, though instances are known when, upon being assailed, they have rallied in large numbers and put up a brave defense. It would have been cruel to harm them and no such thought entered my mind.

I regretted that Higgenbottom was not awake to be amused by the entertaining sight, but it would do him more good to sleep and I did not disturb him. The faintest possible misgiving that they might cause some annoyance kept me awake longer than usual, but after a time I grew weary of the incessant chatter in the branches, and was sinking into sleep, when a startling thing took place.

I wonder whether those mischievous creatures really understood what they were doing when they began slyly gnawing off the rope which held one end of Percy Higgenbottom's hammock. They must have, for what other reason could they have for gnawing it?

There was not a thought of anything of the kind in my mind, and the monkeys were screened from sight. The captain's snores had risen to a penetrating degree, when presto! the knot nearest his head was eaten asunder, and the next thing I saw was the figure of my friend, as dimly shown in the firelight, turning somersaults through the branches to the ground!

Remarkable good fortune attended that involuntary getting out of bed; for the limbs broke his fall, and it so happened that when he reached the earth, he landed on his feet. That he was thoroughly awakened need not be said any more than that he was mad "clean through."

His Winchester had fallen unharmed beside him, and snatching it from the ground, he glared around in the firelight, and uttered a number of exclamations so vigorous that it were better to make no record of them.

Seeing that he was unhurt, I gave way to merriment and laughed until I was hardly able to breathe. He stood angry and glowering, and in a few moments savagely demanded:

"What are you laughing at?"

"You; it is the greatest joke of my life; I never saw anything half so funny," and I sank back in my hammock and gave way until I could laugh no more.

"Some folks have no more feelings than to ridicule the misfortunes of others."

"It may be unfeeling, captain, but I can't help it——"

At that moment I found myself going downward, entangled in my hammock, for the instant, and then, as I frantically clutched at the limbs I slid out of the dangling couch, and would have dropped squarely on the head of my friend had he not leaped to one side in the nick of time.

I admit that I was considerably jarred but the branches served me the same friendly office and I was comparatively unharmed.

I turned around to explain matters to Higgenbottom, but he lay on the ground doubled up with mirth. He certainly had warrant for his merriment, and I made a feeble attempt to join him, but it was a failure. I could only wait until he had recovered, and even then, when he regained his strength, he gave way to fits of laughter that it struck me were altogether superfluous.

Man has been described as a creature who laughs, but I believe that every one of those monkeys that witnessed our discomfiture were shaken from head to the extremity of his tail with merriment, for such wild chattering and skipping about never before disturbed that ancient forest.

Succeeding the captain's outburst came a feeling of resentment at the trick that had been played on him. Throwing additional wood on the fire, he moved around under the trees, gazing aloft at the animals of which he could catch glimpses as they scampered from limb to limb.

"If I could be certain which one did that, I would bring his fun to a stop," he said, half disposed to fire at a venture.

"Since it is impossible to tell, restrain your wrath. I was jarred twice as much as you, and if I can forgive my tormentor, I am sure you should."

"You are just as mad as I, but are trying to hide it. Well, that ends the hammock siestas in a country which abounds with monkeys."

We walked the short distance through the gloom to where the steamer was moored to the shore, and on the way thither, I noticed for the first time that there was a moon in the clear sky. It was not full, but it shed considerable light, which was unobserved by us amid the shadows of the wood.

Arrived at the boat, we found all three of the crew sleeping soundly. They were so accustomed to the noises of the wilderness that they found them of a soothing nature rather than otherwise.

"I don't fancy sleeping so close to the bank," I remarked; "why not move out into the stream, where it will not be so easy for wild animals to reach us?"

"I was thinking of that very thing. There being no steam up, we can shove the steamer with poles."

The rope was untied from the trunk of the tree, and stepping aboard, we pushed against the bank. The craft was so small it readily yielded, and we kept at work until near the middle of the river, which, as well as I can recall, was seventy five yards or more in width.

By that time the current was carrying us downward, but when the captain let the anchor drop from the stern, the boat quickly came to rest. The disturbance caused Padro to look up from his couch forward and ask what was going on. A word reassured him and he lay down again, neither of his companions having awakened.

I had been so shaken up by my mishap that I lay awake for some time after the captain's stertorious breathing showed he was again unconscious. I was lying on a blanket just in front of the silent engine, and after a time, with the varied noises of the woods in my ears, sank into unconsciousness.

I must have slept a full hour, when, with no apparent cause, I awoke in full command of my senses. Without stirring I lay still and listened.

Every one of my companions was asleep, and for a while I could detect nothing out of the usual order of things; but finally, with a thrill of alarm, I became aware of the fact that there was something unusual going on, and that, too, very near at hand.

CHAPTER VI.

DRAWING NEAR EL GRAN CHACO.

The current, split by the sharp prow of the steamer, rippled past, but amid the faint, soothing sound, I distinguished a disturbance of the water, which I knew was caused by something else.

Rising on my elbow, I listened intently and was soon able to note that the noise was traveling around the boat.

When first recognized, it was at the stern and could be plainly followed, as it moved along the opposite side and then around the prow toward where I was lying. Suddenly the noise ceased, and listening a full minute, I was unable to hear it.

"It is some animal," I reflected, "that has taken a look at the steamer and is now returning to shore."

Cautiously and silently I raised my head and peered over the side. At the very moment of doing so, the boat tipped several inches, and the frightful front of a leopard came up over the gunwale, exactly opposite my face and not six inches distant.

It will always be a question with me

as to which was the more scared—the wild beast or myself. I was literally transfixed for the instant, when those round, glaring eyes rose so near my own that I clearly felt the hot breath in my face, as it came through the partly opened jaws.

Raising his head, the brute had rested one paw on the upper edge of the gunwhale, his weight causing the slight tipping alluded to, and he either intended to come over the side or to take a look at the interior. It was a remarkable coincidence that he and I made our movements at precisely the same instant, and when so near each other.

The leopard hesitated for a moment as if trying to grasp the situation, and then, with a whiffing snort, dropped back into the water and began swimming in a perfect panic for the left bank of the river; that is, opposite to where we had kindled our campfire.

He was a splendid swimmer and he went through the water with astonishing speed, the ripples spreading out behind him like a fan. In a brief while, he entered the shadows thrown out by the trees overhanging the bank and I saw him no more.

While this was going on I sat up in my bunk, both forearms resting on the gunwale and watched him. Not until he had vanished did it occur to me that a fine chance had been offered to use my Winchester and bag a specimen of the royal game of the country. Nothing would have been easier than to send a bullet through that vicious looking head, but it was too late now to think of anything of the kind.

My experience, however, was sufficient to drive away all thought of sleep. When a perch among the branches of a tree, or a couch aboard the steamer itself would give no security, it was better to take turns in acting the sentinel. I wondered that Captain Higgenbottom had not arranged for that before we lay down. It certainly would have to be done later on.

My rifle reposed within arm's reach, and, still leaning on the gunwale, I resolved to keep guard until daylight, when, the others being awake, it would be safe for me to sleep. With all my senses on the alert, I was sure no enemy could approach within striking distance without instant discovery.

It is probable that I had held the position described for ten or fifteen minutes, when I closed my eyes and did not open them again until the sun was shining and my friends had been busy about the boat for half an hour.

"While your position was not the most favorable for sleep," said Higgenbottom, "you were resting so comfortably that we let you alone. We will have breakfast on board and we ought to make considerable progress today."

Steam was already blowing off from the little engine, and while the captain and I were eating our morning meal, I told the story of the leopard. He laughed.

"After this, some one must always stand guard. I didn't think it necessary, for it will be quite a while before we reach the section of the Tobas, but the wild animals in this part of the world are altogether too fond of prying into other people's affairs. I don't expect to use Uncle Sam for a week or more, but he might as well be ready for any emergency."

He passed forward to where the narrow throated piece of ordnance was securely fixed in place, examined the spring which was operated by the cord that entered through the vent hole, and then, by severe exertion, he forced the mechanism back into a tense position by pressing the ramrod with all his might against it.

Since the arrangement was his own construction, it worked perfectly. Then the highly explosive cartridge was carefully adjusted, and the machine was ready for deadly business.

Once more the captain grasped the wheel in the pilot house, I standing at his elbow, and the eventful voyage was resumed.

Naturally, after he had made his contract in La Paz, the Bolivian capital, the New Englander gathered all the information he could regarding the mysterious Pilcomayo. He therefore knew much more than I, but I am bound to say that this knowledge was anything but extensive.

"Some of the explorers who started down the stream the same as we," he remarked, "succeeded in reaching the edge of the Gran Chaco before they were massacred or turned back. The same may be said of those who ascended the river from the Rio de la Plata or Parana, so that the only portion unknown is that which flows across the northeastern corner of Argentina and through the Toba country."

"How extensive is that?"

"As nearly as I can figure out, it is some three hundred miles. We have only to make a dash across the stretch to accomplish that which has been tried for nearly two centuries in vain."

"My feeling is that it will never be done except by an armed force large enough to beat off any body of Indians that can be collected."

"That may be the case regarding Spanish enterprise, but Yankee ingenuity will play around those people every time. A few dynamite shells and the swift flight of the Hail Columbia will make those redskins feel like thirty cents."

"How easily they might block us by building a dam across the stream in front!"

The shrewd fellow lit another cigar, and since the boat just then required little attention, he grinned at me in his suggestive way.

"No doubt, but this ain't the part of the world where the Tobas live, and it will be a week or more before we get the first glimpse of them. By that time, my good fellow, the river will be three or four times its present width, we shall have a free course and can leave them behind as if they were standing still."

There seemed logic in this, but it was singular that the New Englander in gathering information about the Pilcomayo overlooked one strange fact, of which he and I were to become informed in the most alarming manner conceivable. At present, neither held the slightest suspicion of a truth which, had we but known it, would have overturned our ideas.

That day's work was encouraging and added to our hopes. We encountered more than one rough passage, where all the skill of the captain was called into play, but he was easily equal to the demand. We passed through a second canyon, but it was not so perilous as that already described, and we scraped past several sunken rocks that were dodged in the nick of time.

It is to be remembered that we were rapidly leaving the mountainous section for the lowlands. Even though the southern winter had begun, we were certain to encounter hot, smothering weather, and prudence was necessary to escape fever and the diseases to which the country is peculiarly subject.

We repeatedly saw animals on the shore, most of which surveyed us with wondering curiosity, as well they might. Both the captain and myself occasionally took a shot at a jaguar or leopard, but I am ashamed to say that in no instance was there any evidence that they were hit by the bullets that cut the leaves about them.

The parrots and brilliant songsters that flitted among the branches were not disturbed. Some of them exhibited every tint of the rainbow, and others looked like balls of flame as they darted through the green vegetation.

It was a relief not to see any of the hideous serpents, which are liable to be encountered at all times. In that section of the continent is found the genuine boa constrictors, some of which are more than a score of feet in length.

It would be monotonous to relate in detail the incidents of the succeeding

week or more, since there was a strong similarity in them. We sometimes camped on shore and again slept on the steamer. I need not add that at no time was the boat unguarded, and to this vigilance was doubtless due our immunity from more than one unpleasant visit by wild beasts.

We caught fish and shot several wild turkeys that were foolish enough to approach our camp, and never suffered for lack of food, for even at that season an abundance of wild fruits were everywhere. The river increased in width with a more sluggish current, until it was more than a hundred yards between the banks.

Far to the left and again to the right could be traced the lofty mountain ranges, outlined against the clear sky, some of them of such altitude that their peaks are forever crowned with snow, but none of the cool breezes fanned our cheeks. The month of April in the lowlands of Bolivia, though marking the beginning of winter, is one of the most trying seasons of the year.

Although we were without the means of locating ourselves with anything approaching certainty, we agreed on the afternoon of the tenth day that we were near El Gran Chaco, and consequently were entering the country of the terrible Tobas, who, as has been shown, wrought such frightful havoc with all explorers who dared to venture into the domain claimed by them.

Standing on the little steamer, which was puffing leisurely forward, we noticed the change in the face of the country that had been going on for two or three days. The hills and mountains had disappeared and on either hand stretched the seemingly limitless grassy pampas, over which millions of horned cattle roam at will, furnishing an exhaustless supply of animal food to the untamable savages of the section. Through the captain's glass he detected a vast herd to the westward, cropping the succulent grass, and he was still studying them when he exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"What is it?" I demanded.

"A party of Toba Indians," was the reply.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST SIGHT OF THE TOBAS.

The Pilcomayo at this point was fully an eighth of a mile wide, with a current so sluggish that it was hardly perceptible. It was so roiled by previous rains that we could not see the bottom, but we judged the depth to be eight or ten feet, more than amply sufficient for the draft of the Hail Columbia. Had we used one of the poles with which the boat was provided, we should have discovered an alarming fact.

As I have stated, the vast grassy plains stretched away on either hand until the line of the horizon was reached. The Gran Chaco covers hundreds of square miles and there could be no doubt that our steamer was entering the highly dangerous region.

On the left bank and reaching to the margin of the stream, was a stretch of timber, covering eight or ten acres. Contrary to the great extent of forest passed on our way to this point, it was almost entirely free of bushes and undergrowth, and most of the trees stood so far apart that in many places we could catch glimpses of the plain beyond.

It was among these trunks that Captain Higgenbottom had discovered a dozen or more forms that were the first savages we had seen since leaving Sucre, and were undoubtedly some of the terrible Tobas. They were so near that the glass was not required to discern them distinctly.

They were moving to and fro, their whole attention evidently centered upon the boat, and they soon came down to the edge of the wood where they were seen still more plainly.

They were of ordinary stature, wearing no clothing except a breech clout, with bushy hair, and the upper parts of their bodies and their faces were daubed with pigments of varying colors. As may be supposed, we studied them with profound curiosity.

As we had been told, they had no firearms but carried long bows, with quivers of arrows suspended behind their shoulders, after the manner of the primitive tribes of American Indians. In addition to these weapons, most of them had long spears, tipped with stone and ground to a fine point. They can hurl these missiles to remarkable distances, and with wonderful accuracy of aim.

It is said that some of the spear points and even the arrow heads are dipped in a virulent poison, so that a slight wound from either missile is sufficient to cause death.

My gaze was still fixed upon the Tobas, when the captain turned the wheel, so as to steer the steamer directly toward them.

"What do you intend to do?" I asked in astonishment.

"Make a call," he replied with a grin, and seeing that my wonderment was greater, he added:

"I am going nigh enough to drop a shell among them."

"Why not let them alone, if they do not disturb you?"

"But they *will* disturb us; there's nothing like the first impression; a visit from one of the dynamite cartridges will be the best kind of a notice to them to keep their hands off."

This reasoning was not satisfactory, but I made no protest. The windows of the pilot house were closed, so that none of the Toba missiles could reach us, and we were therefore safe for the time.

Padro, Hernandez and Armetia were pallid with terror, for none understood the Tobas better than they. Their inclination was to get as far from the party as possible, but they were helpless. Padro cowered in front of the engine, where he was beyond reach of his enemies, while his companions did not dare raise their heads sufficiently to peer over the gunwales.

One thing was evident—the Tobas did not hold us in any fear. The occurrences of the past with which they must have been familiar, justified this self confidence.

As we slowly pushed toward the wooded shore, they came down to meet us and constituted a formidable body of barbarians, who were as eager to kill all white men as if they were so many rabid dogs.

"Be careful," I whispered to the captain, "or they will pierce some of us with their arrows or spears."

"Impossible; we are protected and the crew will take mighty good care not to draw a shot."

Nevertheless the Tobas took chances. The tallest of the party, and evidently the leader, stepped directly out in front of his warriors, sighted carefully with his long bow and an instant after the twang of the sinew reached our ears, we heard the dull impact of the missile on the outside of the pilot house.

Nothing would have been easier than to pick off this wretch as well as several of his companions, with our Winchesters, but the captain said:

"That won't scare them enough; Uncle Sam must speak."

Slipping out of the pilot house, on the side opposite the Tobas, Higgenbottom stole forward, stooping so low that he was unperceived by any of our enemies, who launched several more arrows, while one hurled a spear with similar accuracy, but no harm could befall us so long as matters remained as they were.

We were about a hundred yards from the natives, and Higgenbottom, who understood perfectly how to manage his gun, waited until he had depressed the muzzle to the right angle, when again he sharply twitched the

string; there was the quick buzz of the coiled steel, and the cylindrical shot, weighing several pounds, plunged upward, and, curving over, struck the ground at the very feet of the leader, who looked curiously at it, as if he felt no suspicion of its real nature.

I held my breath and crouched waiting for the terrific explosion, accompanied by its appalling results; but to our unbounded amazement, the cartridge failed to explode. It seemed to strike the ground right, but it lay as inert as if it were a brick that one of us had tossed to land.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" was the disgusted exclamation of my friend; "did you ever see anything like that?"

"It must be defective, for it hit the earth properly."

"It wasn't defective, for I made them all. Every one of those twenty is perfect and ought to explode."

Meanwhile, the Tobas, after curiously scrutinizing the oblong object at their feet, picked it up and began an examination of it. Of course they had never before seen anything of the kind and knew nothing of its deadly nature.

"I hope one of them will drop it to the ground. I will give them another——"

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed, "they're going to throw it back to the boat! If it strikes us there won't be a piece left as big as your hand."

It looked as if the leader intended to do as I suggested, for stepping from among his gang, he poised himself for the throw. Higgenbottom rang for Padro to reverse the engine, but, before he could do so, the missile was hurled.

We might have known, however, that no living person could throw such an awkward object a hundred yards. Still, it looked as if he were about to succeed, but the shell splashed into the water after traveling not more than three fourths of the distance, and sank to the bottom, without having inflicted the least damage upon any one.

It was at this moment that the captain met with the narrowest conceivable escape from death. He exposed himself somewhat recklessly, while reloading the gun, when, like a flash, the leader of the Tobas launched an arrow, which grazed one of the long yellow tufts of hair at my friend's shoulder, and speeding well beyond the steamer dropped into the river.

"By gracious! that fellow can shoot well!" exclaimed Higgenbottom, who took good care not to tempt him again.

I had taken his place at the wheel and turned the prow out into the stream, as the screw began revolving. No danger of any one of the crew exposing himself to spear or arrow so long as he could avoid it.

"I would like to give them another shell," said the captain, looking cautiously up at me, "but I'm afraid there will be a second miss. We have already made a bad impression and another failure will tempt them to renew their attack."

"They can't well do that, since they have no canoes."

"I am told they will swim out in the river and attack any enemy, no matter how formidable."

"We can attend to them with our Winchesters."

By gracious, if the whole party of a dozen or more did not try the very thing we were talking about! Brandishing spears and arrows over their heads and emitting rasping shouts and cries, they began wading toward us.

"Wait until they begin swimming," I suggested, "and then we'll pick them off at our leisure."

But the amazing fact quickly became apparent that there was no necessity for their swimming. When they had advanced half the intervening distance, the water did not rise above their knees.

We had only to remain where we were to have them swarming over the side in the course of a few minutes. The river was much shallower than we

supposed, though still abundantly deep for the steamer.

However, we had much the advantage of the situation, for we could move faster than our enemies and it took us but a short time to place ourselves beyond their reach.

Observing our action, they faced about and returned to land. Thus far no one had been harmed on either side, and the captain was in doubt whether it would not have been much better for all of us, had we sent a few rifle shots among the Tobas.

As for myself, I was relieved that since no real necessity existed for shooting any one, we had refrained from doing so.

Passing in among the trees, a short distance back from the shore, the Tobas were seen to be busy with something. A few minutes later, a column of wavy blue vapor climbed above the treetops and slowly dissolved in the clear air.

"It is a signal fire," I remarked; "they are telegraphing to some of their friends and notifying them of our coming."

"No doubt of it; keep a sharp watch for the answer."

We were not long in descrying it. Directly down stream and perhaps two or three miles away, a second thin column of smoke stained the blue sky. That, too, seemed to ascend from a patch of woods, but the winding course of the river prevented our learning the truth for some time.

Now that no risk was incurred, one of the crew thrust a pole overboard to learn the depth of the water. It was no greater than before, perhaps slightly less.

"This is something I never thought of," said the captain gravely; "we can't afford to have the river become much shallower or we shall be stopped. I suppose it is due to the widening of the current."

"That is one cause, but there must be a great deal of evaporation on these broad, flat plains, even at this season of the year. There will be no more rain for months and it is impossible therefore that our situation should improve."

CHAPTER VIII.

FORGING AHEAD.

One fact was self evident; while the steamer might be able to go ahead for an indefinite distance, it could never make the return voyage to Sucre. The canyons, tremendous current and numerous obstructions were insuperable.

Captain Higgenbottom was generally optimistic in his feelings and found comfort in the apparent fact that the shallowness of the Pilcomayo was mainly due to its great expansion at the section where we first encountered the Tobas. Most of the lakes of that region are simply the broadening out of rivers.

Heading southward, we sped down stream, for it was important that we should lose no time. The river began narrowing, and as we approached the point where the further signal fire was burning, the banks contracted until they were separated by less than a hundred feet. Even this shrank, and naturally the current increased in depth and velocity.

I was standing beside my friend, who, from his slightly elevated position in the pilot house, commanded the most extensive view of the country before us. The vast, grassy plains stretched out on either hand, and the woods, from which the telltale smoke stained the sky, were found to be on our right instead of the left and were no more than two or three acres in extent.

The trees were choked with undergrowth, and for a time we could discern nothing of the savages who, it was certain, were somewhere in the grove.

"I wonder what the devils are doing," said the captain; "for they seem

to be careful about exposing themselves—well, I'll be hanged!"

There was good cause for the exclamation, for at the same moment we saw that the Tobas had hastily thrown a dam across the narrow river, directly in front of us. Branches of trees, dirt and stones of considerable size had been placed in our path, the whole making so much of an obstruction that the speed and depth of the water were considerably increased.

"What shall we do?" I asked in alarm; "we cannot run into the dam, for it will knock the boat to pieces."

"Take the wheel for a few minutes," he said, as he signaled for Padro to slacken speed.

We were now within a hundred yards of the dam and approaching it at a comparatively slow pace. Not a Toba had shown himself. The engineer, instead of merely slackening our progress, shut off steam altogether, which was fortunate for us.

Higgenbottom hurriedly made his way to the ordnance in front and immediately depressed the muzzle and pulled the string.

The shell, true to the aim, sped onward, striking the dam near the middle and exploding with frightful force. All know the tremendous power of this chemical, and the obstruction was shattered to atoms, water, mist, bits of stone, wood and dirt flying in every direction, a lot of débris falling in a shower over the boat.

A clean cut passage a dozen feet in width, was opened in the center of the dam through which the water rushed like a mill race. I rang for full steam and headed the steamer for this channel, for nothing else was possible, and we shot through with arrowy speed. Without paying heed to what I was doing, the captain hastily shoved another shell into the gun.

"Down!" I shouted, "or you're a dead man!"

The air was filled with the most discordant screeches and yells and it looked as if a hundred Tobas leaped from the very ground, dancing, screeching and launching arrows and spears at the boat as it sped past. They ran along the edge of the stream, though they could not equal our speed, and a perfect shower of missiles descended upon the craft.

My friend was wise enough to heed my warning and instantly dropped down out of range. Had he not done so, he surely must have been hit.

But the New Englander, cool, determined and resolute, while prone upon the deck, swung the light piece around so as to point it at the howling group, and again jerked the cord. The dreadful shell dropped directly among the fierce group, burst, and sent fully a dozen into eternity, the whole occurring with such appalling suddenness that it was over before we really comprehended what had taken place.

The execution was so frightful, so overwhelming, that the savages, among the most fearless met anywhere, were dazed. The unharmed or slightly wounded dived into the wood in a panic and instantly vanished from view.

Meantime, the steamer was speeding downward like a race horse. The rush of waters carried it irresistibly and the most I could do was to keep it as nearly as possible in the middle of the channel, and trust to Providence to see us through.

Again the captain, with his wonderful coolness, managed to reload the gun, so as to be ready for another discharge should the opportunity offer.

But we had safely passed two parties of Tobas and Heaven only knew how we should fare when we encountered others.

Higgenbottom climbed up beside me and I surrendered the wheel to him.

"The old gun worked pretty well that time," he chuckled; "those of the Tobas who were not killed were scared out of their senses. I tell you, Windermyer, I have solved the right method

of exploring the mysterious Pilcomayo."

"Far from it; we have just entered the dangerous section, which is several hundred miles in extent, and it will be time enough to hurrah when we have left it behind us."

"At any rate we have made a good beginning—but those fellows are irrepressible."

This allusion was to their action in replenishing the signal fire which had been kindled in reply to the one further up stream. The column of smoke was heavy and displayed a peculiar fluttering motion, as it rose above the tree-tops, which made it clear that it conveyed some message to others of the tribe, most probably still below us.

Great as had been the execution of the dynamite cartridge, it had not deprived the savages of their cunning and treacherous methods. It was impossible to share the hopefulness of my friend, for it cannot be denied that our experience from the moment we caught sight of the Tobas, had been exceedingly lively and was ominous of what awaited us in the near future.

The river broadened slightly, with the current quite rapid and so deep that there was no fear of grounding, so long as we exercised ordinary care, though when this state of affairs would end, it was impossible to say. Looking back, nothing could be seen of the savages, nor did any shouts betray their presence in the wood.

Suddenly a cry of terror came from Padro, standing at the stern in front of the engine, and I hurried thither. He could speak broken English, and in answer to my demand for the cause of his alarm, he pointed to Armetia, who was lying on his face, lengthwise of the boat and a couple of paces from where the terrified engineer was staring at the motionless form.

"What's the matter with him?" I asked.

"He dead!—dead!—dead!" wailed Padro.

Still doubtful, I bent over the prostrate figure and turned it on its side. One glance showed that Padro had spoken truly; the breath of life was gone from the body.

But I was mystified to understand the cause of his death, for I saw no wound upon him, and his dusky countenance looked calm and peaceful, for all the world as if he were asleep.

Reading my question, Padro stooped over and drew forth an arrow that was partly hidden by the body.

"See dat! It do dat!"

In the naked shoulder of the dead man was a slight puncture, such as might have been made by the sting of an ordinary bee. It showed where the keen point of the arrow had barely pierced the skin.

Since the poor fellow had carefully kept out of sight of the Tobas, while the scrimmage was under way, the missile must have glanced against him, taking an eccentric course which robbed it of nearly all its force.

There could be no mistaking the fearful meaning of this incident. The tip of the arrow had been dipped in a poison as deadly as the virus of the cobra, which needs only to pass under the skin to complete its infernal work.

"What a terrible set these Tobas are," I said to the captain, as I rejoined him and explained what had taken place; "such missiles are tenfold worse than dynamite."

"They may be under some circumstances, but we have certainly wrought the most mischief so far. Besides, I doubt whether all their arrows are thus poisoned. From what I learned in Sucre the practice is not common among them."

"It needs but one or two among a hundred to give one an unspeakable dread. You have had several narrow escapes yourself, and you may get nipped when you are not thinking of it."

"A miss is as good as a mile," was the airy response of my friend, whose

spirits most of the time seemed irrepressible.

All our interests were in front of us. We looked back, but the column of smoke which I have described was the only sign of the presence of enemies that met our eyes.

Ahead, the river began broadening again, until it was two or three hundred feet in extent. Once more the muddy water slackened its flow and despite the usual high spirits of Higgenbottom, his face plainly showed he was anxious.

"My only fear," he said in a low voice, "is that the depth may become too slight to navigate the Hail Columbia."

"Suppose it does?" I repeated, thereby asking the question that had been uppermost in my mind for several hours.

"I'm blessed if I can tell what I'll do; don't let's cross a bridge until we reach it. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"Oidinarily that may be good philosophy," I replied with some impatience, "but under circumstances like these it is nonsense. I am convinced that the real obstacle confronting us is the one just named—ah! what does *that* mean?"

The captain noticed it at the same moment—a jarring or tremor which passed through the boat, whose speed was slightly decreased, although the screw was churning the water with the usual vigor.

Higgenbottom nodded his head, for the cause was apparent to both of us. The boat had touched bottom, so lightly, it was true, that the motion was not stopped, and she passed quickly over the shoal place into deeper water.

The incident—slight of itself—meant a great deal. Other shoal spots were certain to be met, and more than likely some of them would prove still shallower, in which event they could not be passed by the Hail Columbia. The captain became serious, and it will be admitted that he had sufficient cause to be a trifle anxious.

CHAPTER IX.

SHORTHANDED.

The afternoon was drawing to a close and we continued under half speed, continually afraid of running aground and sticking fast. Stepping to the side, I thrust the end of one of the poles into the water, and, to my surprise, found the depth nearly five feet.

"Good!" exclaimed Higgenbottom, as I held up the stick and indicated the depth; "if that only continues, we can ask nothing better."

"Ah, that 'if,'" I replied; "the whole question hinges on that."

No more than half of the wood taken on the night before had been used, but it was prudent to renew the supply while the chance was ours, for it might be that when our need was the sorest, we should be shut off from the opportunity.

The captain fixed his attention upon some scrubby trees on our right, a quarter of a mile distant, and headed the steamer for them. The increased depth of the water so encouraged him that he signaled to Padro to go ahead at full speed, but the screw had hardly responded to the renewed vigor when the boat rapidly slackened its progress and then came to a standstill.

"By gracious! we're aground!" he called, and then ordered the engineer to reverse under full steam.

It was fortunate that we happened to be going so slowly at the moment we grounded, and that the bottom of the river was soft mud, for with comparatively little effort the boat backed off from the shoal into deeper water.

This accomplished, the captain headed once more toward the wood, advancing so gradually that the craft seemed hardly to be moving.

We had not forgotten the signal

smoke of the second and larger party of Tobas, and, ever since leaving them behind, had been on the lookout for the reply to it, but failed to discover anything of that nature.

"There may be a party in that very wood lying in wait for us," I suggested.

"I have been studying the place but have seen nothing; have you?"

"No; nevertheless they may be there."

"If so, why should they fail to show themselves, since they can have no reason to suspect we intended stopping there. However, it is easy enough to learn whether any of the devils are lurking among the trees."

Again I pushed the pole over the side and found fully three feet of water. Our speed was not increased, and, when we were within a hundred yards, we stopped.

Higgenbotttom's scheme was that often used by a military force in approaching a wood where there is reason to fear an enemy is hiding. He launched one of the dynamite shells among the trees.

Again there was a frightful explosion which scattered fragments of limbs and trunks in a shower in all directions, some of the bits of branches rising far above the tops of the tallest trees. But that was all. Not a single person showed himself. The Tobas evidently were waiting somewhere else.

"That cartridge served another good purpose," said Higgenbottom; "for it has splintered our fuel for us."

Singularly enough the depth of the water allowed the boat to come up against the bank, and the two natives scrambled over the side to gather the wood, while it could be done in safety. The lifeless form of Armetia was not disturbed, but allowed to lie where it was stretched when the poor fellow succumbed to the poisoned missile.

Leaving the captain to attend to the boat, I sprang ashore and hurried after the couple, to help gather fuel. The shattered limbs and tree trunks, which were scattered over a space of many feet, afforded a striking illustration of the terrific power of the explosive sent among them. It was as my friend had said; the pieces were within easy reach and we rapidly replenished our partly exhausted supply of wood.

When the work was nearly completed, each of us walked back for our last armful. Padro gathered his load, I did the same, and Hernandez had nearly filled his arms, when he stopped with a half suppressed exclamation.

The natives looked at each other and said something in their native tongue, which of course was unintelligible to me. Padro shook his head and Hernandez again spoke, but with great earnestness. Then he suddenly threw down the sticks he had gathered, turned on his heel and started off on a lope, quickly disappearing from view.

Puzzled to understand the meaning of his strange action, I appealed to Padro. He answered, but as before, spoke in his own tongue, and without adding anything moved with his burden toward the boat, I following close behind him.

When I told Higgenbottom of the occurrence, he addressed Padro in his native language, for the New Englander had learned to speak it quite well, and they conversed for a few minutes.

"We shall never see the fellow again," remarked my friend, turning to me; "he has run away."

"And why?"

"Scared; he considers it sure death to go on and believes his only chance for life is to turn about and get out of this infernal country while he has a small chance."

"Isn't he right?"

"Perhaps he is; we shall learn before long. The only wonder," added the captain, lowering his voice, so as not to be overheard, "is that Padro didn't go with him."

"He doesn't seem to be in any panic."

"All the same, he is as frightened as he can be; we shall lose him pretty soon, that is if he is not picked off before he gets an opening to run away."

"Do you intend to remain here by the shore?"

"By no means."

Heading the boat out into the river we steamed forward until the middle was reached, when steam was shut off and the anchor dropped. As we were placed, we had fully a hundred yards of water on either side of the steamer.

"If there are any of the Tobas watching us they can't approach without being seen," said Higgenbottom.

"There is no moon tonight."

"But the sky is clear and there will be plenty of star gleam."

Night gradually descended, and by and by we were walled in on every hand by darkness. It was as Higgenbottom had foretold. There was no moon, but millions of stars twinkled from the unclouded sky.

On either hand, we could make out the dim, shadowy outlines of the shore, but nothing was seen with distinctness and the silence, save from the noises of the solitude, which were never still, was oppressive.

Since my friend was certain that the terrified Padro would desert on the first opportunity, it was idle to place any dependence upon him.

"It will make us shorthanded," I said in a low voice, as we stood at the bow beyond hearing of the native, "but either of us can handle the engine or wheel, and we shall easily get along if that is our only trouble."

"It is a question with me whether we should remain here or feel our way forward while the chance is ours. We can go so slow that little risk will be run."

"Unless the river narrows, in which event we shall offer the Tobas a better chance to attack us."

Finally the captain decided to stay where we were for some hours to come. Resolved to depend upon Padro for nothing, it was arranged that I should mount guard the first half of the night and Higgenbottom the other half. It might seem that each of us would be in danger of falling asleep, since the sentinel keeps his senses only by pacing back and forth; but neither was in need of slumber and we were too deeply impressed with our responsibility to succumb.

Informing Padro, therefore, that he might sleep until called, Higgenbottom stretched out on his couch forward and the native lay down near the engine at the stern. My position was at the bow, where I could readily watch every portion of the river, except immediately aft.

At intervals, I made my way thither, so that a strict guard was kept of every portion of the boat.

I recall that it was not far from midnight when in passing to the stern, I saw dimly the extended figure of Padro who was apparently asleep. I gave him no further attention and returned to my former station.

Not the slightest sight or sound had been noticed that could awaken misgiving. Peering through the gloom, the faint, shadowy outlines of either shore were visible, but no moving object revealed itself, nor could the listening ear detect anything out of the usual order of things, for the plash which once startled me was made by some sportive fish.

At such times one's senses often assume a preternatural acuteness. It will be remembered that the tonnage of the little steamer was so slight that its poise was readily disturbed by a trifling cause. I was standing at the prow, when I suddenly felt a slight but peculiar jarring of the boat, as if something had gently pushed it, and wondering what it could mean, I listened and waited for further clues.

The shock, less than at first, was felt again and then there was an almost

inaudible rippling of the water at the stern. Suspecting its meaning, I softly picked my way thither, only to have my suspicions confirmed.

Padro, while pretending to be asleep, had softly risen from his couch, stepped over the gunwale at the stern into the shallow water, and was making his way to land. I could see him better than he could observe me, but he was no more than an indistinct shadow which only permitted me to notice that the water did not reach to his knees, even when he must have sunk a few inches in the mud, and then he vanished from my field of vision.

"That leaves us to ourselves," I grimly muttered, "for the only native left with us is dead, and little can be expected from him; but the fellows were not much of an element of strength, and I don't know as they are to be blamed for trying to save their necks while a desperate hope remains. It may be that the wisest course for me and the captain is to imitate them."

Under some circumstances the action of the two natives might have led to the suspicion that they had deserted to join the enemy. That, however, was clearly impossible. The Tobas would accept no recruits from among strangers, for they needed none.

CHAPTER X.

STUCK FAST.

STANDING at the bow of the motionless steamer, gazing off over the silent river, dimly lit up by the gleam of twinkling stars, I gradually became aware that some object was resting on the water directly ahead and hovering, as may be said, on the line of invisibility.

It was not curious, perhaps, that when I peered at it, the object seemed to fade from sight until I doubted whether it was not some figment of the fancy; but when I removed my eyes and came suddenly back, it was too plain to admit of a mistake. It was like the Pleiades, which under close scrutiny shrinks to six stars, but reveals the seventh at the first glance.

"It's a Toba canoe!"

The words were spoken by Higgenbottom, who had noiselessly risen, and stood at my elbow, looking in the same direction.

"I agree with you, though it is the first I have seen, and even that is only half visible."

"How would it do to drop a shell in it?"

"I don't believe it possible; the cartridge wouldn't be likely to explode and it strikes me it would be wise for you to be more chary in using your cartridges."

In the hope of learning more, the captain pointed his glass at the strange craft.

"Yes; it is one of their boats," he whispered, "and if I'm not mistaken, two of them are in it. Why don't they come closer or leave?"

It was a hard question to answer, for it was remarkable that the canoe should halt at this precise point and remain there so long, neither approaching nor receding.

"Windermyer," added my friend, in the same guarded voice, "get up steam as soon as you can."

I hurried to the stern and hastily filled the furnace with wood. There was so much heat still lingering among the flues that the fuel broke into a blaze as soon as the door was closed. In ten or fifteen minutes there would be enough steam to turn the screw, and I returned to Higgenbottom.

The boat was in plainer view, having slightly shifted its position. It had come a little closer and was turned diagonally toward us, so it was now easy to see that it contained two occupants.

Evidently they had not satisfied their curiosity from the first standpoint and they began slowly circling about the steamer. One of them swayed a pad-

dle, similar to that used by the Indians in our own country, but with such carefulness that it was almost impossible to hear the slight ripple.

The canoe made a complete circuit of the craft, returning to its first position, where it once more became motionless.

"Windermyer," eagerly whispered my friend, "you must have enough steam to turn the screw; see whether you have."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Run 'em down if I can."

It was a grim jest, but it caught my fancy. I opened the valve of the engine to the fullest extent and quickly discovered that the pressure of the steam was greater than I suspected, for the screw began vigorously churning the water and the boat moved ahead with considerable speed.

Higgenbottom steered straight for the smaller boat, whose occupants must have been startled when they saw the frightful craft bearing down upon them. The one using the paddle swung it with all the power at his command, sending his boat to one side and out of our path.

But the Hail Columbia also turned and still made for it. The frightened Toba sheered his canoe the opposite way, but in vain, seeing which he drove it ahead with all the skill and strength he could summon.

The light boat skimmed the surface swiftly, but our steamer was capable of a speed which no smaller craft could equal, and despite the efforts of the savage, we gained rapidly upon him.

Only one thing remained to do and he or rather they did it. With a suppressed howl, both leaped out of the canoe, one to the right and the other to the left, and splashed for shore in a crazy panic. Since it was impossible to follow both, and there was no special reason for running either down, Higgenbottom gave up the pursuit, checking the steamer at the side of the canoe.

Having shut off steam I ran to the prow in answer to the captain's call.

"Who knows but what we can make some use of that craft?" he said; "fasten it to the side of the boat."

Leaning over the gunwale, I grasped the canoe, drew it nearer, and, after a little manipulation, secured it by means of a cord. The captain came down to inspect it.

The Toba canoe was perhaps a dozen feet in length, and was made of the bark of some species of tree, the big pieces being glued together and over one another, so as to make them impervious to water. The glue, as I afterward learned, was obtained from the same tree that furnished the bark, so that the tree itself must have been accommodating and highly useful.

The paddle had a single blade, which was neither broad nor long, and the buoyancy of the craft was probably sufficient to support four or five persons.

"If I had a paint box aboard," remarked Higgenbottom, "I would christen it the Hail Columbia, Jr., but we shall have to wait for that. However, we have a good head of steam and we may as well improve our time," he added, returning to the pilot house, while I went aft and again set the screw revolving, though only at half speed.

It was taking big risks, but it did seem that we might as well be feeling our way forward, as to remain motionless simply because it was night. Having turned on the steam, I had leisure to inspect our surroundings.

One fact speedily became apparent. The Pilcomayo, instead of narrowing, was growing broader. When we started, as I have explained, we could dimly trace the outlines of each shore, but looking over the gunwale, first on one side and then on the other, I failed to see either bank. How much greater the width became, of course, it was impossible to guess, since we were without any means of judging.

Just as I feared, we had gone less

than a fourth of a mile, when we ran aground, but our moderate speed enabled us to back off, and Higgenbottom turned sharply to the left for fully a hundred feet, when he headed down stream again, while without orders, I slowed our progress still more.

My friend now did a rash thing: he signalled me to go ahead at the highest speed. It was easy for us to speak to each other, with the short distance between, and I called to him to know if he had not made a mistake.

"No," he replied; "it is our only hope."

"All right; here we go!"

And I gave her full steam. Almost at the same moment I felt the hull touch bottom, the speed perceptibly slackening, but we pushed on, and before we stopped, we swung into clear water again and away we went.

Perhaps it was the best plan, for where it was impossible to distinguish the channel, even if one existed, nothing was to be gained by hesitation.

As nearly as I could judge, we sped onward for a fourth of a mile, and I was beginning to feel hopeful that the worst was over, when again we grazed bottom. Higgenbottom jingled the bell for more speed, but it was impossible: the boat was doing her utmost.

Further and further we pushed, going slower and slower, while I held my breath in suspense. At last, the advance ceased, with the screw going like a whirlwind.

It being clear that we could not advance further, I reversed with all steam, in the hope of repeating our former maneuver. But the boat refused to budge. The effort was kept up for ten or fifteen minutes, when Higgenbottom came out of the pilot house.

"Let us help with the poles," he said with the coolness he showed at all times.

He thrust one over the left of the prow and I at the other side. It seemed as if there was not more than an inch or two of water, but we bent to it with might and main, pressing and pushing until our bodies were almost horizontal, and we could not exert another ounce of strength. At last, panting and perspiring, we ceased.

"It looks as if it is no go," he remarked.

"You are right."

"Never say die," he added cheerily, after we had rested a few minutes, and we went at it again, struggling with desperate energy, but in vain.

The truth was that the high speed of the boat had driven her inextricably into the mud. Nothing except one of Merritt's wrecking steamers would have sufficed to pull her free again.

The time came when we had to give it up, sit down and calmly face the desperate situation.

"Higgenbottom," I said impressively, "you gathered all the information possible about the confounded Pilcomayo after you left Concepcion and while in Sucre, but you failed to learn the most important fact of all."

"What is that?"

"The river grows shallower, as it flows southward. It spreads out in many places as we have discovered, until it is too thin to float a boat even of so slight draft as the Hail Columbia. Not only that, but the water evaporates, and I have no doubt that fifty miles further south, there is less of a stream than here and a hundred miles still less."

"But it must increase *somewhere*, for it is a goodly sized river in the lower portion."

"Of course, for even before it passes through El Gran Chaco it unites with the Paraguay from Brazil, and becomes a respectable stream, but until then it is comparatively insignificant."

"Is there no tide in the Pilcomayo?"

I did not reply, for I knew the question was meant for a grim jest, and my friend added:

"The rainy season is six months off,

and shallow as the river is now, it will grow more so each day."

"There is no doubt of that."

"And it is impossible to go back?"

"When we can't move the boat an inch, and it is steadily becoming more firmly fixed, it is evident we can't count upon the Hail Columbia to help us out of our trouble."

Percy Higgenbottom was now serious. Even his habitual spirits forsook him. Sitting on the gunwale, he hummed for a minue or two and then turned toward me.

"Hernandez and Padro had a heap more sense than we, for they left while there was a chance."

"The same chance remains to us."

"Then we must take it! The career of the Hail Columbia has ended, and it looks as if the same may soon be said of ourselves."

CHAPTER XI.

A CHANGE OF BASE.

THE crisis had come and we endeavored to face it like men. It was impossible to go forward with the steamer, and equally impossible to turn back. As Higgenbottom declared, the career of the Hail Columbia, so far as we were concerned, was at an end.

As nearly as we could figure out, we were in the southeastern corner of Bolivia, at the point where the Pilcomayo, after running almost due east, makes an abrupt bend to the south, soon beginning to form the boundary between Paraguay and the Argentine Republic, whence it flows for something more than three hundred miles, before joining the Paraguay, Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, standing at the junction of the two streams.

The stretch of three hundred and odd miles constitutes the dangerous portion of the river, which has never yet been passed by any white man, although the effort has been repeated from early in the eighteenth century. Full of high hope we had set out from Sucre, only to be stopped before we had penetrated as far as some of our predecessors.

Having given up the problem, the all important question for us to answer was that of saving ourselves. Manifestly two courses were open: to turn back and undertake to tramp overland to Sucre, the first point where we could strike anything approaching civilization, or to push across the northeastern corner of El Gran Chaco to Concepcion, in the northern part of Paraguay, on the river of the same name and one of the most important cities of the country.

"It is perhaps more than two hundred miles to Concepcion," said my friend, "and fully double that distance to Sucre. The latter route is tenfold rougher and more mountainous, and the job would try us to the utmost."

"But we should not go far before passing out of the region of the Tobas, and well armed as we are, it would be only a laborious tramp, for we could not be in peril from the wild animals."

"From here to Concepcion is a broad level plain, easy to traverse."

"What about food?"

"It abounds with grass, which is the proper nutriment for a couple of asses like ourselves. But," Higgenbottom hastened to add, as if ashamed of his momentary lapse from seriousness, "the plain is broken by patches of woods; there are tens of thousands of wild cattle, and in some of the wooded portions we shall find edible fruits."

"And Tobas."

"Then I take it you favor turning back?"

"No," I replied; "I was merely bringing out the bad points of the route which I think we ought to take. Even if we started to go up the river, we shall be liable to run into parties of savages for fifty miles or more. So I propose that we take the bull by the horns and start for the Tropic of Capricorn, on which Concepcion stands."

" That being settled, we cannot set out too soon. It is a lucky thing that we caught that Toba canoe; for we can use it to go ashore, instead of splashing through the water where we are liable to sink to our waists in the mud and perhaps over our heads."

Having agreed upon the main scheme, it only remained to complete our preparations. First of all, we made a hasty meal upon the jerked venison and fruit that was left, and then did up a small quantity, sufficient to last three or four days, on short allowance. It was easy to stow it among our pockets, so as to cause no inconvenience.

Each, it will be remembered, carried a couple of Smith & Wesson revolvers, with a supply of cartridges. Thus we were provided with ten shots apiece, at an instant's emergency.

In addition, there were the four repeating Winchesters, whose magazines contained respectively nine charges. It was useless to attempt to carry more than one of these to a man, since it would be too heavy an incumbrance. We selected the best and moved to the prow of the boat where the canoe was moored.

" We are not yet armed *cap-à-pie*," said my friend.

" We ought to consider ourselves so with thirty eight shots apiece, without renewing a single charge."

" Do as I do."

Stooping over the basket containing the dynamite cartridges, he took out one and shoved it carefully into the right hand pocket of his coat. Then he did the same with his other pocket. Thus, in addition to his firearms, he carried two powerful dynamite shells. I followed suit.

" There," said he, with a touch of his old waggery, " if we are driven into a corner, we ought to be able to put up a pretty respectable fight; and if we are captured, our captors must handle us pretty carefully or they will get hurt."

" What about *us?* "

" Of course we'll all go to kingdom come together. But seriously, Windermyer, I think it likely these things may come in useful before we reach Concepcion, but we musn't forget to be careful with them."

" No; a slip or stumble is likely to explode one and wind up this attempt at exploring the Pilcomayo as effectually as all those that have gone before."

It was a relief to find something to smile over, and we gently laughed as we stepped gingerly over the gunwale and adjusted ourselves in the Toba canoe. The body of Armetia was left where it still lay near the engine, for we could give it no more fitting tomb than was already provided. The two remaining rifles were left with it, for it was not believed necessary to throw them overboard, since the captors could know nothing of their use.

Our first thought was to fill the furnace with wood, tie down the safety valve and let the Hail Columbia blow up, but reflection convinced us that such a course would be the height of folly, since it would advertise our disaster to our enemies. They would be shrewd enough to suspect that before this took place we abandoned the craft, and consequently they would search the shore for us, whereas if the boat were left as it was, they would be likely to believe we were still aboard, and several days might pass before they would dare make an open attack.

In the interval we ought to place a good many miles behind us.

But one important fact was not overlooked. There was an uncertain number of Tobas somewhere in the neighborhood, and our safety depended upon getting away without discovery by them. For aught we knew, other canoes were hovering in the vicinity and we might run into them at any moment.

All this was so apparent, that there was no need of discussing it or consulting as to our plan of action. Higgenbottom sat near the stern or bow,

for there was no difference between them, and I carefully dipped the paddle into the roiled current.

At the first effort, the end struck the muddy bottom, and I feared the canoe was sunk so low by our weight that we should be compelled to abandon it after all. Instead of paddling I used the implement as a pole, knowing from the feeling while doing so that the canoe was in contact with the bed of the river.

There was satisfaction, however, in the knowledge that the craft was moving, and much to my relief the water soon deepened to more than a foot. Then I devoted the paddle to its proper use and we gradually moved away from the steamer.

It will be understood that everything for the time depended upon our making a safe start. If discovered by any Tobas prowling in the neighborhood, a fight would be precipitated, with not one chance in a thousand of our saving ourselves, abnormally loaded and primed as we were.

The very thing dreaded took place. We had not reached a point fifty feet distant from the steamer, when my companion exclaimed excitedly:

"Back quick, for God's sake!"

Without pausing to learn the cause of his startling exclamation, I reversed as may be said, at full speed, and, in a twinkling, was again at the side of the stranded Hail Columbia. I had not discovered as yet what it was that frightened Higgenbottom, and now paused for him to explain.

"Climb aboard again!" he added in a guarded voice, "and don't forget you're loaded with dynamite."

Again I obeyed him unquestioningly, but when on the boat insisted that he should enlighten me.

"Didn't you see?" he asked in astonishment.

"I saw nothing to explain your alarm."

"A boat twice as big as our canoe loomed up between us and the shore for which we were heading, and if I'm not mightily mistaken it was crammed full of Tobas."

"Heavens, I did not catch a glimpse of them!"

"It wasn't necessary, but you never did a better thing than when you obeyed me without an instant's hesitation. It may sound absurd to say we are keener eyed than those dusky devils, but I don't believe they saw us at all."

"It is more likely that they caught sight of us, but in the gloom did not suspect we were white men."

"That perhaps is so, but while we were hurrying back a new idea struck me."

Without waiting to explain, he walked to the dynamite gun, shoved a cartridge down its throat, and turned the weapon toward the eastern shore. He pointed it at an angle of forty five degrees, which insured the shell traveling the greatest distance, and pulled the string.

The range was easily made, and descending on the low grassy bank, the expected explosion followed, the detonation fairly shaking the earth, particles of which were hurled in every direction, some of them as revealed by the momentary vivid glare, ascending high in air, while hundreds of bits, as they fell into the river, sounded like pattering hail.

Hardly had this taken place, when the New Englander had the gun charged with a second shell, which was sent after the first, and repeated its performance, with the same impressive uproar and destructiveness.

Then he sent a third cartridge toward the western bank, invisible in the gloom, but the missile dropped harmlessly into the water, doubtless falling far short of the shore.

If anything was certain, it was that the eastern bank, opposite the stranded steamer, was thoroughly cleared of our enemies, and that it was now comparatively safe to repeat our attempt to reach it.

It was a clever idea on the part of Captain Higgenbottom, as was proven a few minutes later, when we once more entered the canoe and reached shore without encountering the first sign of danger.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OVERLAND ROUTE.

Close to the southern edge of the torrid zone, under the vivid stargleam of a cloudless sky, wherein the beautiful constellation of the Southern Cross gleamed with wonderful splendor, Percy Higgenbottom and I stepped from the Toba canoe upon the eastern bank of the Pilcomayo.

The first thing done after setting foot on the flat, grassy plain, was to give the craft a vigorous shove, which sent it far out in the gloom. The sluggish current would carry it a considerable distance before daylight, and when discovered by the owners, it would tell no tale of having served any white men in the way described.

Peering in all directions, we discerned nothing to cause misgiving. No light showed on the stranded steamer, the furnace door having been closed and the fire having subsided to that degree that all danger of explosion was past.

" Now," said my companion, " the important thing is to keep to the right course. You know how prone a person is to wander in a circle when traveling without any guide. We must depend wholly upon our compass."

" Our course should be southeast? "

" Exactly."

" Do you know how to allow for the variation of the needle? "

" I did not forget to study that at Asuncion and Concepcion."

The compass to which my friend referred dangled as a charm from his watch chain. Striking a match, he carefully shaded the tiny flame, so that it shone only on the diminutive glass face. It took but a moment to locate ourselves.

" Off we go," he said, with something of his old cheeriness of manner, " and may God, Who has been so kind to us, still hold us in His keeping."

" Amen," I said, and never was a prayer more fervently uttered.

It will be remembered that we were pretty heavily weighted, for we carried in addition to our small suppply of food, revolvers and Winchesters, two elongated cartridge shells each weighing two or three pounds. Higgenbottom, as will be recalled, wore the ordinary boots, more common in this country a half century ago than now, while I had leathern leggings strapped around my lower limbs, and reaching to my knees. Each carried his rifle resting over his right shoulder, and thus equipped we set our faces toward the Paraguayan city more than two hundred miles away, on the eastern side of the immense plain known as El Gran Chaco.

Since there was nothing in the nature of a path or trail, we walked side by side, conversing at times in low tones, but continually listening and peering into the surrounding gloom for that which we prayed we might not hear or see.

The grass was short, not rising more than half way to our knees. We were rugged and strong, and had been cramped so long on the little steamer that for a time the exercise was pleasant.

Aside from the ever present danger from the fierce Tobas, our situation was by no means unpleasant. In the first place, the plain was so level that walking was comparatively easy, the grass offering no obstruction but serving rather as a velvety carpet to our feet. Then the temperature, although oppressive during the middle of the day, was almost cool at other times and pleasant at night. No rain would fall for months, and we thus escaped one of the most intolerable afflictions of

tropical countries. True, the mosquitoes at times were a pest, but no more so than is frequently the case in our own favored land at home.

Although we did our best to follow a direct course, and were quite confident we were doing so, we were too wise to rely upon any impression. Within less than half an hour of our starting overland, Higgenbottom again halted, and drawing out his rubber safe ignited a match with the same care as before.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" was his exclamation.

I was looking over his shoulder and saw the cause of his impatience. Despite our care, we were bearing too much to the left, so that our course had become almost due east.

"That explains what to many persons is inexplainable," I remarked, as we made the necessary correction and pressed on again.

"What do you mean?"

"The reason why lost persons travel in a circle."

"I don't understand you."

"You notice that we have both turned unconsciously to the left; each of us is right handed."

"What of it?"

"The disproportionate strength extends to the right leg as well as the right arm; we use the right leg with slightly more vigor than the left, and therefore bear in that direction."

"Suppose a person to be left handed?"

"Then he would swerve to the right."

"And if ambidextrous?"

"He ought to go straight ahead."

"Your theory is the true one, provided it *is* the true one; but my recollection of the stories of long hunts in the woods, as told by my grandfather, is that when a hunter was lost, he was as liable to turn to the right as the left and vice versa. It all depended upon how he happened to start."

"There are exceptions to all rules."

"But none to a law, since it would no longer be a law, and in the case you speak of, it must be a law."

"Well, we shall have to leave the question open for future investigation —helloa! what does that mean?"

We had halted at the same instant, led to do so by what seemed to be the sound of rumbling thunder—certainly an amazing occurrence when the sky was unclouded and the season for storms was over. It was not sharp or explosive, but deep and muttering without any increase of volume.

While we stood listening and wondering, a still more alarming thing was noted: the earth under our feet was trembling, with a perceptible swaying motion. The noise and tremor of the ground were caused by an earthquake!

Boast as a man may, he can never become fully accustomed to those remarkable occurrences. It matters not that he may have passed through a number unharmed; he is always confronted by the probability that the new one may indulge in some whim against which he cannot protect himself and which may prove instantly fatal.

Visions of the ground beneath us suddenly splitting apart into a fathomless chasm into which we would drop and be crushed like worms, held us speechless awed and terrified.

The tremor lasted but a few minutes, though the thunder continued to mutter faintly for some time after the earthquake itself had passed. Both of us had seen much more violent shocks in South America, but, as I have stated, no one can be placed as were we, without being thoroughly frightened, and he who claims the contrary tells a falsehood.

We resumed our walk, so impressed by the occurrence that when we spoke, we did so for a long time in low tones, as if fearful of being overheard by some one prowling at our elbow. By and by, however, we rallied and remembering the value of time, improved it to the utmost.

When Higgenbottom once more struck a match and examined his compass, it was a pleasure to learn that we had varied only to a slight extent from an exact southeastern course.

"By and by," he remarked, "we shall be able to manage it, so that if we are lost and have no compass we can stick to the right direction."

"Provided it is to the southeast."

Calculating as best we could, we gave ourselves about six hours for travel before the sun would appear in the horizon. Then would be the time for extreme care, and it was not unlikely that we should have to remain in hiding until night came, for we felt that if once discovered by a party of Tobas, it would be impossible to escape a collision with them, and, if they chanced to be numerous, it must prove fatal to us.

We took long strides, and kept it up after the pace began to tell, and the loads we carried made themselves manifest. When my friend paused again and looked at his compass, he chuckled.

"We are heading southeast in a bee line," he explained, "and the figures on my watch show that day is at hand."

A few minutes later, I, who was two or three paces in advance, felt my foot strike water. My companion noticed it the next moment, but thinking it was caused by some small depression in the ground, we pressed on, only to find the plashing continued.

"Higgenbottom," I said, "do you know of any river or lake between the Pilcomayo and the Paraguay?"

"I never heard of any."

"It looks, then, as if we had discovered some big body of water. Even if we fail to add to the knowledge of the mysterious river, we shall be able to tell the public something new, that is if we ever live to reach the public's ear."

For as I came to a stop I saw the water, as reflected in the starlight, stretching in advance until it faded from sight in the gloom. That it was of insignificant depth was proven by the grass which showed through it.

"This may compel a change of course, but it is growing light and we would better wait until we can learn more."

Thus we stood until the yellow gleams in the horizon had increased to that degree that we could scan the plain for several miles in all directions.

The outlook was anything but pleasing. Behind us and to the north and south stretched the pampas, and it may be said that it did the same in front, but between us and the solid land in that direction lay a body of water fully a mile in width. Not only that, but it extended north and south further than the eye could reach, cutting directly across our path.

"It is generally a pretty extensive job to circumnavigate a river," I said, "and there's no telling what distance we shall have to travel to flank this, even if it is only a lake. We can readily see how far it is necessary to go to reach the further shore."

"And it doesn't look deep, for the heads of much of the grass show all the way."

We decided to cross. Higgenbottom was not particular about wetting his boots, but since they already fitted him tightly, he was afraid they would cause him trouble by shrinking. He therefore removed them, and thrusting his stockings inside hung them over his shoulder, and rolling up his trousers struck off in the water. I followed without discarding leggings or shoes, keeping a little to the rear, since there was no need of more than one of us plunging into an unseen hole.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE PERIL.

We walked the whole mile through the water, without once sinking to a

greater depth than six inches. Moreover, the ground was comparatively solid, so that we were not troubled with anything in the nature of mud. My companion, therefore, had much the advantage of me, since he was able to sit down and don dry stockings and boots, while it was the other way with me. However, all this was a trifle hardly worth the mention.

While fording this temporary lake, the sun appeared above the horizon, and the day was fully come when we stepped upon land made dry because of its superior elevation.

We agreed that we were, to say the least, fully twenty miles from the Pilcomayo, for the compass showed we had traveled a comparatively direct course, and we had maintained a good pace, not counting the walk through the water, and had been all of six hours on the way.

Now that our view reached for miles in every direction, we scanned all portions in our field of vision with the intensest scrutiny. Higgenbottom first used his binocular and then passed it to me. The gratifying result of this search was that we discovered no sign of a living thing and consequently, so far as we could judge, were in no present danger.

Naturally our interest lay to the northwest—that is the section we had just traversed. The surface of the plain was so flat that we could see nothing of the Pilcomayo and were unable even to locate it. It seemed to us that we had good ground for being hopeful. The Tobas who were so jealously watching the Hail Columbia would hesitate a long time, after the demonstration from the dynamite cartridges, to attack it.

The sight of the canoe adrift would fail to give any clue to the use it had been put to, and it would be only through the most improbable chance that they would learn of our flight across the plain. Should that, however, come to their knowledge, they would be able to trail and run us down in spite of everything we might do to prevent it.

Absolute safety would seem to demand that we should sit on the ground and eat, sleep and rest until sunset, for in such a posture, varied by lying prone, if it should become necessary, we should be in no danger of discovery.

But the prospect of throwing away valuable time, when so many miles lay before us, was unpleasant to the last degree. It was more comfortable to travel while the sun was shining, even if it became oppressive during the middle of the day, resting only when our tired frames required it, and it was easier, too, to maintain the right course then than at night.

Finally, after fully discussing the situation, we settled upon what may be considered a compromise.

We would eat our breakfast and then sleep for most of the forenoon. By meridian, we should be fully refreshed, and if all looked well, would resume our journey, continually using the glass to detect the appearance of danger.

It will be admitted that with this aid, which enabled us to see much farther than the most lynx-eyed Toba, we should have no excuse for not discovering the savages long before they could possibly discern us. The luxuriant grass was everywhere, making one spot as good a hiding place as another.

We therefore ate our morning meal and then stretched out on the bare ground, so tired that both of us almost immediately sank into refreshing slumber. The climate was so mild we needed no extra covering by daytime or at night, though it would have been well at the latter time could we have been provided with blankets to protect us from the saturating dews.

We had not undertaken to bring any extra clothing with us, believing the suits on our bodies sufficient to last for

weeks to come. At any rate, if any mishap befell them, we should be without remedy until we reached Concepcion or met kind friends, and of the latter contingency, it need not be said that we did not have the most shadowy hope.

Higgenbottom was the first to open his eyes, and when he did so, the sun had crossed the meridian and the afternoon was well begun.

Both felt like new men, for the rest was what we needed and we were in exuberant spirits. As I rose to a sitting position and looked around, my companion was standing with his binocular to his eyes, attentively scanning the surrounding country. Observing that I had awakened, he said:

"I have described a complete circle twice."

"With what result?"

"None at all, which is the best possible result. Now, suppose you try it."

I rose to my feet and repeated his act to the extent of sweeping once every portion of the country that came within my range of vision. I was happy to confirm what he had said.

"Now," he remarked, "we ought to make twenty or thirty miles more before dark."

"But we have forgotten our dinner or lunch or whatever you please to call it."

"It is you who have forgotten that we agreed to go upon a short allowance for three or four days. Two meals a day are all," he added decisively.

"By George! I was never so hungry in my life," I said ruefully; "I feel as if I hadn't eaten anything for a week."

"If you feel that way, a half day won't make any difference in your emotions."

"What can't be cured must be endured," I replied with a sigh, appreciating the wisdom of my friend's sentiments and with no thought of really opposing them.

As before, we made our course due southeast. One of the most natural things for a person to do when placed in a similar situation is to make calculations upon the extent of the work before him. In fact, I have always found it impossible to refrain and Higgenbottom felt much as I did.

"Let us say that it is exactly two hundred miles from where we are now to Concepcion," said I, "though I admit it may be a little further."

"Say rather that it is that distance to the Paraguay river, at a point north of Concepcion, for when we reach that stream, we shall find it navigable, with plenty of shipping, none of which can possibly be hostile."

"Why not then make the river itself our destination instead of the city?"

"That has been my purpose from the beginning—that is in a certain sense. Concepcion is the first place at which we wish to stop, but I hope we shall reach it by striking the nearest point of the Paraguay and passing down that."

"That's better yet; then our overland journey will be no more than two hundred miles?"

"Not unless we wander off the track."

"Which is impossible so long as you have your compass."

"That much is admitted."

"Well, then, we ought to travel from forty to fifty miles every twenty four hours, which will take us to the Paraguay within five days."

"Your mathematics are correct, but such forecasts end nearly always in disappointment. We shall have the plain all the way, varied now and then by patches of timber, and there is always the possibility of finding some of the Tobas in our path. It may be that we shall have to stop traveling by daylight, in which case, our time will be doubled. Besides, suppose we have a fight——"

He did not complete his sentence, for there was no need of it. I felt that

my forecast, as he termed it, was childish, but nevertheless I could not help making it.

Well aware of the risk we were incurring, we never forgot our caution. The glass which dangled from a string around Higgenbottom's neck, was continually raised and pointed toward different points of the compass.

I noticed that he looked to the rear as often as in any other direction, and when he passed the instrument to me I did the same, for our chief dread, so long as nothing appeared, was that of being pursued by the savages with whom we had already had an encounter.

It was noticeable throughout the first hour or two that the plain, although comparatively level, gradually rose until we must have been twenty or thirty feet above the Pilcomayo, which had now been left a considerable distance to the rear. Thenceforward, the pampa was like the floor of a house.

It was not yet the middle of the afternoon, when Higgenbottom, who was a short distance in advance, held his binocular pointed eastward so long that I became uneasy.

"Have you discovered anything?" I asked, stepping beside him.

"Confound it! I am afraid so," was his reply, and passing the glass to me he added:

"What do you make of it?"

The moment I leveled the glass to the eastward, I saw he was right. Far away on the plain a peculiar quivering movement was discernible.

I would have thought it was caused by the wind blowing over the grass, had I not noticed that the space thus agitated had a dark brown color. Suddenly the truth flashed upon me.

"It is a herd of cattle, numbering thousands," I said, passing the glass back to my companion.

He studied the sight for a few minutes and then added:

"You are right; it is one of those immense droves of cattle on the move; they are at a full gallop, and, by heavens, they're coming directly toward us!"

It was a startling fact. The enormous aggregation was speeding over the plain in our direction, and peering to the right and left, we could see neither the beginning nor end of the right or left wing. It was, therefore, impossible for us to get out of their path by turning aside.

There was no tree within reach to give refuge, and we could do nothing but stand where we were and await the onslaught.

Would they overwhelm and crush us under their multitudinous hoofs? Had we any means of checking them? None at all, for it is well known that such herds, when under the impulse of a stampede or panic, will dash straight over the bluffs of a river hundreds of feet in height.

Rather it should be said those at the rear crowd over those in front, when the latter, awaking to their danger, make frenzied efforts to check themselves, but are swept irresistibly onward by the fearful rush of the thousands behind them.

Could we turn them aside? That was the only possible hope, but what way was there of bringing it about? We were in a sorry plight, indeed, and I hastened to suggest the only way which occurred to me to avert being trampled to death by the oncoming herd.

"When they come within range," said I, "we will open fire with our Winchesters, shout and wave our hats. Possibly we can make them divide and pass by on both sides of us."

Here it was that the Yankee ingenuity of Percy Higgenbottom came to our aid.

"I have a better plan."

As he spoke he ran a number of rods straight toward the herd, now thundering down upon us, and placed one of his dynamite cartridges on the ground.

Then he hurried back, glowing and expectant.

"Let us see how *that* will work."

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE DANGER AND A STRANGE ESCAPE.

It worked beautifully.

No more terrifying sight can be imagined than that of the thousands of panic stricken cattle, bearing down upon us in a wild stampede. All were tearing forward at a headlong run, snorting with affright, the myriads of horns often striking together with a curious, crackling sound, many emitting short bellows, eyes glaring, and the vast herd pouring along like the ocean when it has broken its barriers and is overwhelming a whole country.

And we two men stood directly in their path, with not a break visible in the appalling army of quadrupeds, when the front was within a hundred yards, coming with undiminished speed. My heart was in my mouth, for if the cartridge failed to explode, we should be crushed and trampled into nothingness within the following minute.

Gazing at that awful torrent, I saw also the small oblong object resting in the grass and barely visible from where we stood. It looked harmless and perhaps was to prove so, but of what was it not capable if it would only do its appointed work!

Suddenly there came a muffled explosion, and one, two, three of the infuriated cattle rose in air. More properly speaking, they were raised, and as they went up it was in small fragments that were scattered over a number of square rods.

In addition to this trio, more than twice as many were hurled sideways and forward and backward, rolling over and over, in lumps and heaps that bore no resemblance to their original being.

A great hole was gouged out of the ground, and the shell acted as if it were an irresistible wedge fired into the front of the herd from some giant piece of ordnance. The terror which took possession of the survivors was tenfold greater than that which would have checked them upon the top of a lofty bluff over which they were about to plunge.

With a power that otherwise never could have been theirs, they pressed to the right and left, and in a few seconds were thundering past us, while we stood in an open space that was fully a score of feet in width.

It looked as if our peril had been averted in this extraordinary fashion, but neither my friend nor myself could feel assured on that point. Although from where we stood, we could see the further side of the army of quadrupeds, yet many thousands of furious beasts were still in front, and the gap was likely to be closed any moment, when the frightful death that had threatened us before would be inevitable.

Inspired by this fear, I ran forward until I was as close as possible to the apex of the angle formed by the fan-like space, and hastily placed one of my cartridges on the ground, in the same position as the other, and then instantly dashed back to my friend, who nodded approvingly. He had been on the point of doing the same thing.

To escape the possible consequences of the explosion, we retreated a number of steps, walking backward and with our eyes fixed upon the dangerous point.

That which I anticipated took place. The apex kept steadily edging nearer to us, and before long a huge bull, who must have gloried in the pride of his tremendous strength, lunged forward over the shell, as if determined that no obstacle should swerve him a hair's breadth from his course.

To put it mildly, that *taurus* made a mistake, for the next moment his headless body, turning end over end, soared

aloft for fully twenty feet, before it came down with a " dull thud " and lay an inert pile whose forceful lesson was not lost on his surviving companions.

Others were slain or mortally hurt, and the panic was greater if possible than before. The rushing swarm was wedged further apart, so that as it passed us, the cleared space was doubled.

A few minutes later, the whole herd were at our backs, and we turned around to gaze upon the remarkable sight. The dampness of the soil and the abundance of grass prevented any dust rising, when but for that we should have been almost suffocated, and, since our position was slightly elevated, we could see the moving sea, the galloping bodies suggesting the short, agitated waves, as it rolled westward, until it became a quivering, tremulous, dark mass that gradually lost all semblance to its true character and finally faded out in the distance.

The first words spoken were by Higgenbottom, who, in his quaint way, made the inquiring remark:

" Suppose, Windermyer, we hadn't brought those cartridges with us? "

" The consequences would have been unpleasant."

" Slightly; not only did they save our lives, but they furnished us with abundant food, and I think I recall a remark of yours to the effect that you were hungry."

Going forward, we found enough beef at our disposal to supply a meal to a regiment, and it was in slices to suit any taste, from a piece no larger than one's hand to one weighing thirty or forty pounds. Moreover, we could take our choice from any part of the animal.

But all was not as we could have wished. There was no water at hand with which to cleanse the steaks and no means of kindling a fire to cook them; for despite the well known fact that the Gran Chaco is broken in many places by patches of timber, we had come upon none, nor, so far as we could see, were we near any.

As in other cases, we were forced to fix upon a compromise. The atmosphere in most of South America is so dry that meat does not spoil, when exposed to it. On many of the boats navigating the inland streams, or at the ranches in the interior, the flesh of animals when exposed for a few days, becomes thoroughly dried or " jerked " without losing any of its sweetness.

It need hardly be said that the cattle which we had encountered were in no condition for the market. They were thin and lean, better fitted for running, as they had proved, than for the table; but we cut several thin strips from the parts that were the least tough and stringy, and flung them over our shoulders.

Hungry as I was, I preferred to wait until the supply brought with us was exhausted before eating the fresh meat. Besides, there was hope of coming upon wood which would permit us to broil the steaks.

To do all this required much less time than has been taken in the telling. We were on the point of resuming our journey eastward, when my companion asked:

" What do you suppose stampeded those cattle? "

" It might have been one of a dozen causes, or simply a whim of some of them. On the Llano Estacado of Texas and the prairies further north, I have been told by cattlemen that an animal in the middle of a herd may happen to have a bad dream, and by his cavortings start off the whole drove in a stampede. I don't believe there is a more stupid creature for its size in the world than a cow, unless it's a big bull. Whoever heard of a trained cow? "

" All that may be true, but I feel a trifle uneasy over this affair."

He emphasized his misgiving by again bringing his glass to his eyes and attentively scrutinizing the country to the eastward. If it should so happen that

a party of Tobas had caused the stampede, we were in peculiar danger, for the grass upon which we had hitherto relied to hide us when we lay down, had been trampled flat by the tens of thousands of hoofs, and would afford no screen whatever. This condition extended so far to the north and south that it would be like flanking a river or lake to pass around it, while the extent eastward was indefinite.

But we might as well go forward as to stand still, and we did so, Higgenbottom keeping slightly in advance, frequently using his binocular and not forgetting to shape his course by his compass. We should have been relieved had it been later in the day, for there was good ground for alarm.

It did seem as if there never was a threatened danger in that pestiferous country that did not prove a reality; for we had not walked a mile when we discerned a party of mounted Indians, who assuredly were Tobas, directly in our front and riding as straight for us as the cattle had come a short time before.

The strange fact about their appearance was that Higgenbottom first discovered them without the aid of his glass, and I observed them at the same moment. So sudden indeed did they show themselves that it looked as if riders and horses had been lying on the ground and had suddenly risen to their feet, though it was incredible that such should have been the fact.

But there they were, apparently two score in number, and it looked as if we were inextricably caught.

One thing was evident: we were only adding to our peril by maintaining our erect position, for we must be visible to any horsemen that were visible to us.

One of the peculiarities marking the stampede of the cattle was that here and there, scattered over the plain, were the dead bodies of some of them. Perhaps one stumbled. If so, he never had the chance to rise again, since he was immediately trampled to death by the mad throng behind him.

At any rate, they were stretched before us, scattered here and there like tiny islets in a lake.

It happened that two such bodies lay near together and only a short way off. My companion and I ran to them and dropped to the ground, facing the oncoming horsemen.

"If I could make certain of the exact line they will follow," said Higgenbottom, "I would lay my remaining cartridge in front of them."

"The prospect of its serving us is too slight. Besides, they may turn off to one side and pass us by."

"It is probable they saw us before we lay down."

"But not certain; there are so many dead bodies that these will serve as screens for us. They have no reason to expect two white men to be wandering through this part of the country."

"That may all be, and yet if they saw us before we lay down they will be sure to investigate. Could it have been *they* who stampeded the cattle?"

"No; for, if so, they would not have been so far to the rear; their horses can outspeed any other quadruped, and they would have been on the heels of the cattle or among them."

But it was useless to speculate. We kept our faces toward the Tobas, the rifle of each resting on the body in front, which served as a barricade and we hoped also as a screen against discovery. The savages were approaching at an easy gallop and were soon so near that we counted them. Inasmuch as each made the number the same—twenty three—it is quite certain we were right.

CHAPTER XV.

RIDING DOUBLE.

As I have stated, there could be no doubt that the approaching horsemen

belonged to the dreaded tribe of Tobas. They were a formidable body, almost naked, with their painted breasts and faces, and immense bushy heads of hair, their big bows and spears, and their fully warranted self confidence.

They are lords of El Gran Chaco, and will remain supreme until some powerful military force marches through their country and sweeps the dusky desperadoes from its path.

Like our own wild Indians, all rode bareback, the only implement used to help in managing their animals being a halter, made of the tough bark of some tree, with one end twisted around the nose of the beast.

The horses themselves are small animals that are properly ponies, possessing considerable speed and great endurance. They are of pure blood, though wild asses and mules are often encountered on the pampas of the South American countries.

Those which we were watching were generally of a dark bay color, with black points, and several showed white markings. Two or three were of a coal black hue, and one was curiously mottled like the trick animals sometimes seen in a circus.

The great question with us was whether these Tobas knew that two white men were lying each behind the body of a dead cow and watching them. Hope was awakened when, while the horsemen were a fourth of a mile away, they were observed to veer slightly to their right, which course, if continued, would take them to the north of us, though by no means as far as we could desire.

"That may mean that they have not seen us," remarked my companion, who was no more than a dozen feet from me, "or it may be a movement intended as a reconnoisance."

"Most likely the latter."

When directly opposite, they were two hundred yards distant and still apparently in direct pursuit of the vanished herd of cattle, a fact which warranted us in hoping they had not discovered us.

But, as in the former instances, the outcome was the very thing we feared. Hardly was the party at the point named, when it was revealed that they were aware of our presence. All halted, and two headed straight for us, coming on a slow walk, while the others, who had been riding at an easy canter, attentively watched them.

We had shifted our own positions so as to face them, our bodies protected by those of the dead animals. Each held his Winchester aimed, for in such a situation everything depends upon promptness.

The two Tobas who were thus drawing near were of unusual size, and one I should judge from his appearance, had a stature of at least six feet. This fellow bestrode the mottled pony to which I have alluded, and was armed with an immense bow and arrow.

The horse of the other was of a shining, coal black color, and the rider carried a long spear at his hip, the point projecting in front of his animal's head, while the butt extended beyond his tail. It was a dangerous weapon, which he could hurl with wonderful accuracy for a long distance, and a shudder came over me as I reflected that it was more than probable the point had been dipped in deadly venom.

The one with the bow and arrow was slightly in advance of his companion, and both of us believed him to be the real leader. Their ponies continued their slow advance, until within bowshot, when they paused and the archer began coolly fitting an arrow to his bow.

All this time our hats showed over the barricades, and we did not remove our gaze from the two enemies. The action of the bowman proved that he intended to launch his deadly missile at the New Englander, while the spearman's preliminary actions indicated that I had been selected as his victim.

The moment had come when any

further hesitation on our part meant death.

Higgenbottom and I fired exactly together and neither threw away his shot. The archer was in the act of sighting his arrow, when with a howl he recoiled and then rolled sideways to the ground. My man did precisely the same thing, and both ponies, panic stricken by the occurrence, threw up their heads with snorts of affright, and galloping about in a half circle, headed for the group at the rear.

"Now give it to *them!*" added my companion, springing to his feet, pointing his gun at the group and firing four charges in rapid succession.

The idea was good, for it promised to stampede the party, and sighting my repeater as quickly as I could, I went my friend one better, by sending five bullets among the dazed savages.

What is more all of the shots were not thrown away. One of mine killed a pony and the howl of the Toba showed that Higgenbottom had hit him hard, for he dived involuntarily off his animal as it fell, but with vivacious nimbleness ran to the black horse from which I had shot the rider, and with a powerful leap, landed astride of him, and hammering his naked heels against his ribs, sent him skurrying after the others who were speeding away like mad.

The whole party had been put to flight, seeing which we sat down on the ground and partly replenished the magazines of our rifles, neither of us credulous enough to believe that that was the last by any means of the Tobas. A singular occurrence followed.

The savages halted fully an eighth of a mile distant—too far for us to throw away any shot. Two of the miscreants, most likely leaders both, lay lifeless on the plain, while the mottled horse of which I have spoken, and upon which the tall bowman had ridden, refused to follow his companions.

Standing motionless, with head high in air and his bark halter dangling to the ground, he emitted a neigh and looked directly at us. The brute seemed to ask by his action:

"Who are you and what do you mean by slaying my master?"

Then, stranger than that, the mottled pony began walking slowly toward my companion, just as the timid but curious antelope will draw near the signal that has been displayed on purpose to entice him within range of the hunter.

"What a splendid fellow!" exclaimed Higgenbottom admiringly; "but he has all the curiosity of a woman."

When he was within a hundred feet, head still high, his silky nostrils snuffing the air and stepping hesitatingly, a new hope came to us.

"What a prize if we can capture him! Don't do anything to frighten him."

More and more timidly he advanced until half of the intervening distance was passed. At that point, his fear overcame his curiosity, if it was really that feeling which agitated him, and he stood still, not daring to come any closer.

His unaccountable action caused my comrade to resolve to make him our own. Without rising from his prone position, Higgenbottom spoke gently, uttering a number of soothing words, which seemed to produce the desired effect, for when the man rose so as to reveal the upper part of his body, the horse, which had shown a disposition to break into flight, stood still, pointed his nose toward him and snuffed again.

My friend now rose to his feet, and stepping around the barricade, began cautiously approaching the pony. He kept up his gentle utterances and held a banana extended in his hand. When the animal seemed on the point of breaking away, Higgenbottom stopped, but continued his persuasive wooing.

Thus the advance went on step by step, the course of the horse being the most extraordinary in some respects that I have ever seen. The moment came, when with a quick movement,

my companion leaped slightly forward, seized the dangling halter and held the animal a prisoner.

Realizing this, the captive snorted and tugged to get away, but was held fast. After his nose and neck had been patted, he seemed to lose all fear, and obediently followed the halter grasped by his new master back to where I had risen to my feet.

The Tobas, who saw all this from a distance, must have been as much astonished as we, but they made no move to interfere. Almost at the moment their former property was captured, they broke into a gallop, heading northward, leaving the two lifeless bodies stretched on the ground and one of their best horses in our hands.

"That isn't the last of them by any means," I said to Higgenbottom, as we both gazed after the party.

"You are right, and this isn't the place to wait for them; they have gone after reinforcements."

"Ah, if we only could have secured another of their ponies, we might laugh them to scorn," said I.

"But since that is out of the question, we must make the best use of the one that was good enough to come to us."

Higgenbottom vaulted upon the shiny back of the mottled steed, and I sprang up behind him. It took but a few minutes to adjust ourselves to our new surroundings, during which the pony showed natural nervousness, but behaved better than we expected.

I steadied myself by placing one arm around the waist of my friend, who, holding his rifle in his left hand and grasping the bridle with his right, glanced at his compass, fixed the right course in his mind, and spoke gently to the animal.

The latter stepped forward without any urging, and broke into the easiest swinging canter that can be imagined. Looking behind us, the Toba party was almost invisible to the northward.

Now, while the horse, which Higgenbottom immediately christened Uncle Sam, in memory of his dynamite gun, was probably the equal in speed and endurance of any other of his species, it must be remembered that he was doing double duty. Each of us was quite large and heavy, and it was unreasonable to hope that in case of pursuit our steed could travel either as fast or as far as his pursuers.

This being axiomatic, as may be said, we proceeded to make hay while the sun shone. The canter appeared to be the natural gait of the animal, and he was allowed to maintain it, while the miles were rapidly placed behind us.

It was agreed to let him follow his own wishes. When tired, he might drop to a walk or stop altogether as he preferred. If hungry, we soon reached a section untrampled by the stampeded cattle, were he could eat his fill.

His endurance was amazing, for he kept up his voluntary flight for hour after hour until the afternoon was well advanced. Then, when Higgenbottom, out of pitying admiration for the noble creature, drew him down to a walk, it suddenly occurred to him that during all that time he had forgotten to consult his compass. He now hastened to do so and immediately uttered the disgusted exclamation:

"Well, I'll be hanged! We're away off! We have been traveling due north for I don't know how many hours."

CHAPTER XVI.

AT BAY.

The blunder was the more exasperating since there was no palliation for it. Strange that in the novel experience of riding double across the pampa, neither Higgenbottom nor I had once thought of the danger of wandering from the true course.

"Confound it!" he added with impatient waggery; "it seems that a horse as well as a man will travel in a circle when left to himself."

"It may be that in the case of Uncle Sam he did it purposely to find his former companions who disappeared in that direction."

The possibility of this being the fact startled my friend into slewing the animal around, so that we traveled nearer south than southeast. We had not neglected to scan the horizon for our enemies, and, as if to complete our misfortunes, we now caught sight of them approaching from the north, not distant more than a couple of miles, and of course heading for us.

The party numbered fifty or more, and we did not doubt that it included those with whom we had had our last brush. So it was true, as we suspected from the first, that they had gone in quest of reinforcements, and, having obtained them, now "meant business."

At the same moment, we made another discovery. Directly ahead loomed one of the buttes, such as are often seen on our own western prairies, and it was fully a hundred feet in height. We scanned it with deep interest and my companion said:

"I believe we shall have to make our last stand there."

"Why?"

"I have noticed within the last few minutes that the Tobas are gaining on us. As grand a horse as Uncle Sam is, he cannot carry two men of our weight as fast as those animals can travel, with a single rider apiece. If we keep straight on, we shall be overtaken inside of an hour, and it will probably be on the open plain, where we shall not have half a chance to defend ourselves. We can put up a decent fight at that bluff."

"I agree with you; let's make for it."

He had already headed the pony that way, and, with slight urging, he broke into a swift run, the still air fanning our faces in a breeze, while his hoofs beat the soft earth with a rhythmic sound that showed how fast the noble creature was traveling.

"I hope those cartridges of ours will not be jolted into exploding," remarked the New Englander, "but we've got to take the chances."

Glancing back, the mounted Tobas were seen thundering along at the top of their speed, and there could be no mistake as to their gaining fast upon us. They were coming up, as may be said, hand over hand. But there was little fear of our failing to reach the supposed refuge in time, unless overtaken by some mishap.

Nothing of that nature intervened, and with the same majestic stride, Uncle Sam brought us to the foot of the bluff, while the Tobas were still at a distance that threatened no harm to us. It was no time for sentiment, and the steaming steed had hardly halted, when we leaped to the ground.

"Good by!" said Higgenbottom; "you did us a splendid turn, and I wish we could keep you, but it is impossible. Off with you!"

On receiving a resounding slap on the haunch, the animal snorted his farewell and facing his companions, trotted away to meet them.

The bluff upon which all our hopes were now centered was, as I have said, all of a hundred feet high. It was as if an acre of earth, covered with grass, had been pushed upward to that height, leaving the sides composed of gravel, clay and dirt, rising out of the earth and roughened and crumbling from the exposure to the weather.

Another comparison suggested by its appearance was that of an immense bouquet or nosegay, though of course the flowers were lacking.

Our first fear, as we approached it, was that the slope was so nearly perpendicular on all sides that it would be impossible to climb it. Higgenbottom dashed forward in one direction and I the other, meeting on the opposite side.

"I think we can do it here," said my companion, clearly nervous over the critical situation.

"We *must!*" I replied, instantly starting up the incline, which was so nearly vertical that it taxed my utmost strength.

The ground crumbled under my feet and I had taken but a few steps when I slid back again.

"A little to the left," suggested Higgenbottom, who had already made some progress and was therefore in advance; "it is all the better for us that it is so hard to climb; it will make the job tougher for the Tobas."

"And I am afraid too tough for us."

But the next moment I was encouraged by the fact that though I slipped and stumbled I was really ascending the steep slope. My friend in front of me was my "pacer" so to speak, and I grimly vowed to keep at his heels.

Our position prevented us from seeing the savages, but they were coming like a whirlwind and would soon be in sight of us.

Repeatedly it looked as if we were stopped for good, and would have to make our stand on the side of the cliff, where the advantage was fatally less than on the crest, but we were inspired by the most powerful of all motives—the hope of life; and, panting and almost breathless, in imminent peril of rolling down to the base with the streams of débris that were continually sweeping under our feet, we toiled onward, with a desperation that was at the highest tension.

Finally, only a dozen feet separated us from the summit.

I was looking at my leader when an object suddenly appeared in the brief space between us and then slid down with the rattling dirt passing beneath me. It was an Indian arrow, launched by one of the Tobas, and casting a glance below, I saw that the whole party of horsemen had arrived and were grouped at the base where we began our laborious climb.

I said nothing to my friend, for it could do no good. He was straining every nerve and so was I. But a second arrow was fired, and I distinctly felt it graze my ear.

A cold shudder thrilled me and for the instant I believed I had been wounded; but other missiles were sure to follow, and it was not to be expected that all or even many of them would miss their mark.

Had the bluff been ten feet higher, we should have been forced to stop, even though exposed to certain death, to regain our breath and strength. As it was, Higgenbottom was barely able to drag himself over the edge, where he lay on his face, so used up that he could only pant, too exhausted to gasp a syllable.

And my plight was equally distressing. By superhuman exertion, I pulled myself over, unable even to draw my feet out of sight, until I caught my breath. We had no more strength than a couple of children, and had a single Toba appeared on the scene, within the following five minutes, he could have wrought his sweet will with us, and we not able to raise a hand to defend ourselves.

But in a little while we pulled ourselves further from the margin of the bluff and managed to speak in broken sentences.

"I wonder if they dare follow," was the first thing uttered by my companion.

I slewed my body around and still lying on my face, peered over.

Two nearly naked Tobas were not only climbing the same steep ascent, but were half way up! They must have started while we were on the way.

The daring of those wretches is unsurpassable, and helps to account for the annihilation of scores of explorers who attempted to follow the Pilcomayo through the Gran Chaco.

"I guess we're good enough for you," I grimly muttered, as I drew my Winchester round in front.

"Hold on," said Higgenbottom, "let them come nearer and then we will use our revolvers."

I liked the suggestion, and, laying my larger weapon aside, drew one of my pistols, in imitation of my companion.

One reason for allowing the savages to come closer was that it gave us a few more minutes in which to recover our full strength. Our respiration rapidly decreased, while we furtively watched the wretches steadily coming upward, with the large group below watching them.

They were much better climbers than we, for they progressed with little apparent exertion. Had they started when we were half way up the slope, they would have overtaken us at the upper edge.

But of what could they be thinking? Did they suppose that after our terrific effort, we would lie supinely down and permit them to slay us? Were these a couple of ambitious warriors, eager to earn the applause of their brethren?

Not wishing to draw a flight of arrows while our heads projected over the margin, we drew back, carefully examined our revolvers, and awaited the moment when the two should come within certain range.

As in our own case, one was following the other, the passageway being too narrow to allow them to walk side by side, but they were so near, that the one at the rear could touch his leader at any moment with outstretched hand.

"I claim the first shot," said Higgenbottom, as with pistol grasped, he thrust his head forward again and looked over.

Hardly had I time to do the same, when he let fly. The Toba was no more than twenty feet below, when the two shots were fired, both speeding true to their aim, and, hitting the leader fairly in the breast. Either bullet would have been fatal.

With a rasping screech, he flung his arms aloft, leaped upward and backward several feet, and, before his companion could dodge, struck him as if fired from a catapult. The impact was resistless, and carried the second off his feet.

The two went rolling, sliding and tumbling, so mixed up with the rattling dirt and gravel that it was impossible to tell them apart, or to distinguish the dead man from the live one.

But I took a shot as may be said for luck, though never able to learn whether I struck the living or defunct one, or whether I missed both. They never ceased falling, and sped downward until they slumped to the level ground at the feet of the amazed horsemen, who, I may say without too much self esteem, must have concluded that they were up against as lively a couple of explorers as it had ever been their fate to meet.

Moreover, something more of the same nature was quite likely to happen if this foolishness continued.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DESPERATE SCHEME.

I AM quite convinced that the reader will concede one merit to Percy Higgenbottom and myself, the same being our disposition to face unflinchingly any and every peril that confronted us, and not to allow ourselves to be misled by false hopes.

Now, here we were, on the crest of the butte, which was as level as a floor, covered with grass and no trees, the appearance suggesting the origin to which allusion has already been made, namely, that of a section of the pampa having been pushed upward from the level to a height of a hundred feet.

It has been shown that the butte which we had climbed and upon which we turned at bay, could be scaled only on one side, where the ascent was so steep that the work was exhausting to the last degree. We had made that climb, and generously armed as we were, could hold a thousand Tobas at bay.

This was exceedingly comforting in one respect, but what of it? We were virtually caught in a trap, from which no way offered itself of escaping. We had enough food to last us a week by husbanding the supply, but we were without a drop of water with which to quench our thirst.

All the savages, therefore, had to do, was to hold their place at the base of the butte, or within a short distance, and we should be forced to descend and fight it out with them or await a lingering death on the summit. In common but expressive language, our enemies had us foul.

"There's nothing to be made by waiting," said my companion, after we had discussed every phase of the situation; "we can stand them off for several days and nights, but the end will be the same."

"We have got to make a break for liberty, and it is best to do it tonight, while we are fresh and strong," I replied; "for each night will see us weakened and less prepared to put up a fight."

The afternoon was drawing to a close and darkness would soon be upon us. Peering over the edge of the bluff, we saw that most of the Tobas had dismounted and were moving here and there, in a lolling, lazy fashion, as if they felt that the situation had taken the form of a merely waiting game.

One thought must have occurred to the reader. We had two dynamite cartridges in our possession. Why not clear the way by exploding one of them among the wretches, and then, in the confusion, make a dash from the foot of the butte?

That was the only plan that seemed possible, and we decided not only to resort to it, but to do so within the next hour or two, while the night was still young. We even hoped we might secure a horse apiece during the hurly burly and leave our enemies well behind before they could attempt effective pursuit.

But no mistake must be made at the beginning when a slip would spoil everything.

"To drop the shell among them from where we are now," said my companion, "would do its work, but it would take so much time for us to descend that they would rally and be ready for us."

"True; therefore we must steal downward to, say, two thirds of the way to the bottom, throw the cartridge, and the moment it explodes, hasten to the base and then 'Hurrah for Harry and St. George!'"

It was not yet fully dark, and we were sitting on the ground occasionally peeping over the edge to make sure no march was stolen upon us, when both heard a peculiar thud directly behind us. Turning we saw one of the Toba arrows with its head buried several inches in the ground and the other end pointing upward.

"Where did that come from?" I asked in astonishment.

"Where *could* it come from?" added Higgenbottom by way of reply; "there is but one source—well, I'll be hanged!"

A second missile dived into the ground still closer, both of us involuntarily starting, as we saw how narrowly it missed us.

I hitched to the edge of the butte and looked over. Perhaps a hundred yards from the foot stood a single Toba warrior, long bow in hand and deliberately launching his arrows at us. Since it was impossible to aim directly at his target, he sent the arrows high up in the air, where they curved over and dropped upon the top of the butte.

The native, knowing we were there, was trying to reach us by this roundabout course, and, as I have shown, had come mighty near succeeding.

At the moment I solved the puzzle, he let fly with a third arrow, which we plainly saw as it climbed the air, far above our heads and at a considerable distance away. Then, as it ceased as-

cending, it seemed to poise for a moment at the height, as if seeking us out, when it dived for us.

And, by heavens, it dived so truly that if I had not been quick to roll to one side, it would have buried its head in my back instead of in the earth.

" I think it is time *we* had a little of that fun," muttered the New Englander, thrusting the muzzle of his Winchester over the margin of the butte and carefully aiming at the miscreant, who evidently believed he had all the sport to himself.

He was in the act of letting fly with a fourth missile, when my companion fired, hitting the fellow so fairly that when he leaped in air with a wild cry and fell to the ground, he did not get up again.

" What's more," grimly added my friend, " I didn't have to shoot over your head to wing you. Now, if any other of your friends want to try that trick he will never have a better chance."

But if any of them held such an intention, it was postponed. We waited several minutes, and, observing nothing of the kind, I reached out and drew from the ground the arrow which I had dodged by so narrow a chance.

The head was composed of some kind of flint or hard stone, diamond shaped and ground to a point of astonishing keenness. It suggested a stiletto which a slight pressure would force deep into one's flesh.

That, however, which most interested me, was the appearance of the flint itself. It was perhaps two inches in length, and from the extreme point half of its surface was covered with a yellowish substance resembling mucilage. Although hard while exposed to the air, no doubt it would readily dissolve when subjected to moisture.

We were horrified, for there could be no doubt what this appearance meant. That gelatinous substance was the deadliest poison conceivable. Let but the tiniest particle pass under the skin and the victim would die as quickly as had poor Armetia.

" And that isn't the end of this," said Higgenbottom; " they will be afraid to try it while we can see them, but when it is fully dark, a half dozen will begin their devilish bombardment and keep it up until the top of this butte resembles the back of some huge porcupine."

" *Therefore*, when that takes place we must be out of range."

" Which can be done only by leaving this place."

Such being our resolve, we impatiently awaited the moment for making the crucial test upon which the question of life and death depended.

Twilight in the tropical regions is always brief. While we were talking in low tones and peeping over the edge of the butte, we saw that the night had fully come. Again the deeply blue vault was studded with its myriads of stars, which seemed to gleam with a cold, pitying splendor upon us, and the horses and warriors at the base of the bluff faded and melted in the gloom, until not a glimpse of any of them could be obtained.

In the intense stillness, we plainly heard the neighing now and then of a pony, the soft beat of his hoofs, as he changed his position, and occasionally the odd, guttural words of the Tobas, as they spoke to one another in conversational tones. Once the rattling of gravel made us think some of them were about to repeat the mad attempt to climb the slope.

We thrust our heads and shoulders over the lip of the butte, each grasping his revolver and waiting for the miscreants to show themselves; but, as the moments passed without bringing them to view and without our hearing a repetition of the streaming dirt and gravel, it was clear that the Tobas were too wise to repeat an attempt that was sure to result disastrously to them.

" Do you imagine," I asked, " that they will dream of any such scheme as we have in mind?"

"It must be all guesswork, but on general principles, I should say that if they do look for anything of the kind, they will not expect it until the night is pretty well along."

"Now, then, is the time to risk it," replied my companion, who was as impatient as I to act.

What we had specially to guard against was of betraying ourselves by starting the dirt and gravel under our feet. The utmost care was necessary. We should have preferred to wait until we were almost at the bottom, but to do so, would place us in danger from our own action. The furious force of the exploding shell might injure or kill us as well as the Tobas.

It was understood, as has been intimated, that we meant to pick our way until within some thirty feet of the base, and then launch the cartridge, following it with a dash for freedom.

My companion took the lead, passing softly over the side of the butte, Winchester in hand and moving with all the caution possible. As soon as the way was cleared, I followed.

There being no moon, we did not fear discovery until the distance was greatly lessened, but it need not be said that never were our eyes and ears called upon for more delicate and intense service.

The result at first was discouraging. The débris started in a stream, and we stopped, half disposed to retreat, but the fall was quickly checked, and we could hear nothing from the gloom below to indicate that our purpose was suspected. Indeed, why should the Tobas look for anything of the kind after our desperate effort to place ourselves beyond their reach.

Steadying himself by pressing his hand against the bluff behind him, and stepping downward with the most extreme care, Higgenbottom continued the descent, foot by foot, until he paused and turning round, whispered:

"We are over half way to the bottom."

"Yes; there's no doubt of it, and I can catch a glimpse of some of them."

"All right; here we go!"

Balancing himself with skill, he carefully drew out the single shell remaining with him and holding it suspended in his hand, peered downward and listened.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DASH FOR FREEDOM.

The stillness was so profound that we feared the Tobas had penetrated our purpose. One of them said something, to which his companion replied in the guttural fashion we had already noticed. A single horse took a few steps, his hoof beats reaching our ears with startling distinctness. Then again all was still.

My companion was standing erect and I was in the same position and within arm's reach. The background of the bluff helped to screen us, and it would seem that even the sharp eyed Tobas could not make out our forms in the gloom, for only the faintest shadows showed where they were grouped.

In the dim stargleam, I saw Higgenbottom draw back his hand and the next moment he made a quick flirt forward, and the cartridge shell was visible for an instant, as it sped outward and then vanished in the gloom. It seemed a long while in the tense condition of our nerves that we stood braced and waiting for it to strike and explode.

I heard it plainly as it struck the ground with a thump, and then I held my breath. But no explosion followed!

For a few seconds we were dazed. We had counted on nothing of this nature, but from some cause, impossible to understand, the shell failed to do its duty. How the terrible explosive could stand such a jar and remain intact was a mystery, but that it had done so was beyond question. The chemical, so potent for terrible work, is sometimes

erratic in its action, exploding seemingly without reason, and refusing to do so when no cause is apparent.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" muttered the disgusted and dismayed New Englander, in a dangerously loud voice; "Who would have thought it?"

The only shell left was in my possession and I drew it from my coat pocket.

"It's do or die!" I whispered; "here goes!" and I tossed the thing over my comrade's head and out toward where I knew the Tobas were grouped.

There was no failure this time.

The next instant it was as if a volcano had burst upward through the solid ground. The atmosphere was one vivid blinding glare, and for a moment I believed both of us had been mortally hurt.

But amid the horrible confusion and tumult, Higgenbottom called:

"Quick! Now's our chance!"

I had been shocked more than he, and was severely bruised by some of the débris hurled in every direction. Shading my eyes with one hand, I strove with desperate might to recall my senses and to clear my vision.

I remember hearing the awful shrieks of the savages, many of whom must have been blown to fragments, and then, as with a superhuman effort, I partially regained my self control and saw that my comrade was missing. He had rushed down the slope, counting upon my following, while I was standing idle.

Fearful that my delay was fatal, I leaped almost the entire distance, but striking the sloping path near the base, carried bushels of gravel and dirt with me, as I stumbled, rolled, slid and scrambled to the bottom, where, fortunately I landed on my feet.

There was no time to halt or try to get my bearings. It was impossible to retreat and the moment I found myself on the plain again I started on a dead run, straight out from the butte, with no attempt to note the direction. My one purpose was to get as far away as I could in the quickest time possible, and I did so.

I was still running when a frightened neigh sounded at my side, and I perceived a pony galloping in the same direction with me. Acting wholly under impulse, I reached out and grasped the flying halter, and with one desperate bound, vaulted upon his back.

The horse, like all the quadrupeds and bipeds in the vicinity, was in a wild panic and showed for the time no consciousness that he was carrying a rider. I hammered my heels against his ribs, and with another neigh of terror, he broke into a gallop directly out into the darkness and across the pampa.

It was at this instant that I thought of Higgenbottom, wondering what had become of him, and whether he could possibly have met with such good fortune. It would not do to desert him, and yet in what way could I aid him?

Tugging at the halter, I gradually checked the speed of my horse and managed to bring his head around so as to face the butte, which rose like a castle against the starlit sky. Shouts, cries, shrieks and groans still filled the air and the sounds of many hoof beats showed how complete a panic had taken possession of the whole party.

Suddenly a horseman loomed to view in the darkness and was headed straight toward me. I was thrilled at the thought that my friend after all had met with the same astonishing good fortune that was mine.

"Come on, old fellow!" I called; "things have turned out better than we dared to hope."

Without waiting for him to reach my side, I turned the nose of my pony away and again banging his ribs, sent him flying off in a gallop, but partly held him in until my companion could join me.

"Was there ever such good luck?" I chuckled; "we have a horse apiece, and no doubt they are among the best of the party. How do you feel, Higgenbottom?"

Receiving no response, I looked sharply around at the horseman who was almost up to me. As I did so, I saw his arm raised above his head, with a long, formidable spear grasped, which he was in the act of launching with deadly aim.

It was not Higgenbottom, but a Toba warrior whom I had mistaken for him!

With a gasp of affright, I ducked my head and plunged over the shoulder of my pony with a quickness which no equestrian ever surpassed. A second later would have been fatal, for, as I landed, I heard the whizz of the infernal missile, as it whisked past and struck the ground several yards beyond.

The Indian must have been sure he had impaled me, for he, too, leaped down, and, abandoning his animal, darted forward to finish me if haply I was still alive.

He found me very much alive, for holding my Winchester and halter with my left hand, I stooped under the neck of my steed and let fly with two chambers of my revolver as quickly as I could aim and pull trigger. With little more than two paces separating us, it is unnecessary to add further particulars.

Neither of the ponies was accustomed to firearms. The one belonging to the fallen Toba bounded away in a wild panic, and my animal tugged so hard at his halter that I was in danger of being carried off my feet. But I managed to hold on and keep upright, and as soon as I was near enough I took a flying leap that placed me on his back again and made me master for the time of the situation.

It was some minutes before I could fully regain control of the animal, for naturally he was greatly shaken by what he had passed through and often started and shied without cause. Finally, when he became tractable, I brought him to a standstill.

My situation was most peculiar. There I was in the middle of the plain, astride of a strange horse, wholly ignorant of what had become of my friend and without the slightest knowledge of which way to turn. The only compass of the exploring party was with the New Englander, and where was he?

While my heart glowed with gratitude over the extraordinary manner in which I had eluded the vengeance of the Tobas, I was distressed beyond measure about my friend. It was impossible to deny that the chances were that he had lost his life, for it was not to be expected that such a run of luck as mine could have come to him, and it has been shown how narrow was my escape from the mounted savage, even after I had secured possession of a horse.

I started to capture the second pony, whose owner had fallen before my revolver, having a vague idea that he might be made to serve my friend, but the prospect was too remote, and anyhow, the animal dashed off in the gloom before I could make any serious effort to secure him.

The all important problem with me was in what way I could help Higgenbottom, if he was really in a condition to be helped. Since we started out on our eventful attempt to explore the Pilcomayo, we had not been separated until now, and having never considered such a possibility, had not arranged any code of signals by which to communicate in the presence of danger.

I might whistle or shout, with the likelihood that the reply which appeared to come from him would really be emitted by one of the Tobas, who would thus be provided with the means for my undoing.

In sore perplexity, I dismounted, and firmly holding the bridle of the pony, knelt down and pressed my ear to the ground. Such I knew was the custom of the American Indians, and somehow or other I fancied it might help me.

The readiness with which sound travels through the earth when it cannot be heard in the air is startling. The

moment my ear touched the ground, I instantly raised my head and glanced around, certain that several horsemen were within sight, but nothing of the kind appeared, and after waiting a few minutes, I knelt down and pressed my ear once more against the better conductor.

The same sounds were heard, but were so perceptibly fainter that it was evident the horsemen were traveling in another direction. Still I listened, until in a brief while, nothing could be distinguished. This, while interesting, was valueless. Much as the reflection pained me, it was idle to hope I could be of any help to my friend before the morrow, and only then through some lucky turn of events.

" Now, if Higgenbottom was in my position," I thought, " he would put forth every effort to push ahead, and that is the best thing for me to do under the circumstances."

But the difficulty to which I have referred confronted me. I had no idea of the right course to take, and was without means of learning it until the rising sun should come to my help; but it was intolerable to remain motionless, and I set to work to formulate a reasonable theory as to the right course to be pursued.

Recalling the point where I had last seen the butte, and remembering that the path by which we had climbed it was on the south side, it seemed I could not be far wrong when I fixed upon a course leading to the southeast. In truth, there was no doubt in my mind that I *started* right, but the task was to keep to a course.

The method of doing this was simple. I fixed the location of the Southern Cross; then noted the lowest star's location as compared with another, whose name I did not know, and found that by following a course directly between the two my route would be substantially to the southeast.

This was the theory by which I was guided during the hours of the night that remained, and throughout which I pressed my pony with little mercy or consideration.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALONE ON THE PAMPA.

ALTHOUGH I had nothing in the nature of a saddle, my horse was one of the easiest riding animals I ever bestrode. He had a peculiar, racking gait, which he seemed to prefer to a walk, trot or canter, and, since it was quite rapid, I neither urged nor checked him, quite satisfied that he should hold his favorite pace.

Confident that I had started in the right direction, I did not forget to consult my compass, as formed by the two stars I have named. It was a curious fact that my pony showed the same tendency to which I have already referred several times—that of bearing to the left. This was easily checked, and he proved more tractable under the simple halter than would be supposed.

The even, sweeping progress must have lasted for nearly two hours, when he dropped so abruptly to a walk that I came within a hair of sliding over his head. At the same time, he pricked his ears and snuffed, sure evidence that he had detected something out of the usual order.

My Winchester was resting across the back of the animal just above my thighs, and I grasped the weapon more firmly, ready to aim and fire on the instant it became necessary.

If my horse was frightened, he would have stopped altogether or shied to one side, but he did neither. He walked forward, with neck outstretched, gently snuffing the air, as if it was the sense of smell upon which he was depending instead of sight.

A few minutes later, it looked as if there were a million stars gleaming on the pampa in front of me. The cause was plain: we had again reached a

body of water, which reflected the myriad orbs of night.

How deep or wide it was could not be guessed, but I believed it was shallow, since that peculiarity marks all the water found in El Gran Chaco. I looked up at the sky and saw that, as I viewed it, we were following the true course and consequently it was necessary that we should cross the stream.

I might have hesitated, had the pony shown any timidity, but with a gentle snuffing and a still slower step, he advanced into the water and kept on. I gently urged him, for, if the sheet was to be crossed, there was no call to be tardy about it. He increased his pace, and in a few minutes we were out of sight of both shores.

The depth slightly grew, until the water rose to his knees, though I knew from his action and the sound of his hoofs, that he sunk at each step into several inches of mud. At this moment, the pony stopped, stretched his head downward, and began drinking.

"A good example," I said to myself, and, leaning over, scooped up some of the element in the hollow of my hand and drank it.

It was as warm as dishwater, and no doubt was roiled. I felt little thirst, and, after a few mouthfuls was satisfied. The animal drank his fill, and then resumed his splashing advance, emerging soon after on the other side.

I judged the sheet was a half mile in width, and it resembled the body of water which we had crossed the day before.

The instant we struck hard earth again, the pony resumed his peculiar, racking gait, and a glance at my starry guide showed that he was following the right course.

"Ah, if I only had Higgenbottom with me," I sadly repeated a score of times; "he would make no mistake with his compass, and he carries a binocular that I shall need tomorrow. Cool, brave and resourceful, I should be much safer with him than alone. God protect him, for something tells me it has not been as well with him as with me."

I struck a match and glanced at my watch. To my astonishment, it was far beyond midnight. I had been longer on the road than I supposed, for it will be remembered that our start was made early in the evening.

The easy, soothing pace of the pony produced the inevitable effect. I had not slept since the preceding forenoon, the stirring incidents in which I was involved having driven all such disposition from me; but the strain was lifted, and something in the nature of a reaction followed. I found my senses wandering, and like many a man in a similar situation, I dropped into unconsciousness, though I doubt whether I ever would have believed it, except for my startling awakening.

I suppose it was the same instinctive action that keeps one from falling out of bed that prevented me from slipping off my animal during the period (how long or short I cannot guess), that I was borne forward in a sound sleep. But while in that delightful situation, I suddenly shot over the head of the pony, landing so squarely on my forehead that the wonder is my neck was not broken.

As it was, every bone, nerve and muscle in my body were shaken, and for a moment I was sure I was dangerously hurt.

The horse, while swinging along, paused as abruptly as if he had struck a stone wall, and, unable to offer the slightest resistance, I kept on until checked by the solid ground.

The animal was terrified by the unexpected appearance of a dreaded danger directly in front of him. I heard the warning growl of a wild beast, which served to bring back my wandering senses on the instant, and leaping to my feet, Winchester in hand, I faced the new peril.

An animal larger than an enormous mastiff, was crouching on the ground.

growling and lashing its tail, its cat-like eyes glowing with a phosphorescent light, as it crept slowly forward, all the time gathering its muscles for a spring at me.

I believed it was a puma or cougar that had appeared so abruptly in our path, and, leveling my rifle at the compact catlike head, I started to pump half a dozen bullets or less into its brain.

But I didn't pump one. With a cold shiver, I found that the weapon had been so injured by being hurled over the head of my horse that it was useless. The lock would not work, and my Winchester was simply a club, of no more use than an ordinary tree branch.

Hardly was the discovery made, when the puma leaped. At the moment of doing so, he emitted a grating snarl, and then his body rose in a graceful but terrible curve which would have landed him on my head and chest, had I not whisked to one side just in time to elude him.

Instead of attempting to use my Winchester as a club, I flung it aside and drew one of my revolvers. When the brute missed, he snarled again, and whirling with lightning-like swiftness, made a second leap directly at me. While in the act of doing so, and with the muzzle of my Smith & Wesson almost touching his nose, I discharged the whole five chambers in instant succession.

Ordinarily so small a weapon would have produced little effect against a formidable brute, but a revolver can do a good deal of execution, when it has the opportunity my weapon had.

I doubt whether a whole platoon of musketry would have been more destructive than that bombardment of the cougar with my revolver. At the moment I fired, he was in the act of leaping and did leap, but, instead of projecting himself against me, he bounded directly up in the air, and falling on his head and shoulders, rolled over, furiously clawing the dirt, and dying in a moment in front of me, as I sprang backward to escape his claws.

"It isn't often a South American puma is slain by the revolver of a gentleman," I said, "but it looks very much, my fine fellow, as if you are a victim."

But where all this time was my pony? I looked around, but he was nowhere in sight. Hardly had he sent me flying over his head, when in an ecstasy of terror, he whirled to one side and dashed off at headlong speed. Doubtless he was still running and would keep it up for miles.

As proof of his panic, when I knelt down and applied my ear to the ground, I could not hear the slightest sound of his flying hoofs. He was gone beyond recovery.

"There is one consolation," I reflected, trying hard to take a philosophical view of my dilemma, "he carried me a goodly distance toward home."

Aye, provided he had really done so, I added the next moment, shuddering at the probability that in the face of all my care, he had veered to one side, and, for aught I knew, had been bearing me back to the butte, where he had left most of his companions.

But the question could not be answered until the sun appeared, and, pulling myself together, I slung my broken Winchester over my shoulder, and struck off at a rapid pace, resolved not to throw away an hour's time.

By and by, when I lit another match and looked at my watch, I found that the night was almost gone. Before long, some portion of the horizon must begin to show the growing light of the rising sun. As if the foolish artifice could help, I kept my gaze fixed on the gloom directly in advance, determined that the sun *should* make its first appearance there.

And by gracious, it did!

With a thrill of hope and gratitude

that cannot be described, I saw the first streakings a little to the left of the course I was following. This was proof that I was still pursuing, as I had from the first, a due southeastern course. Had Higgenbottom been with me, guiding every rod of our progress by his compass, it could scarcely have been done more accurately.

"Hurrah!" I shouted, snatching off my sombrero and waving it above my head, forgetting for the moment my useless Winchester, the fact that I was afoot and alone on the pampa, with slight prospect of ever seeing my friend again, and with equally slight hope of making my way out of the accursed country.

As the sun came up and its glorious light illumined the endless, grassy prairie, I anxiously swept every visible portion, hopeful and yet fearful of what should meet my vision.

My situation was like that of the mariner adrift on a spar in mid ocean, who scans the heaving waters in vain for a sight of the friendly sail. North, south, east and west, in every direction, stretched the green motionless sea, with not a sign of butte, or living creature or wild animal to break the monotony.

Amid this very loneliness of desolation, I was borne up by the consciousness that the result of it all had been to carry me forward on my homeward journey. I must be well within the province of Paraguay, not far from the Tropic of Capricorn, and within a comparatively short distance of the river, which once reached, would bear me to Concepcion, my destination, where all dangers, so far as the Tobas were concerned, would be at an end.

So I took heart and strode off with a vigorous step, continually sweeping every portion of the visible pampa with my clear vision; and, as might have been supposed, I had not progressed for an hour, when once more I was brought to an abrupt standstill by the unmistakable appearance of danger in the very form I most dreaded to see.

CHAPTER XX.

AT LAST.

As in the previous instance, it was a party of horsemen, who, when first seen, resembled a number of faintly moving specks in the distance, but, instead of appearing directly in front, they were somewhat to the north.

But there could be no mistaking their identity, and that fact was enough, or rather more than enough, for me. I did not wait for a closer scrutiny, but lay flat on the ground, surrounded by the grass which was six inches or more in height.

It was good reasoning on my part that, if I could not see objects the height of a man at a distance of a hundred yards, those horsemen were unable to discern me. Moreover, a man on foot is so much less conspicuous than one on a horse that I was certain even the keen eyes of the Tobas had failed to detect me.

The question was then as to whether they would come near enough to render discovery probable. Every now and then I raised my head far enough to look across the intervening plain and study the dreaded marauders.

Several times my heart was in my mouth, for they seemed to be heading directly toward me, but, with a feeling of unspeakable relief, I soon realized that they were traveling to the westward, and unless an abrupt change took place in their course, there was no danger of my being seen.

Relieved of the great fear, I made a careful examination of my injured Winchester. It took but a few minutes to find that the lock was so broken that it was altogether beyond my power to repair it.

The weapon's usefulness was at an end, and it would be simply burdening myself to carry it with me.

I still had my revolvers, which were in excellent condition, and a goodly supply of cartridges.

"As nearly as I can figure out," I said to myself, "it will take two or three days to reach the Paraguay, and the danger from the Tobas ought to diminish as I travel eastward. Every mile will have to be made on foot and I must carry with me only such things as are indispensable. Consequently, my Winchester remains here."

And it did. Rather curiously, through all the tumult and exciting occurrences of the previous night, I had retained a couple of the beef strips with which Higgenbottom and I provided ourselves after the first explosion of the dynamite cartridges. The meat had become quite dry, and one of the strips afforded me a substantial meal that was by no means unpalatable.

When I had disposed of it I was refreshed and strengthened. I decided that that should answer for the day, and on the following morning I would eat the remaining quantity. This would exhaust my food supply, but it would be a strange thing for an able bodied man, armed with two Smith & Wesson's to starve to death in a tropical country.

The reader need not be reminded of the plenitude of vegetable as well as animal life. Indeed, the school geographies refer to most of South America as a vast conservatory with the roof removed.

When at last the horsemen flickered from view in the far away western horizon, I rose to my feet and resumed my long journey to the southeast. The same apparently endless sea of grass stretched away on every hand, and about noon I made out the form of a butte, similar to the one already described, so far to the northwest that the atmosphere imparted to it a soft bluish tint, which mellowed its rough outlines and made it an object of beauty.

So far as I could judge, I had no use for it, and I did not change my course, but gradually placed it on my left and finally it sank from sight, like a low lying cloud in the sky.

The next object that interested me was an unmistakable grove of timber, so nearly in my front that I made straight for it. I was growing wearied and was in need of sleep. Something in the appearance of the patch of woods suggested cool shadows and rest; but any one who has been placed in a situation resembling mine knows how deceptive distance is on the prairie.

The rock or stream which appears to be within half a mile, is probably three or four miles away, and, although I roused myself into taking long and vigorous strides, it seemed for a long time impossible to lessen the interval between myself and the wood, and I feared I should not be able to reach it before nightfall.

But the sun was still in the sky, when, pretty well worn out, I moved in among the trees and undergrowth, stepping carefully and peering around, for I could not forget that I was in the land of the jaguar, the leopard, the cougar, the black bear, the ant bear, and of the viper, the scorpion, the boa constrictor, the vampire bat and endless noxious insects, to say nothing of the Tobas, more to be feared than all of them.

A strange silence pervaded the grove which was several acres in extent. The undergrowth was not dense, though it appeared everywhere, and the tall trees were joined by loops of vines, whose beginning and end it was hard to find. Here and there a bird of gorgeous plumage was perched among the topmost branches, apparently dozing, though noon had long since passed. Several, disturbed by my appearance, uttered discordant cries and fluttered to more distant branches, from which they curiously watched me as I moved along.

But neither serpent, wild animal nor wild man was to be seen on the ground.

I carefully picked my way across the grove to the further side and then came back to the center without discovering the slightest thing to cause uneasiness.

The most interesting and gratifying find was made at this point. In the very middle of the grove grew three trees of moderate height, with delicate green leaves, resembling that of our own beech and with a considerable spread of limb.

Here and there, among these pretty leaves was seen a bright green fruit, suggesting a species of apple, but more elongated in shape. Some of the larger specimens had taken on a yellowish tint, which showed they were ripe.

I had heard of the algaroba or carob tree, but this was the first time I had seen it. When plucked and eaten, the fruit was found pleasant, though the flavor was different from any fruit of our own country. Its most marked peculiarity is its juiciness, which is so great that one or two of the fruits when slowly eaten by a feverish person will wholly satisfy his thirst.

The carob tree is more common in the Argentine Republic than elsewhere, and the well known drink, *laaga*, of which the natives are very fond, is made from it.

" Now," I said to myself, " since I have come thus unexpectedly upon a fresh supply of food, I should be very foolish not to turn it to the best possible account."

Whereupon I fell to and gorged myself with the delicious fruit, of which I intended to carry away a goodly supply, since I was not likely to find any more on my long journey to the Paraguay.

The present cause for discomfort was as to how the coming night should be spent. The mildness of the weather was such that it was no hardship to lie on the ground until morning without any blanket or extra covering; but, though I had failed to observe any proof of animal or reptile life, it nevertheless was about me and would be sure speedily to manifest itself.

The evident thing to do was to kindle a fire, which would be so screened by the surrounding vegetation as to be invisible on all sides beyond the edge of the grove, but the fire, to be effective in holding danger at a distance, must be kept going, and I was so tired from my long tramp that I was sure soon to sink into slumber.

The only really safe course was to perch among the branches, where I should be beyond reach of any prowling wild animals or venomous serpents; but the hammocks with which Higgenbottom had provided himself at Sucré, and which afforded so much enjoyment to the monkeys during our first night on shore, were gone, and, since no other recourse was open, I began gathering limbs and branches, collecting a goodly supply before darkness settled upon the scene. Then, from my match safe, which fortunately was only half empty, I kindled a fire which soon sent its yellow reflection against the exuberant vegetation overhead and among the trees around me.

When night was fully come the scene was picturesque and striking. For greater safety, I started two fires and placed myself between them, where the warmth was uncomfortable until I allowed them to die down somewhat.

Looking aloft, I saw a dozen or more birds attentively watching me, some small, some large, some with sober jackets and others of brilliant plumage, perched here, there and everywhere, one so near that I could have knocked it over with a short stick, while the largest and therefore the biggest coward was so far up among the branches that I could make out only a portion of its figure. It suggested the American snow owl, but it need not be said it was no relative of that well known bird.

" I wish I could be sure you were the only ones that would feel any interest in me," I muttered, as I assumed an

easy position on the ground and glanced from one to the other, " but there are quadrupeds—well, I'll be hanged!" I exclaimed, involuntarily quoting Higgenbottom's favorite exclamation, as I drew one of my pistols and leaped to my feet.

By the merest accident, I had looked off to the right among the trees and undergrowth, when I caught sight of two round, glaring balls of light, which, there could be no doubt, were the eyes of some wild animal, probably a jaguar, or tiger, or leopard who also possessed an inquiring mind.

His position was so far back among the shadows that nothing could be seen of his head or body, but the height of the glowing orbs from the ground indicated that he was an animal of extraordinary size, and one against which my revolvers would not be very effective except under circumstances as favorable as the night before.

But the most daring wild beast is afraid of fire, and so long as I kept the two going and did not wander away from them, I was as safe as within the stone walls of a castle.

My action in springing to my feet startled the brute, which instantly recoiled, and the flaming eyeballs vanished; but he was stealthily watching me from some near by point in the gloom of the wood.

Hoping to frighten him, I leveled my pistol at the spot where the glowing eyes were seen a moment before, and let fly with two chambers. The bullets zipped among the leaves and undergrowth, but probably missed the crouching animal by a dozen feet.

Meaning to be caught at no disadvantage, I recharged the two empty chambers, and then took two or three short, slow steps in the direction of the jaguar, as I had decided the animal was. Such a course will sometimes scare the bravest brute, since it implies a courage and intention on the part of a man which is far from being the truth, but, in the present instance, it was I who was startled almost out of my senses.

The shock was caused by a warning growl directly behind me, and turning like a flash, I saw the jaguar no more than ten feet distant, apparently debating whether to venture nearer or to make his leap from where he stood. In obedience to an impulse, I instantly fired three bullets at him, every one of which landed. Instead of making his charge, he whirled about and whisked off in the gloom.

After this experience, nothing could have made me believe that any sleep would come to me, though I was in sore need of it. I congratulated myself that I had collected so much fuel that it would last until daylight, if economically used.

Accordingly, I sat down on the ground between the fires, revolver in hand, prepared to mount guard until the morrow. I expected each minute the reappearance of the brute, but an hour passed without the first evidence of its being in the neighborhood, and then, strange as it may seem, I dropped asleep and never opened my eyes until the gray light of the coming day was stealing through the grove.

Glancing around, I saw that both fires had entirely died out, but no prowling wild animal was in sight. A wonderful escape had been mine, and again I thanked Heaven for its great care over me.

The needed sleep had been gained, and in higher spirits than ever, I once more resumed my tramp toward the rising sun, or to be exact, a little to the south of it.

It would be tedious were I to give the particulars of the remainder of my journey. I had passed well out of the range of the Tobas and saw no more of them. On the fourth day, early in the afternoon, my eyes were gladdened by the sight of a river so large and broad that I knew it was the Paraguay. A steamer was going up stream, and two vessels were sailing slowly southward.

With a thrill, which it is hard for any person to understand who has not been placed in a similar situation, I saw the glorious Stars and Stripes fluttering from the masthead of one of them. Inspired with new life and vigor, I dashed down the bank, waving my hat and shouting.

I was quickly seen, and the captain sent a small boat ashore to take me aboard.

He was a bronzed, bewhiskered skipper from Salem, Massachusetts, Ephraim Collins by name, who listened to my story with deep interest. He had been on a trading voyage into Brazil, and was now on his way to the Rio de la Plata, whence he intended to return to Boston.

"I'll be mighty glad to take you to Concepcion, or as far as you would like to go," he said in his hearty manner; "but, though you may not know it yourself, Mr. Windermyer, you are threatened with a dangerous illness."

I had felt it coming for the last two days. A strange dizziness had been increasing, and while walking over the plain, queer lights danced before my eyes, so that at times I staggered like a drunken man.

One of the prostrating fevers of the country—no doubt caused by my exposure—had seized me, and I was in need of prompt medical attention. Indeed, now that the strain was released, I collapsed and had to be assisted to the cabin.

The kindest attention was given me, but there did not happen to be a physician on board the Mary Ann, and when I was tenderly carried to the hotel in Concepcion, I was delirious and in a bad way indeed.

The city was unprovided with a desirable hospital, and the English physician who was immediately called, pronounced my fever non contagious, so there was no objection to this course by the few guests of the hotel, who otherwise would have permitted nothing of the kind.

Dim, vague, flickering pictures remain of the two days spent on the Mary Ann and of a part of the week at the hotel that followed. My attendant was a gentleman of skill and experience with such diseases as had laid me low, and I am sure that none could have handled me better.

Thus it came about that after a few days, I began to mend; my wasted strength gradually crept back into my enfeebled frame, the muddled brain clarified, and lying on my couch, taking the potent medicine from the hand of the good doctor, I soon comprehended in all its blessed fullness, that the crisis had been passed and I was convalescent.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MUTUAL RESOLUTION.

It was a week to a day after I had taken to my bed at the shabby hotel in the little Paraguayan town of Concepcion (which is a common name in South America), that I was able to don my clothing unaided, and, leaning on a cane, walk feebly out on the shaded piazza with which nearly all hostelries in that part of the world are provided.

I had paid my physician his moderate fee, and he, having assured me that all I now required was to be prudent, had gone off to visit some of his other patients in the town, which it must be confessed is not a healthy one.

I took my seat in a chair near the corner of the porch, and leaning back in the most comfortable posture I could assume, became aware that two persons, seated just far enough away to be beyond sight, were talking animatedly, and what seemed strange in that part of the world, they were using the English language.

"I call it pretty tough," said one, "after going through so many dangers, losing my steamer, being chased by the infernal Tobas, fighting with wild animals and being squeezed flat by a boa

constrictor seventy five feet long, living on grass, drinking water so thick with mud that it looked like molasses though it didn't taste like it—I say its pretty tough to be turned down by the confounded government and set adrift without a penny. I'm ashamed to go home and look my folks in the face."

"But," replied the other, "the Bolivian government furnished you with the boat, and you have told me you didn't pay the natives any wages, since your journey came to naught."

"That may all be so, but look at the waste of the raw material. Why, I'll be hanged! The government ought to give me a gold medal beside paying me double for having tried so hard."

There was no mistaking that voice, and, rising from my seat, I walked round the corner without the help of my cane, and saw Percy Higgenbottom leaning back in his chair, his feet resting on the railing and a huge cigar in his hand.

"Glad to see you, Windermyer," he said, extending one hand, but making no change of posture; "I've been keeping track of you ever since I got here three days ago; the doctor told me you had had a rough time of it, but were on the mend and was sure to pull through all right. Happy to take your hand, old boy."

He introduced me to his companion, a Major Sitgraves of the British army, who was traveling for pleasure. He and Higgenbottom had grown quite chummy, and the American had related the particulars of his memorable attempt to explore the Pilcomayo, adding another to the unbroken list of failures, but Yankee like, Higgenbottom was inspired by the idea that the Bolivian government for which he had been working ought to pay him for what he had failed to do, even though my friend had expressly agreed that no part of the large sum promised should be his unless his attempt was successful.

Major Sitgraves would have been pleased to see his American friend succeed in his wishes, but was trying to convince him that he had not the slightest ground for hoping for such a spasm of generosity on the part of the Bolivian government—a view which I also took.

After some conversation, and after I had lit my first cigar in more than a week, Higgenbottom told of his experience after that memorable affair at the base of the butte when we became separated.

"The most curious feature of the business," remarked my friend, after he had heard my narrative, "is that my experience was so similar to yours. There was no chance to arrange matters between us. It was each for himself, and when I saw a chance to mount a horse I did so the quickest I knew how, and scooted off in the darkness without paying heed to the course. It was because you and I took such instant advantage that we got our start.

"When morning came, I was out of sight of the Tobas, but I had been following the wrong course, and was further away from Paraguay than when I started. I set myself straight by means of my compass and kept at it until my horse collapsed and I was dead tired myself. Twice I saw parties of Tobas, but I kept out of their way and at night when I entered a grove, the same as you did, I came within a hair of being squeezed to death by a constrictor, which so terrified my pony that he dashed off and I never saw him again.

"The next misfortune that befell me was the loss of my compass. It slipped off my watch chain, and of course there was no use searching for it. Thenceforward I did as you did—made my own calculations and pushed on as best I could, but despite all my care, I continually went wrong, and thus was several days behind you in reaching the Paraguay.

"However, I struck it at a lower point, and knowing that you were aiming for Concepcion, I secured passage for the same point."

"I really gave you up as lost," said I; "how did you feel regarding me?"

The New Englander took a puff or two at his cigar, and then, removing it, grinned as he replied:

"Somehow or other, I never had any doubt that you would get through, and I felt the same about myself, for I never could forget that we were *Americans* who never say die."

Thus ended the attempt of Percy Higgenbottom and myself to explore the Pilcomayo. He was persistent in his effort to secure some kind of honorarium from the Bolivian government with which he made his agreement, but it need hardly be said he was unsuccessful, the officials—legally enough—refusing to reimburse him to the extent of a single penny.

"Perform your part of the contract," said the suave President Señor Severo Fernandez Alonzo, "and we will perform ours."

"I'll be hanged!" exclaimed my friend, in relating the incident to me months afterward, "If I ever again go within a thousand miles of that infernal Pilcomayo, it will be when I am blind, deaf and idiotic."

"In which sentiments I fervently join," was my response.

THE END.

THE CAMPANILE.

Against a sky whose blue is steely,
  Far faded in the garish glare,
Uplifts the gray old campanile
  Its slender javelin in air.

Like cooling springs to plodders parching,
  The sudden sight, for now we know
Italian skies are o'er us arching,
  Italian breezes round us blow.

Though grim, and with adornments meager,
  This lonely first Italian spire,
For us, who gaze with vision eager,
  It satisfies the heart's desire.

Since lines of beauty unbeholden
  By other eyes for us unfold,
As rock veins rough, that seem not golden,
  To some unveil their hidden gold.

Thus, looking through the lens of fancy
  Upon this bell tower, do we see—
Oh, strange and happy necromancy!—
  The promise of all Italy.

Clinton Scollard.

A BATTLE WITH MISFORTUNE.

BY UPTON B. SINCLAIR, JR.

A tale of trials in the great metropolis, wherein is shown that the fight with poverty and illness may have all the exciting features of a contest with life threatening conditions in the wilder regions of the earth.

CHAPTER I.

THE POET FROM EAST GREENVILLE.

HE was a pale faced, slender young man; he was standing in the City Hall Park, talking to a tall policeman.

"Can you tell me, please, where I can find the office of the *Globe?*"

The officer nodded in the direction of one of the tall office buildings which could be seen through the trees, and the young man moved slowly away.

As he went he gazed about him with a bewildered expression, which plainly showed that he was not used to the noise and confusion which prevailed about him. A newspaper bundle which he carried under his arm, together with the dusty appearance of his boots, would have been sufficient to tell the observer that he had just arrived from the country.

It was not without considerable difficulty that the young man succeeded in getting across the street, with its rattling trucks and jingling cable cars, but he finally gained the building in safety.

When he had passed through the doorway he once more gazed about him hesitatingly at the crowds of men who were hurrying toward the row of elevators.

Finally he ventured to approach the blue uniformed official who was in charge of these.

"Can you tell me," he inquired, "where I can find the editor of the *Globe?*"

"Thirteenth floor," answered the other, laconically; "step in."

But still the young man hesitated.

"I—I don't know——" he stammered. "Where—aren't there any stairs?"

"What in the world do you want with stairs?" demanded the other gruffly.

"I—I haven't got any money," was the stammering reply.

The "starter" gazed at the stranger for a moment or two in complete consternation, and then he burst into a roar of laughter which caused the other to flush with embarrassment.

The scene was abruptly ended, however, for the elevator was on the point of starting; and the official took the stranger by the shoulder and pushed him into the car.

"We won't charge you this time," he gasped, still breathless with laughter.

The young man had scarcely time to recover from his astonishment at the incident before he had reached his destination; outside in the hall, however, he gazed around him as much at a loss as ever.

He ventured to address a printer's boy who was hurrying by with a bundle of proofs.

"Can you tell me where I can find the editor of the *Globe?*"

"What editor do you want?" demanded the boy. "City editor, night editor, sporting editor, Sunday editor?"

"I don't know," was the uncertain reply; "I think——"

"If you want the city editor,"

snapped the other, as he turned to go, "he is in Room 15, across the way."

The stranger made his way over to the door indicated, from which a constant stream of busy men were hurrying. He knocked timidly, and then waited.

It was fully five minutes before finding that not the least attention was paid to him, he finally summoned courage to do as the rest were doing and step inside.

After another short wait, he ventured to accost one of the office boys, inquiring for the city editor.

"Name?" demanded the other.

"He—he doesn't know me," was the reply.

A pad of paper was shoved towards the stranger, with the instructions "Write your name and business."

When this was done, the office boy picked up the sheet and hurried through another doorway, glancing at the writing as he did so.

"Clarence Owen," he read; "manuscript to be examined."

In the mean time the pale young man betrayed his intense anxiety by mopping his brow as he paced up and down nervously. From an inside pocket he extracted a roll of manuscript, tied with pink ribbon, which he was fumbling at when the office boy came back.

"Step in," he said.

The stranger lost no time in obeying, and found himself in a large room containing fully a dozen desks at which as many men, mostly in their shirt sleeves, were writing busily.

None of them paid the slightest attention to his entrance, and so he stood hesitatingly in the doorway for a minute or two; then finally a man in the far corner looked up without taking his pen from the paper.

"You want to see me?" he called. "This way, please, and be quick about it."

He was a short, wiry man, with spectacles and a heavy black mustache, and the young man quaked inwardly as he saw the look on his face. He came hesitatingly toward the desk.

"Well, what is it?" cried the other again.

"I have here a manuscript which I would like to show you," began the caller, still fumbling at the ribbon. "I —I——"

The editor snatched it out of his hand before he had time to half open it, and darted a swift glance at the contents. Then he gazed up over his spectacles at the stranger, and his first words were in a tone that made the other jump as if he had heard a shot.

"What in the Dickens is this?"

"It is—it is a poem, sir; an—an epic poem——" and he stopped abruptly.

The editor was gazing in utter consternation, first at the heavy bundle of closely rolled manuscript and then at its bearer.

"Where in the world do you come from?" he gasped.

"From East Greenville, New Jersey," said the other; "I—I——"

He did not get any farther. The editor held out the manuscript.

"Here," he said simply.

And without waiting for another word he turned and once more began furiously writing.

The young man from East Greenville took the manuscript in his trembling hand, meanwhile gazing at the editor in puzzled uncertainty.

"W—what do you wish me to do?" he stammered.

The editor's reply would probably have required editing before publication; but it was never delivered, for at this moment there was a brisk step behind the stranger, and another person appeared on the scene.

He was also a young man, though much taller and more powerfully built, and seemingly several years older than the first comer.

He was contrasted in other ways also, for he was neatly dressed in the latest style and had the easy air of one who belonged in the office.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "I have brought the story for you to look over; are you at leisure now?"

"As much as I ever shall be," was the response, as the other again looked up. "I have been reading an epic poem."

Then he chanced to catch sight of the hesitating figure beside the desk.

"Don't you see that you are in the way?" he cried. "I have no time to fool with you."

The unfortunate poet turned white and started backward at the gruff remark; the other young man also looked astonished at the editor's rudeness, but the latter went on with his writing, while the first comer turned and hurried out of the office.

A sob arose to his throat, but he choked it down, and clenching his hands in rage he made his way toward the elevator; a few moments later he was once more outside in the turmoil of the street.

It would not be possible to imagine a more desolate and homesick expression than that on the young poet's face. He seemed not to notice which way he was going as he was hurried along in the stream of the crowd.

Finally he turned off into a side street, down which he wandered aimlessly.

But he had not gone very far before he looked around in surprise as he heard a voice behind him.

"Hello!" it called. "Can it be possible that it is you?"

Young Owen turned, half mechanically, and saw to his surprise that the remark was addressed to him. A natty looking young man had darted out of a doorway near by and was approaching him with outstretched hand.

"It can't be that I am mistaken," he cried, "it is you for a fact!"

The other extended his hand almost involuntarily, but no look of recognition crossed his face.

"I—I don't think——" he began.

"Is it possible that you don't know me?" cried the other; "why I recognized you the instant I saw you; how is everybody at home?"

"They—they're very well," replied Owen, hesitatingly. "That is, father's dead, you know; but sister's very well."

"And she hasn't forgotten me, I hope?" cried the other, effusively.

"I don't know, I am sure," was the reply. "I think you have made a mistake."

"But I am perfectly sure that I have not," was the other's answer. "Your face is perfectly familiar to me. Your name is—h'm, let me see now——"

"Clarence Owen?" inquired the other.

"Just on the tip of my tongue," cried the newcomer, slapping his knee. "I knew I had not made a mistake. When did you come in from the country?"

"Only this morning," said Owen.

"And how did you come?"

"Oh, I walked," was the reply.

"Walked!" gasped the first speaker. "Do you mean you walked all the way?"

"Oh, Greenville's only about fifty miles from here, and I took two days to do it, you know."

"I don't think I shall ever forget Greenville," the other continued, reminiscently; "I don't know where I have had a pleasanter time. It has been a good many years ago, to be sure, so perhaps that is why you did not recollect me."

The stranger continued his glib conversation, though apparently without any success in awakening the recollections of his acquaintance. The two were strolling down the street, but they had not gone more than a dozen yards before the conversation was unexpectedly interrupted.

The city man felt a hand laid upon his shoulder, and he turned nervously.

"You had better quit!" said a voice, sharply.

The young man from the country had also turned in astonishment. He found himself gazing at the prosperous

young man who had taken his place in the editorial room.

"This has gone far enough, I say," went on the latter. "Get out of here!"

The man who was thus addressed flushed angrily, and muttered an oath under his breath.

"What have you got to do with it?" he snapped. "I don't know you."

"I know you don't," was the reply, "But I know you, and I have already told you to get out. If you know what is good for you, you won't stop to talk!"

The reply was a most unexpected one; the man's face was convulsed with passion, and clenching his fist, he sprang forward and aimed a savage blow at the other's face.

The latter was taken completely by surprise, and he had no time to defend himself. It was only the quickness of the countryman which saved him.

The young poet swung up his arm in time to divert the stroke, and at the same time the truth of the situation seemed to flash over him, and he struck out lustily himself, with the result that his would be acquaintance was sent flying backwards on the pavement.

CHAPTER II.

SHATTERING AN ILLUSION.

THE confidence man sprang to his feet again and rushed forward as if to begin a fight; but he suddenly caught sight of a blue uniform on a neighboring corner, and with an oath of baffled rage, turned and darted up the street.

The two were left gazing at each other.

"By Jove, that was quick of you!" said the newcomer; "I owe you a vote of thanks."

"The debt is all mine," was the response; "you have saved me from a scrape, I see. I have already had one adventure like that, but I suppose I will get used to it after I have been here a while."

The other gazed at him curiously, beginning his survey with his face, and winding up with the very dusty pair of farm boots.

"You have just come in from the country, then?" he remarked with some interest.

"Yes," was the other's reply, "only this morning."

"And what were you doing there in the *Globe* office?"

"I had a poem to sell," was the hesitating response.

This announcement caused fully as much astonishment as it had in the case of the unsuspecting editor.

"Do you mean that bundle I saw was a poem?" gasped the other.

The stranger stammered out a confused assent.

"Pray let me see it."

He looked at the manuscript, which was written on both sides, from edge to edge, in the most painstaking hand, and read as follows:

THE HERO OF MANILA.

An epic poem in twelve books, by Clarence Owen, East Greenville, New Jersey.

BOOK I.

Canto I.

Oh, throned in might above the shining stars
High thoughted Muse who breathest the sacred flame
Of Poesy—descend in mailèd might
And crown the brows of one who, though obscure
Has dared attempt the sacred heights which none
May scale save he who in the deeps of thought
Has heard thy voice commanding. Haste, oh, Muse,
For o'er the eastern sea there comes a sound
Of thunder music echoing from the crash
Of armèd fleets locked in the dead embrace of battle.

As the young man read, his countenance betrayed signs of more emotion than could be accounted for by the stirring quality of these lines. He bit his lip and gasped for breath, his face growing red with emotion.

At last he could stand it no longer; he turned toward the poet, who was watching him anxiously. Hastily plunging his hand into his pocket, he produced a small coin.

"Will you do me a favor?" he gasped. "Do you see that cart across the way? Will you go and buy me a couple of bananas, please?"

The stranger gazed at him with open mouth.

"Bananas!" he cried. "What for?"

"Never mind," exclaimed the other, "quick, I want them."

And then as young Owen turned to obey the order, the other staggered back against a lamp post near by and went into a perfect spasm of smothered laughter.

"An epic poem, in twelve books!" he gasped. "And to the city editor of the New York *Globe*! Ye gods, ye gods!"

It was very soon necessary for him to regain his self control, however, for the poet made his purchase and quickly returned. He found his new acquaintance once more gazing at him gravely.

"I thank you," he said, as he took the bananas. "Won't you have one?"

And as the invitation was accepted, he himself took the other and proceeded to eat it.

It was evident that his gravity was still in danger of being overpowered, for his features were still working visibly. In fact, before the banana had half disappeared he was once more choking with laughter, which manifestation the other gazed at in no little alarm.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

And all his companion was able to gasp out was that it was such a funny tasting banana—which reply only served to increase the confusion of the one and the perplexity of the other.

It was not very long before the stranger began to suspect that he was being made fun of; a look of grave dignity crossed his face, and he extended his hand for the manuscript.

"I thank you very much," he said quietly, "I think I had best be going now."

The other, seeing that he had hurt his companion's feelings, speedily recovered his gravity.

"Which way are you going?" he said. "Perhaps I might walk a way with you. I don't want you to think I am laughing at the poem. I really am not, for I am no judge of poetry. It was simply the idea of your having brought it to that editor, for I know how he hates poetry."

The other was somewhat mollified.

"I did not know where to take it," he said. "Perhaps you can tell me. It is very timely, you see, and I thought the papers might like to buy it."

There was something so very earnest about the way in which this was said that the other was not moved to laughter again.

"We will talk it over," he rejoined. "Have you had lunch yet?"

"N—no," was the hesitating response.

"Well, let's go together then. I should judge you have not very much money, but I know of a place where we can get something rather cheap."

The younger man still hesitated, however, and flushed visibly.

"I fear I cannot," he said. "You see——"

"What is the matter?" asked the other.

"I have no money at all!"

"You don't mean you came to town with nothing in your pocket?" cried the city man in astonishment.

"No, not exactly," answered his companion; "but as I have already told you, I have had one adventure with one of your city sneak thieves——"

"And you mean that you have lost all you had?"

"I didn't have very much to lose," was the response, "but I lost every bit of it."

"Tell me about it. First, by the way, though, I might introduce myself. I

already know your name. Mine is David Bronson; go ahead."

"It is a short story," began the other. "I was going across City Hall Square about an hour ago, and I thought I would take a short cut, so I started to walk over the grass. I hadn't gone half a dozen steps before a fellow with a badge on his coat grabbed me by the shoulder. 'Here, you,' he cried; 'what are you doing on that grass? It is a dollar fine!'"

"And you don't mean you paid it to him?" exclaimed Bronson.

"Why, I didn't know," stammered Owen; "there was a sign right beside me 'Keep off the grass,' and there was such a crowd and so much noise, and this fellow had me by the collar, and I was frightened because I thought he would arrest me, and he kept demanding the fine, and as I took out the bills from my pocket—I had four dollars—he grabbed them. 'I'll get change,' he cried. 'You wait there!' There were two one dollar bills in the bunch, and so I started after him, yelling to him, but I could not catch sight of him again in the crowd. And that is the last I have seen of him."

Young Bronson gazed at the fellow pityingly.

"You are in a scrape," he said. "And how far are you from home?"

"Fifty miles," was the reply. "And I walked every inch of the way, too; but I haven't been worrying about that; you see I can sell the poem."

The other was silent for a few minutes as they strolled leisurely down the street.

"By Jove!" he muttered, half to himself, "this is a case. What in the world are you going to do?"

"How do you mean?" inquired the other, anxiously.

"Have you any friends in the city?"

"Not a soul."

"Then I suppose you will have to write home."

"Write home?" repeated Owen. "There is nobody to write to; I came to the city to make my fortune, and I am going to stay!"

There was a resolute ring to his voice as he spoke these words, and his companion turned and gazed at him. There was that about the young man's delicate and finely cut features and his bright eyes which inspired respect, and so the other did not even smile.

"I admire your courage," he said, after a long pause, "and I do not like to say anything to discourage you, but I have had a good many dealings with newspapers, and you will find what I have to say worth listening to."

"Well, then?" said the other, anxiously.

"If you don't hurry up and get some work before dinner time you will be in a most unpleasant fix; you will never get a dollar from an epic poem if you stay here fifty years and write fifty every year!"

Bronson saw that his abrupt words had wounded the feelings of his sensitive young companion; but fortunately it was not difficult for him to find a way of changing the subject.

It was a breathlessly hot afternoon in August, and the two were on the sunny side of the street. They were passing a bake shop, the shade of whose awning looked refreshing.

"By the way," added Bronson hurriedly, "here is the place where I usually get my lunch. It is not a very aristocratic resort, but perhaps you won't mind being my guest on that account?"

A more tactful way of putting the question it would have been hard to find.

"I should not in the least mind going with you," said Owen, "but I don't like——"

The other caught him impatiently by the arm and marched him inside of the shop.

"Come," he said, "you have told me your story, and now if you like I will

tell you mine, and then perhaps I will find a way to help you out of your scrape."

CHAPTER III.

QUEER WAYS OF WORKING.

THE two sat down at one of the little tables on one side of the store.

"Same as usual," said Bronson to the waitress who approached, "but double this time."

And then he turned toward his companion with a smile.

"I suppose when you saw me come prancing into the *Globe* office you thought I was a prosperous newspaper man, didn't you?"

"You don't look as if you are starving," was the other's response, as he gazed at the well dressed figure opposite.

"Well, it is only owing to good management that I am not," was the other's answer, "for, as a matter of fact, I haven't got as much money as you had when you struck town."

Then, apparently thinking that the words might cause Owen to hesitate in accepting his hospitality, he continued hurriedly:

"If you like," he said, "I will tell you of my adventures; I have had a lot of them. It will give you a good idea of what you have got to face in the city."

"I wish you would," responded Owen eagerly.

By this time the meal had been placed before the two. It consisted of two rolls apiece, a small plate of butter, and two glasses of milk.

"Now get to work," said Bronson cheerily. "Make it last a long while, and in the mean time I will tell you my story.

"It is just six months today since I struck out," he began. "I come from Connecticut—about twice as far away as your place. I lived all my life with an uncle who has a big farm up there. I went to school and to a little college near town, and after I graduated I began to look around to find out what I was going to do with myself. I was another one of those aspiring young persons who fancy they have literary genius. I never got so high as to think myself a poet, but I did think I could write stories and edit a newspaper, and all that, so I used to try to write articles when I suppose I ought to have been learning to run a farm.

"Any way, I got tired with having my uncle find fault with me about it; the upshot was I announced that I was coming to New York to shift for myself. So you see you are not the only one who is suffering poverty for the glorious cause."

Owen sat gazing at his companion in admiration.

"And do you .eally mean you have been getting along by yourself?" he cried.

"I came without a cent," was the reply. "I made my uncle a bet before I left. He is raising nothing but potatoes this year; and he said, 'If you don't come back to hoe them in less than a year I will share the farm with you, and you can scribble the rest of your life.' I have lasted six months so far."

"It is certainly a glorious prize," exclaimed Owen, his eyes sparkling.

"And that is not all there is to it, either," was the laughing response. "That is not even half."

"What else is there?" asked Owen, with a puzzled look.

Bronson laughed merrily.

"You might guess," he said, "especially since you are poetically inclined; there is a woman in the case."

"Who is that?"

"My cousin," was the answer. "We were already engaged, but I made up my mind not to ask my uncle's consent until I had won my independence. It's quite a romance, you see."

The younger man looked as much interested as if he were already turning the circumstances into a poem.

"Go on," he entreated. "What have you been doing since?"

"Ask me what I have not done," replied the other. "In the first place, I struck New York about St. Valentine's day—the date of that last great snowstorm—and that was the way I made my first money. I succeeded in hiring a shovel on my general air of respectability, and before the day was over I had done two dollars' worth of work; then I set out to look for a situation. I didn't have an epic poem, so I had to try for something humbler."

"And you mean you got a situation on the *Globe?*" inquired the other eagerly. "Then perhaps I can do it!"

"Don't you begin building your castles too fast," was the response. "My first situation was not on the *Globe* by a long shot. I think I could give you a thousand guesses with no fear of your ever hitting it. I began as an undertaker's assistant."

Young Owen gave a start of horror.

"An undertaker's assistant!" he gasped.

"It was the first chance that showed itself," continued the other. "You see I was not used to New York then, and my money went pretty fast; besides, it was an honest occupation, so I took the job. I got five dollars a week, which was pretty good for an inexperienced hand.

"It was a little place down on the Bowery, and about ten minutes after I engaged I set out to work. The undertaker drove me around to a miserable tenement house, and we went up stairs and proceeded to lay out a corpse for burial. I was charged with the pleasant task of dressing it. The coat was a little small, and I could not get it on, so the undertaker proceeded to break both of the body's arms across his knee. Then I thought it was time for me to give up my job."

The narrator broke out into another of his merry laughs as he watched the look of horror which had spread across his companion's face.

"Now you see what you are in for," he chuckled.

"Go on," gasped Owen, faintly.

"Well, the next thing was a waiter," went on Bronson. "I cut out a list of advertisements from a paper I found lying in City Hall Park, and proceeded to look them up. I spent two days doing that, and after I had been through the whole list I found one at the foot which seemed to suit. The restaurant was on the Bowery, too, and I set to work to learn to carry a tray with a tower of dishes three feet high on the top of it.

"I got along pretty well at first, but I began to get ambitious, and the result was a smashup. That happened about the third day, and as ill luck would have it, the proprietor was drunk at the same time, so he proceeded to fire dishes at me in his rage; I threw him over the counter, and then I got out of that.

"I was pretty desperate then, because I had cleared away all the snow in the city, and no more fell. I was finally reduced to selling newspapers. I thought I would have to join the Salvation Army or enlist in the army or something. But I was beginning to get a little used to the city by that time, and I realized that I might as well make some use of my education. I don't know what good fairy happened to put my next thought in my mind, but I tell you, it was an inspiration. Did you ever hear of such a thing as a joke factory?"

Owen opened his eyes wider than ever.

"A joke factory?" he cried. "What in the world——"

"Yes, a real joke factory, and it is working night and day, and is a paying business, too. Not the least of its advantages is that I am manager, owner, office boy, and everything all rolled up into one."

"Please explain," begged the poet, more puzzled than ever.

"Well, I used to look at the evening

papers, and it was not very long before it occurred to me—as I suppose it occurs to every one—that I could write jokes every bit as good as the ones that were printed there. The struggle for existence had sharpened my wits, and so I got right to work. I knew somebody must be paid for writing the jokes, at least those that weren't stolen (and I have since learned that somebody is paid for stealing them, too).

"At any rate, I wrote out half a dozen, and just the same as you did, I carried them up to one of the editors. They were not quite as long as an epic poem, you see, and so the third man I visited managed to find time to glance over them. He picked one of them out, and threw the rest back at me. 'I will keep this,' he said. 'Good morning.'

"I thought that was pretty cheeky, but I didn't venture to ask any more questions. I just got out. You may believe I watched that newspaper, and three days later I saw my joke.

"I was not sure yet whether I was going to get any money for it, but I happened to meet a newspaper man, and he told me what to do. I sent in my bill, and sure enough, next week there was a dollar for me at the cashier's office. And that was the starting of the joke factory."

"And do you mean that you have been getting along by writing jokes ever since? Good heavens, you must be writing thousands!"

Bronson saw that his companion's gaze was straying over his well made clothing.

"Oh, this didn't come out of the jokes," he laughed. "I brought it with me. As a matter of fact you will be surprised when you learn the truth. I have been selling on an average of just four jokes a week since I came to the city, and I have been living on that four dollars, and I tell you that it is quite an achievement for New York. You see now I am just the kind of a person a young poet would want to meet."

"I am afraid it won't do me much good," answered the other sadly, "because I don't know how to write jokes."

"You don't know what you can do until you try."

"It must be frightfully difficult," said Owen, "isn't it?"

"I found it so at first until I got into the hang of the thing. Now I can think up jokes without the least trouble in the world. I have got so that all I have to do is to get a good quiet place and I can count on at least a dozen in an hour."

"And you get at least a dollar for each one?" gasped the other.

"No, I don't succeed in selling them all," was the laughing response. "If I could sell all I write, my fortune would very soon be made. Thinking them up is by no means the hardest part. There is a sort of way of going about it you know. I have a regular list of joke subjects—there is the tramp joke, the mother in law joke, the boarding house joke, the small boy brother joke, the life insurance agent joke, the cannibal and missionary joke, and so on. I have counted them up, and I am sure there are fifty subjects about which a man can make a joke.

"Then, to take the tramp idea, for instance; there are about a dozen things available in connection with tramps. There is the fact that tramps don't like to saw wood, that they are afraid of water, and bull dogs, and tough apple pies. You see, when you get the thing reduced down like that it is very easy to take any one of the ideas and build a joke up around it. The expert in the art of writing jokes always goes at it from the rear, so to speak. If you want to go into the business I will introduce you into all the secrets."

"I don't know what I am to do now," said Owen. "I hadn't thought of anything but my poem."

Bronson smiled, but forbore to make any remark.

"The rest of my adventures are very soon told," he continued. "Now I have a list of about half a dozen papers to which I mail my jokes, and then, besides that, one of the editors gave me a list of the addresses of some of his artists—they buy jokes, too, you know, and illustrate them."

"What was that I saw you taking to the editor of the *Globe?*" asked Owen suddenly. "Jokes?"

"I was just going to tell you about that," said Bronson. "I am getting more ambitious; that was a story."

A look of delight swept over the other's face.

"I have tried to write stories," he said. "What is it about?"

"Oh, it is not a very high class one," replied Bronson, with a laugh. "I guess you would scorn to do that kind of writing. It seems that this editor was having a story done for his paper, and the man was taken sick, so he gave me a chance to finish it. It is a romance based on the Dreyfus case."

"The Dreyfus case!" exclaimed the other. "What do you know about that?"

"Oh, I have read enough about it in the papers to make a wild romance, and for the last two weeks I have been pegging away night after night describing the harrowing adventures of 'The Prisoner of Devil's Island.' I am not sure yet whether it will suit, but I can tell you if it is accepted I'll take a week's holiday from jokes."

"What a splendid chance!" exclaimed Owen. "You must feel that your fortune is made."

"Not quite, but the editor has promised me fifty dollars for the story."

Owen started backward and gazed at him in consternation.

"Fifty dollars!" he gasped, staring at him incredulously. "Why, I would sell my poem for fifty dollars!"

Bronson turned his head away for a minute or two. When he faced about again the corners of his mouth were still slightly contracted.

"I have told you my story," he said, "but you haven't told me a thing about yourself. How did you come to be here?"

"It is a very short story," answered Owen. "I am afraid it won't interest you very much, but you are welcome to know it."

By this time the two had finished their economical meal, and rose to leave, Bronson paying the small sum of ten cents for the banquet. The two then strolled slowly down the street.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOKE FACTORY.

"I HAVE already told you I walked in from East Greenville," began young Owen. "I have lived there all my life with my sister. We two have had a hard struggle, for we were left orphans when we were very young. Several of the neighbors helped to take care of us, but I have worked on a farm ever since I was about eight years old. I never went to school but one year in my life, but my sister and I used to study in the evenings, and now she is a school teacher."

"Is your sister older than you?" asked Bronson.

"Yes, just a year older," replied Owen. "I left her teaching school."

"And what in the world put it into your head to come to the city?" asked Bronson.

Then he chanced to catch sight of the heavy bundle of manuscript which was still under his companion's arm, and he changed the question.

"What put it into your head to write poetry?" he said.

"Oh, I have tried it all my life," replied the other. "I have always fancied I was going to be a poet."

"I suppose it was put into your head by reading some poetry," said Bronson. "What did you read?"

"Oh, I borrowed books from all around the neighborhood. I have read

everything I could get my hands on. I happened to come across a volume of Wordsworth, and a little while later 'Paradise Lost.'"

"And that was what started you on the epic?" said Bronson with a smile. "I shall have to look over that poetry of yours and see what there is in it. I was on my way home when I met you—I suppose you have no objection to walking with me?"

"None in the world," was the answer. "I have no place to go, you know, so I am in no hurry."

The two had by this time once more passed the tall *Globe* building and were walking across City Hall Park. They turned up Broadway, and presently Bronson turned down one of the side streets.

"This is the street I live on," he said. "Come up to my room where it will be quiet and we can have a chance to talk. It would hardly be possible to read poetry in this crowd."

"I am scarcely able to think in it," rejoined Owen. "I don't know how people manage to live in such a fearful racket."

As the two went on, however, the street became quieter, and at last Bronson paused before a brick house. He opened the door with a key and ushered his friend in.

"The stairs are rather dark," he said, "but they run straight on, and the room is light when we get to it."

"Not the least advantageous part of living in a place like this," he continued, chuckling to himself as they ascended, "is the amount of experience and breadth of sympathy it gives you. Here, for instance, on this floor, you learn that the inmates are having fried onions for lunch; in the front room you are initiated into the secrets of the nursery, and you learn how babies behave when they are cutting their teeth. On the floor above, though I have only been here a few months, I have already learned enough to write a full introductory treatise on the method of playing the slide and valve trombone. The third floor back is the room where I think Douglas Jerrold must have sat when he wrote 'Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures.' They are going on now, and from the sound I fancy a broom is being used, too."

Bronson continued his merry bantering until he reached his own room, the door of which he flung open.

"Behold the *sanctum sanctorum!*" he said. "You had better wait until after I put down the trunk lid," he added, laughing, "because there is no other place to sit down, and there is a dish of fruit and some butter in the tray; you see there is not room in here for a chair."

Owen gazed about him curiously. Coming from the country as he did, it was little wonder that he gasped at the dimensions of the room, which reminded him of a good sized double bed. There was a tiny cot along the wall on one side of the trunk, and the washstand stood beside it. To get to the window you had to take your choice of jumping over the back of the bed or stepping on the trunk.

"You recollect what *Touchstone* said about his wife," chuckled Bronson, "'A poor thing, my lord, but mine own.'"

By dint of squeezing close to the wall he found it possible to close the door, and then he flung himself down on the bed and gazed at his companion quizzically.

"How do you like it?" he inquired. "The ceiling, you notice, is a little damaged; the landlady assured me that that was done by the knees of the last occupant."

"The knees?" cried Owen. "How was that possible?"

"Oh, he was a very tall man," said Bronson, "and once or twice he doubled up his legs in bed. The roof leaks a little, too, but the landlady has promised me a tin basin the next time it rains."

Out in front of the window Owen espied the usual iron fire escape. This

was evidently new to him, and Bronson saw him gazing at it.

"That was put there to make the room a little larger," he said with one of his merry laughs. "It is first rate to sit out there these hot nights. We have free shows, because the man on the second floor brings his trombone out, and the woman on the third floor beats her husband there."

Owen seemed scarcely to know whether to take all this seriously or not.

"Really, though," said Bronson, after a little pause, "I am not half way uncomfortable up here—in fact, I do not know when I have been so happy as I have been in this little hole, as you may call it, earning my own way. I am perfectly independent, you know, and I can do just what I like. I should fancy you would appreciate that privilege."

"I should say so," responded Owen seriously. "I could make myself perfectly comfortable here, but I don't know how in the world I am ever to get four dollars a week."

"Oh, you can do it for less," said Bronson. "I only pay seventy five cents a week for this room, which is pretty nearly as cheap as one can get a place. My lunch, as you saw, only costs me five cents, and my breakfast but a little more. You would be surprised to see how cheaply one can live. We will discuss ways and means by and by. I am interested in your story, you know, and I don't mean to let you go until I see you fixed."

As Bronson spoke he laid his hand on the other's shoulder. He had been touched by the pathetic way in which the homesick young fellow had gazed around him.

"Cheer up," he said, laughing; "you never know what is going to happen."

It seemed that the words were prophetic, for at that very moment the comparative silence which just then prevailed through the house was broken by a loud whistle through the hallway. Bronson gave a start as he heard it and dashed through the doorway.

"Wait a moment," he cried, "it may be for me."

Owen gazed after the flying figure in amazement. Then came a moment or two of suspense, followed by a sound more exciting yet—a wild whoop in Bronson's familiar voice.

A quarter of a minute later he was up stairs again, and burst into the room, flourishing in the eyes of his puzzled friend a long, official looking envelope.

There was no room in any other place, and so Bronson leaped upon the bed and there executed a dance of triumph, meanwhile imperiling both his head and the ceiling.

"Gee whiz! This is the best yet," he said. "My fortune is made!"

As Owen still continued to look puzzled, the other held the envelope up before his eyes. It bore on the outside the name of one of New York's best known comic papers.

"The first time I have ever scored with them," said Bronson, "and they pay two dollars; what do you say to that?"

Owen took the envelope as directed and proceeded to examine the contents curiously. What he saw was a number of neatly written slips of paper, each one with a tiny number in the corner and with a joke written upon it.

"But I don't understand," he exclaimed. "How do you know one has been taken?"

"Look at the numbers," said Bronson; "that is the way to tell."

Owen followed the suggestion—1157, 1158, 1159, 1160—1161 was missing!

"I told you," chuckled Bronson; "they have taken 1161."

The other was gazing at him in open-mouthed incredulity.

"Do you mean to tell me, man," he cried, "that you have written 1161 jokes?"

"That's what I do," said Bronson,

" and I have a list of every one of them, too. See here."

He turned to the washstand and proceeded to open a drawer. To do this it was necessary to push the bed to one side, but it was finally accomplished, and Bronson hauled out a huge ledger, the pages of which he proceeded to turn over.

" Here is the chief account book of the great joke factory," he explained. " Here you see every joke, from No. 1 up to 1200, together with a list of every place to which each one has been sent. And now I will see which was the one they accepted."

Bronson turned to 1161. At the top of the page, in large letters, Owen saw the title, " Small boy brother jokes," and 1161 was as follows:

> " Aunt Mary, don't your skirts ever get in the way?"
>
> " Get in the way? Why, Reginald, what in the world do you mean?"
>
> " Why—nothing—only papa said you kicked at everything you saw; and I wondered how you could do it!"

" It is not such a very good one," said Bronson, apologetically, " but it took the editor's fancy, and that is all I care about. That makes the second joke I have sold today, and I think we will have to celebrate."

The thought crossed his mind just then, however, that it was difficult for his new friend to sympathize with his triumph, considering the latter's desolate situation. As soon as that fact occurred to him, Bronson set to work to change the subject.

" I guess you are tired of hearing about jokes, though," he added, as he shut the book with a bang. " Now suppose we get to business."

He flung himself down on the bed once more and gazed at his friend.

" Tell me," he said, " what are you planning to do with yourself?"

" I am sure I haven't an idea—except the poem—and you say that won't do."

" It might as a last resource," said Bronson, gravely, " but let us think of some other things in the meanwhile. How would you like me to take you over and introduce you to my friend the undertaker. Perhaps my place is still vacant."

Evidently the younger fellow was not quite able to keep pace with Bronson's sallies of humor. As the latter saw the look of horror which spread over his countenance, he concluded that it would be just as well for him to abandon his quizzing.

" Cheer up," he said; " we won't come to that quite yet. You promised to let me look over your poetry, you know."

The East Greenville poet was not reluctant to comply with this request. He once more brought out the epic.

" Did you bring any other poetry with you?" asked Bronson.

He wished he had not asked the question when he saw the other's next action. He had still been carrying the newspaper package of clothing under his arm, and on opening this he brought forth a second bundle of papers nearly as large as the first.

" None of them are so good," he said, " but you may read them if you like."

Bronson took the bulky epic and settled himself comfortably on the bed. In the meantime his companion sat and gazed at him, his anxiety evidently increasing with every minute.

He could not but feel nervous as he saw the businesslike look upon the other's face—especially when he realized how much more experience and knowledge of the world Bronson possessed than he.

Bronson read for perhaps fifteen minutes without saying a word. Then he put down the papers, and gazed at his friend. It was all he could do to restrain a smile as he saw the agonized look upon the other's countenance.

" What do you think of it?" Owen inquired, breathlessly.

" Well," said Bronson, " I will tell

you. I don't know just how to start in. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but yet you are here in New York without any money, and we might as well tell the truth and have the tooth out quickly."

A look of dismay crossed the other's face.

"Do you want me to tell you just what I think?" continued Bronson.

"Y—yes," was the faint response.

"Well," said Bronson, "I don't call myself a poet by any means, but I think if I had plenty of paper, ink and time to spare, I could write just that sort of thing eight hours a day."

He saw that that was rather a harsh blow, and so he made haste to continue.

"I am not much of a judge of poetry, but I have heard a good deal of it in my lifetime, and I know enough to realize what is required in the making of a great epic poem, such as you have been trying to imitate here. I know perfectly well that it cannot be done by a young fellow who knows no more about life and suffering than you or I.

"You may have poetic talent for all I know, but every one who dabbles in poetry seems to imagine he can start off without training or study. You wouldn't think of trying to play a violin without practise or instruction, and you wouldn't think of attempting to paint a picture without having learned to draw.

"Poetry is the most intricate work of them all, and requires the most care, study and labor, and yet, because you happen to be in a mild state of enthusiasm over Dewey's victory, you think you can sit down and make a poem about it to equal the masterpieces into which the world's great geniuses have poured their heart's blood.

"Perhaps you won't thank me for this sermon," Bronson added, with a smile, "but you may be perfectly sure that I am only doing it to save you from worse welcomes from different editors you might go to see."

He stopped abruptly, and then as he gazed at the woebegone expression on the face opposite his own, he felt ashamed at his own harshness, however necessary it might have seemed. He proceeded to turn his attention to the other poems, which he glanced over hurriedly.

They were upon every conceivable subject—fragments of great epics on everything from the building of the universe to the election of McKinley—a whole series of long sonnets to a mysterious and probably imaginary "Amarilla," and beside these a whole host of shorter poems, which Bronson took up.

He spent an hour or two at this occupation, while his friend looked more and more miserable as he sat and gazed at him. At last Bronson looked up from one small piece of paper.

"You must be a poet, to have written all this enormous quantity of stuff," he said, laughing, "but now I want to show you just what I mean. I don't know whether you fancy me much of a critic or not, but here is something you might make into a poem."

It was a small lyric of three stanzas, entitled:

MAY SONG.

In the arms of the dancing breezes,
The golden shower has gone
And the harp strings of the meadows,
Are thrilled with the music of morn.

And roses! roses! their glory
  Flung wide to the love of the day:—
Whose breath is the soul of sweetness,
  Whose breath is the music of May!
Oh heart to sing with the roses,
  The mad, mad music of May!

One throb for the vision of beauty,
  The world is panting to tell,
Ere the sun-arise in his hotness,
  The song of the rose to quell.

"Now I can show you just what I mean," continued Bronson—"that is, about your not understanding the technique of poetry."

"It is hardly a fair case," put in

Owen eagerly, " for I assure you I did not think much of that poem."

" That is just where you made your mistake," said the other, laughing; " it did not seem so sublime and so highfolutin to you. As it happened, however, it was something you really felt, and so it has a gleam of life in it. On the other hand, it is full of all sorts of imperfections.

" For instance, you don't know whether ' Whose breath ' refers to roses or today; and, in the second place, you could not find any rhyme for ' Tell ' except one which does not quite make good sense. Very likely you spent half a day hunting around for that rhyme."

" Yes," admitted Owen, reluctantly, " that is just what I did."

" And still you think you can write a famous epic! " said Bronson. " Well, I can't do anything to break you of that idea, and perhaps it is just as well I can't. But one thing I can assure you: your friend Wordsworth said he never made enough by his poems to pay for his shoe laces, and I tell you that if you want to earn enough to exist in New York City, you want to find some other occupation for, say, ten or twenty years—until you get to be famous."

" But what in the world am I going to do? " demanded Owen. " I don't know where to begin, and I haven't any place to go."

" I can't stand seeing a face like that around," said Bronson, springing up with a cheery laugh and clapping the other on the shoulder again. " Cheer up! Of course, you know I am not going to turn you out on the street until you get some place to go to and some kind of work to do. You have succeeded in interesting me a great deal more than you had any idea of; you are lots more interesting than your poem."

Bronson gazed around the room dubiously as he continued:

" I don't know," he said, " just how we can arrange it, unless I can get a hammock and suspend it from the walls, for two people can never sleep in that cot, and there is no place else that I can put my trunk. But perhaps if the rain holds off I can make myself comfortable out on that fire escape."

Owen had been gazing at the other in consternation as he went on; his face had gradually flushed as he realized the import of the words, and now he broke in hastily:

" How can you suppose I could think of such a thing! " he cried.

" Never you worry," laughed Bronson. " You will find I have by far the best of it if it happens to be a hot night; and, in fact, if it happens to be a rainy one, I don't know but that it would be just the same, unless the landlady should actually bring up that basin in the mean time."

But the grave look did not leave young Owen's face; he turned toward the trunk where his hat was lying.

" I cannot think of it," he said firmly, " I must manage to get along by myself. Good by."

Bronson, too, became immediately grave. He put his arm on the young man's shoulder, at the same time quietly taking his hat from his hand.

" Now see here, old man," he said, " don't let's have any nonsense about this. I don't like sentiment, and I've not got much time for arguing, but just answer me one question. If you were here in New York as comfortably fixed as I am, and you had stumbled across me without a cent in my pocket or a place to sleep, would you turn me out loose on the street? "

That was the best possible way of putting the argument. Owen shifted his feet nervously, and began stammering out a faint reply.

" Now, you know perfectly well you would not," went on Bronson, " and so you might as well listen to reason. You have no objection to me as a companion, have you? "

" You know it is not that," began Owen, earnestly. " You are the first person who has had a kind word for

me, and I shall never forget it. But——"

"Very well, then. I don't propose to ask you to accept any charity from me, but I do say that in this big city you and I will do just as well to stick together. I haven't a friend, either, and I feel pretty lonely at times. There is no reason why you shouldn't share this room with me, such as it is, and when you get something to do—which will probably be in a short time—you can pay your part. Or perhaps we can get a larger one; so sit down there and quit your fooling."

Owen was almost speechless with gratitude. He grasped his new friend's hand, and started to express this; but Bronson had already said that he was not fond of sentiment, and he soon managed to change the subject.

CHAPTER V.

HOW TO LIVE ON FOUR DOLLARS A WEEK.

AT this point the whole house seemed suddenly to shake with the reverberations of the trombone.

"I think that fellow must be studying for a position in an orchestra," said Bronson. "He plays nothing but the trombone parts of the grĕat operas, and such fire and fury you never heard in your life. The worst of it is, he will play the same parts over a hundred times in succession, and he doesn't seem to get it any better the last time than he did the first. He doesn't get started more than ten minutes before the baby on the floor below begins yelling, and the people on the other side of the air shaft commence screaming at both to shut up."

Bronson continued discussing the different adventures which had occurred to him during his sojourn in the lodging house. He seemed to have the names of all the tenants by heart, and had interesting stories to tell of each one of them—all of which served the purpose of keeping Owen from any further thought of going.

At last, however, Bronson's stock of ideas gave out.

"You must be tired," he said, "after all the walking you have been doing today; how would you like to lie down and take a nap?"

"But what will you do in the mean time?" protested Owen.

"I have more things to do than I have time to do them in," was the reply. "I have about fifty jokes to think out, and my great ledger to fix up for the last two or three days. I can very well arrange to do it now."

The younger man made no further objection. It was evident that he was completely exhausted, and within two minutes after he had flung himself down on the narrow bed he was sound asleep, in the midst of his precious manuscripts.

Bronson stood for a minute or two regarding the sleeping form in silence, and thinking of the brave struggle of the young fellow; but just then his eye chanced to light on the epic with its pink ribbon, and with a chuckle he turned toward his own dreary business of cataloguing jokes.

He got out a pen and ink and seated himself upon the trunk, where he was soon hard at work, oblivious to everything else.

The afternoon wore away, and even the almost indefatigable trombone player gave up from exhaustion. But Bronson still continued, busily writing out his efforts at humor from the little notebook he had taken from his pocket, and when at last he ceased it was well towards evening.

He rose, stretched his arms, and again gazed at the motionless form.

"There is no use waking him," he decided. "He is happy for a while, any way."

And with that, he turned to the door, and after wedging himself out, closed it behind him. He made his way down the dark stairway, passed the habitation

of the crying baby and of the fried onions, and was soon out in the street again. There he mailed several packets of his precious jokes, and next entered a large produce store.

No housewife could have been more cautious and economical in the purchase of supplies than Bronson was. He returned with his pockets full to the little room, where he found his friend still sound asleep.

Into the depths of the mysterious trunk Bronson dived, dragging out a frying pan and a couple of plates, also a sort of frame which he fitted over the gas jet. From one of the bundles he produced a fair sized piece of steak, which he dropped into the pan with a slap, at the same time gazing at Owen to see if the sound would awaken him; but the young fellow never moved.

He took several potatoes from his pockets and soon had them pared, cut up into slices and deposited with the steak. And the whole was soon frying merrily over the gas jet, Bronson meanwhile producing a loaf of bread, and from the top of a small piece of ice which was wrapped up on the top of the fire escape, a little butter.

" One would think that fellow ought to be hungry," he muttered to himself, " but perhaps the odor is making him dream of a better banquet."

Owen still gave no sign of consciousness, and his friend did not awaken him until everything was ready. Then, taking the pitcher of ice water, held it over the other's head, and allowed a few drops to fall.

" Wake up there! " he cried. " It is beginning to rain! "

Owen started up and gazed about him in amazement; it was fully a minute or two before he realized where he was, and in the mean time Bronson had seated himself on the floor beside the trunk.

" Ten minutes for refreshments! " he shouted. " Wake up there, quick, and if you don't hurry up you will get left on your share."

It was evident that the young man was half starved, but it was only with difficulty that Bronson could succeed in getting him to share the meal. He felt keenly his position of dependence.

However, he was very hungry, and it was really a most inviting repast. Bronson had evidently had considerable experience as a cook.

" I've found this the cheapest way to live," he said. " I paid only fifteen cents for this steak, and it would have cost me thirty in a restaurant. You see I've got everything down to a fine point."

The trombone player and the baby once more started in furnishing a subject for Bronson's witticisms while the operation of cleaning up the dishes went on.

" I don't wonder you are successful as a writer of jokes," said Owen admiringly. " I wonder that you don't write all the ideas down that occur to you."

" I used to do that," replied Bronson, " but I found it spoiled all the fun, and I can think up jokes enough without it. At first, when I was inexperienced, I used to keep a note book in my hand and write jokes all the time; everything used to suggest a joke. If I went to church, I found myself thinking up jokes on the text; if a funeral went by, or a baby fell down the air shaft, or the house caught on fire, it was only the occasion for a joke with me. But now I have got the thing more systematized, and I never trouble myself about business except in business hours."

When the last remains of the meal were cleared away, the two made their way down the steps and into the open air once more. Bronson had suggested taking a walk to pass the evening.

" I have got something to show you," he said. " Another little trick which I have discovered. Besides having a joke factory of my own, and a restaurant with a band of music attached, I have found a private yacht—a steam one at that."

"A private yacht?" exclaimed Owen. "What in the world do you mean?"

"It is not a very expensive yacht to run," went on Bronson. "It costs only three cents; but still I never take it except when I can afford to be extravagant. I think I can be today on the strength of that two dollar joke."

The two made their way along the narrow streets, until at last Owen realized from the refreshing breeze that he was nearing the river front.

One last rush through a tangle of cars and cabs brought them to a ferry entrance, where Bronson purchased two tickets. In a few minutes they were in the midst of the great crowd which was hurrying aboard of the waiting boat.

"This is the yacht," said Bronson, "and it carries me across the Hudson for three cents."

"But how do you get back?" asked Owen. "Do you swim?"

"I stay on and come back," said Bronson, "and then I stay on and go over again, and so on until I get tired. It is about as pleasant a way of spending a hot summer night as I have succeeded in finding."

Bronson learned that Owen's trip across on the same ferry boat that morning had been the first time the young man had ever seen salt water, or even a large steamer.

It is seldom that those who are confined to the tenement districts of the hot city get sight of any of the beauties of nature, but one chance that they have is on that broad river with its twinkling lights. Owen stood in the front of the boat, gazing about him in silent wonder.

Bronson smiled to himself as he fancied what new epics must be taking form in the head of the enthusiastic young poet. He, himself, meanwhile turned his thoughts to the more practical ends of enjoying the fresh sea breeze, and cudgeling out a few stray jokes mean time.

The sight was still more wonderful when the two strolled to the other end of the ferry boat for the return trip. The great city seemed to rise strangely and mysteriously from the very waves themselves, and the shadows of the lofty buildings and their twinkling lights danced on the changing surface of the river.

There was novelty enough to keep Owen's attention through the entire evening. It is probably very seldom, indeed, that the owner of a private yacht derives more pleasure from it than filled the heart of the young countryman.

His long nap had refreshed him, so when the proposal to return home was finally made it came from Bronson.

When they reached the lodging house again they were greeted by the notes of the irrepressible trombone, playing the very same passage that had saluted Owen when he first entered the house.

"He has been a week getting through that one opera," chuckled Bronson. "Do you wonder people take sandwiches with them when they go to hear Wagner cycles?"

The problem of how two persons could occupy that room at once now arose, but Owen settled it peremptorily by declaring his intention to sleep on the fire escape, nor would he yield to any of his companion's protests.

After assuring Bronson that he never walked in his sleep, so that there was no danger of his falling through the opening, he curled himself up in the corner, and was soon oblivious to all the troubles of the day.

CHAPTER VI.

OWEN'S FIRST TRIUMPH.

It was with a start of consternation that Bronson awakened next morning. His first thought was to gaze out on the fire escape, and he discovered to his alarm that his companion was no longer there.

He rushed to the window and looked around him, but down in the court below nothing of his friend was to be seen, and it finally dawned on Bronson that the young countryman had probably awakened with the chickens and gone out to take a walk.

It flashed over him at the same time that perhaps Owen might have taken this means of relieving him of the trouble of his care, but a glance around the room showed that the precious epic had not been carried away.

" He will come back," Bronson decided.

He proceeded to dress without further worry, and in fact not ten minutes had passed before the door was flung open, and Owen rushed in.

The young fellow's cheeks were glowing with excitement, and there was a look of triumph on his face which caused Bronson to gaze at him eagerly.

" What is the matter? " he cried.

By way of answer Owen thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a bright new quarter which he held up for inspection.

" How is that for luck? " he laughed. " And all by accident! "

" How did it happen? " asked Bronson.

" I was never more surprised in my life," Owen replied. " It was like finding it. I took a stroll down by the ferry house again, and there I saw an old man and woman come out. They had evidently just arrived on a train, and had several bundles which they were scarcely able to carry, so, of course, I stepped over and offered to help them. They only went two blocks to the Elevated railroad station, and would you believe it, when I left them, the old man made me take this! "

" And do you mean you expected to do it for nothing? " gasped Bronson with open eyes.

" Why, of course. I refused to take it at first, but he insisted, so——"

Bronson shook his head sadly.

" A hopeless case," he groaned. " I am afraid you will have to stick to epics; but in the meanwhile put that in your pocket, and we will hurry up and spend it before you have a chance to give it away."

He gripped his friend by the arm, and the two hurried out into the street. A few doors away was a small restaurant, where Bronson ordered two cups of coffee and some boiled eggs.

" It will cost fifteen cents apiece," he said, " which is fearfully extravagant, but I am in a hurry to get over and find out what that editor thinks about my wonderful Dreyfus story. I want to be down there the first thing when he gets to his office."

Bronson rattled on, narrating the thrilling adventures which occurred in the course of this marvelous tale.

" That is the kind of stuff that interests the readers of the Sunday *Globe*," he explained.

Several times during the course of the meal Owen looked timidly up, as if he had something to say, but each time his diffidence seemed to restrain him. At last, however, when Bronson came to give him advice as to his course in hunting for work during the day, he ventured to put in a word.

" I—I thought I would try," he stammered. " I don't know how they will go, but you might look at them."

" What do you mean? " cried Bronson. Then, as a sudden idea occurred to him, he added mischievously, " Have you been writing an ode to a ferry boat, or is it only a sonnet to the Hudson? "

" It's—it's some jokes," replied the other.

Bronson gazed at him for a moment, then grasped him by the shoulder.

" So that is what you got up at four o'clock in the morning for! Let me see them, quick, let me see them! "

Owen brought out a paper which Bronson seized and hurriedly glanced over. He looked down the list, Owen watching him with as much anxiety as while he was reading the " Hero of Manila."

The result was somewhat different, however, for Bronson suddenly gave a start of delight.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "There is a good one!"

Owen's face was fairly radiant.

"You don't mean it?" he cried.

"Yes I do," laughed Bronson. "I see you have been following my advice about writing things which you can really feel and appreciate. You hit it right at the start."

The slender breakfast had been eaten by this time, and the two young men hurried out into the street.

"We must lose no time," said Bronson. "We'll sell that joke while it is fresh."

"Where are you going to take me?" asked Owen. "Surely not to that dreadful editor again?"

"Not much," said Bronson. "If he knew I was associating with epic poets he wouldn't give me any more work. But I am going to send you over to one of my artists."

He gazed up at the clock on one of the tall office buildings near by.

"It is half past eight now," he said. "He will be there by the time you reach the place. Here is the address. Go straight up Broadway until you reach the street. The fellow's name is W. F. Marner, and he illustrates jokes. He will buy that one just as sure as you are alive."

Owen was as delighted as a school boy, and hurried off.

Bronson turned and made his way down to the *Globe* office to await the arrival of the editor.

Owen had fully two miles to go, but after his long walk from East Greenville, it did not seem very much to him. His impatience lent wings to his feet, and in a short while he reached the building in which the artist's studio was situated.

He was almost as nervous as when he had entered the office of the *Globe*, but this time he stepped into the elevator without asking any questions.

He rode to the top floor as his friend had directed, and then, after finding the number he wanted, knocked timidly on the door.

"Come in," called a voice cheerily.

Owen entered and gazed timidly about him.

It was a strange scene that met the young man's eyes—so strange that he started back with a gasp of amazement.

The room, or "studio," as the artist himself would probably have designated it, was a big, bare place with a skylight on the top. In one corner was a bed, which had evidently been used but a short time before. A wash basin and pitcher were on a chair near by. Over in the other corner was a bureau with a pair of shoes and the remains of a breakfast on it—a state of affairs which exactly corresponded with the condition of the rest of the room.

Easels and pictures, fancy costumes of every conceivable description, swords and battle axes, golf sticks and a bicycle, a statue of the Venus de Milo with a high silk hat placed on her head!—but there would be no more possibility of describing the jumble of that strange place than there was of Owen taking them in with his hurried glance.

What fixed his attentions above all things else was the two occupants of the studio. The strangest of them must be described first.

He was standing on a platform in the middle of the room, a tall man clad in a long, white, flowing garment improvised from a sheet; a false white beard hung upon his chin, and in his hand he clutched a long umbrella which he was in the act of raising to his mouth as if it were a trumpet. It was little wonder that Owen gazed in consternation at this personage.

The other was a small and insignificant-looking young man, clad in a varied colored smoking jacket. He was sitting at the easel sketching away for dear life, and was so busy that he did not even glance up as Owen entered.

"Take a seat," he called out. "See you in a minute."

So Owen sat down and watched him hurriedly sketching from that ludicrous figure. When he had finished he cried:

"Drop your trumpet, Jim."

Then he turned toward Owen.

"I have been engaged to make a series of pictures for a new illustrated Bible," he explained. "We have just come to the fall of Jericho, Joshua, 5th chapter, 4th and 5th verses."

And the young artist turned to a Bible which lay at his side and read: "And the seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of ramshorns (otherwise umbrellas) and the seventh day he shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass that when they make a long blast with the ramshorns, and when they hear the sounds of the trumpets the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city shall fall down flat!"

Owen meanwhile stood there with open mouth.

"Is—is this Mr. Marner?" he finally managed to stammer.

"Yes," said the other, "what can I do for you?"

Owen managed to explain that Bronson had sent him with some jokes.

"I have one," he added, "that Mr. Bronson thought was very good."

"Which is it?" asked the other. "Let me see it."

Owen handed the joke over, and the young artist, glancing at it, read as follows:

Scene, the office of the Recording Angel at the gates of Paradise; an applicant for admission.

Recording Angel: "I find here that you are charged with 6,742 separate and distinct oaths."

Applicant (in horror): "But I never swore in my life!"

Recording Angel: "That doesn't make any difference, you played a trombone in a boarding house."

The origin of this joke will readily be apparent to the reader. The artist sprang to his feet with a chuckle.

"By George!" he cried. "That is a bird!"

He turned and spoke to the model, who had meanwhile been standing upon his platform absolutely motionless.

"Jim," he cried, "we will drop the Bible! Be the recording angel!"

And without a word of reply, the model stepped down from his platform and lifted a table upon it. He seated himself behind it on a chair, took a pen in his hand, and placed a huge pair of spectacles upon his nose. Being still clad in a white robe, he needed only wings to complete the illusion.

Owen meanwhile was horrified at the sacrilege of the thing, but it apparently never occurred to the artist. He gave the Bible a shove across the floor, and sent the picture after it. Then he snatched up a square of cardboard, and seizing his pen, hastily set to work.

The rapidity with which he dashed off that sketch made the visitor fairly gasp for breath. And it was a clever sketch, too—a high desk, with the solemn angel sitting at it, his great ledger in front of him, his spectacles on his nose, his pen in his hand, wings on his shoulders, and a golden crown on his bald head.

"And now be the applicant," cried the artist suddenly.

Instantly the model sprang from his seat, and jerking off his beard, assumed a look of contrition and alarm as he stood in front of the desk. He again clutched the umbrella, which this time was sketched as a huge and murderous looking trombone.

Altogether it took about half an hour to complete that sketch, the artist chuckling at every new stroke. In the background appeared the "Golden Gates," with an elevated railroad ticket chopping machine in the entrance, with St. Peter as guardian.

The crowning witticism of all, and one which when it struck the artist

almost caused him to fall off his chair, was a bicycle leaning against the wall, with the sign above it: "Scorchers please take elevator below."

Owen was, of course, radiant at his first success, and seemingly the artist was no less pleased; in fact, he was moved to an unexpected freak of generosity.

"Generally," he said, "I don't pay until the joke has been accepted, but I am so sure that this one will go that I will pay you for it now if you like."

And so it happened that a few minutes later the young man got his hand on the first dollar that he had ever earned by his literary powers.

Encouraged by this cordial reception, he produced three or four more jokes which he had brought with him. The artist selected one of these, which he promised to illustrate, after which he abruptly turned his labors over Joshua.

Owen, after promising to call again, made his way out of the building. His head was fairly swimming with triumph. He was a confirmed joke writer from that moment, and, in fact, he soon found himself busily trying to cudgel out a few more as he walked along the street.

When he once more reached his room he found the trombone still at work, but Bronson had not yet returned, so he sat down and wrote out some more jokes which he had thought up in the mean time.

If he could have seen into the future, a future very close to this seemingly promising present, his thoughts would have congealed in the contemplation of that which was to befall himself and Bronson.

(To be continued.)

BELLS OF VENICE.

Silence o'er city fair,
  Not a breeze sighing,
Silence in palace old
  At the day's dying,

Gold in the sunset sky,
  And on sea lying,
Long lines of golden light
  Like arrows flying.

Boats on the paths of blue,
  Blue skies o'er bending,
Silence at sunset's hour,
  At the day's ending.

When lo! the many bells
  From each church tower
Ring out in melody,
  At sunset's hour.

Silence unbroken save
  For sweet bells ringing,
As through the sunset's gate
  Day's flight is winging.

Grace Hibbard.

A QUEER MESSENGER.

BY HENRY F. HARRISON.

A sailor's yarn concerning a swim that was taken against the rules, and which turned out to be a mighty lucky thing for two unfortunates, although it meant lifelong hampering to the swimmer.

IT were over thirty years ago, nigh's I can reck'n. I was a tough young chap of my inches, and bein' born and bred in sight of the sea, took to it as natural as a duck.

The first v'y'ge ever I made were in a little full rig ship called the Dolphin. Little she were for a fact, tonnin' exac'ly one hundred and thirty four—the smallest square rigger as ever sailed round the Cape o' Good Hope.

We were on a tradin' v'y'ge—they bein' commoner then than nowadays. Cargo? Bless you, there was a little of everything, according to the locality where we was goin'.

Tin whistles and bead grimcracks, big figured calicoes and cast iron pocket knives for the South Sea islan's; old clo'es and plug hats for Madagascar, fish hooks and tin ware for the Laccadives, and so on.

And Cap'n West, bein' kind of a spec'lator in his way, had bought up a lot of condemned army ordnance stuff to a gover'ment sale.

There was cavalry sabers, hoss pistols, a lot of flint lock muskets, and two brass cannon—field pieces, I believe they call 'em—with a lot of ammynition of different kinds. This army truck he was cal'latin' to traffic to the commandant of the Dutch fort to Anjier.

In them days ships carried big crews. There wasn't no such thing as puttin' half a dozen men aboard a thousan' ton fore and after like they does now. Not by no manner of means.

The Dolphin had eighteen men before the mast, besides the carpenter, bo'sun, supercargo, three mates and the cap'n.

One watch could shorten and make sail, so there wasn't no callin' out all han's every time it come on to a blow, which it did pretty continual till we'd got well round the cape and struck the sou'west monsoons, which give us fine weather.

We were well to the nor'ward of Cape Guardafui, cal'latin' to run acrost to an Arab seaport—Keshin were its name, I think—to dicker for red coral and sponges, which the natives is great for fishin' up, when we struck a dead calm somewheres about thirty mile off shore.

Hot! I've seen blazin' days on the line in my time, but this beat anything I ever remember. The pitch jest sizzled 'tween the deck planks, which were that hot you couldn't bear your hand on 'em, and the tar was fryin' out of the standin' riggin' fore and aft.

" I can't go this," says English Ned, which were an old shipmate o' mine. " I'm goin' to slip over the bows for a dip, if it takes a leg."

" Maybe it'll take more'n a leg if one o' them big Gulf of Aden sharks happens to drift along," I told him.

But of course he were bound to have his own way, and he did.

The old man was asleep in the shade of the spanker, and the mate below, else Ned wouldn't have dared to go over—orders bein' very strict about goin' in swimmin' from shipboard.

Ned knowed this as a matter of course, and took advantage. Them of us as was awake stood to the rail kind o' envin' him, and as he swum and sput-

tered himself with the cool, greeny blue water, till all at once a Kanaka chap, which had eyes like a needle, sings out "Shark!"

Sure enough, and as big a one as ever I laid my two eyes on.

He must a' come under the keel from t'other side of the ship, for we'd see nothin' of no black fin as is usual the case when a shark is anywheres round.

Ned heard us sing out and struck for the ship, puttin' in his best licks, but it wasn't no use.

Before the boat was down and fairly unhooked, the shark turned belly up. Ned gave one awful screech, and when we got to him the poor chap's right arm were bit off jest above the elber!

Of course it might a' been wuss—though this were bad enough in all conscience. We pulled him in and got him aboard as quick as possible—he having swooned with losin' of so much blood. Cap'n West stopped the bleedin' after a fashion by takin' up the arteries nigh as handy as a surgeon, and Ned come to.

Meanwhiles the Kanaka had rigged an old harpoon, and got over in the main channels.

All at once he hollered, "Fast"; and sure enough he were. All han's tailed on to the line as the iron were fast to, and hauled the shark alongside spite of the splashin' and squirmin'.

Then we bent a big shark hook to the end of the main brace, hooked it into sharkey's upper jaw, an' h'isted him inboard—the carpenter standin' ready with an axe for to chop off his tail—that bein' about the vitalist part of a big shark.

"Cap'n," says Ned, a minute after the old man had poured a calker of rum down his throat, "I wish't the fellers would open that ere critter an' see if my arm's inside him—there's a ring on one o' my fingers as was give me by my sweetheart, and I'd like to get it back as it was a keepsake."

The old man said "All right," as a matter of course. Sharks'll swaller anything they can lay their jaws to, and it's most allus customary to see what's in one's stummick.

I've seen four feet of chain sheet and a big silver watch took out of one, to say nothin of a pair of sea boots and a sheath knife.

But, as I was sayin'. D'rectly he stopped thrashin' about we cut him open. Poor Ned's arm were there sure enough, and it were kind of pitiful to see. He got back his ring and then we gave the arm a sea burial.

There were something else in the shark. A ball of marline, a rusty bunch of keys and a junk bottle corked up tight.

"Maybe it's something to drink," says the bo'sun.

But come to hold the bottle up to the light, there was nothin' 'cepting a scrap of paper inside.

While the men was heavin' the shark's carcass over the rail and swabbin' up the deck, the bo'sun smashed the bottle, and Cap'n West, seein' writin' on the paper, read it aloud.

Of course I disremember just the words. But it was to the effec' that the cap'n of a 'Merican bark—Belcher his name were, and the Bloomin' Rose the vessel's—had been took pris'ner by an Arab pirate.

It seems the Arabs had plundered and burnt the bark, massacreed all the crew 'cept the cap'n and mate, which was aboard the dhow bein' carried to Keshin, where they would be sold for slaves.

The cap'n had wrote the message, put it inside the bottle and sent it adrift on the sly, takin' the one chance in ten million of its bein' picked up by some ship. The shark had swallered it—and that's the way it came to us.

Well, of course we was tremendous worked up. The Bloomin' Rose was an old Salem bark, and Cap'n West knowed Cap'n Belcher well.

"Boys," he says, "by the date of this writin' the bark was burnt some time yesterday. There's a breeze comin'.

Who's game for gettin' up the guns and ammunition outer the hold, and runnin' into Keshin, where we'll threat'n to blow the town to flinders if they don't give up Captain Belcher and his mate. What d'ye say?"

We all said one thing, wild and reckless as were the proposition. And that one thing were "Yes."

Keshin then wasn't only a small town—mostly sun dried clay houses and such, with p'raps a couple o' thousan' people in it, and I don't doubt but that we could have laid it in ruins if we'd set out. But as it happened, things took a different turn, and we didn't have to bombard the town.

We got the two field pieces h'isted out of the hold and sot 'em on their kerriges with ammynition and all alongside 'em. And besides that there was a couple of dozen ships' muskets loaded and primed a layin' on the main hatch, with a pile of the army sabers, and as many big hoss pistols.

The breeze had sprung up light from the east, and the old ship had headway on her again, when some one aloft sung out, "Sail, oh!"

"It's one of them Arab dhows—I can make out her lateen rig," says the mate, who'd been spying her with his glass from the main rigging.

And when a little later we see she was headin' for us, comin' up hand over hand, there were consider'ble excitement aboard.

But nobody flinched. Even Cap'n West's two twin boys, eight or nine years old, bawled like good ones because the old man made 'em go below so's to be out of the way of danger in case of a scrimmage.

The dhow sailed three foot to our one, and, for all the breeze was so light, in a couple of hours she were that near we could see her decks was swarmin' with men.

Of course they see the Dolphin was a merchant vessel, and was chucklin' to think they'd have another haul like they did with the Bloomin' Rose—supposin', as we knowed were more than likely, this were the same pirate craft.

The field pieces was loaded half way to the muzzle with spikes and iron scraps from the carpenter's shop, atop of a big charge of powder, and pinted to'ards the rail. Then we throwed a tarpaulin over each of 'em, and the nigger cook had a red hot poker in the galley stove to touch 'em off when Cap'n West said the word.

All han's 'ceptin' Cap'n West, the man to the wheel, and the cook smuggled down under the bulwarks. Every man, even to Bob the cabin boy, were armed with a gun, a hoss pistol and cavalry saber.

"We'll warm 'em, darn 'em," says the old man, gritting his teeth as the dhow came a hummin' up to wind'ard and the copper faced dogs on deck sot up a yell to see how easy they was goin' to take another prize.

I were only a youngster then, but I'll never forgit how excited I were, a layin' there with my heart knockin' up agin my ribs, hearin the Arabs yellin' close on our quarter.

Down came their big lateen sail, and as she ranged up alongside the dhow's captain sung out something in Arabic, and grapples was thrown into our main and mizzen riggin'.

"Bo'sun!" yelled Cap'n West.

We knowed that wasn't for us—not just that minute leastwise.

The bo'sun yanked the tarpaulins off the guns quicker' you'd say knife. The Arabs was crowded to the dhow's rail thicker'n hornets, brandishin' their carvin' knives and shoutin'.

"Cook!" sings out the captain, and out of the galley bust Bob, touchin' the red hot poker to the primin' fust of one gun, then the other.

"*Whang! Whang!*"

Lord, how it did rake 'em! And then the old man grabs up a saber.

"Give 'em the ball ketridges fust, boys," he shouts, and every man Jack of us was on his feet in a twinklin' with muskets to the shoulder.

I s'pose we fired kind of permiscuous like, but the cannon shots had throwed 'em all into a huddle of confusion, and they more or less dropped to the musketry.

Then as they fell back screechin' from the rail, Cap'n West sprang over the bulwarks, we a follerin' with pistols and sabers just as in the old han' to han' fights you read about.

Nigh as I remember, there were over sixty pirates aboard the dhow. Thirteen was killed and badly wounded by the charges of spikes and scrap iron, and 'most as many more by the ball ketridges.

But it were the complete surprise as gained us the day. We shot 'em without no thought of mercy 'ceptin' them as threw down their weepins and made signs for quarter.

And we driv mor'n half of 'em overboard with the sabers. That were the last of *them*, for in ten minutes the water was jest alive with sharks.

It were the completest vict'ry anybody'd ask for, and all over inside of half an hour. Best of all was, Cap'n Belcher and the mate of the Bloomin' Rose was in the hold, layin' tied hand and foot.

The dhow had a deal of plunder aboard. We hove over the dead, fixed up the wounded ones the best we could, and tied the prisoners round the deck. Only for the mate, Cap'n West would have sailed slap into Keshin with a pirate swingin' to every lower yard arm. As it were, we handed 'em over to the 'thorities when we *did* get in, and I believe they was hung eventooally.

The only one who was dissatisfied were English Ned.

"If I'd a had my arm," he says, grumblin', "I could a' had a hack at 'em with the rest. It's jest my bloomin' luck."

"You'll get your share of the booty some day, all the same," says Cap'n West.

And so he did, and a nice pay day we had with somethin' like a year and a half's pay and each man's whack at the plunder, when we got into Boston. I notice I never had such a one since, and never expec' to.

My wheel, eh? All right—strike eight bells, for'ard!

IN "FODDER GITTIN' TIME."

WHEN de corn begins to rustle,
Den de darkeys hatter hustle,
  For de fodder gittin' time is close at han';
An' de days is hot an' hazy,
An' de darkeys mighty lazy,
  But dey pulls de fodder down an' ties de ban';

But de darkey's mighty willin'
Futter plug de water millin—
  An' hit ripens at de time hits needed wuss;
Under neaf de corn hits growin'
Whar we plant hit in de hoein
  An' de darkey eats de mos' wha' gits dar fuss.

Oh, de rustle ob de fodder, when de win' is in de corn—
  Dat's de music whut am dear to Unker Sime;
Oh, de cookin' of de dinner, an' the blowin' of de horn—
  Dats de chorus of de fodder gittin' time.

Ellen Frizell Wycoff.

BY FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE.*

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

The story of John Ashton, involving the quality of a sin and a coincidental mystery, being a tale in which New York and London are links in a chain of extraordinary incidents.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

IN London Lord John Hertford, ninth earl of Ashton and Cowingford, is married to Lady Mercy Covington, and on the very night of the wedding reception Lord John is summoned from the room and fails to come back. The bride seeks to hush the matter up and with the aid of a faithful servant, Robert, remains hidden away in the house, awaiting her husband's return, while her friends are under the impression that the bride and groom are traveling abroad.

Meantime, in New York one John Ashton, trusted employé of Henry Hollister, banker, who believes himself to be Mr. Hollister's nephew and is practically the fiancé of his daughter Hope, in seeking to shield the prodigal son of the family is himself accused of theft. The banker then announces to him that he is not his nephew, that he is merely a foundling who was picked up on a doorstep, and declares that now, having brought such disgrace to those who have befriended him, the best thing he can do is to kill himself. A struggle ensues, the banker falls, and striking his head against the safe, is left for dead by Ashton, who writes a note stating that he is responsible for the deed, and then wanders forth in a sort of daze, expecting each instant to be arrested for the crime. But to his amazement, no attempt is made to interfere with his movements; he takes ship for foreign shores and for nearly a year travels in new lands, striving to forget and failing miserably. Then, reaching London, he has about decided that the only thing to do is to return to New York and give himself up, when he is accosted in the street by Robert, Lord John's servant, who takes him for his master. Ashton protests, but it is of no avail. The old man evidently thinks his wits are wandering; and finally Ashton, feeling sorry for the fellow, consents to humor him to the extent of accompanying him home to talk over the coincidence.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBERT'S DELUSION.

WHEN Robert returned, he had recovered the imperturbable calmness for which English servants are renowned. He actually hummed a favorite air to himself while he was engaged in setting the table.

Ashton watched him curiously, vaguely wishing that he were indeed the lost earl, returned to enjoy his own, and to be waited upon by such a servant.

Once, when Robert was absent from the room for a longer period than usual, he returned bearing a smoking jacket and a pair of slippers, and without a word, knelt down and began to undo the laces of Ashton's dust covered shoes.

"You might as well be comfortable, sir," he said, when his guest demurred. "I was on the point of saying that you used to like to wear these slippers and this jacket when we were here together in this way, and in this very room. You are so like Lord John, sir, that I forget that you are not actually he. You will pardon me, sir, if I speak in that way sometimes? It does me good just to think that you are he. He was almost like my own boy, you know, sir, and I loved him just the same. You won't mind if I keep on thinking that you are the earl, if the thought gives me so much pleasure, will you?"

"No, Robert; it can do no harm, I

* *This story began in the January issue of* THE ARGOSY, *which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.*

suppose; still, it seems to me to be a strange sort of pleasure. You will find that the slippers will not fit me, and that will disabuse your mind of this conceit."

"Oh, they will fit you, sir, never fear. They used to fit perfectly, you know, and I do not believe that your feet have grown. There. Am I not right, sir?"

"I can't deny it, Robert. It is all very strange."

"Yes, sir; very strange; so it is, but the strangeness will wear off after a while."

When the cold tongue, fresh bread, steaming chocolate, the inevitable pot of marmalade and a profusion of delicacies were placed upon the table, Robert took his place behind the chair that he had arranged for Ashton, and bade him to the repast.

"You will sup with me, Robert," he said, as he took the proffered seat.

"Yes, sir, after I have waited upon you. You will not mind if I prefer to do things just as I used to do them, before you went—that is before he went away?"

"No; please yourself, if you get any pleasure out of it."

"Thank you, sir. Why, I feel ten years younger than I did before I met you on the corner of St. James Street."

"Robert, are you sure that you are in your right mind? Try to think, now, and see if you are not laboring under some vivid hallucination. This is all so confoundedly preposterous, and you are in such deadly earnest, that by Jove, I begin to think that perhaps I am the earl after all, and that I have been living in a dream for thirty years or more."

"Thirty one, sir. Thirty one last February."

"Eh? By Jove, that's funny. How the devil did you know my age?"

"I held you in my arms before you were a day old, sir."

"Well, upon my soul, Robert, I believe that you are as crazy as a loon. I suspected it when you first addressed me, but your earnestness compelled me to believe you sincere."

"No, sir, I am in my right mind. Don't think about that at all. You were thirty one on the tenth day of last February. Isn't that true?"

"Humph! I'm not at all sure of that. I have always celebrated the twelfth, but I might be two days older than that, for my—friends—could not have known the exact day of my birth. Look here, Robert, are you sure that your master is not dead, and that the loss of one you loved so dearly sort of queered you; eh?"

"Well, sir, if he had died, I think I should have died, too. I won't deny that."

"Have you got a photograph of him?"

"Yes, sir. Here it is, and a perfect likeness, too. It was taken just a week before you went away."

"The devil it was! Eh? Is that the earl?"

"Yes, sir. Go to the mirror, sir, and look upon the picture and then at yourself. What do you think of it?"

"I think, if this is a likeness of the earl, I don't blame you. It could not have been more like me if I had sat for it myself."

"That it could not, sir; that's the truth. Now, if you will sit here in this chair, I will bring you one of your favorite cigars. They are all the better for being a year older, you know."

"Yes, that is what the Englishmen think."

When Ashton had lighted the cigar, he smoked on in silence for several moments, while Robert stood faithfully beside him, devouring him with his eyes, stroking the backs of his own hands softly, his whole attitude one of devotion, almost rapture.

Presently Ashton burst into a hearty laugh—the first time in a year that he had laughed aloud—and the sound, emanating from himself, was strange to him, and it ceased as abruptly as it began.

"What is it? What is the matter?" asked Robert.

"Suppose the earl were to walk in here now, and find me arrayed in his smoking jacket, wearing his slippers and smoking his cigars. What do you think he would do, Robert?"

"He would sit right down here and smoke with you, sir, and say it was an excellent joke. I am sure that he would, sir."

"Well, perhaps he would, but I am not half so sure of it as you are. How long has he been away?"

"He left the house one year ago tonight, sir."

"Humph! And I left my home one year ago tonight, too."

"Yes, sir; certainly. Of course you did. Don't you remember, there was a wed—ahem! a sort of party here, sir? A lot of your old friends, and the Prince and Princess of Wales and——"

"Hold on, Robert. Great Scott, man! What are you talking about? I think I know what is the matter. The party you refer to, was a funeral, eh? And the earl was dead? Now stop and think if I am not right."

"You see, sir"—calmly—"you cannot be correct, because if that were true, there would be another earl here now. If he had died as you say, the next in line would have inherited the title and the estates. You understand that, do you not, sir?"

"Yes, to be sure. Decidedly, this is the most remarkable circumstance, take it all through, that I ever heard of. Now you get that chair and put it there. That's right. Sit down upon it, and tell me the story of the disappearance of the earl, from beginning to end. Perhaps we can get something out of it; at all events, we'll try. While you are telling it, I want you to observe one thing."

"Certainly, my lord."

"Bosh! You carry this farce too far. I want you to remember that you are speaking of the earl and not of me. Have you tried hard to find him?"

"I have searched everywhere, sir."

"Did you notify the police?"

"No, sir, the countess would not have it so. She preferred——"

"The countess! Good heavens! Was he married?"

"Yes, sir; the ceremony——"

"Stop!"

Ashton leaped to his feet, kicked off the slippers and threw off the jacket before Robert realized what he was doing.

"Where is the countess now?" he demanded. "Here in this house? Good God, Robert, you don't suppose I want to be caught here under these circumstances, do you? Where is my hat?"

"Please wait, sir. Let me help you on with this jacket again. The countess is not here. She is abroad, sir. She has been abroad a year. There is no one in the house but ourselves."

"And a woman. You spoke about a woman. Who is she?"

"A servant, sir."

"Where is she?"

"In her own room, sir. She is an invalid, and never leaves it. There, that is better. Now the slippers; so, and so; and your cigar? You threw it away and you must have a fresh one. Now, shall I tell you the story?"

"Yes. I'll play the earl for a little while and listen to you. You gave me quite a start, though."

Ashton had permitted himself to be gently thrust back into the chair, and rejacketed and reslippered, resumed his former position.

"Where shall I begin, sir?" asked Robert. "At the wedding ceremony?"

"Yes, if that is the proper place."

"Do you remember, sir, how beautiful Lady Mercy looked that morning?" asked Robert, musingly, for his mind had leaped back over the year and the spectacle of that day was passing in review before him.

He saw again the increasing dawn; heard again the twitter of birds; felt

once more the pleasure of that early morning wedding; but he was rudely awakened from his dream by the voice of Ashton, calmly inquiring:

"Who is Lady Mercy? The countess?"

Robert's emotions were too greatly magnified to admit of expression. He could only stare at Ashton in melancholy and pathetic silence, for he did not know what to say.

He had thought that a delicate reference to Lady Mercy might recall something of the rare beauty of her face and character to the mind of his guest—that it might rekindle the spark of memory which he firmly believed was smoldering underneath a mass of forgetfulness so dense that only time, patience and constant reference to things of the past could remove it. There was not in his mind a single doubt that the rightful earl was in his presence, enjoying his own.

He believed with the same sincerity that he worshiped God, that Lord John had met with some accident which had stolen his memory, and that constant association with things of the past would gradually restore it; but he was in terror lest he should say something that would again start him away, and the problem that he had to face, and which at that moment seemed to him to be the most vital, was how to keep the earl there in his own home, under his own watchful care, until recollection returned, and he should again become master of his faculties.

While preparing the supper, he had the forethought to go to the apartments of the countess and tell her that he had company in his own room, and that he would return to her when his guest had departed, for he had not dared to run the risk of telling her who that guest was until he had studied the situation thoroughly, and was prepared to act for each of them.

Now, his one thought was, how to bring them together, for down deep in his faithful heart he was convinced that such a meeting would be the final solution of all the difficulties; but he loved his mistress too well to run the risk of introducing the earl into her presence until he was sure that he would recognize her.

When at last he responded to the question that Ashton asked, it was to say, calmly:

"Yes, Lady Mercy is the countess. Would you like to see her picture?"

"Surely, if you have one here."

"I have one that was taken at the same time as yours—the earl's, I mean. Here it is. Tell me if you have any recollection of the face."

He gave the photograph into Ashton's hands, and the latter took it and held it face downward while without severity, but in sincere earnestness, he said, slowly:

"Robert, I cannot permit you to continue this farce of associating me with the earl. It is not good for you. Understand once for all that I am not the earl, that I never heard of him until I met you today, that I never saw this house or this room before and that I will not be a party to any such deception or attempt at deception. At first it amused me, then it interested me, but now it is taking a serious turn, and I cannot permit it to continue. If there were no countess, I might be disposed to humor you; but as it is, it is not to be thought of for an instant. Unless you will promise me to drop the idea utterly, and not to refer to it again, I must withdraw my offer to assist you and leave this place at once. Do you understand that I mean what I say?"

"Yes, sir. I beg your pardon. I will endeavor not to offend again. Now will you look at the picture of the countess?"

"She is very beautiful. There is strength and power as well as beauty in the face, too. Did they love each other, Robert?"

"Yes, they loved as few people in this world love."

Poor Robert. He was torn by a

thousand conflicting emotions. He had expected that there would be some faint spark of recognition in the mind of his guest when his eyes should fall upon that portrait, but there was none. He looked eagerly, with hunger in his eyes and heart, for such a sign, but he saw none, and there shot through him something like despair at the magnitude of the task before him.

If he only dared to consult a physician; but that was not to be thought of, for it would displease Lady Mercy. No, there was only one way and he sighed as he thought of it. He must watch and wait, with patience, perseverance and love. Love would conquer in the end. He felt assured of that. If he were debarred from referring to his guest as the master of the house, and treating him as such, there was still one course left open to him, and that was, constantly to bring the supposed earl in contact with reminiscences and things of the past, and thus, gradually to revive his recollection.

Something—he did not know what, but he thoroughly believed that there was something, somewhere, which, if his lord were brought in sudden contact with it, would fan that smoldering spark of memory into a blaze which would burn away the obstructions over which he now found it impossible to see. Robert honestly believed that he was constituted the special agent of the Almighty for the purpose of administering drafts of reminiscence to his master, and that ultimately he would succeed in restoring health and strength to the mind that was now wandering through an unknown realm.

If it was necessary at first to give the medicine in small doses, and without the consciousness of the patient that he was swallowing it, the nurse must be patient and steadfast; and he prayed for strength, endurance, humility and knowledge to fulfil his mission.

But there was another, and in some respects, a greater responsibility upon him: the countess.

It was vitally necessary that something should be said to her; but what? He had already told her that he had a guest below, who was awaiting him, and that was unprecedented in itself. During the year that had passed he had never once admitted a stranger to the house; how, therefore, should he now have a guest? And having one, who was he?

The countess, naturally, would require an explanation; or rather, she would expect one. Robert felt that he would rather defy a regiment of interrogation points than to face the battery of her great eyes.

How should he reply to their unvoiced questions? He almost forgot the importance of the conditions immediately surrounding him, in contemplation of this new perplexity. Should he tell her the truth?

In all his life, Robert had never lied for himself. He had lied for others, time and time again; but never for himself, and he did not know how. His mind was too primitive and too honest to permit him deliberately to tell her what he knew to be an untruth regarding the most vital circumstance in her life; and yet to tell her what he absolutely knew to be the unvarnished fact, might prostrate her; might be her undoing, and might—and he feared that it would—destroy the chances that God had vouchsafed him, for the regeneration of his lost master.

In the mean time, Ashton had become impatient for a continuation of the story that Robert had promised to tell him. His own history had made him cynical; his experiences during the year just passed had rendered him incredulous of all things; but he was a man born with a natural love for his fellow man; it was his nature to recognize virtues at the same time that he blinded himself to vices; he loved to overlook a great fault, if by so doing, he could discover an insignificant good intention, and during the hour that had passed since he entered the house of

the earl, he had come to the conclusion that Robert was unqualifiedly mad.

Harmlessly so, but thoroughly so. A monomaniac, utterly daft on the one subject, while remaining entirely sane concerning everything else; and, that being the case, it was very much better to humor him to the utmost.

"Come, Robert," he said at last, "tell me about that wedding, and what followed it;" and Robert, thoroughly sincere, but still under the influence of his thoughts, replied:

"Yes, my lord."

CHAPTER V.

A FUTILE HOPE.

THERE was nothing forgotten nor neglected in the story that Robert told. He began at the time when Lord John was a boy and related everything that could, in his belief, serve to reënlighten the recollection of his auditor.

He referred to the young man's chums at Eton and Oxford, mentioning the names of many of them; he even told of the childhood playfellowship between Lady Mercy and the young earl, of their long separation, and their subsequent meeting. He related, graphically, how they became engaged, and he told of the wedding in detail, even describing the flowers and mentioning the names of guests whose personality had been dear to Lord John.

He told of the early morning ceremony, recalled the glory of that dawning day, the songs of the birds, and the harmony and peace of the entire scene.

Then, bit by bit, he went through the day of reception, forgetting nothing, even to the most trivial detail, and dwelling at considerable length upon the message that was brought to him, and which he in turn delivered to the earl: "Tell him that his friend Tom must see him at once; he will understand."

He told how he had placed the earl's hat on his head, and watched him when he left the house, and how he had waited at the door for his return, until the peremptory summons from the countess called him from his post.

During the recital his eyes never once left the face of his guest. He watched him as the proverbial cat watches the unregenerate mouse, endeavoring, by his words, to recall a sign of recognition of the circumstances described.

There was a chill at his heart when he realized his utter failure, for there was not a suggestion of responsiveness upon the face of the man who listened.

Robert sighed resignedly, with the mental reservation that he must be patient and wait; and then he plunged into the subsequent happenings, withholding only the fact that the countess had remained in the home of her husband while they were supposed to be traveling abroad, and that she was still there, virtually a prisoner, awaiting the return of the man she loved, and still strong in the confidence that he would one day come back.

When at last the story was told; when even Robert felt that there was nothing left to relate, Ashton, who had permitted his cigar to go out, relighted it, and leaning back in his chair, said, coolly:

"Robert, the earl is dead."

"Dead!" cried Robert. "No, sir, I do not believe it."

"He is dead. Nothing short of death could have kept him all this time away from"—he hesitated and raised the photograph of the countess until he held it before his eyes—"such a bride as that. He is dead, or he would have come back before this."

"It may be, sir, it may be; but I cannot believe it," said Robert.

"Jealousy killed him. The fact that he was called away from his bride even before he had a chance to touch her lips with his, proves that. Nothing short of the hate of a woman could have been as relentless as that. We will give up

the search for Lord John, even before we begin it, Robert."

"Yes, sir, if you think best."

"And I will assist you to find his murderer."

"Yes, sir; and even if his soul—that is, his memory has fled, we will find his body."

"Humph! That is a year old now, and you had better let it lie; but we will find out what became of it."

"That is what I mean, sir. If we can find out positively what became of his body, that is all I ask; and if you will promise to assist me, I shall feel that success is almost within my grasp.

"You see, sir"—and Robert's face became pitiful in the anxiety it expressed, lest he should again say the wrong thing at the wrong time—"besides the countess and myself, you are the only person in the world who knows that the earl ever disappeared, and I need the advice and assistance of a man like yourself; I do not know how to act, alone, for, after all, sir, I am only a servant. Then, by and by"—there was marked hesitation in the old man's speech now—"after you have got things more thoroughly in your grasp, perhaps I can induce you to meet the countess and talk with her. You can understand how isolated she feels, with nobody in the whole world to turn to—that is, nobody but me, and I am nobody in a matter of this kind. It is all very sad, sir, for she looks to me for everything, and I—well, I am not competent to do all that should be done, sir, or to advise properly upon any subject out of my own sphere."

Ashton remained silent for several moments after Robert ceased speaking. He was quietly puffing at his cigar and watching the smoke as it curled and eddied towards the frescoed ceiling.

For the first time in a whole year, he had found something to interest him sufficiently to take his mind from himself, and it was as invigorating as is the prospect of a coming circus to the enthusiasm of a small boy.

The photograph of the countess was still in his possession, and he raised it several times, and studied the features of Lady Mercy. The face attracted him, interested him. It seemed to appeal to him to give all the assistance he could to this faithful old servant whose life and soul were bound up in devotion to her and to the missing earl.

All the time that he was thinking and studying the pictured face of Lady Mercy, he was himself the subject of scrutinizing study. Robert's eyes never left him. They glowed with anticipation every time he realized that the thoughts of his guest were fixed upon the countess. He believed that Lord John felt the thrill of something long forgotten and but dimly suggested to the memory by the photograph of the woman he had loved.

"Suppose, Robert," said Ashton, after he had thought out what he considered best to do, "suppose that the countess should feel that you had taken a great liberty in revealing to an entire stranger, the secret that she has guarded so jealously; suppose that she should reprimand you for it—what then?"

"I know that she will not take it that way, sir."

"Possibly not, but women are apt to view things differently from men. I can understand why you should feel towards me as you do; it is the likeness that I bear to the earl, but that very fact will probably be offensive to her."

"Yes, sir, that is it; and it is something more than that, too. You not only look like him, sir, but you *are* like him—in everything, and that is why I know that you are good and noble, and that I ought to confide in you and ask your help. And as for the countess taking offense because you are like Lord John—it isn't to be thought of, sir."

"Has she no father, or brothers, or somebody more appropriate than I to whom she could appeal?"

"No, sir. She is an orphan. She

had one brother, but he died in India, several years ago."

"Then some near friend of her father's or brother's, or an old chum of the earl's would be better."

"There is nobody, sir, in whom she is willing to confide."

"It is a pity. It seems to me, Robert, that there is a duty to be performed in this matter."

"Yes, sir; what is it?"

"Who succeeds to the title, in the event of Lord John's death?"

"A distant cousin."

"What is his name? Where does he live? Who and what is he? In short, tell me all about him."

"Well, sir, I don't rightly know where he is now; I don't think anybody does know, for he has not been in London for nearly five years."

"What is his name?"

"His name is Hertford. Perhaps, sir, you may remember to have heard the name somewhere before."

Poor Robert dwelt lingeringly upon the last sentence, hoping against hope that there would be some start of recognition in the face of his auditor; hoping that the name would revive a spark of memory, would touch a long disused, untuned chord in the recollection of his guest; but there was nothing. Ashton did not even remove the cigar from his lips nor alter his attitude by the diameter of a hair.

"No," he said, meditatively, "I do not remember to have heard it before;" and Robert breathed a sigh of intense disappointment. "What is his given name?"

"His full name is Richard Herndon Hertford, sir. His mother was a Herndon—Lady Grace; surely you must remember her, Mr. John, for——"

"Robert!"

Ashton spoke sharply, at the same time casting his half smoked cigar from him and rising to his feet.

"I have warned you several times that you must not continue this farce of persistently confounding my identity with that of your missing master. It is a harmless deceit, perhaps, except so far as you are personally concerned, but it is not good for you, and it must not continue, unless you want me to go away and leave you, for I will not remain and listen to that sort of twaddle. I realize that you are in great distress over his disappearance, and I am willing to help you in any way that I can, but there must be no more of that sort of thing; I will not have it. I am not the missing earl; I am not Lord John; I am not even an Englishman. You should be aware of that from my manner of speaking."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir. Pardon me, pray pardon me! I forget, you know. You are so like him, and when I see you sitting there, looking just as he looked, speaking with his voice, looking at me with his eyes——"

"Smoking his cigars and wearing his jacket and slippers——"

"Yes, sir, perhaps that has something to do with it, too—I forget myself. I am not as young as I once was, sir. May I—would you mind, sir, if I should sometimes address you as Mr. John? You see, that is your name, sir, and it was his name, too. Perhaps if I could do that, I would be less likely to offend you in the other way, and it would humor the whim of an old man. Would you mind very much, sir?"

"Not in the least, Robert. Call me Mr. John as much as you like, or Jack, if it pleases you better. It should be an honor to any man to be on terms of familiarity with as true and honest a heart as yours. I wish from the depths of my soul that I were the missing earl, returned to be cared for and coddled by such a faithful old servant. But I am not, and I won't be milorded any more."

"Thank you—thank you, Mr. John." Robert uttered the name that he was permitted to use, with a lingering enunciation impossible to describe. It dwelt on his tongue like a sweet morsel, too rare to be hastily parted with. "You

will resume your seat now, sir? Thank you—thank you! Now let me give you a glass of this sherry and a fresh cigar. There! You gave me such a start when you got up so suddenly, and I knew that I had offended again. It is very kind of you to put up with the mistakes that I am constantly making. We were speaking of Mr. Richard Hertford, I believe, and I had just mentioned Lady Grace, his mother."

"Yes."

"Lady Grace was called the most beautiful woman in England in her time. It is ten years since she died. Mr. Richard's father was General Hertford. He was killed in India, shortly before Lady Grace passed away. He was first cousin to the late earl, Lord John's father, so you see, sir——"

"Spare me the family history, Robert, and come down to Richard Hertford. How old a man is he, and where is he likely to be found now?"

"Well, sir, he is something more than ten years your senior—I remember that it is another coincidence that you are the same age as Lord John—and he is a great traveler, seldom remaining in England more than a few weeks at a time. He possesses a private fortune which is much more than sufficient for his needs, for I know that he does not use half his income. I believe that at the present time, he is somewhere in South America."

"Were Richard Hertford and the earl friends?"

"The very best of friends, sir."

"Well, Robert, it is my opinion that an effort should be made to communicate with Richard Hertford at once. He is the proper person to assist you and the countess in the search for the missing earl, and he is the one who is entitled to the title and estates if, as I believe, the earl is dead. His bankers doubtless would know where to find him."

"I think they would, sir."

"Then it is your duty to call upon them at once."

"Very well, Mr. John, I will do so, but it is only with the consent of Lady Mercy that I can promise to communicate with him."

"Certainly. And now, Robert, it is nearly midnight and I must go."

"Surely, sir, you are not going away tonight!" cried Robert, aghast at the mere thought, for until that instant it had not occurred to him that his guest had any idea of not remaining in the house over night.

"What the devil do you expect me to do? Sleep here?" demanded Ashton, in surprise.

"Most certainly, sir. You came here at my request, as a favor to me. It is very late and there is not a cab stand nearer than a mile. I can provide you with every comfort, so that you will not miss your luggage at all. I shall take it quite unkindly, Mr. John, if you insist upon going away tonight, and"—with insinuating deference—"the earl would be deeply incensed if he should return and discover that I had permitted you to do so. You will remain, sir?"

John Ashton leaned back in the chair from which he had partially risen, and laughed softly, for he was intensely amused by the absurdity of the situation. There could be no harm in remaining as the guest of the old and trusted servant, and he saw that Robert was genuinely pained by the suggestion of his going away.

Had he known that the countess was in the house, he would not for one instant have considered the idea of remaining, but there was only one other person besides Robert and himself beneath the roof, and that person was doubtless the housekeeper—another old and tried dependent, like the one before him.

There was, also, a spice of adventure about the affair, which fascinated him. He had permitted circumstance to direct his thoughts and actions for so long a time, that he now had little inclination to resist its influence.

The mere fact that the incident had forced the ghost of a laugh from his somber soul was sufficient inducement of itself. He decided to humor the old man still farther, and stay.

"Very well, Robert," he said, laughing again. "I will don one of Lord John's night shirts and sleep in Lord John's bed, since you seem to wish it so earnestly; only find them both without delay, for I am very tired and your old sherry has made me sleepy. By morning, doubtless, you will see things differently, or at least more clearly, and perhaps under the circumstances, it is my duty to remain."

"Yes, sir; most decidedly it is. Will you excuse me while I prepare the room? Ah, sir, it will make me very happy to know that you are sleeping under this roof tonight—very happy indeed, Mr. John."

He left the room with all haste, as though he feared that if he hesitated, his guest might change his mind, and yet insist upon departing.

When Ashton was alone, the incidents of the present moment were speedily forgotten in the anguish of that past from which he could not escape. The novelty of the scene with Robert had provided the first opportunity of immunity from it that had been permitted him during all that long and almost endless year, and of all the days that it had contained, the one just passed had been the bitterest and most drear.

The very moment that found him alone again with his own thoughts, however, reinvoked the specters that haunted him by day, that dwelt with him by night, that traveled before, behind and on either side of him, wheresoever he went—the ghosts of memory, of regret and of despair. He forgot that there had ever been such a personage as Lord John Makepeace Hertford, the earl of Ashton and Cowingford; he forgot that there was a countess, that there was a Robert, and that he was at that moment strangely and inexplicably installed in the residence of a peer of England, an unbidden if not an unwelcome guest.

Memory conjured up before him the wraith of Hope Hollister as she had appeared at that terrible moment when he had bidden her good by forever; regret leered at him across the chasm that his own act had dug between them before that last meeting, and jeered at him from the grave of Hope's father, filled, as he believed by his own impetuous act; despair gnawed at his vitals and seared his heart with the hot irons of inquisitory reproof, and there was no joy in him.

When Robert departed from the room, it was as if he had carried the light with him, and so left Ashton in total darkness, and he sat there, plunged in blackness, with his head bowed upon his hands, again utterly and desolately alone.

The man who finds himself alone in body, momentarily bereft of association with his kind, experiences a pang of discomfort which is half resentment, but which finds solace in the resolve to return to and live again with the associations of the past; the man who is alone in soul, who has cut himself adrift from everything that is past, who feels that his solitude is greatest when surging humanity jostles him the hardest, is benumbed. He suffers as dumb brutes suffer, silently; he lives as the leper lives, miserably; and he dies as martyrs have died, gladly.

The day at Greenwich with its white bait and jugglers and all that had succeeded it faded from view. Only the man remained; only the solitary man.

Great men, like lofty mountains, are solitary because they tower so high; but they are surrounded by brightness and the world is at their feet. Men like John Ashton are unexplored caverns in the earth, and they are solitary because they have dived so deep; it is the blackness of despair and the darkness of desolation which surrounds them. The former is the harvest marking the

fruition of accomplished ambition; the latter is the reaping of the crop of renunciation.

It would have been difficult if not quite impossible for a psychologist to have defined the condition of John Ashton's mind. His grief was not of the poignant kind which groans in anguish and conjures up pictures of the past to reagonize remorse that has become partially benumbed.

Such grief had never been his, or if it had, it had only touched him with spasmodic dashes here and there during the year that had passed. Such grief comes only to him who has remaining some glimmer of hope for the future, even though it be distant and indistinct. With John Ashton, hope was dead, and with it had died all things of this world, leaving only him alive.

He would have gone to a dungeon with the same indifference that he consented to sleep in Lord John's bed; he would have accepted a king's scepter with the same lack of appreciation with which he had swallowed Lord John's sherry. His soul was ingulfed in a condition which may be paradoxically described as intense indifference—a condition more to be dreaded than the utmost agony that the physical being can suffer—a condition more alarming than premeditated crime with its results.

He did not hear Robert when the faithful old man reëntered the room and was not aware of his presence until he felt a light touch upon one of the hands that covered his face, and looked up quickly to perceive that the old servant was on one knee beside him, gazing anxiously into his burning eyes.

"Mr. John, what is it? Are you suffering? Have I been gone too long?" he exclaimed.

"No, no! It is nothing, Robert, nothing. I was dreaming, that is all; dreaming dreams. Ah, Robert, you are the first of my kind who has succeeded in calling me back to my own self for a whole year, and it did me good, even though I lapsed into my dreams again the moment you left me. Perhaps if you will love me a little for the sake of that lost master of yours whom I so much resemble, I will not dream so often. Ho, ho, Robert! You have made me sentimental, like your old self; eh? Still I am in earnest—in deadly earnest."

It appeared for a moment as if Robert was about to embrace him then and there, but he controlled the desire with a visible effort.

"Ah, sir," he said, brokenly, "if you will let me love you for his sake, I will try to be content. Come, Mr. John, your room is prepared; I will conduct you to it at once. You are very tired. Come, sir, you may have forgotten the way, but I will show it to you."

CHAPTER VI.

A COLLAPSE AND A CONFESSION.

ROBERT conducted John Ashton to the room that he had prepared for him, and having seen that everything was arranged to his satisfaction, bestowing a lingering touch here and there, he at last, with marked hesitation and a wistful glance at his guest, turned to leave the apartment.

"I will bring your coffee to you in the morning, just as I used to—just as I used to take it to him," he said.

"Very well, Robert, I will sleep till you awaken me, then. Was this the earl's room?"

"Yes, sir. He always preferred it to any other in this house; but he did not remain much in London; he preferred the quiet of Hertford Hall."

"Hertford Hall? Where is that?"

"It is the family seat, sir, in Sussex. Is there anything more that I can do for you, Mr. John?"

"Nothing, Robert, thank you. Good night."

"Good night, sir, and God bless you. Good night."

He passed out silently and closed the door behind him, leaving Ashton standing in the middle of the room, fast lapsing again into that dreamy state which was inevitable with him whenever he was alone.

It did not, however, return with its accustomed monopolizing power, and there was a half smile upon his face as he surveyed the room in which he was, by a curious complication of conditions, at once master and guest. And finally, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, he began his preparations for the night.

If he could have followed the faithful servant when he returned to the room where the interview had taken place, he would have been amazed, for no sooner had Robert entered it than he locked the door and then dropped upon his knees and sobbed aloud. His kind old face was buried in his folded arms where they rested upon the chair that Ashton had occupied while he smoked Lord John's cigars and drank his sherry.

The old man remained thus for many minutes, praying silently. Only God and himself knew what passed between them during that half hour through which he never raised his head or moved, except as his body trembled with the emotions within him; but at last he rose, and wiping the moisture from his eyes, forced back into his possession that placid, imperturbable, expressionless countenance which belongs in fee simple to the well trained English servant.

He regarded himself critically in the mirror, and at last satisfied, opened the door and passed out again and along the corridor to the front of the house, thence up the stairs to the second floor and paused finally before a door upon which he softly and gently tapped with the ends of his fingers.

It was opened almost instantly, as though the summons had been anxiously and impatiently expected, and Robert crossed the threshold, more perturbed in mind and body than he remembered ever to have been before.

"It is very late, my lady," he murmured apologetically. "My guest detained me longer than I anticipated. I thought that perhaps you had retired."

"And wished it also, Robert? Is that what your words mean?"

"Yes, Miss Mercy. It was thoughtless in me to say that I would return after my—my friend had gone;" and Robert turned his eyes away from the clear, searching gaze that was bent upon him.

He had decided that it would be best to deceive his mistress regarding what he believed to be the truth, until he could feel the ground more securely beneath him. He believed that it would be best to temporize for the present, until he could study more thoroughly the unfortunate malady from which his beloved Mr. John was suffering; but he had underestimated the clear perceptions of his mistress; he had forgotten that during the year she had learned to read his impassive face as clearly as though his thoughts had been written there in illumined type.

"Who is your guest, Robert? Who is your—your friend?" she inquired, imitating, with the faintest touch of satire, his hesitation over that last word, and at the same time resuming the chair from which she had risen to admit him.

The old man hung his head, dismayed and speechless. He had entered the room firm in the belief that he could deceive Lady Mercy, but at the threshold he encountered two obstacles either of which was sufficient to render utterly impotent any deception that he might attempt to practise.

He realized the moment when she asked these questions, that he had not the power to lie to her, and moreover, that if the power had been given to him then and there, she would have penetrated the veil of falsehood and demanded the truth. His love for Lady Mercy is difficult to analyze and can be

comprehended only by those who have been blessed by such a devotion, or who have, like Robert, bestowed it upon another.

She was at once his daughter and his mistress, his child and his mother, his charge and his religion. He was her dependent and yet she was utterly dependent upon him. He stood in the place of father, mother, husband, servant, counselor and friend, and in all these relations she possessed a twofold claim upon him, for in addition to her own personality, she was the wife of his idol, and she had been left to him as a sacred trust and care.

For the first time in his life, he did not know in what words to reply to her.

If he had dared to raise his eyes to hers he would have seen that his hesitation had sent a sudden wave of color to her face to be succeeded the next instant by a death-like pallor. Her eyes dilated and the pupils became distended with suppressed excitement, and her hands tightened their grasp upon the arms of the chair in which she was seated.

Otherwise she gave no outward sign of the tempest of impatience and expectancy that was raging within her.

Throughout an entire year she had risen every morning with the confident expectation that the day would bring Lord John back to her, and she had retired every night with a prayer upon her lips that ere the hours of darkness had passed, she would be summoned from her sleep to welcome him home.

With her the expectation of his return had been more than hope; it had been certainty. There had never been a moment when she had given away to actual despair, and it was that mental certainty of his home coming that had kept her alive, that had preserved her beauty and maintained her health.

She and Robert had been of one mind in this respect. They had hoped alike, thought alike, prayed alike, believed alike. Their perceptions had focused at the same point, and each time that he had returned from his daily wanderings in search of his master, there had been little need of conversation between them, for his face inevitably told her all that his tongue could have uttered.

Never until tonight, had a stranger been admitted within the house. Never, until tonight had Robert broken from his habit of passing an interval of time with her, between the hours of darkness and retiring. Never, until tonight had he manifested the slightest reluctance or hesitation in replying to any question of hers; and now there had been, or was, a stranger in the house—a guest—a friend!

Lady Mercy knew that something quite unusual had happened; she saw that Robert hesitated to confide in her just then, and although she saw traces of tears in his eyes, her delicate intuition told her that they had been tears of happiness rather than of sorrow; it told her that it was joy and not grief that he was withholding from her.

It is a paradox of the human organism, that an expectant soul can await the advent of joy with much more fortitude and patience than it can withstand the silent approach of grief. If Robert had good news to impart, she could await his own pleasure, and the moments thus passed would give her the opportunity which she felt was quite necessary, to prepare herself for the announcement when it came.

Heaven and earth could hold but one joy for her now, and hence it was that certain happiness which Robert had brought to her and which he hesitated to give, fearful of the effect that its too sudden development might have upon her. She could wait—she had waited a whole year—and while she still waited, she resolved, with heroic strength, to prepare herself.

"Who was your guest, Robert?" she inquired again, presently, uttering the question softly.

Still he did not reply. He could not

lie to her; he dared not tell her the truth.

"Has your guest departed?" she continued, after another pause.

"No," replied Robert, slowly. "He is still here."

"Still here? Still in this house?" she demanded quickly, in great astonishment.

"Yes, my lady."

"Where is he?"

"He has retired."

"Retired?"

The countess gazed at Robert in wide eyed amazement. She bent forward towards him and for a full minute remained silent, and then in a voice which had sunk almost to a whisper, yet which was distinctly audible, she murmured:

"Robert, tell me the name of your guest."

The old servant raised his head at last and fixed his great pathetic eyes upon the face of Lady Mercy; and while he gazed at her thus, she saw two tears spring unbidden to his cheeks and roll silently downward; otherwise the expression of his face did not change; and he did not reply.

"Robert, tell me the name of your guest," the countess said again, speaking the words automatically, in the same low tone, without emphasis, almost without expression.

"His name, my lady, is John Ashton."

She did not move; for a moment it seemed as if she did not breathe. Her hands still grasped the arms of the chair; her eyes were still fixed upon the face of her servant, but they seemed to gaze through and beyond him, not at him.

Her attitude was as though she had not heard the words he had uttered, or if she had heard them, did not understand. At last she sighed, and with that sigh all the rigidity left her, and she sank back into the depths of the chair. Presently she spoke again.

"We will both be calm, Robert," she said, "and presently you will find the courage to tell me all there is to tell. Did you meet him on the street while you were out, in the early part of the evening?"

"Yes, my lady."

"And he—was—an old friend of yours, Robert?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Did you address him first, or—or did he speak to you?"

"He did not see me until I spoke to him, Miss Mercy."

"And then——"

"Yes, my lady?"

"What then, Robert?"

"He—did—not know—old Robert! He—didn't know—me!"

The words came out in sobbing gasps, and the old man leaned his arms upon the mantel and buried his tear stained face between them. He could not utter another word, then.

All the pent up emotions of hours burst their bounds at last, and he no longer endeavored to restrain them. He had borne the burden to the point of falling beneath it, and he could sustain it no longer.

The countess sprang to her feet on the instant that he gave way. The paralyzing effect of the announcement not yet half made, yet wholly understood, vanished the instant she realized that the faithful old man had given way, and that it devolved upon her to sustain him.

She hastened to his side, and with her arms around him, led him gently to the chair she had occupied. Then, when he was seated, she sank upon one knee beside him while with tender force she pulled his hands from his face and held them in her own.

"Dear Robert!" she murmured, "dear, dear Robert. It has been very hard for you—very, very hard, and through it all you have been so brave and good and gentle. Hush! Hush, Robert. You must not give way like this. Really, you must not, Robert. It is nothing very dreadful, is it, Robert,

except that he has forgotten? He—he is not—not ill, or wounded?"

The old man tried to speak, but he could not. He could only shake his head in silent negation. The countess patted his hands and rubbed them, waiting with an eagerness that was maddening, for Robert to recover himself sufficiently to be able to speak.

It was as though he were a little child who had been discovered in an act of wrong doing, and having been chided for it, is overcome by the emotion which all must feel when forgiveness is vouchsafed; and she was the mother who had chided and forgiven.

Gradually he became more quiet, and at last Lady Mercy ventured another question.

"Tell me, Robert," she said, "does he look well, or ill? Is he well, Robert?"

"Yes."

"How does he look? Tell me! I cannot bear it to wait much longer."

"He looks—just as he did—the day he went away," came the reply, with spasmodic interruptions. "I was passing the corner of St. James Street and Piccadilly, my lady, and I saw him standing there. He was looking at the crowd without seeming to see it.

"I watched him for some time before I dared to speak. I went around him; I stood on either side of him, first one side and then the other, and then directly in front of him, but although he looked at me, he did not see me. I wanted to make sure that it was Mr. John before I addressed him.

"I had been looking for him so long, that I was afraid lest my old eyes had played me a trick, or that my imagination had superseded my judgment. All the same, Miss Mercy, I was sure from the first, and the more I looked, the surer I became; and at last I spoke to him."

"Yes, Robert, yes; go on. I am listening. You spoke to him; and then——"

"Why, then, my lady, I am afraid I do not rightly remember just what I did say. You know I have been thinking over what I would say to him when we met, every day since he went away, but I somehow forgot it all then. I said just what came to me first, I suppose, but I don't in the least remember what it was except that I called him Jack, just as I used to do when he was a boy; and then, my lady—oh, it was horrible!"

"What was horrible, Robert?"

"He turned and looked at me as if I were a perfect stranger. There was not a single sign of recognition about him. I do not know all that was said, only that he was sure that he had never seen me before. You see, Miss Mercy, some accident must have happened to him the night he went away—some accident that made him forget who he was, his name and everything about himself. You have heard of such cases, my lady?"

"Yes, Robert. Yes—yes!"

"I discovered that at once, for he was so natural, and so like himself in every other way, that it was the only manner in which to account for it. And I was in such terror every instant, fearing that he would leave me. At first I tried to make him remember, by reminding him that I had carried him in my arms when he was a little lad, but that and other things I mentioned had no effect on him. He told me that I was an utter stranger to him, but he said he believed that I was in earnest and that he wished that he could help me to find my master. That wish was the straw I seized; and then I asked him if he would tell me his name."

Robert had by this time recovered from the effects of his late emotions, and now he rose from the chair and returned to the mantel, where he took once more the respectful attitude of a servant.

"He told me that his name was John Ashton, and when I told him that my master was the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford, it seemed for an instant

to revive a spark of memory; but it was only for an instant. The name is the only part of his past that he recollects at all, and in some strange way he has accounted for it by fixing upon his mind the belief that he was named for an Englishman who was a friend of his parents. Think of it, my lady. He told me that his full name is John Cowingford Ashton. As soon as I heard him say that, I felt sure that it would be only a question of time when his memory would return fully. Don't you think so, my lady? Don't you think so, Miss Mercy?"

"Yes, yes, Robert. We will make him remember; you and I together. Did—did you mention my name to him, Robert?"

"Not yet, Miss Mercy; not quite yet. It was too soon. I thought it best to wait. My first duty was to get him home."

"How did you do that, Robert? Ah! Suppose that you had failed!"

"I did not fail, my lady. He had said that he would like to help me to find my lost master, and I asked him to come here where I could tell him all about it, so that he could give me his advice. At first he said he would come tomorrow, but I did not dare let him out of my sight, and at last I prevailed upon him to enter a cab and come here.

"I tell you, Miss Mercy, I could have leaped for joy when at last I had him comfortably seated beside the grate in my room, wearing his own jacket and slippers, with a glass of sherry beside him and a cigar between his fingers, looking for all the world as though he had not been away at all. He was hungry and tired, and I prepared some supper for him. It would have done your heart good to have seen him eat, and to have seen him smoke, too, after he had eaten. You remember what a smoker he always was, Miss Mercy?"

"I remember—everything, Robert."

"He did not like it though, because I kept calling him my lord. It made him angry, and twice he came very near leaving the house on account of it. I think, really, though, that it amused him more than it angered him, and that he objected more on my account than on his own. He actually thought I was a little queer in my head, and he did not approve of my deceiving myself in that way. You know that Mr. John always thought more about the feelings of other people than of his own. Why, Miss Mercy, there is only one change—one little bit of change that I can discover at all; just one, and it is hardly noticeable."

"What is it, Robert?"

"His manner of speaking. The voice is the same; perhaps a trifle deeper, but that can be accounted for by exposure; but his manner of speaking is just a little different. I should say that during the year he has been away, he has been in America, or Australia, where I am told they do not pronounce their words—that is, all of them—just as they do here, and you know, if the accident deprived him of memory, it naturally must have made him forget how he used to pronounce his words. He has learned a different way of talking just as he has learned a different way of thinking; and it is not so very different either."

"Tell me," said the countess, slowly, "what you said to him after he had eaten his supper. Tell me what happened then."

"My lady, that is the hard part of it. That is the part that it is so difficult to tell. It is what made me hesitate about revealing the truth to you when I came into your presence a little while ago. You must bear in mind, Miss Mercy, that his memory is entirely gone, and that in the place of it there are hallucinations—strange and unaccountable hallucinations. My lady, are you strong enough to hear it all, and do you believe that you can control your emotions sufficiently to be patient, and to do the hardest thing that ever anybody had to do—wait?"

"Yes, Robert. I am strong enough. As for waiting, have I not waited with patience a whole year, without knowing where he was or what he was doing? Did you think that my fortitude will desert me now that I do know where he is and what he is doing? Yes, yes! I can wait and watch, and help. Tell me what it is you want to say.

"Is it that he has forgotten me? Is it that he has forgotten my very existence? Is it that he does not remember our childhood, our courtship—the wedding itself? Is it that he has forgotten that he has a wife? Tell me, Robert, and tell me plainly. I am strong enough to hear it, and what is more, I am strong enough to help you to make him remember.

"Surely that is enough. Tell me the worst, first. Let me hear the best, last; and then we will consult together and decide what is best to do for his sake. We will not consider ourselves, Robert; we will only think of him, and of what is best for him. Tell me, Robert; has he forgotten me utterly?"

"Yes, Miss Mercy, he has forgotten you—utterly!" was the sad response.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLAN TO SEE THROUGH CANVAS EYES.

THERE were several moments after Robert replied to her question during which the countess remained immovable, with bowed head. She had said that she was strong enough to hear the truth, and she was, but it had come to her with a greater shock than she had anticipated.

There is nothing so terrible as to be forgotten by one who is loved. It is the only heart poison for which there is no antidote; it is the only mental calamity for which there is no specific.

"If I could only go to him unawares," she murmured at last, addressing no one and merely voicing the thoughts that were uppermost in her mind. "If I could only approach him silently while his back was turned and throw my arms around him and turn his face towards me so that he could look into my eyes, he would know me then. He would remember me then."

"No, no, my lady!" cried Robert, infinitely startled. "Such a thing is not to be thought of. It would frighten him away. You would undo all that has been done and render us much worse off than we were before he was found. No, no, you must not do that."

"Must not, Robert?"

"Must not, my lady. Pardon me, but it is true. Listen, and I will tell you why."

"Well?"

"I thought at one time as you think now, that he would remember your face, and I resolved to make the test by showing him a photograph of you; but first I deemed it best to speak of you."

"Yes, Robert."

"I did so in the most commonplace manner that I could, and on the instant he leaped to his feet, kicked off the slippers, threw off the smoking jacket, and cried out, 'Good God, Robert, is there a countess?' What could I do, Miss Mercy? He was for leaving the house then and there, insisting that he was in a false position.

"'Where is she?' he demanded; 'here in this house? You don't suppose I want to be caught here under these circumstances, do you?' He called for his hat, and I had all I could do to make him remain. I had to tell him that you were abroad, and that the woman in the house was a servant, an invalid who never left her room. I think he thought it might be the housekeeper, but it was the only way that I could keep him. After that I induced him to look at your picture. That came about quite naturally, for he first asked to see a photograph of himself."

"Of himself! Did he ask for it in that way?"

" No, my lady, no. He asked me if I had a picture of the earl, and when I gave him one to look at, he went to the mirror and remained for quite a time, looking first at it, and then at his own reflection in the glass. I could see that it puzzled him mightily, too."

" What did he say? Did he speak about the likeness? "

" Yes. He admitted that he did not blame me for being deceived, if that was a picture of the earl; and then I gave him your likeness."

" Well, Robert, well? Tell me what he said and did then, Robert. Forget nothing. I want to know every look and word. What then, Robert? "

" Well, my lady, he just looked at it, that was all. Then he said, in the calmest manner, that you were very beautiful; but there was not the least sign of recognition in his face. He kept the picture in his possession, though, and I noticed that he fixed his eyes upon it very often while we talked, as though there was something about it which touched a chord of memory.

" I have heard that people who are afflicted as he is, realize that they have forgotten things, and are ashamed of it, and because they are, deny everything which might betray them. I thought, maybe, it was so with him, and that he was so emphatic in his denial of everything simply because he could not remember well enough to be sure. Don't you think such a thing is possible? "

" Undoubtedly, Robert."

" I am very sure that I saw signs of his remembering things, when he thought I did not notice. But you must not think of permitting him to see you yet, and we must not let him suspect that you are in the house. It would not do. It would drive him away at once. I am sure of it."

Lady Mercy sighed heavily. With every fiber trembling from suppressed excitement—with every impulse of her soul straining upon the leash which separated her from her husband—with the intelligence that he was in the same house with her, almost within reach of her hands, and with the certain knowledge that she must not go to him—that he would repulse her if she did so, she felt that the situation was more than she could bear.

" How long will it be, Robert? How long a time do you think it will be before I can go to him? " she murmured, brokenly.

The old servant shook his head.

" I cannot tell," he replied. " Nobody can tell. In a day or two we may be able to approximate the time; now, it would be wrong to attempt to do so. You will listen to old Robert? You will be guided by me, Miss Mercy? "

" Yes," she whispered; and then human nature conquered. She leaned forward upon the arm of her chair and wept.

Robert was too wise in his generation to disturb her, for he knew that her tears would do more than any argument he could use, to convince her of the wisdom of his advice. He waited patiently and silently until the paroxysm had passed, and at last she raised her head and spoke.

" How did you prevail upon him to remain over night? " she asked.

" It was, strangely enough, not difficult to do," he replied, " although I am of the opinion that he consented solely as a favor to me. It is true that he started to go, but the hour was late and he was very tired. I put him to bed in Mr. Jack's old room, and he has consented to remain there until I take him his coffee in the morning. I have dreadful misgivings, though, for to-morrow."

" Misgivings? What are they? "

" He will wish to go away, and, my lady, I cannot think of any plan by which I can induce him to remain. His conviction that he is a stranger and that he has no right here; more than that, his firm belief that in remaining he is taking an ungentlemanly advantage of the absence of the real earl, will, I am

sure, overcome every argument that I can offer."

The countess bowed her head in thought. Presently she raised it again, and there was the light of confident knowledge in her eyes.

"God, who sent him back to us," she said, slowly, "will not permit him to leave us again. He will remain, Robert. I feel it. I know it. There will be a way provided to detain him. Leave it in the hands of Him who directed your footsteps to the spot where your master awaited you. He will wish to go out, naturally, but you must go with him. You can find a reason for accompanying him. You must find one."

"Yes, my lady. But about his going abroad before he recovers his memory. Have you thought what that may involve, Miss Mercy?"

"No; what do you mean?"

"He is sure to be seen and recognized by some of his friends. They will address him and he will not know them. Others will bow to him—ladies, perhaps—and he will not recognize them. There will be no end of complications of all sorts, and I tremble, my lady, for the task that is before me. I fear that I am not equal to it. I am too old. My perceptions are not keen enough. My judgment is not always clear."

"That, also," she replied reverently, "must be left to the will of God. Even though such things as you suggest should happen, they are mere incidents, and we need give them no unnecessary concern. He has returned; that is the one great blessing, and the lesser ones will come with time if we are patient, watchful, and firm. But, Robert, before he goes out again, I must see him."

"My lady! Miss Mercy!"

"I must see him, Robert, without myself being seen. I must see him, Robert; I must!"

"But how?"

"Cannot you think of a plan?"

The old man thought deeply, standing with the ends of his thumbs and fingers together and rocking forward and backward upon his toes and heels, a thing that he would never have done in the presence of his mistress had his mind been less occupied. Suddenly his face brightened and he looked up eagerly.

"There is a way," he said, "an excellent way, and it can be done without the slightest danger, but I will have to commit an act of vandalism which you may not feel inclined to permit."

"An act of vandalism, Robert? I do not understand."

"Do you remember, my lady, the portrait of one of the old earls of Ashton and Cowingford which stands upon an easel in one corner of the library? The portrait of Sir Roderick of Hertford, the Crusader?"

"Yes."

"You shall see Mr. John through the eyes of the old earl, Miss Mercy," continued the old man eagerly, now thoroughly enthused with the idea he had suddenly formed. "Nothing could be easier. With my penknife, I will cut out the pupils of the old earl's eyes—afterwards, you know, I can paste a bit of black cloth against them, and the defacement will not be noticeable—then I will draw the easel a trifle closer in the corner, and—don't you understand, Miss Mercy? You will get behind the picture. The curtains which drape the window will conceal you on one side, and the bookcase will effectually screen you on the other, so that he could not by any possibility see you, unless he should make a point of peering behind the portrait of his ancestor.

"He is sure to look at that portrait long and earnestly, for he fairly worshiped it when he was a boy. Why, even since he became a man, I have seen him stand and gaze at that picture for minutes at a time. It always seemed to have some sort of fascination for him, and when he was a little fellow, he used to ask me the strangest questions about it. It may be that he will be angry when he finds that I have used

my penknife on his favorite picture. Do you think he will, my lady?"

"No, Robert. When his memory has returned to him with sufficient force to make him realize what you have done, he will bless you, not blame you for it. He has often told me about the picture. When we were children, we used to look at it together, and I remember he used to say then that the eyes always looked at him just as if they were in a living person. Yes, he will look at the picture, and in doing so, he will look into my eyes."

"Suppose, my lady, that he should look at it too long, and that you should give way and betray your presence?"

"I will not do that, Robert; never fear."

"I have seen him stand for a whole hour before it, Miss Mercy. He used to tell me that when anything troubled him, he went and told it to the old earl, as he called the portrait, and that it always did him good. Will you try to rest now, dear Lady Mercy? I will go to the library and prepare the portrait, and when it is time, I will call you and assist you to your place behind it. Then I will take Mr. John to the library, and after that—after that, I am afraid I will not have a chance to see you for several hours. I fear, my lady, I fear very much that you will have to prepare your own luncheon."

For the first time since their interview began, Lady Mercy smiled. Then she glided forward and, raising herself on tiptoe, before he realized what she intended, she touched her lips to his forehead.

The old man tottered backwards as though a bullet had struck him, and his face became fiery red, like that of a schoolboy who has been surreptitiously kissed by a wilful playmate.

"Miss Mercy," he said, severely, "you should not have done that. One would think that you were back again in short dresses—but I thank you for it. It is a much greater reward than I ever could deserve."

The countess did not have an opportunity to reply, for Robert bowed with great dignity, turned, and left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEEKING A SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERY.

WITH the advent of daylight Robert betook himself to the library and performed the work of preparing it for the silent interview that was to take place there, and so firm was his belief in the righteousness of the deed that his hand did not tremble when he desecrated the old portrait of that ancient and now almost forgotten head of the family, Sir Roderick Hertford, crusader.

This duty done and everything arranged to his satisfaction, his next care was for the countess. She was aroused somewhat earlier than usual, and while he passed the tray in at her door, he assured her that he would summon her to the library in ample time for her to conceal herself before he should conduct Lord John thither—and then he prepared his new found master's breakfast.

Ashton was wide awake when Robert entered the room, and he regarded the old servant with a quizzical smile while the latter was arranging the tray on a table beside the bed.

"Good morning, Mr. John," Robert said, on entering the room and perceiving that his guest was not sleeping.

He spoke with cheery brightness. His old face beamed like the sunshine that gladdened the world outside, and there was a confidence in his manner that had been utterly wanting at their last interview.

"Good morning, Robert," responded Ashton. "You look as though the sunlight of a new day had burned away all the fog that clouded your brain last night. I hope it has."

"Yes, sir. It has, quite. There isn't a bit of fog there now."

"Well, that's comforting, surely. What have we here?"

"Two boiled eggs, a bit of toast and a cup of coffee, sir. Did you rest well, Mr. John? Did you sleep well?"

"Like a top."

"That is good, very good. There is nothing like one's own bed for good repose, but," he added with precipitate haste, "good, healthy fatigue will induce sleep anywhere. Now, sir, while you are disposing of the contents of this tray, I will prepare your bath, and after that I will shave you as you have not been shaved for a year."

He turned away before Ashton could reply, and the latter, half smiling, murmured to himself:

"I believe the old rascal is as positive as ever that I am Lord John, and that now he is playing possum, just to put me off my guard. There must be some way to convince him of his error, and, for the old man's sake, I must find it. The trouble is, that everything I attempt seems to rivet his faith the stronger." Then he attacked the toast, but his mind continued on in the same strain.

"Who, for instance," he mused, "would have imagined that the slippers and jacket would fit me so exactly, to say nothing of the unaccountable likeness between the lost earl and myself? If I had not shaved off my beard and mustache, Robert would never have mistaken me, for that the act did make a great alteration in my appearance, I have the proof in the failure of my friends to recognize me that last day I spent in New York."

His eyes followed the servant as he busied himself in the preparation of the bath, arranging towels and cloths, flesh brushes and the general paraphernalia of the matutinal plunge; and again he smiled to himself, for he remembered, suddenly, that there was upon his body one mark which Lord John could not possibly have possessed.

It was on his left breast, over that spot where the heart is popularly supposed to be located, and it was itself the ineradicable evidence of an unknown tattooer's skill, imprinted there before the time when he could remember, and never explained by his supposed uncle, Henry Hollister. Doubtless the people who abandoned him as an infant before the banker's door had marked him for recognition.

At all events it was there, faint now, from the wear of time, and by reason of the growth and expansion of the cuticle, but nevertheless discernible.

"That will convince him as nothing else could," thought Ashton as he leaped from the bed and plunged into the bath that Robert had prepared.

"Robert," he called, when his skin was glowing from the application of the rough towels, "come here."

"Yes, sir. What is it?" replied Robert, hastening to him.

"I want you to look at this mark on my breast. What is it, Robert?"

"A heart, sir."

"That is right; a heart. Did you ever see that before, Robert?"

"Yes, sir, often."

"What?"

"Hundreds of times, sir."

"The devil you did! By the lord Harry, old man, you make me think that you are either a hopeless lunatic, a blithering idiot, or a damned old rascal. Do you mean to tell me that Lord John had a mark like that on *his* breast?"

"Yes, sir, precisely like it."

Ashton could only stare at the servant in amazement, and the latter, perceiving his advantage, was not loath to take advantage of it.

"Don't you remember, Mr. Jack, how you used to ask me about that mark when you were a boy, and how we used to wonder how it came there? Neither your father nor your mother would ever tell you anything about it, and once, sir, when you begged me to do so, I made bold to ask the old earl, and he came mighty near sending me away for it; don't you remember that?"

"No, I'm blessed if I do. Go on;

what more have you got to say about it? Let it all out now, for you'll never have another chance."

"Why, there isn't anything more to say, sir, unless it is that the mark has faded somewhat more than I should have thought it would in one year. Still, I suppose you have been traveling in a different climate, and that may have had something to do with it. Don't you think so, sir?"

"Oh, undoubtedly!" exclaimed Ashton with bitter irony. "Look here, Robert, there is surely something wrong about that cranium of yours. I am strongly of the opinion that you have got the worst kind of wheels in it, and every one of them is going the wrong way."

"Wheels, sir?"

"Yes, wheels. That is an Americanism, Robert, and I am an American. Do you understand that?"

"I supposed that you had been in America or Australia, sir, from your manner of speaking. I guessed that, sir."

"Oh, you did! Well, you are the champion guesser of two continents, I'll admit that. Do you insist that your lost earl had a mark like that on *his* breast?"

"Precisely like it, sir."

"Can you prove it?"

"Easily, sir."

"How?"

"By a letter you wrote to me when——"

"By a letter that I wrote to you!"

"By a letter that you wrote to me when you were at Hertford Hall at the time when I asked your father about it," continued Robert firmly, for the old man had taken the bit in his teeth at last, and he refused to compromise with what he believed to be the truth.

He saw, or thought he saw the advantage he had gained, and he determined to make the most of it before the opportunity was gone. He had been compelled, up to that moment, to administer only homeopathic doses of memory to the strangely afflicted earl, but now he meant to give him the genuine article to swallow.

"You had urged me so many times to ask your father about it," he went on, "that I finally did so, and then, according to promise, I wrote to you of my failure, telling you that the old earl very nearly dismissed me for my impertinence. You wrote a letter back, thanking me, and assuring me that you would make it all right with your father, and that you would take all the blame. I have that letter, sir, as I have all that you ever wrote to me, and I can find it in ten minutes."

"Humph! Well, you trot right down stairs and find it, then, while I am getting into my clothes. I'd like to see that letter, for upon my soul, I don't believe that you possess such a document. After that, I'll bid you good morning, for it is utterly abhorrent to every principle of my nature for me to remain here and even passively become a party to the deception that you are determined to practice upon yourself."

"Oh, sir—oh, Mr. John——"

"Stop! Not another word. I won't have it! I warned you last night, but the warning seems to have done no good. I will not repeat it, nor will I give you the chance to err again."

"Mr. John, for God's sake, listen to me."

"Go and get that letter."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir. I will get it;" and with ashen face the old man tottered from the room.

"This certainly beats everything I ever heard of or read about," said Ashton aloud when he was again alone; and then, while he busied himself in dressing, he continued to think upon the labyrinth of coincidence apparently conspiring to force him to accept a false position.

There was the unaccountable coincidence of likeness between the lost earl and himself, which nobody, himself included, could deny. There was

the coincidence of names; on the one hand, the earl of Ashton and Cowingford, and on the other, John Cowingford Ashton. There was the same physique and doubtless the same voice, for a change in voice is more quickly discernible than any other attribute of man; and last, there was the coincidence of the tattooed heart on the left breast, and if Robert was right, and he did possess the letter to which he had referred, the old man could scarcely be condemned for the opinion he had formed regarding the identity of his guest.

Ashton realized that fully, but he was determined that he would put a stop to it.

How to account for these coincidences was entirely beyond the capacity of the subject of them. It is true that he was a foundling, and the suggestion was pertinent that it might develop that he was related to the missing earl. He might be a cousin, or even a twin brother, since it was shown that their ages were practically the same, and might be exactly so for all that Ashton could tell, but opposed to such a theory was the undeniable fact that one was born and had always lived in England, while the other was found on a doorstep in the city of New York.

The name was accounted for by the statement of Henry Hollister that he had named the foundling for a college associate, and that friend might possibly have been the father of the missing earl, only in that case the name would more likely have been Hertford.

John Ashton shook his head in deep perplexity. He was only clear about one thing, and that was that he would get away from the complication before old Robert could work himself any deeper into the mire of credulity; and just as he arrived at that decision Robert returned.

"Here it is, sir," he said, extending a letter which Ashton received and read to the last word. Then he replaced it in the envelope and returned it.

"Very good," he said calmly. "I am convinced that you spoke the truth and I owe you an apology for doubting you, Robert. Now I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, sir. I will reply to them if I can."

"Did Lord John ever have a brother?"

"No, sir, he was an only child."

"You are sure of that, Robert?"

"Positive, sir; I have been in the family all my life—ever since his father was a lad."

"Did he have a cousin—a male cousin, or a near relative who was stolen while he was a babe? I mean one about his own age, or, in fact, any age at all?"

"No, sir, never."

"You would be likely to know about it if such a thing had occurred in the family?"

"I am sure that I would know about it."

"Why are you so sure about it?"

"Because I have been in the family so long, sir, and because the family has never been a large one. Mr. Richard Hertford is the nearest relative that my master ever had with the exception of his own parents."

"Where was Lord John born?"

"At Hertford Hall."

"Were you there at the time?"

"Not exactly, sir. I was with the old earl, here in London. We were telegraphed for, and went down on the afternoon train. Lord John was born at two in the afternoon, and we arrived there at seven in the evening. I remember it as well as though it were yesterday, sir."

"Humph! Your statement seems to be unanswerable, Robert. You ought to know."

"I do know, sir."

Ashton was silent. He believed that under the circumstances it would be littleless than a downright act of cruelty for him to go away without first dispelling the delusion in Robert's mind, and

he was at last convinced that the old servant was genuinely deceived.

Again, there was the countess. Robert had said that she was traveling abroad. Ere long she would return to be met by Robert's statement that the earl was surely alive, had been at home, and had gone away again, he could not tell whither; and the countess, possibly on the point of forming new ties, or at least partly recovered from the effects of her loss, would be cast into a new slough of despondency, infinitely worse than the first.

"Robert," he said, presently, "I wish to have a real, downright, sensible talk with you."

"Yes, sir."

"And I want you to reply to me with perfect truth."

"I will do so, sir."

"You must neither equivocate nor temporize. The time is past for that, now."

"Very well, sir."

"Do you really believe that I am the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford?"

"I do, sir."

"Does it amount to more than mere belief? Are you, in your own mind, certain of it?"

"I am, sir."

"Since when, Robert?"

"Since the first moment that I saw you."

"Has nothing happened since that moment to shake your faith?"

"No, sir, nothing."

"Not even my own positive denial?"

"Not even that, sir."

"Well, that is cool, to say the least. Let us begin now on the supposition that I am the lost Lord John; what object would I have in denying it?"

"Only your own conviction, sir. I believe that you are sincere in denying it. I believe that you think you are some other person—that you have forgotten who you really are?"

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed Ashton, aghast at the spectacle that Robert had created. Then, with sudden sadness, he added: "I wish to God I could forget who I really am."

"And I, sir, wish to God, with all my heart, that you could remember who you really are," Robert responded. "Try, sir, try! Did not the picture of Lady Mercy compel some responsive memory in your heart? I thought that I saw it there when you looked at the photograph."

"Hush, Robert. Can you not understand how preposterous your belief is? If I were the earl, how could I have forgotten it?"

"By reason of some accident, sir, or a severe illness. It would not be the first case of the kind. Men have met with accidents which have deprived them of memory and made them forget the past."

"But I do not forget the past, my good man. God Almighty knows that I remember it only too well—that I would leap for joy if I could erase every recollection of it from my mind forever. Good heavens, do you suppose that I would hesitate one instant between the misery of that past and the promised joys of this present, if there were any doubt concerning the truth? If I were John Hertford, do you think I would deny it to you? Was there, could there have been any cause that you have kept back from me which could have induced your master to leave home of his own accord?"

"Not one."

"Is there no way by which I can convince you of your error, Robert? It must be done."

"I am sure, sir, that there is not."

"Well, for downright obstinacy, you are head and shoulders over anything I ever saw. Can't you think of some test that we might apply, that would convince you? Was there no other mark upon him besides that confounded tattoo business?"

"Not that I remember, sir."

"I am bound to convince you somehow, Robert, for I will not remain here and permit you to live under any such

hallucination. I shall leave England tomorrow, but before I go, you must be convinced."

"Oh, sir," cried Robert, "you will not leave England! I will die if you do that."

"Yes, I shall leave England; consider that settled."

The announcement was too much for the old man. He sank upon a chair and sobbed aloud, and Ashton, after regarding him a moment with consternation and deep contrition in his face, added:

"Tut, tut, Robert. None of that. Stand up and listen to me. There, that is better, old chap. You make me feel like an infernal scoundrel—as though, somehow, I hadn't any right to assert my own identity. Would you know the handwriting of Lord John, if you should see it?"

"Indeed I would, sir."

"Then get me pen, ink, and paper. You shall see some that is not his."

"Yes, sir. We will go to the library, sir, if you will wait a moment here until I return. I will be gone only a few moments."

CHAPTER IX.

THE EYES BEHIND THE PORTRAIT.

Ashton was rather startled by the precipitate haste with which Robert left the room, but he attributed it to his desire to compose himself before that test of handwriting, which Ashton intended should be final, was tried.

There was, indeed, some truth in the conjecture, for the faithful old man did wish to compose his countenance before going into the presence of Lady Mercy, who he knew was impatiently awaiting the summons to the library where from behind the screen offered by the portrait of the crusader, she could look again upon the face and form of the man she loved.

She instantly detected, however, the perturbation depicted upon Robert's countenance.

"What is it, Robert? What has happened?" she demanded, the moment he made his appearance.

"He is determined to leave us, Miss Mercy," sobbed the old man. "He is going away, and tomorrow he says he will leave England. What shall we do? What can we do?"

"He must be prevented from going. There will be a way, Robert. Wait until I have seen him. There will be time enough after that. Are you ready to take me to the library?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Come, then."

She went past him, through the open doorway, and on down the stairs so rapidly that he found it difficult to keep pace with her. Her own hands seized the easel against which the portrait rested, but she was not strong enough to move it from its place. It was Robert who did that, and when she had passed behind it and applied her eyes to the holes that Robert's penknife had made, he moved it back again so that she was effectually a prisoner.

"Can you see around the room?" he inquired, when everything was adjusted.

"Perfectly. Do you think it will be possible for him to detect me here?"

"No, my lady, I do not. It is barely possible for me to discover the defect, and I know that it is there. He, not knowing it, will never suspect your presence. Do you think you will be able to retain your composure?"

"Yes, Robert."

"No matter what he says or does?"

"Yes; I will not give way. Go, Robert, go; he is waiting."

"One moment, and I will go," he replied. Then, with deft fingers he placed writing materials upon the table, arranged the curtains to suit him, and hastened back to the room where he had left his guest.

"Come, sir," he said. "I will take you to the library now, if you please."

Ashton did not reply. He followed his conductor in silence along the hall

and down the stairs to the library door, passed inside and paused.

The portrait of Sir Roderick was in the corner directly opposite the point where he entered the room. It was a striking picture. One that would have claimed attention anywhere, particularly the attention of one as fond of art as John Ashton, and he experienced an uncanny feeling as his gaze encountered the eyes of the portrait, as though the stern old warrior did not entirely approve of his intrusion.

"Whom does that portrait represent? One of the early ancestors?" he inquired.

"That is Sir Roderick, sir; the portrait you used to love so dearly. Look closer, sir. You will remember it."

"Confound you, Robert. If I were not so sorry for you, I should be angry."

"Will you not look at the portrait more closely, sir?" asked Robert, unmoved.

"Not now. After we have tried that handwriting, I will. Where are the materials? Ah, here they are. What shall I write?"

"Do you wish me to dictate it, sir?"

"Yes."

"The last letter that I received from you, sir, read something like this," said the old man, calmly, determined that inasmuch as he had now boldly asserted his unfaltering belief, he would adhere to it in public as well as in private. "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"'Robert Smithson'—never mind the address—'Send Powers to the station at 9.45'—9.45 in figures, sir—'to-morrow morning. He should bring the carriage as I shall have a friend or two with me.' That is all, sir."

"How did he sign it?" asked Ashton, pausing with uplifted pen, when the short note was finished.

"Just 'Hertford,' sir. Sometimes he signed John Hertford, to checks and things of that sort, but never Ashton, or Cowingford. You always preferred to use the family name. Your letters to me were always signed with the one name."

"Good. Well, there it is. Now take a look at it, and it may be that you will be convinced of your folly."

He threw down the pen, and rising, crossed the room until he stood before the portrait behind which Lady Mercy was concealed, and Robert, who took two or three steps towards the table to comply with the request, noticing what he had done, stopped suddenly, too deeply concerned over the possible discovery of the presence of the countess to care to inspect the handwriting which he was already convinced did not need inspection, and so fearful that she would do something to betray her presence, that he instantly forgot everything except her purpose in coming to the library.

Ashton, in his turn, forgot what Robert was supposed to be doing in the unaccountable fascination he felt for the portrait. He remained, several moments, motionless, regarding it with a steady gaze, feeling, with a tingling sense of uncanniness, that the gaze was returned.

He was vaguely conscious of an inexplicable attraction towards the likeness of the man who had rested so many centuries in his grave, and he experienced an indefinable wish that he could change places with the knight who looked down upon him with a glance as bold as any with which he had met the infidel Saracen on his native deserts. Twice he attempted to turn away, only to discover that the portrait drew his eyes to the pictured face with an irresistible attraction.

Then he turned his gaze upon other paintings in the room, only to find that the eyes of Sir Roderick gleamed upon him from each, and that the countenance of the warrior was drawn in the sunsets, in the landscapes, among the trees and in the portraits of every work of art with which the walls were decorated.

Robert, in the mean time, had approached within a few feet of his supposed master, and standing directly behind him, physically paralyzed by suppressed excitement, awaited the result. His fingers were interlocked, and each hand strained upon the other with unrelaxed tension, so that the knuckles gleamed brightly red, like clouded rubies, the veins in the backs of his hands became purple and swollen, and contrasted strangely with the surrounding pallor.

His face was as white as the face of a corpse, except in two spots over his eyes, where the blood seemed to have collected its forces and paused, held there by the power of the will to assist the visual organs. He had paused in the act of stepping. His weight rested on the ball of his right foot while the toe of the left one seemed barely to touch the carpet. Had he been one of the victims of Vesuvius in the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum, overtaken in his agonizing flight by the deadly sulphur fumes, engulfed, sustained and preserved by the flood of ashes that followed and recreated by modern art as other figures have been, anxiety, terror, hope, doubt, faith and unbelief could not have been more curiously depicted. He saw what Ashton could not see. He knew what Ashton did not know. He realized fully what Ashton only sensed, as one experiences realities in dreams, that there was life and hope and love, light and warmth and feeling in the expression of the eyes that looked down upon them from the picture.

Ashton saw only that there was something living beyond and behind that painted canvas; he saw it without belief or realization; he realized it without sight or sense; he imagined all that his inner being revealed without trusting to his imagination; he felt that his pulses thrilled, yet denied to himself that they were stirred; he breathed more deeply, and yet with shorter inhalations, while he wondered if he were breathing at all; he saw moisture in the depths of those eyes, and wondered if a painter's art had permitted the brush to depict a reality like that, knowing, while he wondered, that art had never builded so high; and then, while still attracted and repulsed, beckoned and repelled as though he were the steel between the positive and the negative poles of a magnet, by a strange paradox, he remembered Hope.

There was no more likeness between the picture and Hope Hollister, than there might have been between the icebergs of the frozen north and the sands of blistered Sahara, but still there was the thought. There was no likeness at all between Hope Hollister and the woman whose identity glowed behind the eyes of the portrait; yet still, there was the thought.

There was absolutely nothing in the circumstances, or in the surroundings to suggest Hope Hollister to his mind, and yet the thought came and brought with it an indescribable feeling of awe and a wave of tenderness which at once enthralled and attracted him, and he drew a step nearer to the canvas.

With his eyes fixed intently upon the pupils of those orbs that seemed to him to beckon him on, he paused again and sighed, raising his right hand and passing it methodically across his brow.

For the moment he forgot where he was, for across the wide ocean, among the mazes of that great city, through the thick walls of the house and into the room where he stood leaped the image of the woman he had loved so devoutly—whom he now loved so despairingly—whose memory, throughout the year of wandering had been his safeguard, his mentor, his religion.

"Hope, Hope!" he murmured. "My lost love. What is it that brings you before me now, so vividly that I can see every lineament of your dear face in the grim visage of this old warrior? What is the magic of this portrait which makes you look at me out of his eyes? What has cast the spell of

your presence in this room, strange to me and to you alike? Are you thinking of me, my Hope? Has the past year of separation been as bitter to you as it has been to me?"

He ceased speaking. Robert, not daring to move, remained like a graven image, hoping, doubting, fearing, wondering.

There were several moments of absolute silence, and then, with startling distinctness, seemingly from behind the picture, there came a heartbreaking sigh.

Ashton came to himself with a start, and he turned instantly to Robert.

"What was that?" he demanded. "Who made that sound?"

"It was I, sir. I did it," replied Robert with strange eagerness. He could lie for others, if not for himself.

Still Ashton doubted, while knowing that he ought not to doubt—while believing there was no reason to doubt. He shook his head incredulously.

"It came from behind the picture," he said.

Robert, not knowing what to reply, said nothing. It was the wisest course he could have pursued, and the next moment Ashton had turned his face once again upon the portrait and was once more plunged in his own thoughts.

It was the appeal he had made to his lost love that had forced the sigh from the countess, for she, like Robert, believed that he was appealing to his memory for her. The name Hope was only a word to her. Taken in connection with the words that followed the man who uttered them was only battling with forgetfulness and *hoping* that the veil which hid the past from view might be drawn aside.

"Are you thinking of me, my Hope?" he had said. "Has the past year of separation been as bitter to you as it has been to me?"

His eyes were looking straight into hers; her gaze was peering into the utmost depths of his soul when the words were uttered; is it strange that she sighed?

She saw all that Robert had seen; she believed all that Robert believed. The boy with whom she had played in childhood, the man whom she had loved and married and from whom she was parted on her wedding day, stood before her, and she dared not make her presence known.

When he turned his eyes away to speak to Robert, she quickly brushed the tears from her eyes, so that when he looked again towards her, she believed that she was prepared to meet his glance, but she was in nowise prepared for what she saw.

For the first time in all the months that had passed since John Ashton and Hope parted before the door of Henry Hollister's bank, tears welled up from his soul through his eyes and rolled unheeded down his cheeks.

It was only for a moment that he remained thus. Through his own tears, he saw, or fancied that he saw, tears in the painted eyes of the portrait.

With a quick gesture he dashed his own aside and stepped eagerly forward to obtain a nearer view.

There was no mistake. There *were* tears in the eyes of that pictured face and while he gazed upon them in amazement, they rolled down the canvas. Tears! Real tears!

He looked again, bending forward still nearer, and then he saw the eyes vanish as if by magic while from behind the easel he heard another sigh, half sob, half moan.

Instantly alert, he seized the painting by the frame and hurled it across the room, exposing to full view the exquisite face and quivering form of Lady Mercy, now utterly terrorized by the consciousness that her presence was betrayed and that she stood revealed before him.

(To be continued.)

AT FEUD.

BY FRANK H. SWEET.

The spirit of revenge in a young mountaineer, and the strange circumstance that for a time gave it check, together with the narrative of what took place in an encounter with the chief offender.

"SOMEBODY'LL be made ter pay fer this!"

The words were hissed rather than spoken, and the boy's fingers closed convulsively on the barrel of his long rifle. It was not yet noon, but the shadows of the forest were thick around him.

On either side rose the jagged walls of a dark ravine. From somewhere in the distance came the sound of running water. Stray gleams of sunlight came through occasional openings in the foliage, and one of these fell at the boy's feet and rested upon the dead body of a large deerhound.

It showed in strong relief the fine outlines of the body and the long tapering limbs. It just touched the delicate face and ears, but left in pitying shadow the ugly wound made by the bullet.

As the young mountaineer gazed at the dark scar, his eyes gleamed fiercely.

"Somebody'll pay fer hit," he repeated savagely, "an' I 'low that somebody'll be Tom Peters. The low down sneakin' spy an' traitor! He's driv pap inter the mount'n by his lyin' an' tale bearin', and now he thinks he'n do what he likes with our fambly cos I'm a boy. But I'll show him! Hit shan't be said I'm the bes' shot in the mount'n fer nothin'. I'll end this old quarrel now fer good 'n always. Ef Tom Peters 'lows on killin' any more dogs, he'll hatter be quicker to shute ner I am."

Then his mood changed. Letting his rifle fall upon the ground, he threw himself beside the dead body of his friend.

"Poor old Driver!" he sobbed, "can't you speak ter me? Ain't you 'n' me goin' on any more hunts? Poor old doggie! Poor old doggie!"

For some time, he lay there sobbing bitterly; then he rose and began to scoop a hole in the loose sand.

When it was large enough, he lifted the dead body of his friend and laid it gently in its last resting place, sifting in the dirt carefully, and, over all, placing several large stones.

When it was finished, he picked up his rifle and gazed at his work thoughtfully. There were no tears on his face now, and his sensitive mouth had grown harsh and sullen.

"Good by, old doggie," he said, as he turned away. "I wisht you knew what I'm goin' fer. You'd rest easy."

He moved along slowly and cautiously and paused frequently to look around. As he forced his way through the underbrush, he examined his rifle carefully.

Now and then a rabbit or squirrel ran across his path, but he scarcely noticed. Several times, he saw larger game in the distance, and once he almost stumbled over a wild turkey. But he did not give them a second glance.

Over stones and fallen timber, across wild ravines and, up, up the narrow mountain path, slowly and stealthily; and never for a moment did the angry gleam leave his eyes, nor his mouth lose its resolute harshness.

As he rose higher and higher, he could see the faint outlines of a settlement far down the valley. Here and there were vague farm houses and

shadowy cabins, but they were miles away, and of small interest to him.

The people of valley and mountain held little intercourse, and despised the ways of each other.

On this side the range was wild and almost inaccessible, and the cabins of the hardy mountaineers were far apart. Perched like an eagle's nest on a narrow shelf of rock, and hidden from the valley below by a thick growth of chestnuts, was the home of Tom Peters.

His nearest neighbor was Jake Winthrop, who had built his cabin in the wildest part of a gloomy ravine, three miles down the mountain.

Time was when these two men had been good friends, but that was years ago. A sudden quarrel at a shooting match had begun the feud. Tom Peters was badly wounded, and was confined to his bed for months.

In his first anger, he had sworn to kill Winthrop on sight; but, as he recovered, he seemed to think better of it. During these later years, they had carefully avoided each other. Peters made a new route to the settlement, and Winthrop selected another part of the mountain for his hunting.

Whenever they chanced to meet, their eyes grew fierce and they handled their rifles nervously.

As the years went by, the breach became wider, and the children grew up with the feud as part of their heritage.

It had long been suspected in the valley that Winthrop was engaged in moonshining, but proof was difficult. Several times the officers had made sudden descents upon his place, only to be surprised by his bland looks of wonder and his willingness to show them round.

But at last they had their revenge. One dark night they stole into the valley and found he was at work. He escaped, but the still and the supply of whisky were destroyed. Since then he had kept in hiding.

Food and information were brought to him by his son, and the two spent long hours in discussing plans of revenge. Both were fully convinced that Peters was the instigator of the raid. He had known of the existence of the still—indeed, he had helped to make it, many years before. He was familiar with the secret entrance to the ravine, and knew all about Winthrop's habit of working at night.

And only a few weeks before, the boy had seen him in the settlement, talking with one of the officers. No, there was no doubt who was the secret enemy!

As Bob Winthrop made his way up the mountain path, his eyes grew more fierce and angry. He thought of his father hiding among the rocks, of the ruins of the still, of gentle old Driver buried in the gloomy ravine.

"Poor old doggie! Poor old doggie!" he muttered between his clinched teeth. "But he shall be made to pay fer hit! I sw'ar he sh'll be made to pay fer hit!"

After a while, he began to move more slowly and cautiously. Whenever he came to a large boulder or the summit of a ridge, he peered over carefully before venturing in sight. Then he stole forward swiftly until he reached another shelter.

At last, he paused near a sharp turn in the path. The rifle was once more examined and the priming renewed. Then he dropped upon his hands and knees and crawled stealthily around the turn.

Before him was a sharp descent of a few rods, and, beyond this, a dense fringe of chestnut trees. Above the trees was a column of black smoke.

"He's cert'nly ter home," he said, with a grim smile of satisfaction. "That smoke means dinner. I reckon I'd better come on him sorter easy-like."

But for a long time he remained motionless, his eyes fixed keenly on the woods; then he stole slowly forward.

All this time, the column of smoke was growing thicker and blacker. He watched it with increasing surprise.

When he reached the edge of the woods he could see it floating thickly above the tree tops.

It took him but a few minutes to pass through the fringe of woods, and he paused in the shelter of a large clump of chincapin bushes and glanced sharply around. No one was in sight; but the entire roof of the cabin was in a blaze, and smoke was coming from the door and windows. He gazed at it curiously.

" Queer there ain't nobody roun'," he muttered. " Mebbe they're in the cabin, tryin' ter git things out. Well, hit's good time's any. I'll jess wa'n him an' then hit'll be one or t'other."

He stepped from the bushes and gave a loud shout, and then he cocked his rifle and waited.

One, two, three minutes passed, and there was nothing but the crackling of flames and the frightened cries of bluejays and doves. He grew impatient.

" Somebody mus' be ter home, or how'd the fire get started? They shorely wouldn't set hit on purpose."

He gave another shout and moved slowly toward the cabin. A few moments, and there came the wail of an infant.

" A baby! " he cried, wonderingly. " Why don't the fools bring hit out? "

Then a terrible thought occurred to him: perhaps they were all dead or away! For a moment, he stood irresolute; then a quick flash of pity drove the anger from his face.

" I ain't fightin' babies! " And, dropping his rifle upon the ground, he sped toward the cabin.

Without a moment's hesitation, he dashed into the wall of smoke and flame. But only for an instant. The heat was too much for him, and he staggered out weakly and half blinded. A large spring of water bubbled up in front of the cabin, and the sight gave him a new idea.

A quick bound took him into the spring, and a moment later he rushed back to the cabin, with the water running from him in streams. This time he remained longer. When he came out, he carried a small bundle in his arms. But, almost before he was beyond reach of the flames, he stumbled and fell. After a moment, he rose and staggered on a few steps, and fell again. Before he reached the place where he had left his rifle, he had fallen three times. The last time he did not rise.

The flames crackled and the bluejays screamed. The heavy clouds of smoke drifted away from the burning cabin and floated over the chestnuts.

At last, the small bundle, which had fallen upon the ground, began to stir. A few frantic movements, and it opened and a baby crawled out.

The blanket was scorched and blackened, and there were great holes which the fire had made; but the baby was apparently unhurt. It gazed about curiously for a moment, and then crawled over to the unconscious figure of the boy.

After a while, it reached up and touched the blistered face. A shudder ran through the boy's frame, and he opened his eyes. Then he rose slowly to his feet.

" Sorter seems like I fainted," he said, in a wondering voice. " I thought only gals did that. But I reckon I'd better be gettin' home 'n' hev these burns looked arter. Smart like they's consider'ble bad. Lucky I kep' my eyes shet."

A low wail at his feet drew his attention.

" Yes, baby, I'm goin' ter take you 'long o' me," and the ghost of a smile flickered across his blackened face. " Seems like you sorter belong ter me now. I 'low your folks hev done deserted you."

He reached down, but, as his blistered flesh came in contact with the baby, he drew back with a low cry of pain. Then, as though ashamed of his weakness, he picked up the baby and his rifle and walked quietly toward the woods.

But his progress was very slow.

Something seemed to be dancing before his eyes, and he had to pause frequently and rest. Gradually his steps grew more weak and uncertain.

"Seems mighty queer," he said, thoughtfully. "I never felt like this afore."

At length, he reached the sharp turn in the path. As he did so, he fancied that he could hear some one coming up the mountain.

"It's him!" he muttered, fiercely. "Now we'n settle hit fer good an' all."

Moving back into the bushes, he laid the baby upon a bed of leaves; then he returned, and took a position behind a rock. The angry flame had returned to his eyes, and the excitement had restored momentary energy to his limbs.

The figure came on rapidly. When it was within hailing distance, Bob stepped from his concealment.

"You, Tom Peters!" he called, sharply. "Is your gun loaded?"

"Yes," in startled accents from below.

"Then aim 'n' fire, quick!"

Almost with the words came the sharp report of a rifle, and a bullet whistled past. The boy laughed derisively.

"Now hit's my turn," and he brought his rifle into position and took deliberate aim.

But, even as he pulled the trigger, his strength failed him. He staggered weakly for a moment, then sank upon the ground. The bullet flew wide of its mark.

Tom Peters came on deliberately. He was a large, powerful man, with a heavy beard and keen, restless eyes. When he reached the prostrate figure of the boy he gazed down at him regretfully.

"I didn't 'low ter kill him," he said, and there was real concern in his voice. "But hit all come so sudden. I might have aimed closer 'n I thought. Well, he brung hit on himse'f. But hit's queer he's so burned."

He knelt down, and examined the figure more closely.

"Hair 'n' clothes nigh burned off'n him," he said, wonderingly, "an' face 'n' han's a solid blister. He's cert'nly been where's fire."

A quick glance around showed him the black smoke, which was still floating above the chestnuts. He sprang to his feet with a low cry of dismay. When he turned back to the unconscious boy, his face was dark with passion.

"So that's how come ye got burned!" he hissed. "Fired my cabin, an' mebbe killed my fambly. You—you scoundrel!" He raised his rifle and then lowered it with a bitter laugh. "Hit's lucky you're dead!"

At that instant a woman rushed past him, sobbing wildly.

"My baby! Oh, where's my baby?" Then, catching sight of the prostrate figure, she threw herself upon it. "Oh, my boy! my boy!" she cried. "Thank God! thank God!"

"What's the matter, Alice?" the man asked, sternly. "Are you crazy?"

"No, but hit's a wonder I'm not. Oh, Tom, hit war awful—awful!" and once more she began to sob wildly.

"What war awful?"

"The fire. I saw hit all. Me 'n' the children went roun' on t'other side the ravine, fer—fer berries. I 'lowed the baby'd sleep till we got back. I'd wrapped him up keerful. We seen the fire plain, but we couldn't get back. Hit's a long way roun' the ravine. Then I prayed fer help, an' the boy came an' saved the baby. He went in twicet."

Her sobbing had gradually ceased and she now looked up with a pitiful inquiry in her eyes.

"Where's my baby?" she asked, wistfully.

A low cry from the bushes answered her. In a moment, the baby was brought and placed in her arms.

"An' did the boy get all them burns a-savin' hit?" Tom Peters asked, with a strange look on his face.

The woman nodded.

"I thought hit war an angel," she

said, simply, "sent ter answer my pra'r."

Unconsciously her hand began to stroke the boy's face. Either the pain or something in her touch seemed to arouse him.

After a moment, he opened his eyes and gazed at them curiously; then he recognized Peters.

"Is your gun loaded?" he asked, confusedly.

"No," and the strong voice trembled a little. "I 'low there won't be no more use fer guns atween us."

"But I 'low there will," and by a desperate effort the boy struggled to his feet. "I feel sorter queer, but I reckon I 'n hold a gun. An' hit's time this quar'l war settled."

The man folded his arms across his chest.

"You 'n shute ef you like ter," he said, quietly, "but I'm through."

The boy's eyes blazed scornfully.

"So you're a coward 's well 's a spy 'n' dog killer," he taunted.

"I don't know what you mean by spy 'n' dog killer," he said, with a quick flush, "but Tom Peters ain't gen'rally spoke of as a coward."

"Didn' you bring the officers down on pap's still?" fiercely. "Didn' you kill my dog? Ain't you been a sneakin' spy all 'long?"

"I never heerd o' the still bein' took till this mornin'," was the calm answer, "an' I ain't a man as kills dogs. I seen a lot o' settlemint boys huntin' yes'day, an' mebbe some o' them shot him." Then he added gently: "You 'n' me can't fight any more."

"But I seen you talkin' with the officer, down ter the settlemint," he said, doubtfully.

"He war askin' me about a darky who used to work fer you all. He 'lowed on bribin' him, but I had no idee what 'twar fer."

"Then there ain't no cause fer quar'l atween us," the boy said, musingly. "I'm right glad. Pap thought a heap o' you. That's what made him so bitter. He 'lowed you war workin' agin him."

"I'd ruther be frien's with your pap than with any man in the whole worl'," was the quick answer. "I'd 'a' made up long ago, but I know'd 'twar no use. He war that bitter, he'd 'a' shot me on sight."

The boy reached out his hand and the man grasped it warmly.

GLIMPSES.

WITH dull, cold face the opal faintly gleameth ;
  Its shimmering light grows dimmer—will expire—
When sudden, lo ! the wondrous glow that streameth
  Betrays a hidden heart of crimson fire.

In every human soul, however shrouded
  In dull, cold apathy, or vain disguise,
By fierce despair, or sin however clouded,
  Burns yet deep down a spark that never dies.

And lo !—as through the opal's pallor stealing
  Those flaming messengers of light outgleam—
In rare, grand moments flashes forth, revealing
  A glimpse of Light whose depth we may not dream !

Charlotte W. Thurston.

THE CAPTIVES OF THE TEMPLE.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A tale of strange adventure in South American wilds. The sequel to a quest for the Great Royal Orchid, involving an escape from one foe only to fall into the hands of another still more relentless.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

On the ship Wing, bound to South America after rare woods, are Oliver Keyburn, son of the owner, and his friend, William Desklit. Keyburn has taken the part of Pedro Gapo, a negro member of the crew, against the cruelty of the captain, Jacob Pence. After they get into the Amazon, Keyburn and Desklit are made prisoners at the captain's orders, and preparations are under way to leave them on an island, when the vessel is wrecked by a tidal wave. Keyburn, Desklit and the negro escape and are picked up by a steam yacht, the Flora, hailing from London and bound for the head waters of the Tapajos, in search of a rare plant known as the Great Royal Orchid. There is a young lady in the party, Professor Wisdom's niece, and when it is no longer possible to navigate the river, all disembark and make their way through the forest.

During a night camp, Keyburn is suddenly struck down by an unseen foe, and when he recovers his senses finds himself on a comfortable bed in a room of barbaric splendor. A young negro is in attendance, and questioning him in the Spanish tongue, Keyburn learns that he is in the house of Padre Jadispiato, the chief priest of the temple. Presently Jadispiato himself appears and has Keyburn conducted to the temple of Ameza, where he and the rest of the party are to die. The priestess—a beautiful white girl, who had been captured some years previous—assists the party, with the exception of four men, to escape through a secret passage. They hide for days without food, and, after many adventures, steal forth, to find the town deserted. They discover a wounded sailor from the Wing, who tells them that Pence and his ruffians have fought the Amezans and captured the city. While Keyburn and his friends are in front of the temple, the drunken mob, headed by Pence, appears; the latter tries to seize Elna, the priestess, but Keyburn interferes, is felled to the ground, and a fierce struggle ensues.

CHAPTER IX.

A BRIEF RESPITE AND A MYSTERY.

THE brief glance I had had showed me that the party with Pence was a large one. It consisted not only of his own men from the Wing and the twenty ruffians from Santerem, but also of a number of blacks, the former slaves of the priests. The professor's party, the four scientists, were also present, in the foreground.

As I fell, half stunned by the blow, I felt, rather than saw, a struggle going on around me. I heard the great voice of Pedro Gapo bawling out something I did not catch, and caught the shrill screams of old Altama as she called upon the blacks to take a stand against their new friends.

The struggle, of course, was doomed to be short lived, and could end only one way. Pence's men were all armed with rifles, and not one of our friends had a gun.

When it was over, a row of captives lay on the ground before the temple. Professor Wisdom, Professor Turnbell, Dr. Twinkle, Mr. Hebard, Desklit and myself, were all bound and helpless, and some of the party slightly injured. On the ground near us lay Pedro Gapo, apparently dead, with blood flowing from an ugly wound.

**This story began in the December issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

Lottie and Elna, pale, but wonderfully calm, stood a short distance away, and the old woman called Altama cowered behind them.

The blacks of Ameza, some hundred or more, stood around in excited groups, as if scarcely knowing what to make of it since Pence had come and freed them from their masters.

The fight had sobered Pence and Huskway. The ex captain of the Wing waved his hands toward us and gave orders for his men to watch us, while he and his rascally first officer stepped to one side to confer.

Seeing the coast clear and no opposition being offered by the crew, Lottie rushed to the side of Professor Wisdom and wept over him. He, with the stoicism of a true seeker after nature's wonders, smiled back at her and bade her be brave and patient.

"My dear," he said, "we have indeed fallen into evil hands. But God is God in Brazil as well as in London. Put your faith in Him and all will be well."

Elna then stepped up, appearing as calm and queenly as she had when Priestess Isisora.

"Friend," she said to Wisdom, "tell me something of what has happened. There were something like two hundred priests and whites in Ameza, and now there are none save those in this party. You were with these marauders. Tell me what happened."

"This happened," replied Professor Wisdom. "All the priests and their friends who had not been killed here, retreated to what seemed to be rude fastnesses in the hills. They were not strong against a force armed with modern guns, and a ruthless slaughter took place. I do not say positively that all were slain, but such is my belief. I saw wounded men and women pursued and shot in wantonness. It was simply horrible. We were compelled to accompany the robbers and murderers, but not a life has been taken by us."

"We came near losing our own lives at the hands of the priests," spoke up Mr. Hebard. "But I prefer them vastly to these drunken sailors."

No attention was being paid to the prostrate body of Pedro Gapo, and a number of the blacks stepped over and picked him up.

"Take him away!" ordered one of the sailors.

That was evidently what they wanted to do, and Gapo disappeared.

Pence and Huskway, having finished their conversation, returned to their captives.

"It's fair to all," said Pence with a leer, "to tell you what we want to do and what we intend to do. We came here to find diamonds, and we are going to find them. We did not know till we met the party in the forest that this place was inhabited by so strange a race of loons. It is clear now that whatever of wealth there is here was the property of the priests. Those priests are all dead, and it is now our business to search the place and find the diamonds that are whispered mysteriously about in all the towns on the Amazon. They are here, and they are of fabulous value. We will make a search for them, and these diamonds shall become the property of myself and companions.

"We found you four old fools here as prisoners when we came. What the devil you want with this flower they call the moon flower is more than I know. However, I have no animosity toward you, and if you will depart in peace, I will let you go. These two girls, however, must remain with us. I have taken a fancy to this one in white, and my friend Huskway admires the other. That settles that. As for these two hounds, Keyburn and Desklit, they must die. We made one attempt to kill them, but some devil's charm must have saved them. But now I propose to make a good job of it."

"You are a prepossessing scoun-

drel," remarked Professor Wisdom calmly. "You mildly propose to turn me adrift with my companions, and keep my niece a captive. Do you think I will accept such a proposition?"

"Well!" roared Pence, "what do I care whether you do or not? You can go or stay as you like, but if you stay I warn you not to interfere with my affairs. I'll kill you as quick as that scoundrel Keyburn."

"You may not kill him as quick as you think," observed the professor.

Pence did not consider this worthy an answer. I was his captive, and there was nothing in sight to prevent his working his evil will on me.

"We are masters of the situation," he said with an oath, "and there is no hurry. We have had so much fighting that we are hungry. We will see if there is anything in this accursed place to eat."

He spoke to the blacks in the Spanish of the coast towns, and they readily understood what was wanted. The men from the Wing gave themselves up to ransacking the place, taking whatever of value caught their fancy.

But few things of great worth were found. By some quick method the priests had secreted all the diamonds, and whatever they held of value.

The blacks prepared a feast for their new friends, and Pence graciously allowed his captives, even including Desklit and myself, to partake. Having satisfied their hunger, their next business in hand was to find that for which they had come.

"Those priests have hid the diamonds," said Pence. "When I started for this forsaken hole I expected to take the diamonds out of the earth. And there is probably a rich diamond mine here, which we will find in time. But I hear that the priests have an immense treasure in diamonds and that is what we want now. They have hidden this treasure somewhere in the temple, but we will unearth it."

But they did not do so. They searched the temple through and through. They ransacked the houses of the priests, and every other house of importance in the place. But they found no diamond treasure, nor any clue to a secret hiding place.

As the captain and Huskway returned to where we lay, and the professor was talking calmly to his niece and Elna, Huskway chanced to spy old Altama crouching near the ex priestess.

"A witch!" he cried. "That old hag must know the secrets of the place. She must know where the priests would hide their treasure."

Pence spoke to her in the coast Spanish.

"Old hag, crone, witch," he said with brutality, "we want to know where the diamonds of the priests are hidden. You have lived here long, and must be a witch, for you appear when all the others are dead or hiding in the hills. Come! Tell us the secret and save your life."

A shrill and unearthly laugh came from the old woman's thin, cracked lips.

"If I am a witch," she said, "I need not tell my secrets, for you cannot kill a witch. If I am not a witch, I have nothing to tell, for none but a witch could gain the secrets of the priests."

"By heavens! This woman is no fool," cried Huskway. "I believe she does know. We'll make her tell. We'll wring the truth from her."

"You call me witch!" screamed the old woman, pointing a long bony finger at them. "Know then, that such indeed I am. Hundreds have I cursed. Hundreds have fallen under terrible tortures and afflictions, because my finger pointed to their evil star and cursed them. Ha! Beware how you trifle with my friends. I will curse you with the greatest curse I know. I will turn you into frogs and snakes."

"Furies! The woman is mad!" exclaimed Pence.

"Mad! Not much!" replied Huskway. "She is shamming. But she cannot fool me. Come, I say, old woman, tell us where the diamonds of the priests are kept."

"Diamonds! I know nothing of diamonds," replied Altama. "The priests wore precious jewels upon their vestments, but they are turned to water when not in use. Look for them in the springs that bubble from the earth."

"Damn you!" roared Huskway, grasping the woman's palsied hand. "I'll twist the arm off you. Now tell."

With his powerful grip he turned the woman's wrist till the dry old bones began to crack.

A scream of terror and pain came from her.

"Then drop your chin music and tell!" shouted Huskway.

"I know nothing! I cannot tell! Mercy!"

"By God! I'll kill you by inches if you don't tell."

The wretch twisted again, and with a scream the old woman fell on her knees before him.

"Mercy! Have mercy! I am old!" she cried.

"I'll show you mercy, you old she devil! Tell us where——"

"For shame! For shame!" came in a clear ringing voice from Elna as she stepped forward and confronted the heartless brute. "You monster of cruelty! Would you kill a woman who has never harmed you?"

Huskway, somewhat abashed by the beautiful blazing eyes, dropped Altama's arm, and looked at Elna.

"But I want to make her tell," he said. "We must know where the diamonds are. You will get your share if you marry Pence."

A look of infinite scorn curled Elna's handsome lip.

"Know then," she said, "if it will save that old woman from further suffering, that I, and I alone, know the secret of the priests. I, and I alone, hold in my breast the knowledge you are seeking."

"You! You!" gasped both Pence and Huskway in a breath. "How did you come by that knowledge?"

"Being one of them, it is my right."

"What's this? What's this?" stammered Pence, looking from Elna to Lottie. "I thought you two were with this crank party?"

"That young lady accompanied her uncle to this country, and became my friend," said Elna. "I am Isisora, the priestess of Ameza."

For a moment there was absolute silence. Pence and Huskway, apparently overcome by the happy knowledge that the treasure was now practically within their grasp, grinned and gasped, and looked too gratified for words.

The rest of us were rendered speechless by the splendid heroism of the girl, who placed her own life in jeopardy to save that of an old and useless woman.

"Well," said Pence with a grin meant to be friendly, "my dear, we will not twist your lovely arm out of its socket. If the secret is really yours, we will share it in due time. There is no hurry now, for there is no one to take you away from me."

The wily rascal was turning away when Huskway, his face black with rage, sprang forward and seized him.

"None of that, curse you!" he cried. "I see your game. While the secret was unknown you were eager for me to work for a share. But now you have the game in your own hands, you will let me go without and bag the whole thing. I'm blasted if you will. Do you understand?"

"You fool!" hissed Pence, "what do you think I am? Could I bag it all against you and the boys?"

"Not if we know it," growled Huskway but little mollified. "We'll see to that."

"Therein lies our hope," whispered Desklit. "If they will only split and

kill each other, we'll get out of this yet."

The squabble had the effect of ending for the time all talk of the treasure, and Huskway walked away, while Pence gave sundry orders with regard to the disposition of his prisoners.

I saw the four Englishmen released as to their feet, but with their hands still tied together, and then led away toward a house that Pence had chosen as their temporary habitation.

Desklit and I were not released at all, but were lifted and carried a short distance into the temple and laid upon the stone floor.

The four men who carried us were of course from the Wing, but were men with whom I had never come in contact, and from whom I could expect nothing in the way of friendship. But still I tried my powers of entreaty.

"Why have you men shown your animosity toward us?" I asked. "Surely you have no cause to share Pence's rage. I won his ill will by taking the part of Pedro Gapo against his tyranny. Surely it is not a crime in your eyes to protect the crew's interests. I would have done the same for any of you."

"We heard all about that, boss," said one. "But you was the feller that cut down the feed. You cut off the grog. That didn't make the men like you any better."

"I never had anything to do with such a thing," I declared. "There was never such an order from the house. If your grub and grog have been cut down, Pence did it to make money. The things are paid for at the old rates. I know that, for I pay the bills myself."

"What game could he play?" asked another.

"If the steward stood in with him he could make heavy purchases at the expense of the house, and then sell the stuff to the cheap restaurants on the river front in New York," I said.

"By gum! He could!"

"But say!" put in another, "this ain't no question of grub now. Pence has promised us a share in these diamonds if we obey, an' I'm goin' to do it. You fellers better shut up and let Pence deal with Keyburn."

With this they sullenly walked away.

"Well, old man," said Desklit, as we lay side by side on the hard floor, with the deadly moonflower staring at us with its bright petals, "what do you think of all this? My greatest anxiety is for the girls."

"Mine too," I answered. "I scarcely believe Pence means to kill us."

"I think he does," said Desklit. "But killing us isn't half so bad as marrying the girls against their will."

We lay all that night on the stones of the temple, and in the morning wondered if we were to be fed. But no one came.

"As I said last night," remarked Desklit, in the same cool way he had always spoken, "I am sure Pence intends to kill us. I wish I knew how the girls were faring."

"My God!" I cried, "what torture to think of them alone in the power of those fiends. It is maddening."

"Do you know I don't look upon them as quite alone?" responded Desklit.

"You mean—as the professor said—God would be with them?"

"That, and this: the old woman. Do you know I've got an idea that that old woman knows more than she tells, and is more than she seems. In what little we have seen of this place there was no evidence that the priests made war on women. Yet in the cellar we found an old crone Elna had placed there to escape the ruthless hand of the chief priest. She accused Jadispiato of robbing her of a husband and son by death, and of a daughter by sorcery. Evidently she was of sufficiently high degree to have been the wife of a powerful man. Elna said

nothing of her story, but even if she knew, which is not likely, she has had no time to go into the old romances of the place, nor its tragedies."

I sighed.

"I cannot hang much hope on the old woman," I said. "Even were she all you imply, how could she help us now?"

"That I cannot even suggest," he said. "But she certainly has reason to love Elna, and will help her if she can."

"Yes, that undoubtedly," I admitted.

Just then one of the Wing's crew came in and looked us over to see that we had not worked loose from our thongs.

"Are you going to starve us?" I asked.

"It's not my fault, boss," was the reply. "Pence says as how you won't need no grub, 'cause he's goin' to have you out and kill you today."

"That's encouraging," remarked Desklit. "Admit now, Keyburn, that I am a prophet."

The hours dragged on, but Pence did not come. We wondered what was going on outside, and the burden of our thoughts and conversation was the possible fate of the two girls.

Suddenly we heard the sound of a slight rustling.

"Hist! Speak not!" came the shrill whisper of old Altama.

She appeared from behind a row of stone pillars, with one arm hanging useless at her side. In her other hand she carried a knife.

With a series of quick strokes she severed our bonds, and with a crooked finger bade us be silent and follow her.

Stiff from our durance, and filled with wonder, we crept softly after her.

"To the cellar!" whispered Desklit. "She is taking us to the cellar."

But the old woman turned aside from the passage leading to the trap door and led us to a sort of alcove far in the rear and to the left of the nave.

Here the light was even less bright than in the other portions of the temple. It was a place of mysteries, sure enough, and we were filled with wonder.

Great idols and statues stood around on magnificent pedestals. There were a few of these carved stone pedestals unoccupied. They stood in the most obscure corners.

"Stand upon this!" whispered the old woman to me.

I hesitated.

"Do as she says! Trust her!" said Desklit.

I immediately got up on the pedestal and stood erect on its smooth top.

"And you on this!" whispered the old woman.

"One word—the girls?" asked Desklit.

"Well and safe—be cheerful—the witch will help you."

"My God! I'm going down!" I cried.

And so was Desklit. The center pieces in the tops of the pedestals on which we stood were slowly sinking.

CHAPTER X.

THE TREASURE CHAMBER OF THE PRIESTS.

Down, down, slowly but steadily I went, and Desklit on his pedestal, kept pace with me. Old Altama stood near looking at us with a peculiar fire in her eyes.

"What is there below?" asked Desklit.

Without answering, the strange creature turned and left us.

All this took but a second. In much less time than it takes to write it we were below the outer rim of the pedestal.

"Good by!" I shouted to Desklit.

"Meet you below—somewhere," I heard his voice reply.

The space within the pedestal was large enough for me to turn with com-

fort, and as I went down I looked upward.

The opening in the top of the pedestal made by our descent was now closed. I was in total darkness.

I felt the speed of the strange car decrease, and at a much slower pace I continued the descent. All around me was a smooth wall of stone, without a break in it.

At last, after perhaps a full minute, a flood of light came upward into the hollow space, and looking down I saw my feet emerging into some kind of a large chamber.

I felt a rush of cool air, and then my head emerged from the foot of the column. I saw Desklit, still even with myself, and we each let out a cheer at the reunion.

A few feet further down, the flat pieces of stone on which we stood reached the level of the floor and came to a standstill.

"Well! By all that's great and mysterious, what do you think of this?" cried Desklit, rushing to me and grasping my hand.

"I have heard of mysterious architecture," I replied, "but this beats anything on record, I should say."

"Did I not tell you that old woman knew more than she would tell? Huskway wasn't far wrong when he called her a witch."

"I believe it," I answered. "But now we are here, what next? Suppose the old woman dies, or Pence kills her, and no one else knows we are here. We starve, I suppose."

Desklit rubbed his chin reflectively.

"It looks that way," he said. "But perhaps there is a way to make the platforms carry us up as well as down. Surely there is a way out."

"Look! There they go now!" I cried, as the two stone disks began slowly to rise.

We stood spellbound with surprise as the two round flat pieces of marble slowly rose toward the opening through which we had descended. Under each disk was a stone column which came into view from the depths of some place beneath us where the mechanism controlling it was located.

Whether the thing worked automatically or was being operated by Altama above, we could not tell. In either case, it was certainly a strange piece of machinery.

"Those priests were well skilled in mechanics," I said. "Ameza might have made a name in the world had it been under broad and wise government."

"If it had been under broad and wise government, these things that surprise and interest us now would not exist. We come from a broad and wise government and we are amazed at these preparations for flight and concealment. An Amezan priest would be equally amazed at anything he saw in the United States. Yet they were certainly skilful and intelligent men, but under the thrall of a powerful drug."

The disks of marble had now disappeared into the hollow spaces above, and there was nothing to show that the stone columns confronting us were anything more than the fixed, dead things they seemed.

"Well," said Desklit, who was the coolest hand in all emergencies I have ever seen, "we are here, and no matter whether I die in the place or leave it, I am going to see what sort of retreat the old crone has given us. I wonder where this light comes from."

We began a hurried but not the less complete examination of the basement, or whatever it might be called.

We stood in a low roofed chamber that was perfectly bare of all furniture.

"Well," said Desklit, "we will call this the Hall of Columns."

"And proceed to examine the next," I added, taking the lead toward another chamber which I could see through a large arch.

On entering here we stopped, stood with parted lips, and gazed spellbound at each other.

"We are in an underground palace,

the Place of Mysteries," spoke Desklit softly. "I feel as if I was in the presence of something sacred."

It was a wonderfully beautiful place. From the ante chamber several steps led downward, thus making the roof higher from the floor. Nothing could be seen of the floor or walls. The richest of old tapestries adorned the latter, while pictures of strange significance hung here and there. Ornaments of rare design in gold and silver were arranged on inlaid tables about the great apartment, and couches of curious workmanship stood about on the thick rich carpet.

On several tables scattered about the place were golden lamps in which burned oil that gave out neither smoke nor odor, but a brilliant white light. A few richly carved chairs were placed near the tables, and at one end of the chamber was a sort of daïs.

We took in all these details without speaking a word after the first exclamation of surprise from Desklit. The room was not very large, and the great weight above was easily sustained by the many stone pillars that stood in rows, adding a dignity to the mysterious apartment.

At one end we found a table on which were several books, and behind that a rack of shelves containing many more, together with strange looking old charts. These had evidently remained undisturbed for a great many years.

In fact, save for the lamps as evidence that the priests still maintained the place, it seemed to belong to the mystery laden past.

At last I broke the silence.

"I can't understand," I said, "why, with this place so handy, the priests did not retreat here and save their lives."

"I don't think," said Desklit, "that it was ever intended for a place of retreat from enemies."

"Then what is it for?"

"Rather a retiring place for the priests, I should say—a secret meeting place—star chamber—hall of plots—anything you wish."

"Altama must know."

"Yes, Altama may know, and then again she may not. Still, she knew of its existence, and must know of its purpose."

"I wonder if Elna knows of it."

"Probably not. The place probably has been kept a secret by the priests. It may have been long ago a resort for secluded worship, yet the trappings are too luxurious for that. It certainly is not a place of retreat in time of attack, for there is but the one way in and out, and there is neither water nor food provided."

While we were speaking, I was walking round the room peering behind the tapestry on the wall to find another chamber if any existed. But there seemed to be no other. At last Desklit joined me in the search.

"Look here!" he suddenly called out. "I've found something."

I ran to him. He stood holding a beautiful curtain to one side, revealing a shining spot in the stone wall in which there was a small opening like a keyhole.

"That is a door, I'll bet a cent," said Desklit. "Now, if we could only open it. Some one must have had a key. I wonder if it is to be found here."

"I alone have the key!" said a soft voice behind us, and we turned suddenly.

There stood Elna, once Priestess Isisora of the Moon Flower, and by her side Lottie Wisdom.

Forgetting the puzzle of the keyhole in our great joy at finding them safe, we rushed to them and clasped their hands. Lottie seemed overjoyed at being with Desklit once more, and I fancied I saw a light of pleasure in Elna's beautiful eyes.

"What is this place?" I cried. "What mysteries lie in this temple still unrevealed?"

"That I cannot tell you," replied Elna, "for I do not think I know them

all. I did not know of the existence of the spot until old Jadispiato died."

"Ah! But old Altama knew."

"Yes, she knew, but even that is scarcely true. She did know that the priests had a secret chamber here, and it was because she knew that her husband was murdered, her son put to death in some mysterious way, and her daughter married to a negro by force."

"Heavens! Then Altama was really somebody long ago."

"Altama's husband was a priest of Ameza. As you already know, from the fact that Forresto wished to marry me, the priests of Ameza marry. The husband of Altama was named Croneldo. In a burst of confidence he acquainted Altama with the existence of a beautiful chamber sacred to the use of the priests under the temple.

"In some way, either by craft or by Croneldo's confession, the priests learned of his indiscretion, which was a transgression of the highest degree. He was murdered by Jadispiato himself. His son was put to death, but I do not know how. And, as I said, the daughter of Altama was married to a negro slave.

"All this happened many years ago, and Altama became a poor, maddened thing, whom the priests would not kill. But as she grew older she lost discretion, and it was for babbling about the secrets of the priests that she was again condemned to death by Jadispiato. Instead of permitting the murder, I hid her in the cellar of the temple. And for that, and for my advocacy before the marauders yesterday, she is helping us now."

"But did she not know the mysterious construction of the thing?" asked Desklit. "You said she knew, and yet qualified the statement."

"No, Altama knew nothing except that such a place existed. It was I who told her of the mechanism and bade her bring you here before she assisted us, for you were in immediate danger of death."

"Noble girls!" murmured the doctor, "to risk death yourselves for us."

"It so happened," said Elna, with a smile, "that what you call a risk was really the most fortunate thing I could have done. It would have been a difficult thing to get away from them, guarded as we were. And even had we done so, you would probably have been killed at once, or your guards increased. But after you were missed the excitement was so great that no one seemed to pay much attention to us. We managed to get into the temple, and the rest was easy to accomplish."

"And now that we are here, what do you predict?" I asked. "Can we subsist until those rascals find the diamonds and depart?"

A slight laugh came from Elna.

"We must hope they will not find the diamonds," she said, "for if they find the diamonds they will find us."

"What do you mean?"

"The diamonds are here."

"Ah!" exclaimed Desklit. "That accounts for the whole thing. This, then, is the place of concealment of the treasure. Here, amid wonderful luxury, the priests came and gloated over their great wealth. But had the common people no riches?"

"No. The diamonds, gold, and these tapestries and relics of former greatness remain solely in the hands of the priests. The diamond and gold mines became extinct long years ago. When I became priestess I received the gift of a number of valuable diamonds from Jadispiato. I also became an owner of equal rights with the priests in the entire store. Most of the jewels were secreted when rumors reached us of the approach of diamond hunters."

"But Jadispiato had on plenty of diamonds the day I first saw him," I said.

"Yes, to impress you. Your party had been captured, and it was not thought the other party was so near."

"Tell us another thing," said Desklit. "When we were in the place we call

the cellar, because it is bare and unfurnished, old Altama said there was no other way of getting out save by the trap door. Does this place not communicate with that one?"

"No. Jadispiato, when he was dying, told me of this chamber. It is separated from that cellar by a solid wall of stone twenty feet thick. The cellar was used as a dungeon, and it would not do to have a communicating door from that place to this."

"Well, the former settlers in Ameza were wonderful builders," remarked Desklit. "And so Jadispiato told you the secret of the diamonds."

"More than that," said Elna. "I am the sole custodian and owner of the wealth. The words of Jadispiato to me were in substance as follows: He explained the existence of this place to me, and gave me the key to that little keyhole you were examining as we came in.

"His instructions were for me to retain possession of the key until all danger from Pence and his men had passed. If they were driven from the country I was to deliver the key to the person chosen by the priests as chief priest in place of Jadispiato.

"If Pence's men were victorious and the priests were scattered, I was to use every endeavor to save the diamonds and divide them with those priests remaining alive and whom I could personally find. If the priesthood was totally annihilated, I, as priestess, was to become sole owner of the treasure, and might dispose of them as I would."

"Then they are certainly yours," said Desklit, "for the priests, and not only the priests, but the common people as well, have been annihilated."

"Yes, so I understand the matter," replied Elna. "If the priests and common people are all killed the diamonds are mine. There is no government, no other hand in which to place them, no one who has a higher right. Would the government of Brazil claim them, do you think?"

"Not if we know it," blurted out Desklit. "The government of Brazil! You might as well offer them to the government of China."

"Do you think we will ever get out of here alive?" asked Lottie.

"I trust so," was Elna's reply. "We have much to hope for. It is true, Pence and his men now have everything their own way, and will continue to be a united force as long as they are hunting for the diamonds. But if they find the treasure of the priests they will fight among themselves. In either case we may hope for succor from the blacks who are now beginning to realize the mistake they made in rising against their masters to assist these robbers. And they have a good leader. That sailor friend of yours has much influence among them."

"What sailor friend of mine?" I asked, never thinking of the negro.

"I think you called him Pedro Gapo."

"Pedro Gapo! Why, he was killed in the struggle with Pence's men!"

"It proves otherwise. He was wounded and stunned. The blow he received would have killed any other man. But the slaves, because he was black, took him away and nursed him. He is now recovering, and his condition is kept a secret from his enemies. He is rapidly organizing the blacks for resistance."

"By Jove! Now I come to think of it, that fellow is a Brazilian negro," I said. "He may have come from some place near here, and so have influence over those black fellows. But how will they fight Pence without arms?"

"By craft. The blacks know many of the properties of the poison roots and herbs, and as they are now the servants of the whites, they will find a way to overcome them."

"Heavens! Wholesale poisoning is strong treatment," said Desklit, "but I believe it to be justified by Pence's own rascality and the necessity of saving our own lives."

"And what about our English friends? Are they still safe?"

"Yes. Pence seems to look upon them as harmless lunatics. They are free to wander in the temple and worship the Moon Flower if they wish. They came far enough to get it. They deserve to worship the thing if they so desire."

"But if we remain here long, what about food?"

"Altama will take care of that. Our meals will not be very regular, as she must work very stealthily. But she will endeavor to get enough to us to keep us from starving."

Moved perhaps by curiosity, or perhaps by a wish to satisfy ours, Elna took a golden key from the bosom of her gown and stepped toward the spot where Desklit had found the keyhole. She inserted the key, gave it a turn, and a door in the wall opened.

Inside we saw a silver casket about three feet long and two wide.

"Remove the casket," said Elna.

Desklit and I took hold of the thing. It was very heavy. We drew it out a short distance, but did not lift it from its resting place. The lid raised easily. An exclamation of delight came from all of us. In the casket lay string after string of splendid jewels, of varying sizes.

"The richest and rarest!" said Desklit. "Millions are in that silver box."

We spent much time admiring the jewels, now the sole property of Elna. From that pleasing pastime we fell to chatting about our circumstances and the possibilities of realizing a future away from that strange place.

Hour after hour passed thus pleasantly, notwithstanding the fact that we were still in great danger.

"I am beginning to feel hungry," said Desklit. "Now, Altama, if you wish to win still more of our lasting regard, show your skill in sending us some food."

Almost as he spoke we heard a sound as of some one in distress, and old Altama rushed toward us from the Hall of Columns, bearing in her arms a great basket.

"We are lost!" she cried, trembling in a frenzy that had come upon her. "You, my beloved one, Isisora, are lost! They have discovered the moving pedestals!"

As she spoke she fell unconscious on the ground, and an exclamation from Desklit as he knelt beside her drew our attention to the fact that she was wounded.

CHAPTER XI.

A CHOICE OF RISKS.

In the first rush of consternation following the discovery that our faithful servitor was wounded, we paid little heed to each other. Desklit was absorbed in his attentions to old Altama, with Lottie kneeling by his side to render such assistance as she could.

I bent over the three for a moment, speechless, trying to feel that perhaps the woman had spoken more than the truth when she had said that Pence and his associate cutthroats had discovered our retreat.

I looked up, to find Elna missing. She had darted away at the first words of Altama. I soon saw her returning from the Hall of Columns, pale but with a triumphant smile on her face.

"It is one thing to discover, and another to reach," she said.

"What have you done?" I asked.

"I have stopped the mechanism by which the platforms are moved. They may have found out the fact that these pedestals are but secret ways to reach our hiding place, but I doubt if they will succeed in getting here themselves. The machinery can be controlled from this floor or the one above. The levers moving the columns are hidden up there in one of the pedestals. It is not likely they will discover them. I have stopped the works here so that no one can descend."

At this point a moan came from Altama, and we turned to her.

"She is alive," said Desklit, "but the bullet has done for her. She cannot live long."

"It is horrible!" cried Lottie. "She was so true a friend."

"I would like to hear her story how Pence discovered our retreat," I said. "We ought to learn that in order to know what to do next."

"It is possible that she will be able to tell us," rejoined Desklit. "Let us see what she has brought in the basket. There may be something there that will ease her."

Elna and Lottie uncovered the basket, and revealed a quantity of dried food that would keep us several days with economy. It was not the most inviting store of edibles in the world, but it was sustaining, and that was everything. In addition there were two loaded pistols.

"It is clear the woman scented trouble," said Desklit, "and took great chances to get such things as she thought would be most needful."

"I can't see what use you can make of the pistols," observed Lottie. "You certainly will not attack Pence."

"That remains to be seen," replied Desklit. "But see, Altama is reviving. She may be able to talk now."

The old woman opened her eyes and looked at us all with a serene calm and a smile that proved she knew us.

"Can you speak?" asked Desklit.

"Yes," came the reply in a scarcely audible whisper.

"Can you tell us what happened above? How did the miscreants shoot you?"

"It is over, senor," she said. "I am dying."

"You are severely wounded. I must tell you the truth. I do not think you will be with us long."

"I am glad," she whispered, "I have lived too long. I am old, so very old. It is not well to be so old."

"You did not live too long since you lived to help us," said Lottie, taking the old woman's withered hand in hers.

"Ah! I have not helped. I have brought you into a trap. When they missed you up there they suspected that I had taken you away. They took me before the captain who governs them. He questioned me and called me a witch. I answered nothing. He let me go, saying aloud that he did not believe I knew where you were. But my old ears are sharp. I heard him say to another that if I did not show them where I had taken you they would burn me alive. I knew they would do this, and I wished to make one more effort and bring you food. I also found these two things with which they shoot, and took them for you.

"I filled the basket with dried food that it would keep you for a time. Then, watching my opportunity, I ran into the temple and they followed me, which I did not know. Thinking I was safe I stepped upon one of the pedestals and then I heard a shout. At the same time one of them fired one of these little weapons and I felt a hurt in my breast. But I had strength to reach you. That is all. I am dying, and I leave you in this place. May you get out safely—I do not—think——"

The halting whisper ceased.

"She is not quite dead, but she will never speak again," said Desklit.

We watched over the dying woman till the last flickering spark of life had gone.

"It is over," said the doctor. "Let us remove her to the outer room."

He and I carried the light shrunken form and laid it among the columns.

"The next thing is to satisfy our hunger," said Desklit. "We do not know what we may be called upon to endure before we get through with this scrape."

Lottie and Elna soon had the contents of the basket spread out on one

of the tables, and we ate sparingly. There was, along with the food, some of the native wine or liquor, and we drank a little of this in place of the water we would have preferred.

"Now let us understand this thing," I said, as we sat at our frugal lunch. "This mysterious mechanism can be controlled from above and below. Now what sort of mechanism is it? It certainly will not run forever."

"I do not know much of such things," replied Elna. "From what Jadispiato told me I think it is a system of springs. There are several levers outside, where the columns are, which can be turned to wind up the machinery. This is situated below us."

"Well, it is running now, and will not run down before we wish to go up."

Under other circumstances we might have enjoyed a short stay in that luxurious place. It is true the atmosphere was close and none of the best. But there was some ventilation, and life was far from insupportable.

Our surroundings were luxurious enough to please the most fastidious. Had we been there free from all care, much could have been found that would make our stay enjoyable. But we were there now as prisoners. Our minds were filled with anxious conjecture regarding how we were to get out.

The day ended with no further incidents. We fancied we heard shots above us, and thought that Pence's men were making strenuous endeavors to find a way to descend as they had seen Altama descend with the basket. But Elna's quickness of thought had placed a check on that.

That night we slept on couches, and I think we all slept soundly. I know I did, and all appeared refreshed in the morning.

We began a long tedious day. The hours dragged along as if each was a day in itself. Of course night and day were the same in that place, and we were careful to keep our watches wound up in order to note the passage of time.

Four days passed thus, and then the supply of food brought by Altama became exhausted. The situation was growing desperate. Something must be done, and at once.

"It is simply a question," said Desklit, in the course of our deliberations, "whether to release the springs and let our enemies come down to us, or for us to go up to them."

"There is much to be said on both sides," I answered. "In the first instance, if they came down one or two at a time, we could kill them as they came. But they would probably stop coming, and we should be forced to ascend while there was still a superior force awaiting us. I am rather in favor of going up now, while they do not expect it."

"I think myself, that is the better way. How are the columns now?"

Accompanied by the girls we proceeded to make an examination. We found one disk—that used by Altama when she descended—waiting for a passenger upward. The others were up in their places.

"I do not like to have you go," said Lottie.

"But there is nothing for us here but starvation," I replied. "It will not do for us to wait till our strength has become exhausted. We may have fighting to do."

Both girls looked troubled, but they readily recognized the necessity of immediate action.

Elna released the mechanism by turning a small lever hidden in a niche in the stone.

"Shall I bring down another disk?" she asked.

"I think the better way will be to wait till one ascends on this," I said. "If you bring down another now, it may attract the attention of whoever is watching. I will go up first, arrive

unexpectedly, and may have a chance to dispose of the watchers while Desklit comes."

"Let me go first," said Desklit.

"No, I will go first."

I took an affectionate leave of the two girls, for we had been drawn closely together during our short period of adventures, and stepped on the waiting disk.

It immediately began to rise. I saw the three faces of my friends upturned and anxious as I entered the hollow pedestal above. The interior was totally dark.

I remembered that when we had descended the opening made by the descent of the disk had been apparently filled immediately by a similar one coming into place somehow, to hide the loss. I supposed that this second disk would now disappear as I rose, bringing light, and making my escape from the interior of the pedestal easy.

But no such thing occurred. Instead, as I got fairly into the dark and narrow place, the disk on which I stood seemed weighted with lead. It could not rise, and I was held suspended in total darkness and almost without air to breathe.

Thus I remained for what seemed to me to be an hour, but which Desklit afterward told me was just three minutes. Then I suddenly shot upward, and as a flood of light burst upon me I sprang into the Room of Statues and leaped from the pedestal.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM TRIUMPH TO DESPAIR.

STANDING near the pedestal from which I had appeared as if by magic, was one of the sailors from the Wing, his face pallid from fear, and his hand, which held a pistol, shaking uselessly by his side.

Without giving him time to recover I sprang upon him, knocked him down with the butt of the pistol I carried, stretched him on the floor and knelt on his chest.

"Let me up!" he gasped. "What sort of hellish place is this? I was sittin' on that flat thing when I felt it move and jiggle under me and got off, and then you popped out like a Jack-in-the-box."

"Shut up!" I ordered. "If you open your mouth to make a noise I'll shoot you like a dog."

In a moment another movement was heard, and Desklitt shot up into daylight.

"How did you find things?" he asked.

"I found this fellow on guard, but I've got him down," I answered.

"Well, what shall we do with him? Bind him and leave him here?"

"Let me up," wailed the sailor. "I've had enough of Pence and his infernal lies. There's nary diamond in this place. I wish I was out of it. Why, there ain't enough to feed a family, let alone a crew. What did those beggars eat, any way?"

"There is plenty to eat if you know how to prepare it," said Desklitt. "I do not trust you. I think we will tie you up."

But there was difficulty in finding anything to tie him with. Everything in the place was stone. We could not very well dispense with our clothing to make gags and thongs. We did not know how long it would be before we had a chance to replace the lost articles.

"I will swear to stay here," he said. "Don't hurt me. This business is getting rusty anyhow. Pence is diamond mad. I want to get home."

"Will you swear to stand here and give no alarm?" I asked.

"So help me God!"

We left him there, and with his pistol and ours cautiously made our way toward the nave of the temple.

"Look! See what it means to be looked on as a harmless crank," said Desklit.

The four Englishmen who had come to find the Great Royal Orchid stood in a bunch examining in speechless ecstasy the beauties of the moonflower of Ameza.

Professor Wisdom was the first to spy us. He rushed forward and grasped our hands.

"My niece! Have you seen her?" he asked.

I was surprised that he could take time to ask after her, with the moonflower so near.

"She is safe," said Desklit. "That is, she is safe for the present. Where is Pence?"

"Pence! He and his men are searching the place for diamonds. They are also searching for Lottie and that young priestess. They think the old woman took them away, but they are much puzzled by your disappearance. They spend the greater part of each day wandering through all the houses."

"And have they used you well?"

"We have nothing to complain of. The food is meager here. The blacks know how to prepare it, but there is little that suits an English palate. Some of the sailors shoot game in the forests, but it doesn't go round. The last square meal we had was the Brazilian cats of Jadispiato."

We spoke to the others of the party, and wished they were young and ready for a struggle. We could have done much with four able allies. But these men were useless. They could not fight, nor could they be depended on to show craft or shrewdness.

We left them and worked our way slowly and cautiously out of the temple. We halted under the arch at the entrance, and surveyed the almost ruined city.

Pence and Huskway, in their eager search for treasure, had demolished architecture. Houses were ransacked, slabs of stone overturned, statues upset, and ruin seemed to be on every hand.

Blacks moved here and there, but none of the men from the Wing were in sight. A black passed near enough for us to hail him in a low voice. He turned, and his eyes opened wide in astonishment when he saw us.

"Where are the white men?" I asked in as good Spanish as I could muster.

I did not know what language these blacks used among themselves, but I knew that Spanish, or at least a mixture of Spanish and the tongue found native to the place long ago, had been spoken by the priests. I do not know whether the black understood me or not. He simply motioned for me to keep still and for us both to follow him.

He led us to a house much inferior to the majority in appearance, and into this we hurried, not having met a single man from the Wing. But we did see, on entering, Pedro Gapo.

"'Fore God! I'se glad to see you, Senor Keybu'n!" he said, running to me and putting out his hands to clasp mine. "Where dose lubly girls?"

"They are safe at present, Pedro," I answered, "but in a bad predicament. We have just left them to seek a way to rid ourselves of Pence and Huskway. We think if we could kill those two the rest of the men would stand by us. But where is Pence? We have just come from the temple and have not seen a white man save ourselves and the four Englishmen."

"Das so?" queried Pedro wonderingly. "Dat berry strange, senor. I keep mighty close in here, an' see not'in'. I'se workin' up a scheme to beat 'em, but it takes time fur git dese black folks tu'ned roun' in dere notions. Some is wid me an' some is fur stan'in' wid Pence. But I fotch 'em. I don' know where Pence is. I ask dis lubber."

The same black man who had guided us to the spot, and who therefore might reasonably be supposed to be friendly, had come near. Gapo spoke

to him in a lingo we did not understand and received a reply in the same tongue.

"T'ank de good God!" cried Pedro, dancing up and down and waving his hands in the air. "T'ank de good God! Senors, dat fool Pence jes' diskiver de trap doo' to de cellar, an' ebery man jack of de crew go down fur hunt diamonds wid Pence. Dey t'ink dey fin' de hidin' place."

"Then there is no time to be lost," I said. "If they are in the cellar, we must hurry and shut them in there. It is a glorious chance."

Desklit started, and Gapo made as if to follow.

"No," I said to him in a hurried whisper. "You stay here. We can shut the door, and if anything happens to us, help the girls. Go to the wing of the temple to the left of the nave and you will find a lot of statues and empty pedestals. Get on one of them and it will sink with you. It will take you to the girls. Protect them, and give them food. Keep out of Pence's way."

Leaving the negro open mouthed in astonishment, I followed Desklit. We ran to the temple, through the nave, and to that portion where the trap door to the cellar dungeons was located. We encountered nobody.

The door was open.

With a shout of triumph that came involuntarily from our lips we slammed the door shut and stood on it.

"Saved!" cried Desklit, approaching nearer to excitement than I had yet seen him. "We've got the hyenas caged!"

"And now for a way to fasten them in and let them starve!" I said exultingly.

We felt and heard a terrific thumping on the under side of the door, and clasped each other's hand in ecstasy.

"We've got 'em! We've got 'em!" I shouted. "Thump away, my hearties!"

And in response to my call they did thump. But the door would not budge. It was hard to raise alone; with two men on it it was immovable.

Our enthusiasm grew. We laughed at the success of our trick. We saw nothing but a rapid flight and freedom before us.

And then the dream was broken. From the nave of the temple came running a dozen of the Wing's men, who had not been with Pence in the cellar, but had been having a spree on the native wine in another portion of the city.

"Ho! It's the boss!" laughed one, and in their drunken fury, not giving me an opportunity to plead or reason, they began firing.

Desklit and I replied, but they were twelve against two. Desklit's right arm was struck and fell useless at his side. His pistol dropped, and as he stooped to pick it up with his left hand a bullet struck me in the knee and brought me down.

Like a flash they were on us, and in another moment we were their prisoners; in the next Pence and Huskway, infuriated beyond sanity, were out of the cellar and looking down upon their two recovered prizes.

(To be continued.)

LOVE IS NOT BLIND.

Love is not blind, but, seeing,
He smiles, he beckons, pleads.
They are the blind who follow,
Unseeing, where Love leads.

Emily Bramhall.

COALS OF FIRE.

BY JOHN H. WHITSON.

A memorable experience in a California canyon. What a burro's hoof did, and the consequences of a night on a niche in the side of a precipice.

CRAGS, reddish brown, reddish gray; cliffs rugged and seamed; stretches of dense chaparral, and ranges of somber mountains; over all, a brassy California sky.

A dusty trail, which seemed constantly bent on tying itself into a hopeless tangle of knots and loops, wound its endless length around swimming declivities and across the great divides.

Down the trail, enveloped in the dust cloud which their feet had raised, a long file of heavily laden burros picked their slow way, urged on by Mexican drivers, with a fusillade of Spanish epithets and vile English.

Face to face with these, around an arm of rock, came a dashing young fellow with a little dog at his heels.

He was clad in loose clothes, had a stout canvas bag strapped to his shoulders, and swung a geologist's hammer in his right hand.

At sight of him the foremost burro indulged in a fiendish " he-haw " that awoke far off echoes and brought down on his homely head the maledictions of the drivers.

The youth laughed lightly and crowded himself against the wall. The little dog crept tremblingly to his feet, and in that position they remained until the last burro disappeared around a bend in the trail.

" Come, Snapper! " he said, to the crouching dog; then, with an amused smile, moved on up the mountainside.

There wasn't a jollier student in California than Edgar Thornton. Almost everybody in the little college town at the foot of the range said so, and such unanimity of opinion surely ought to reflect the truth.

" Yes. Thornton's popular, I admit," Theophilus Granger assented, when the subject came up for discussion one day in the college grounds. " But then he's rich; and riches always bring popularity on the Pacific coast. Now, there's Billy Branson, whom he fags and abuses constantly. Billy's poor. His father's nothing but a mechanic at Yreka. For that reason Thornton runs over him and makes him his slave, and you fellows—Pah! What if their positions were reversed? "

But then Theophilus himself was only the son of a wheat farmer, and of course could not be expected to appreciate the peculiar humor indulged in by the hopeful scions of men who had made their money in the " flush " time, and were now, if not actual residents of " Nob " Hill, on terms of intimacy with its aristocracy.

Thornton's father was one of the original gold kings—a Forty niner, as he loved to express it. It was a matter of no small pride to him that he had come to California penniless and was now worth his millions.

Many self made men try to conceal their humble origin, but the elder Thornton was not one of them. He had made his money himself, and he estimated his commanding abilities accordingly.

Edgar was early imbued with the wonderful fact that he was a rich man's son, and must so deport himself. If, in the rainy season, he paddled in the mud with Jones' children—Jones was only a clerk—he was given to understand that he committed a heinous offense. If he ran foot races or played ball with the youthful McSwaggerts,

whose father was a struggling groceryman, he was sent to bed without his supper, and his play hours cut down for an entire week.

Thus hedged in from the contamination of the common people, he grew up firm in the belief that the world contained no king like a gold king, and that the ordinary herd were only fit to be servants and chore boys.

He was generous enough to all who succeeded in breaking through the armor of false pride with which he incased himself. But for the blighting power of these wrong ideas, he doubtless would have been kind and considerate to all.

No one could pull a better stroke or ride a wilder horse, leap farther or swim more easily. He was free with his money, as the son of a millionaire can afford to be, and, as we shall see later on, possessed a full share of nerve and daring.

Geology was just now the hobby at Montrose College, and young Thornton threw himself into its study with his usual whimsical zeal. He would probably drop it at the end of a month for something newer.

Not content with taking his facts at second hand from lectures and books, he began a course of original investigations, which frequently led him into the wildest portions of the adjacent mountains.

Evil minded persons hinted that a roving disposition and a love of adventure had quite as much to do with these wild rambles as anything else.

Now that the braying burros were out of sight, Snapper became as bold as a lion, and trotted courageously up the trail in advance of his young master.

Edgar scanned the rocks as he walked on, and sometimes clipped off a piece and deposited it in the canvas bag.

Often his attention was attracted by a distant flight of birds, or the gleam of a sun kissed valley. Then he would seat himself at the side of the trail and gaze until wearied.

The day was lovely, and on that far mountain height he felt at peace with all the world—and desperately in love with himself. If any thought of Billy Branson came to him, he quickly thrust it back into the region of forgetfulness, and continued to admire the beauties of nature and of Edgar Thornton.

Sitting thus, his quick eye caught a peculiar glitter among the ragged rocks beyond and below him. The trail at that point led along the edge of a precipice.

It made an abrupt curve a few feet beyond where he was sitting, so that the perpendicular face of the cliff was just opposite.

He was gazing at this and admiring the blending colors of the rock, when he noticed the peculiar glitter I have mentioned.

"It's gold!" he cried, leaping to his feet in great excitement.

The fever that had burned for years in the blood of the father took possession of the son. His geological dawdling was forgotten in an instant. He was no longer a strolling, self satisfied student, but a man of bounding pulse and tense energy.

With hurried step and bright eye he hastened around the bend, and was soon above the spot of light which had so wrought on his imagination.

His brain almost reeled as he looked over. Fifty feet down a table-like rock stood out from the face of the cliff; below it was a sheer descent of a thousand feet into a wild canyon.

He started back with considerable trepidation. This feeling passed away shortly, and he drew a carefully wrapped package from the canvas bag.

The covering was stripped off, revealing a light rope ladder of the finest texture and workmanship, capable of sustaining an enormous weight.

He looked at it earnestly, evidently debating the question whether he should trust his weight to it or not.

"I don't believe there will be any danger," he mused, as he turned the

ladder over and over in his hands. "That will sustain a dead weight of five hundred pounds. I'll not get dizzy if I don't look down, and it's only fifty feet to the bottom."

He took a stout rope from the bag, and with many loops and turns fastened the ladder to it, and then buckled the strap closely about a small point of rock that projected from the side of the trail. Then he uncoiled the ladder, tossed the end over the cliff, and, to prevent fraying, bound several folds of cloth round the rope at the points where they touched the sharp edges of the granite.

Having done all this to his satisfaction, he tightened the fastenings of the canvas bag, grasped the ladder firmly, and swung himself cautiously over the edge.

The frail support quivered and swayed in a frightful manner, but he shut his teeth hard, and without once looking down, descended with all the care and caution of a veteran cliff climber.

It seemed a long time before his feet were stayed on the firm surface of the projecting table. Its unyielding solidity quieted the involuntary trembling that had affected his nerves, and, still clinging to the ladder, he scrambled close up to the wall and ventured to look about.

Snapper was whimpering on the edge of the narrow trail. Far away some great bird wheeled and dipped in never ending circles.

A pebble, loosened by his foot, rattled against the worn edges of rock, then dropped noiselessly into space. He listened to hear it strike, but no sound came up from the cavernous depths.

Standing thus for a moment he forgot the errand which had drawn him into that perilous place. Then he drew his hammer and turned toward the spot from which had come that glistening point of light.

He started back with a disappointed cry. A small piece of mica, catching the rays of the sun, had given out that deceptive gleam. He glared at the rock with angry eyes, and picking up the mica, ground it savagely under his heel.

The exasperating "he-haw" of a burro broke in on his anger from the trail above. A pack train was crawling slowly around the edge of the precipice.

It was certainly the height of absurd impossibility, but he could not resist the feeling that the burro was laughing at his discomfiture, and he shook his fist at the creature in a rage.

Snapper dashed between the legs of the burro and scampered down the trail, his fright greatly increased by the yells of the drivers.

Their attention drawn to the dog, they failed to notice the ladder, and the train moved on and disappeared around a bend. Edgar thrust the hammer back into the bag in a thoroughly disgusted mood and drew the ladder to him, with the intention of ascending.

To his horror and consternation it slipped from its fastenings above, and, a moment later fell about him in snaky folds. The buckle was broken!

The hoof of a burro had crushed it into a shapeless mass, and the strap released, had dropped away from the projection to which it had been attached.

For an instant his heart stood still at the calamity; then the blood leaped through his veins with feverish bounds, and he trembled like a leaf.

He sank upon the rock, a white, scared look in his face, and began to shout wildly and incoherently after the receding train.

It had passed out of hearing, and no sound came to him but the hollow echoes of his own voice. A sickening fear swept over him as he realized his abandoned situation, and he crouched in abject terror against the stony cliff.

How long he remained in that position he scarcely knew. With a great effort he finally aroused himself.

The peaks were aflame with the glory of the setting sun. Long shadows crept athwart the divides, and descend-

ing into the gloomy gorges, massed themselves for a final onset.

He coiled the ladder in his trembling hands and hurled it at the points of the rocks overhead. Again and again he sent it hissing through the air, only to have it fall back with a hopeless swish.

Then the shadows crawled up to the rocky table, and the light slowly faded from the sky. For a little while longer the peaks glowed with a rosy red; but the shadows conquered, and darkness flung her black banner over the mountains.

The long drawn agony of that night no pen can portray. Hopes and fears alternated in bewildering confusion. Would the boys of the college search for him when his absence was noticed? Could he attract the attention of the drivers of the next pack train?

Alas! it might not be along for a week. Those trains were noted for nothing so much as the irregularity of their coming and going.

Alone with himself and with his Maker, facing death as he feared, Edgar Thornton realized the hollowness and baseness of his pride, the emptiness of riches, and his own littleness and weakness.

Then he prayed as he had not done for long years. Prayed, as when a little child he knelt at his mother's knee; and with that prayer came a calmer feeling, and he dropped into a troubled sleep.

The sun was shining when he awoke, and a familiar voice was calling his name. It echoed loudly among the crags, and sent the blood in warm waves to his heart.

It was the well known voice of Billy Branson—Billy Branson, whom he had never failed to bully and maltreat.

Edgar leaped to his feet and shouted a hysterical reply, at the same time waving his hat.

A moment later Billy appeared on the trail above.

"Why, how in the world did you ever get down there? I've been hunting for you for over an hour. When Snapper came in last night without you I felt sure something had happened and set out this morning as soon as I could see to look you up."

Billy rattled away volubly, and only stopped when out of breath.

"I climbed down here, yesterday evening, on my rope ladder. The buckle was broken and I couldn't get back. I will tell you as soon as I get out of this," exclaimed Edgar in a tremulous voice.

"How can I help you?" queried Billy, who was one of the kindest and most generous of souls. "Can you toss the end of the ladder up here?"

"I have tried it time and time again," responded Edgar. "I can't do it."

Billy scratched his head and for a moment was lost in thought.

"I tell you what," he said. "You cut your ladder to pieces, and tie the ends together. That will double its length. Then tie a stone to one end, and I think you can throw it up."

Edgar failed to see how that would help him, as he was not an expert climber on a single rope; but he obeyed unquestioningly, and Billy soon had one end in his possession.

While Edgar was cutting and splicing the rope Billy had collected a number of stout sticks. These he now broke into suitable lengths, and fastened them along the rope at a distance of two feet apart.

When he had arranged these to his satisfaction he lowered the contrivance over the edge of the precipice, tying the end he retained to a point of the cliff.

Then he shouted down:

"I believe you can climb up that if you are careful. I will steady it as much as I can."

Edgar heard and understood, and at once began climbing up the frail affair. He was two thirds of the way up, when the sharp point of rock to which the rope was affixed cut through a strand, and it gave with a vicious snap.

Billy saw the danger, and with a des-

perate effort pulled in on the rope with all his might. But his strength was not equal to the task, and seeing he could not hold it away from the sharp edge, with sublime self forgetfulness he thrust his arm and shoulder between the weakened rope and the biting rock.

"What's the matter?" asked Edgar, in evident alarm.

"All right! Come on!" Billy called out in reply, and Edgar began once more to climb upward.

The cruel granite cut through his clothing and tore the quivering flesh. Every step produced the most excruciating agony, but Billy bore it without a murmur.

When at last Edgar dragged himself exhausted upon the rocky trail, he gave a great start and cry of alarm.

Billy had fainted. Poor, frail, human nature could not stand such torture.

Edgar understood it all at a glance. Had it not been for Billy's heroism he would have been lying at the bottom of the canyon a mangled corpse.

He lifted the unconscious boy to his feet, stripped the clothing from his arm and shoulder, and soon stanched the flow of blood and bound up the ugly wound.

In a short time Billy revived and sat up. He smiled bravely, although his lip quivered with pain.

"I'll be all right directly," he said. "I know you would have done as much for me, Edgar."

A thrill of shame shot through Edgar's entire being.

"Billy," and there was a strange tone of earnestness in Edgar's voice as he spoke, "I only wish I was as manly and good and true as you are. I have learned a great deal in the past few hours, and if I live, I intend, with God's help, to make a *man* of myself."

IN THE COOL OF THE DAY.

By this westering sun, dear heart,
In the shade,
Lo! we find ourselves apart,
Unafraid.

Morning hours, the dew impearled,
Say farewell;
Noontide, wooing all the world
With a spell.

Speeds us hither, hand in hand;
Let us stay!
Twilight, trembling where we stand,
Wins the day.

Here, at peace, a newer vow
We will make;
Tryst the truest keep we now
For love's sake!

Where life's westering sun hath cast
Tender shade,
Come, dear, unto me, at last,
Unafraid!

Elizabeth H. Tobey.

THE DISPUTED OWNERSHIP.

BY L. S. GOODWIN.

How two men fell out over the right to possess a certain valuable horse, an interruption to the meeting that was to settle matters, and the unanticipated manner in which the affair was finally adjusted.

IN a small opening near the edge of a forest of oaks and walnuts were arranged two groups of men who appeared to be waiting for something.

They kept as far apart as possible, only throwing savage glances at each other, and the glorious spring sunshine, which had brought the thicket of wild lilacs and lupins into bloom, could not dissipate their mutual unfriendliness.

The loud neighing of a horse was answered by others that were haltered just out of sight in the shade. The beasts seemed to be more sociable than the men whom they had brought to this rendezvous.

Perhaps the latter felt rebuked, for with that breaking of silence one of the groups began exercising the gift of speech.

" Must be mighty hard on ter the hour," interrogatively remarked a man in a deerskin suit.

At the same time he returned to his belt a hatchet with which he had been clearing a path through the dense undergrowth.

" Wants a quarter of," said the person addressed, gazing fixedly at a handsome watch which was exhibited on his palm, as if challenging the noonday sun to convict it of a second's deviation from true time.

He was a man of portly figure, wearing " store clothes," as our friend in deerskin would have phrased it; his bearing was a little official, while his stock of gray hair seemed to belie his age, as shown in a youthful and kindly face.

" Never knew Peragoy to be behind," rejoined the wielder of the hatchet, turning his head and taking a long look over his shoulder.

" In the name of wonder, then, why do you look behind for him, Oliver? "

This sally came from one who was passing his time making a rocking toy of himself, sitting on the ground with knees drawn up and clasped about with his arms.

His facetiousness was evidently assumed, for as he rose immediately the expression of his face changed to one of grave concern.

" Judge Cleaves," said the man below his breath, when he had approached close to the owner of the store clothes and costly chronometer, " I predict that revolvers will be emptied before we are quit of this affair. If ever two men turned into demons it is Boulter and Lithro. And up to within a month they have always been like own brothers, as brothers they be by marriage."

The judge replied in the same key, to the effect that he felt no such serious apprehension, but hoped the quarrel of the brothers in law would shortly be fixed up for them.

A moment later the sound of a powerful animal leaping and tearing through the bushes riveted every one's attention; and with a tremendous bound a black colt, and a bareheaded, barefooted boy rider alighted between the two groups of waiting men.

Alighted, one may say of the horse, on his fore feet, so that one unacquainted with the *genus equus* might have mistaken the quadruped for a biped.

As his heels came down to the earth

with a thud, Boulter and Lithro, the contestants for ownership, whose case the men had met here to settle, sprang forward, one on either side, and attempted to seize the bit.

At this the animal reversed his position, rearing so violently as to seem in peril of falling backward, and compelling the men to retreat for their own safety.

All gazed at the twelve year old boy, who sat his beast like a captain of cavalry, but he scowled ruefully at the two angry looking men, who, by advice of the judge, desisted for the present from further interference.

The plunging animal stood quiet at once. Reining him around, the young rider flung the bridle over the splintered stump of a black walnut, which a passing cyclone had wrenched off, regardless of its timber value, and said to whom it might concern:

"There! Commanche would stand all day, if he's let alone."

Whereupon the figure in coarse hempen shirt and trousers moved backward over the beast's haunches, descending to the ground as unconcernedly as he would have shinned down a sapling.

Drawing himself up, he addressed an explanation to the judge.

"Father didn't come himself, Mr. Squire, 'cause he can't do much with the colt. Commanche has kind o' outgrowed him."

The company laughed, except Lithro and Boulter, who seemed incapable of such demonstration.

"How long have you been training him, Saxton, my boy?" asked the judge, evidently impressed with this exhibition of horsemanship.

"Who—father?"

This time the laughter was accompanied with plaudits.

"Good for you, Sax Peragoy!"

"Meant no harm," apologized the sly fellow. "It's four or five weeks, isn't it, that we've had the care of Commanche?"

He turned for information to the rival claimants of the splendid colt.

Lithro muttered that any way it had been long enough to have given his colt a new name. Boulter glared his impatience at this foolish dallying, while the business for which they were here remained undone.

Squire Cleaves stood admiring the specimen of horse flesh, a four year old standing above the average height, built for fleetness and endurance, symmetrical as a sculptor could desire his model to be, and without a flaw that could have been detected by the best veterinary expert.

Sax smoothed the crinkled mane and caressed the fine head with its intelligent eyes and sensitive nostrils, the spectators finding it a little difficult to identify this complacent creature with the late horse rampant.

"The critter's going to purr," suggested the man already introduced as Olliver.

"If you've lived long enough, just you come close now, and let 'im purr in yer ear," challenged the lad, but the other did not incline to accept the challenge.

Then, all in an instant, the company were startled by a boom, coming from none could tell whence. A great resonant wave of sound swept over the place, and ebbed away into silence, while the listeners stood like statues, and looked questioningly in each other's faces. The first to speak declared they had felt the ground shake under them. Others disputed it. All wondered. His Honor was observed to be standing on the walnut trunk, with his right hand bent into an ear trumpet.

But whatever the sound had been, it was not repeated.

"Buffalo," at length came from Olliver, as he tapped the hatchet at his belt and reflected. "A party of redskins was hunting over west yesterday, pressin' a herd in this direction."

This explanation was scarcely accepted, though no other was offered.

The brief excitement being over, the judge opened the court.

The prostrate walnut served as his bench. On his left was the piece of disputed property called Commanche; on his right sat the jury; and in front of him the principals and witnesses held a position among trampled buckeye and azaleas.

The counter statements were presented and confirmed, as far as circumstances would permit. A number of the witnesses were so involved in the relationship between the two parties as to make them very careful not to hurt either.

Number One testified that he had raised the animal from a foal, having bought the dam for a rifle and three pounds of powder of an Indian, who had lassoed her from a wild herd near the Mexican line.

Number Two, a horse dealer, made oath that he brought that colt from Canada six months before, where he exchanged a draft horse for him. The colt had never been out of his hands a day, till, by mutual consent of himself and his brother in law, he was put in custody of the keeper of the mountain inn, Sax's father, to await this trial.

"Why have you not branded your beast, Mr. Boulter?" asked the court.

Boulter replied that the colt being uncommonly fine was to be sold to a friend at the East, where a brand would be a fatal disfigurement.

"Airs!" broke in Lithro. "*I* don't boast of comin' of Puritan stock. *I* hain't no rich friends neither to pay fabulously fer hosses I want to sell."

Boulter turned on his brother in law fiercely.

"An' *I*," cried he, "don't parade my poverty, like some one else, by comin' here mounted on a fossil critter 'n order to get the sympathy of the jury."

"All a confounded lie!" exclaimed the other. "Excuse me, judge. True, I own as smart a span as is in this region, but they're in use elsewhere today. My wife last night said if I'd no objections she'd come across the river and spend this Sunday with her sister. The women ain't to blame for this deuced quarrel, and they haven't met since it begun. I wasn't mean enough to refuse her, when they could be sure of being alone together.

"I told my hired youngster to hitch up the team and drive her and the little boys over; and my family is at your house this hour, Jim Boulter, if ye did but know it. *That's* why I've rid a beast that's better at the plow than in a race."

He managed to finish his story in spite of calls to order.

To the question of branding, Lithro answered, as might be supposed, that he had the animal on the market ready for any one who would pay his price for him. In such case he never branded.

"But seein's a man can't know who'll steal from him," he added, with an ugly glance at his brother in law, "I'll turn over a new leaf; I'll brand every critter that's to stay with me a week or a month. That colt"—he put it confidently, with a shake of his fist—"will be branded with L afore leavin' this ground."

"Not Commanche, Jake Lithro!" came in a shrill voice from outside the circle, and Sax was espied perched like a sentinel crow on the highest limb of the fallen walnut. "None o' yer alphabet on him, if you please. Defy you to try it! *You'll* get deeper *brandied* in the face—so now—if you don't turn over a new leaf *there*, and leave alone the stuff!"

The jury snickered and nudged one another. Foreman Olliver remarked:

"'Sax is the greatest expert in the State on brands. He'll rattle off to you the names of the owners and ex owners of the whole lot of cattle that come and go between the valley and the mountains from April to November."

"Just so," returned the lad, prompted by the compliment, and feeling the independence of his situation apart and

aloft. "Mother says when books are printed on cattle and horses I shall make a scholar."

Again the laugh went round, the judge joining in it, and, by contrast, the frowns of Boulter and Lithro seemed like thunder clouds about to burst.

"Hello! What's up?"

The ejaculation came from Sax, whose ears were first to catch the sounds of galloping hoofs. Quickly every man's attention was diverted to what seemed to be the approach of a number of horsemen at full speed.

A moment later two horses, who were on a free scout, keeping company with a third ridden by an Indian, became visible through the leafage. The free animals, hardly seen by any one except the lad on his perch, came to a halt near the spot where the horses of the party were tied, gave a wild snort, and scurried away with an amazing tumult.

But the son of the forest and plains dashed into the opening, and, drawing rein, exclaimed:

"Go! Go! Water! Water!"

A sweep of the arm seemed to include in this mysterious message all who were present; however, as he wheeled towards Lithro, the latter recognized Running Wolf, who had been at his house two or three times with horses to sell.

"Good Lord!" cried the man, springing forward, "what is the matter?"

Running Wolf clapped his hands to his mouth and parted them suddenly, blowing out a great puff of air—"Boom!"

It was like an echo of the noise that had startled them a little while before.

"Go!" he urged again, pointing westward. "White squaw—papoose! Water!"

So saying, the Indian broke through the spellbound circle and galloped away in the direction opposite that from which he had come.

"One of them horses tearin' along loose was your Don, Lithro, and wet as a drowned rat." It was Sax that spoke.

"If the dam has broke," gasped Boulter, presenting a dismayed face to the equally dismayed Lithro, who finished the sentence:

"Then our families are lost!"

Overwhelmed by the idea of a common woe, these mortal enemies advanced towards each other with staggering steps and hopeless looks.

All the fire and fury dropped off in that moment. The tiger was cast out of them, and the lamb entered into its place.

Again Sax's voice was heard.

"T'other horse was Boulter's Phyllis, that he drives with Elsie. He rode Elsie here today. I say, Boulter! Elsie's broke her halter and stamped along of her mate. The same to you, Hatchet Olliver, and another on ye—three critters broke away and skipped in a bunch."

Sax had come down from his roost and remounted his colt.

The boy's statement was entirely correct, as a general rush for the horses proved. Three of the best animals had discharged themselves from the service, whatever might be the emergency.

His honor, unwilling to show partiality by giving the use of his steed to Boulter or Lithro, proffered it to Olliver.

There was one of the dumb beasts that seemed to share the excitement; though standing as if rooted, it was with visible tremors running along his side, with nostrils dilated and forked lightning in his eyes.

Boulter and Lithro were seen to exchange a word, with clasped hands. Then said the former aloud:

"Whatever's the calamity, that there beast is his that's first to reach the river. Friends, I call you all to witness."

And the latter added:

"I agree from my heart, as witness heaven and earth."

Squire Cleaves, at full height on the

fallen giant of the forest, as when the first alarm had come to their ears, held up his glittering watch and chain.

"These to the one who saves a life!"

With that proclamation, he leaped to the ground, and turned to direct Sax, as having charge of the colt; but he saw that Commanche and his rider had disappeared.

A minute more and the judge and Lithro's horse, which with exaggeration was dubbed "fossil remains" by the angry Boulter, were the only living things to be seen; mounted or on foot, as the case might be, the whole company of mingled friends and foes, without any distinction, were off for Boulter's Mill, five miles distant.

The judge started for Peragoy's tavern, in the hope of procuring a better mount.

As he moved slowly across the open prairie, he marked the progress of the horsemen; and presently, apart from these, apparently headed for the ford, which was at some distance below the mill, a black object, that was fast becoming reduced to nothing by distance, fixed his attention for a moment as he thought what a pity it was that Commanche was not a manageable beast, and bearing a person who could be of use in an emergency.

But what—what had befallen the main party? The leading horse, the horse he had singled out for his own, appeared to go over a precipice, followed by the group.

Breathlessly the judge strained his gaze. There was floundering and confusion of ranks, which made it certain they had not exactly sunk below the surface; as they rallied and changed their course, the distant observer gathered that they had been stopped by a boy.

Then, his course taking him beyond a mountain spur, his view was ended.

"Have you heard, judge, as how Boulter's dam busted, and his house carried off? So they say."

Such was the salutation of the innkeeper, who was in the act of leading a horse from the stable ready to mount. Another beast being furnished for the judge, the two rode hurriedly away in company toward the scene of disaster.

Sax' father, on learning that the boy had aimed for the ford, proposed to follow him, instead of the party. There would be help enough at the mill, he said. If he was anxious for his son's safety, as well he might be, he intimated nothing of the kind.

It now occurred to the judge that the drenched condition of the runaway horse, as Sax had described it, probably suggested to the lad an accident to Mrs. Lithro in crossing at the ford; and this was quite correct.

It was an appalling sight, the river sweeping widely beyond its banks, bearing on débris of all sorts.

Boulter's buildings were standing, though through and around them rolled the high tide of escaped waters, with everything movable afloat, and not a living soul anywhere to be seen.

These things the owner scarcely noticed, except as far as concerned the missing wife and child. From the time of the late freshets he had been aware that the dam was weakened; and but for the bitter quarrel with his brother in law in which he became engrossed—how paltry the matter looked to him now!—the needed repairs would have been made and this catastrophe averted.

The two desolated men rode along the flooded banks, scanning the surface of the murky waters with looks of despair. Some of the company had sought points of outlook on the higher ground.

It was from such a point that a prolonged shout told of a discovery just as Boulter and Lithro made the same discovery for themselves.

Opposite the ford, on the very pinnacle of a swell of land that in the morning had stood high and dry, but which was now almost submerged, appeared a wrecked wagon and some struggling forms. The men dashed forward, and

their horses were already off their feet in the flood when they were stopped by the cry:

"He's bringin' the last of 'em! The women are saved, but the little ones and the driver are drowned!"

"Hurrah for Olliver!"

The judge's powerful beast landed his double burden. Lithro received his wife in his arms.

But a white and frozen look was on the father's lips, as for the mother's sake he smothered the murmur:

"How shall we live without our boys?"

In the wagon's wake had swum ashore the exhausted mate of Don, who had broken from the team and gone off in a fright when the casualty overtook them.

James Boulter had just thrown himself from the saddle when a sweet voice piped:

"Put me up, Uncle Dim, and let me yide—jus' as you used to."

The man was like one in a dream as he swung the child, in the pride of his first trousers, to the back of the panting animal, where he chirruped in a perfect faith of having lighted upon a grand occasion.

Somehow Boulter had Little Jim's year old brother in his arms, and he kissed his wife and his nephews indiscriminately; while Lithro, standing by, was hugging and crying over Sissy Boulter, neither thinking of anything but the miracle of having the little ones restored to them.

"Oh, Sax had the babies safe to land before anybody else got here," exclaimed Olliver. "Hurrah for Sax is the word!"

"Commanche is yours," said Boulter to the lad, who looked from one to the other in silence.

"Take him—he's well earned," added Lithro.

"Oh, you see," began Sax, all abashed, "'twas only 'cause Commanche runs like the wind and swims like a boat. I couldn't have saved *them*," pointing to the women. "It took Olliver and his hatchet to let up the horse that was down in the tangle, and take one woman from under the broken wagon, with the other a-holdin' her head above water. If Olliver hadn't come just when he did—if he hadn't—oh, my!"

The story of the calamity had read backwards thus far; and it only remained for the sisters to finish it with a beginning, and that was soon done.

Mrs. Boulter said that having been informed of Mrs. Lithro's intention, she took her babe and walked to the ford to meet the team, which had just crossed and taken her up, when the deluge came upon them.

The young driver succeeded in bringing them to the knoll, where they had been found; but there he lost all control of the horses, and the last seen of him he was drifting down the stream on the wagon seat. Poor Eric!

Just then Eric appeared among them, none the worse for his fearful voyage. On reaching a smoother current, he had grasped a floating board, and with it paddled his strange bark to shore.

"All alive and well, by God's favor," observed the innkeeper. "Now you that are out of homes for the time, come right to my house, and find a free welcome. Come everybody, and we'll end off with a thanksgiving dinner."

"There is one item more," said the judge. "My verdict is that the brave lad who reached the river first, and saved the babies, has won also the prize of this watch and chain," and he began to detach them from his person.

"Oh, I guess them's Olliver's, if they're anybody's but yours, squire," stammered Sax.

"Mr. Olliver throws up his claim in your favor," said the judge. "You look excited, my boy, what is it you wish to say?"

"Why, then, if it's all the same to you, squire, I'd rather you should keep your timer, and send me to school.

That'll please my mother, and I reckon if I had a chance I could learn something besides horses," the boy said in a hesitating manner.

"Very good, indeed," and his honor laid a hand on the boy's head. "You shall go to school to your heart's content. Your mother and I were school mates in a New England village, and many a hard tug I had at study, because I was ashamed to let a girl go ahead of me. The opportunity for education is not likely to be lost on one so bright and so brave as you have shown yourself today. At some future day there may be in my law office a student by the name of Saxton Peragoy."

THE AMERICAN SYNDICATE.*

BY FREDERICK R. BURTON.

A sturdy fight against heavy odds. A narrative setting forth the devices resorted to by an enterprising New Yorker who goes into Porto Rico with grit, thirty three odd dollars, and a sign board.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Joe Barber, down on his luck in New York, borrows two hundred dollars from a friend, and armed with a sign board reading "The American Syndicate, J. A. Barber, Manager," sets out to Porto Rico to make his fortune by his wits. Customs dues on the sign board reduce his capital on arrival to thirty three dollars after paying his passage, but Joe puts on a bold front. By his assurance of manner he succeeds in hiring an imposing office, and chance brings him the acquaintance of a native, Don Octavio Valla del Rey, the chance in question being the precipitation into his arms of the don's beautiful daughter, owing to an accident to her carriage. Joe talks trolley line investments with the don and hires for his office assistant a young man of the don's recommendation, who announces his name as Miguelo Marto, but whom Joe decides to call Mike, which, he adds, is all the English he wishes the fellow to know.

After looking over the field, Joe elects to get up a corner in the ice cream freezer market, and begins by buying up the entire stock of a restaurant keeper, giving him the privilege of using them for a week longer. Meantime he arranges by wire with Seeborg & Company, St. Thomas, the nearest point where freezers are obtainable, to purchase the thirty seven they have on hand at their own terms. Joe is asked to dine with Don Octavio, and over the cigars explains the proposed trolley line to the don's friends, who, to his great satisfaction, are deeply interested; Joe also is much impressed by the beautiful daughter Sylvia. Hearing, the next day, that the Ponce caterers are all going to St. Thomas, he decides to accompany them; and by allowing the don to think he contemplates closing the trolley deal with others, he so alarms the Spaniard and his friends that they put up one thousand dollars forfeit money. In St. Thomas Joe discovers the caterers very angry over his corner; but before night they accept his offer of continuing their business on a commission. When Joe returns he finds his affairs in good shape, and seems undisturbed over the arrival of two Americans—who prove to be business rivals. Victor—the fiancé of Sylvia, and a hot headed Spaniard—openly insults Joe in a café, and a duel is speedily arranged by the seconds. The night before the event Joe retires as unconcernedly as ever.

CHAPTER XVI *(Continued)*.

THE FIELD OF HONOR.

THE sun had not risen when the night porter knocked at Joe's door. Had Joe slept? The cheery "All right" which came from within the room had not the somnolent sound that gets into a man's voice when he is suddenly aroused from slumber.

The short interval that elapsed before he issued forth, fully dressed, suggested, too, that the unwilling duelist had not passed all the night in sleep. On

**This story began in the November number of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

the other hand, when he came into the bright light of the office, there was nothing haggard about his eyes to indicate that they had been unclosed during all the previous hours.

The captain shook him by the hand without a word.

"How is it?" asked Joe, vivaciously. "Are we going to have the traditional mist that lends such a soft atmosphere as a setting to the picture?"

"The weather promises to be all that a living man could desire," the captain replied.

Perhaps Joe's sympathy for the captain led him to check his lighthearted manner of talk. At all events, they drove for the most part in silence through the streets of Ponce, and out along the military road for a distance of several miles.

The sun was just rising when at length Montoro stepped from beneath a tree by the roadside.

"This is the spot, gentlemen," he said, saluting them both with grave formality.

They alighted and left their horses hitched in some shrubbery a few paces from the road. Then they followed Montoro to the scene of the meeting.

"Quite right, quite right," murmured Joe, as he looked the place over. "There isn't a detail lacking except the mist rising from the sod. I'm sorry about that mist. It doesn't seem to me the affair will be quite complete without it, but we can't have everything we want, can we, cap?"

The captain's face was as marble. It was too late now to indulge in any vain reproofs. The business in hand demanded his immediate attention.

Everything was ready, even to the solemn surgeon, with his case of instruments. The seconds had provided weapons and done everything with exact punctiliousness to the demands of the occasion. And in due time, precisely as Joe had figured it the evening previous, two young men stood facing each other, stripped of their coats and vests, each holding a gleaming sword and awaiting the word to begin.

The seconds had tossed a coin to determine who should give the word, and the luck fell to Montoro.

"Gentlemen," he said, with his watch in his hand, "when I say 'three' you will advance and fight until one or the other of you is disabled, or yields."

Standing a little away from the combatants and having nothing to do but look on, Captain Tooker felt a thrill of surprised relief as he observed the way in which Joe held his weapon.

"Great guns!" he said to himself, "does the boy really know how to fight, after all?"

He glanced then at Victor. There was apparently no question about that young man's ability. In every inch of his not great stature, he seemed at the moment to be an ideal fighter, and there was a stern expression of determined confidence upon his dark face that contrasted sharply with the semi curious gleam in the American's eyes.

"Ready, gentlemen," called Montoro, "one—two—three!"

Two swords flashed in the early sun as they described the salute of honor with which the combatants greeted each other, and the sturdy captain's heart fairly leaped as he observed that Joe's salute was not lacking in grace, or nicety with respect to the regulation movement provided for such an occasion.

With a slight metallic ring the blades came together, and there was an instant in which the stillness of morning was broken only by the faint rubbing of steel against steel.

"He knows how! He knows how!" almost cried the captain aloud, so intense was his joy at the sight of Joe Barber watching his adversary keenly, toying with his weapon tentatively, and apparently waiting with all the skill of a much scarred duelist to determine his adversary's temper before making up his mind whether to attack or act on the defensive. And Victor, too, seem-

ed to be quite as much surprised as the captain. His eyes flashed after the swords had lain crossed for a second, and his lips were pressed harder together. In that contact of steel he had quickly recognized that he had met no despicable antagonist.

Joe apparently decided to wait. He well calculated the hot Spanish blood of his foe, and knew that Victor could not long remain fencing for an opening.

Another second and the attack came. The buzz of steel against steel grew a little louder, and the blades quivered; then Victor lunged forward straight toward Joe's heart. Only an expert swordsman could appreciate just what happened, but a second later Victor had withdrawn suddenly, and the swords were again crossed and momentarily at rest.

The young Spaniard's eyes were half closed. The ease and perfect mastery with which the American foiled his onslaught nettled him and taught him that he must be cautious. There was another moment of apparently meaningless fencing, and another attack resisted as before.

Then, as Victor withdrew a pace, Joe suddenly advanced, pressed hard upon his antagonist, and before the astonished captain himself realized what maneuver was in progress, Victor's sword was twisted from his hand, hurled a dozen feet into the air, and it fell so close to Montoro that he had to dodge to avoid being hit by it.

With one astonished, chagrined glance at his flying weapon, Victor brought his heels together, put his hands at his side and faced his adversary.

There was a pitying smile on Joe Barber's face. Advancing his sword slowly until the point rested on Victor's breast, he said:

"Touched, I believe, senor."

Then he let his weapon fall and stood at repose, looking toward the captain, as if waiting a command.

Captain Tooker, half mad with excitement, immediately turned to Montoro, and urged that the duel be regarded as at an end. As for Montoro, that punctilious young man, who was actually enjoying his first experience on the field of honor, was greatly embarrassed. He knew not what to do.

"My life is the American's," said Victor, bitterly.

"And I decline to take it," exclaimed Joe. "Come, shall we shake hands and call it quits?"

Victor turned his back.

"I am disgraced," he said, "disgraced utterly. I acknowledge that I am beaten, senor. You cannot ask more."

Montoro was so distracted by the turn affairs had taken that he could not argue the matter, and was hard put to it to give proper attention to his principal; so the upshot was, after a few painful moments, that the captain and Joe retired from the field, assured that so far as the demands of the Spaniards were concerned, honor had been satisfied.

Joe took no part whatever in the discussion, and said nothing until he had climbed into the carriage with his second.

"By the ghosts of all dead warriors!" exclaimed the captain then. "But where and when did you learn to——"

He stopped abruptly for he saw that Joe was trembling like a leaf and that his face was ghastly pale. With a weak attempt at a smile, he stammered in reply, "It was my one fad for a couple of years in New York. I took all the medals in the athletic club, you know."

"Well, you learned your lessons well, but, man alive, you seem worse off than if the desperate little fire eater had run you through. What ails you, old fellow?"

"I am thinking of the consequences," said Joe.

"Consequences?" roared the captain. "Why, damme, there ain't any.

Come, brace up. Here, take a swig of this," and he whipped a flask from his pocket and held it to Joe's lips.

Joe swallowed a drop or two with a very wry face, and responded: "There are consequences, captain, and now I've got to face them. That young man, Victor, is the nephew of Don Octavio, to me the most important business man in Ponce. I may as well tell you, also, that the lady in the case is the don's daughter, to whom Victor is engaged to be married. I've got to go up and tell them all about it."

The captain looked dubious for a moment.

"Well," he said presently, "you have proven that I have no right to advise you. I thought you were mad last night in refusing to consider the consequences, but I didn't think of this. I presume you know best what's got to be done."

"Unhappily," replied Joe, "there isn't any question about it. I have no choice of courses. We'll go to the hotel and have breakfast, and then before any possible intimation of this can reach the don, unless Victor himself takes it, I must call on him and let him know just what has happened. It wouldn't surprise me to find that my business is knocked in the head quite as completely as if Victor had killed me."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONSEQUENCES.

WITH the ride back to town and the bracing of a hearty breakfast, Joe's appearance of equanimity returned. There was still a good deal of disturbance inside, and when he started for Don Octavio's house, he felt much more anxiety than he had at any time during the critical business negotiations.

It might have been difficult for him clearly to analyze his own feelings, and for that reason, if for no other, no attempt will be made here to set them forth, except as they were manifested by what he said and did.

The porter told him that the don's household was at breakfast, which was just what Joe would have wished for. He sent up his card, and was speedily invited to enter.

The servant conducted him to the lofty reception room, where the don, coming from the diningroom, met him. There was every evidence of strong emotion upon the old gentleman's face, but it was also evident that the cause of his emotion was not associated in his own mind with his early visitor.

His very attempt to master himself caused his greeting to Joe to be more than usually cordial.

"Ah, my dear friend," he said, with a tremulous accent, "you honor me indeed. You doubtless have in mind the custom of the ancient Romans who, if they wished particularly to manifest their great esteem of a friend, called upon him before breakfast. I am delighted to interpret your visit in that light, senor, and I shall be distressed if you do not confess at once that you have come to breakfast with me. We shall all be delighted; in fact, it will relieve us immensely if you will let me make a place for you at our modest table."

Nothing could have suited Joe better.

"I have had the misfortune," he said, "to deceive my palate with what passed for a breakfast, but I am nevertheless anxious to accept your invitation, for the purpose of my visit at this hour will best be laid before your entire household."

The don looked startled. His eyes opened and shut rapidly, and his lips twitched; even his hands fluttered about in helpless fashion.

Joe noticed these symptoms of disturbance with no little apprehension, but the don, finished gentleman that he was, controlled himself and led the way to the diningroom. As they went in,

the Donna Anna, with more haste than Joe had ever seen her display, pressed a handkerchief to her eyes, before rising to greet him. Senorita Sylvia was, as always, a vision of fresh beauty, and yet her face was lacking somewhat in its customary radiance.

There were no tears to dash from her eyes, however, and her cheeks were not marked by pallor, but her face was grave until she saw who it was that was entering with her father. Then she brightened quickly, and greeted Joe with an attempt at her characteristic gaiety.

It was only an attempt and it utterly failed to clear the atmosphere which seemed surcharged with nervous excitement.

" Senor Barber will honor us by taking a place at our table this morning," said the don. He darted a glance at both the Donna Anna and his daughter, the meaning of which Joe did not try to guess, and went on hurriedly. " We are greatly pleased to feel that Senor Barber realizes that we have given him the freedom of our house, and we trust that he will ever exercise his privilege as a business associate, as a guest, and as a friend."

During these labored expressions of courtesy, and much more of the same tenor, the don was escorting Joe to a chair, and resuming his own place at the head of the table. When he was seated and before he had finished speaking, with a nervous movement he tucked a letter beneath a plate.

" Don Octavio," said Joe, standing by his chair, " I cannot delay the matter that brings me here at this time. I am profoundly appreciative of your courtesy, your hospitality, and the friendship of you all. I hope you will understand that my coming here upon the serious matter that brings me is really an evidence of my esteem, and my frank desire to retain your respect."

There was not only gravity in Joe's tone, but such a quality of repressed emotion that all the efforts of the don to put himself and his family at ease were overthrown completely, and as if to testify to his discomfiture, the old gentleman placed both his hands upon the table, and stared straight at Joe without a word. The ladies looked apprehensive, and Senorita Sylvia asked quickly:

" Is it about Victor, senor?"

" Partly," Joe answered, " but more about myself. I infer that you have heard——"

The don's trembling hand reached for the letter and took it from beneath the plate.

" What does this mean, Senor Barber?" he asked. " Tell us, I beg you, if you can."

" Has he not told you?" asked Joe, and then, as the only reply was a helpless glance at the letter on the part of the don, and a shake of the head from the senorita, Joe went on, " I have had the misfortune to meet Victor this morning upon the field of honor."

The Donna Anna gave vent to a falsetto squeal, which in any less portly person would have been a dignified shriek; and she leaned back in her chair, waving her napkin frantically before her face and exclaiming: " A duel! A duel! Oh, Santa Maria, a duel!"

For once the don lost his temper.

" Hold your tongue, madam," he cried. " Don't give the senor the impression that we are all fools." Then suddenly controlling himself, " Sylvia, heart's darling," he added, " get your aunt some smelling salts and take her from the room. This is a matter for men to discuss."

" Pardon me," interposed Joe quickly, " I have deliberately sought to speak of this matter in the presence of the ladies, and if the subject is not too distressing to the Donna Anna and your daughter, I shall esteem it the greatest favor if you will permit me to continue at once."

" It may be better so," the don responded. " Surely the matter is serious enough, Senor Barber. A duel

with my nephew Victor! I am too amazed to speak."

"You must not drive me from the room, Octavio," exclaimed the Donna Anna with surprising energy. She had entirely overcome her disposition, or let us frankly say, her effort to faint. "Tell me, senor, tell me before you speak another word whether you have killed our darling."

"This letter," said the Don, contemptuously, before Joe could reply, "evidently was written subsequent to the affair of which the senor comes to tell us. I think, most highly respected sister, than any fears as to Victor's physical condition are groundless, and now permit me to insist that Senor Barber shall be allowed to tell us of this affair uninterruptedly."

It was certainly the most uncomfortable conference in which Joe had ever taken part. He would infinitely have preferred to face a regiment of disappointed caterers. No possible business emergency, he believed, could come so near to undermining his self control as this.

"I have really very little to tell," he said, "except the bald fact that I have announced. Somehow I managed to give offense to Senor Victor, as a result of which I received his challenge. I did my best to have the matter adjusted without resort to weapons——"

"Why did you not tell me?" demanded the don, sharply. "I had made you welcome to my house, senor. I myself had presented you to that boy as a member of my own household, for so, in view of certain domestic arrangements, I was disposed to regard him. I am surprised; frankly, senor, I am deeply grieved that you should have permitted this boy to undertake the risks of a duel without giving me the opportunity to protect him."

This was an awful blow, and not less hard to bear because Joe had anticipated something of the kind.

"I quite understand you," he responded gravely, "and I regret bitterly that I could not see my way to take you into my confidence. In deference to yourself, Don Octavio, I must try to show you why I could not do so. You speak of your nephew as a boy, and I have to admit that he is my junior by a few years, but he was old enough to be a soldier. Victor is not only a soldier, Don Octavio, but a man of high spirits, and unbounded courage. I should like to call him my friend. I should be proud to consider any man my friend who could conduct himself as your nephew did shortly after sunrise this morning."

The expression of horror, reproof, and shocked resentment vanished from the don's face during this recital, giving place to wonderment and pleasure. Joe thus far had studiously refrained from looking toward the senorita, but he could not restrain himself from a hasty glance in that direction now, and he saw not only intense interest but warm admiration gleaming in her eyes.

"And so the boy bore himself well, did he?" said the don, and his words came chokingly. "Senor, I am infinitely relieved. Until I know more of it, I must certainly regard this duel as a most serious and unfortunate occurrence, but I must confess that my old heart glows with pride to hear a gentleman speak so generously of his antagonist. We must have the details, senor. Do I understand that there were no casualties?"

"None whatever. I wish to reassert that I was not consciously offensive to Victor, and that when I realized how far our disagreement had gone, I did everything that a man of honor could do to prevent a hostile meeting. I do not need to tell you, Don Octavio, how basely I would have been regarded by your nephew and the entire community if I had laid the matter before you. Moreover, I was confident that no injury would befall Victor. If anything had happened to me, I should have had to be content then, as I must be now, to

endure the consequences. That is all I care to say concerning the preliminaries to the meeting, for I am perfectly content to leave it to Victor to state the causes for the quarrel.

"We met then at sunrise. It was all in due form, and we fought with swords. There had been a moment or two of fencing in which your nephew gave me no little to think of in the way of meeting his fine attack. Then he unhappily lost his grip on his weapon."

Joe was stumbling along here, finding it extremely difficult to tell the story of Victor's complete discomfiture without an appearance of vaunting his own prowess too highly.

"You mean to say," cried the don, "that Victor dropped his sword?"

"Well, not exactly. It got out of his hand, you understand, and described something of a flight upwards and to one side before its final drop."

There was a slight flush as of mortification on the old don's cheeks, and he toyed nervously with the table cloth as if his fingers itched to grasp a sword hilt and show his young relative how it should be handled.

"The fact is," said Joe, desperately, "that I am a stronger man than Victor, and probably have seen a great deal more of sword practice than he has. There was no discredit to him, I assure you. He fenced well, and his bearing was a credit to his house. Surely there should be no disgrace in the simple fact that he was outclassed."

"I see," responded the don, slowly, "I see, now," and he referred again to the letter. "This is from Victor, unhappy boy. It was delivered just before you came in. We could not make anything of it except that something terrible had happened. I understand it now, senor. As a soldier, and a Spaniard, he feels himself irretrievably shamed in that he has been defeated by an American civilian. If you had been a military man, he might have viewed the matter differently. I sympathize with him deeply, and as for you, senor, I respect your position in the matter, and cannot condemn your actions. It is yet too early for me to speak with absolute composure, but I think I may venture to express the hope that you will not let this unfortunate affair disturb the cordiality of our relations."

"Certainly not, Don Octavio," returned Joe, scarce able to repress an extravagant manifestation of his joy at this outcome of the conversation.

The don bowed gravely. "You must excuse me now," he said; "my natural feelings as the nearest relative of the unhappy boy impel me to seek him at once, give him such comfort as I can, and persuade him that the disgrace he feels is fancied merely. He must not think of staying away from us."

So gravely then that his fussiness of demeanor was entirely lost, the old don shook hands with Joe, and withdrew. Joe, too, made his departure, bowing low to Donna Anna and turning to make a similar obeisance to the senorita. She started from the table and advanced to him with outstretched hand.

"Senor Barber," she said, her eyes glowing and her voice vibrant with sincerity, "you are a generous, noble hearted man."

"Thank you," gasped Joe, in reply, and he was so overwhelmed that he could neither look her in the eyes nor say another word.

He went down the *patio* stairway and along the streets to his office with his head it seemed above the housetops. He knew at last where he stood, and he reveled in the consciousness that love possessed him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ULTIMATUM FROM THE ALCALDE.

The traditional mist of morning had not only been absent from the scene of the bloodless encounter, but so also had

the newspaper reporters and their kodaks. Nevertheless, information concerning the affair spread rapidly.

Before the end of the day it was the gossip of the cafés, the officers' quarters and the Porto Rican clubs. Joe found himself accosted by many an army man who was personally a stranger, and congratulated warmly upon his spirit and his skill as a swordsman.

The Porto Ricans with whom he was acquainted did not speak so directly to him concerning the affair, but they let drop many a little phrase that indicated their cognizance of it, and that he had risen in their estimation was plainly enough shown by the curious and admiring glances with which he was followed; and so, in a day or two, it got into the paper, but it was in that characteristic fashion which is amusing from the point of view of American journalism.

"We are informed," the paragraph ran, "of a highly interesting meeting upon the field of honor in which Senor B——, a distinguished American resident of Ponce, figured as the adversary of Lieutenant X——, until recently a member of His Spanish Majesty's volunteer force in this island. Both parties, it is said, acquitted themselves with distinguished courage, and that the affair terminated without bloodshed was due to the gratifying magnanimity of the distinguished American. It is said, and we may well credit the report, that Senor B—— is in reality the most expert swordsman of two continents. We are credibly informed that he has been the hero of several duels in Europe in which some of his antagonists were military men of distinction, and one a prince of a German state."

At first Joe had felt half pleased and half annoyed at the attentions he received on account of the meeting with Victor, and as they grew more numerous the pleasure gave way to annoyance alone; but when he read what the paper had to say, and thus received his first intimation of his former career as a duelist, he laughed until the tears ran, cut the paragraph out for preservation, and thereafter endured the comments of friends and strangers alike with perfect composure.

Business matters were moving along satisfactorily enough, although there was still ample occasion for exerting his audacious ingenuity in order to keep up sufficient cash payments to establish the credit of the syndicate. Thanks to the ice cream business, there was a steady inflow of money, and by judicious management of it he was able to clear all needed accounts upon the first of September.

There wasn't very much left over, but he was much better off than when he had but a few *pesetas* in cash, and thousands in liability, and Joe accordingly was cheerful.

The office building enterprise was proceeding along much the same lines as had been pursued with the trolley. A local company was in process of organization to supply a part of the capital in conjunction with money to be invested through the syndicate, and certain persons in New York were in receipt of letters from Joe in which he pointed out the promising nature of the investment. Never inclined to be apprehensive for long at a time, he breathed freely, and actually felt that he had solid ground beneath his feet.

One day, about a week after the duel, a messenger came to him from the alcalde, presenting that functionary's compliments and requesting Joe to call upon a matter of urgent importance.

"Something about that confounded duel," thought Joe.

Since that event Victor had not been seen in Ponce. Joe understood that Don Octavio had managed to find the young man, and that he had argued in vain with him. Victor obstinately refused to resume his usual place in society. It appeared, too, that Don Octavio had learned how Victor had turned his back upon his adversary and

ungraciously refused the proffered hand of reconciliation.

This feature of the duel had crept into the rumored accounts of the affair, and in pro Spanish quarters it was not only exaggerated, but distorted. The result was that, while the don himself was profoundly impressed with the American's magnanimity, there were some people in Ponce who shook their heads suspiciously, and cautiously gave it out that they believed Victor had been seriously injured by the American.

Some of them went so far as to threaten an inquiry, and it was this, coming to Joe's ears, that made him attribute the alcalde's wish to see him to the affair of the duel.

It proved to be quite another matter. Omitting the characteristic circumlocution with which the official made himself understood, this is substantially what he said to Joe:

"As the chief executive of the city, I have been pleased with the prospect of a street car line between Ponce and the port. I am not disposed even now to deny its public usefulness, but since the matter was brought to my attention by the gentlemen who have been acting in conjunction with you, a new light has been thrown upon it by others. As I understand it, your company proposes to lay rails in the public highway, and operate cars thereon. The highway, therefore, becomes your roadbed, which you get free of cost. Now along comes another company, wishing to promote the same kind of enterprise, and offering to pay the municipality for the privilege of using its highway. I am informed that it is the custom in American cities for transportation companies to reimburse the municipality for the right to use the streets, and as chief executive of Ponce, I cannot consent to the gift of a franchise on the part of the city."

Joe protested earnestly that the alcalde was misinformed with reference to American custom in the matter. He admitted that in certain large cities, like New York, it was customary for the municipality to exact a franchise fee, but he maintained that in other places, where a street railway would manifestly tend to develop the town's prosperity, such a thing was unheard of. The alcalde was politely firm in his attitude.

"I must care for the interests of the city," he said. "The railway will undoubtedly conduce to the prosperity of Ponce, but I should be culpable if I neglected an opportunity to replenish the city's treasury. I am actually in receipt of an offer of a cash sum for a franchise for such a railway as you propose to build. There has been no bargain between us, Senor Barber, while I hasten to admit that you have been encouraged to go ahead. On that ground and because we all esteem you very highly, I wish to give you every possible advantage in the matter. As you were the first promoter of the idea, I maintain that you have the moral right to the franchise if you are willing to pay for it as much as the rival company offers. I regard this as a generous concession to you, for I might properly put the franchise at auction and dispose of it to the highest bidder. I am, however, disposed to let you have it if you are willing to pay at once as much cash as the other parties have offered, and I have so expressed myself plainly to Messrs. Haskell and Van Dorn."

"Oh!" said Joe, suddenly.

The alcalde looked at him in inquiring surprise.

Joe did not explain himself. The mention of those two names told him the whole story. He knew that argument would be in vain, and that the one thing to do, therefore, if he would save the trolley scheme, was actually to meet the demand made upon him by putting up the cash.

To protest, or ask for time, or maneuver in any way, would simply depreciate the standing of the syndicate in the business community.

" You are quite right," he said suavely. " How much has the rival company offered for the franchise? "

" Fifteen thousand dollars, or at the rate of five thousand dollars per mile," replied the alcalde.

Joe's hand sought his cigar case. The alcalde himself was puffing at a cigarette, and therefore there was no reason why the American should not steady his shocked nerves by his favorite device.

The amount asked was outrageously disproportionate to the just demands of the situation. It was undoubtedly a trick to ruin the syndicate, and the boldness of it suggested that its authors were well aware of the syndicate's inability to meet the emergency. Nevertheless, it had to be done.

The ice cream business was well enough for tiding the syndicate along, but its real success depended upon the accomplishment of some larger enterprise, and the trolley line, as the first and most important, must be saved.

" Of course," said the alcalde, politely, " you will not feel that you are under any compulsion in the matter. If the franchise is not worth that amount to you, I can simply accept the other gentlemen's offer. If it is highly valuable, you will need merely to deposit fifteen thousand dollars with us some time tomorrow, on the understanding that the deposit is in the shape of a forfeit only, to be retained by the city in the event of your actually constructing the line."

" Very well," said Joe, after he had puffed steadily for a minute or two, " we accept the situation. We will deposit fifteen thousand dollars with you tomorrow."

The alcalde expressed his delight that he could still regard the American Syndicate as the chief promoter of Ponce's rising prosperity, and Joe went thoughtfully forth to consider how he should raise the money.

He knew well enough what there was in his safe, and he knew what could be counted on as the day's receipts from the various caterers. Altogether he could muster a little more than two thousand dollars. Where should he get the unlucky other thirteen?

Vilamil's office was handy, and thither Joe went without pausing to consider a plan.

He was glad to find Hernandez and Vilamil together. They had heard of the alcalde's attitude, and immediately asked Joe what he thought of it.

" The franchise is worth it," said Joe, decidedly, " and we must have it."

Then ensued a conversation of the most exacting delicacy. Joe consumed all of two cigars in the vain effort to make it appear the proper thing for the Ponce capitalists to put up the money.

With infinite politeness, and more infinite obstinacy, Vilamil and Hernandez held that it was the part of the syndicate to come to the rescue. The syndicate had required them to purchase an option in a company that as yet had no tangible existence. Surely it behooved the American partners to the enterprise to manifest their sincerity now by removing the one obstacle that had appeared in the way of success.

They had been waiting patiently for the manager of the syndicate to conclude his negotiations with the American capitalists back of the concern, and they were still content to wait if he assured them that these same American capitalists would presently manifest themselves. No assurance would suit them better than a deposit by the syndicate to secure the franchise. In this attitude they were reinforced by Vasquez, who came in before the interview was over.

They were so perfectly reasonable and so utterly immovable, and withal so courteous, that Joe was at his wit's end. He felt that he was in danger of losing his head, and he even accused himself of having done so.

" I have been rattled by the alcalde," he muttered, as he sat alone in his private office during the late afternoon

hours. "It's a put up job by Haskell and Van Dorn, and they've rattled me, for, if they hadn't, I should have persuaded Vilamil and the others to put up the stuff. I'm defeated there. What else can I do?"

There was only one thing: appeal to the don. It was a most disagreeable expedient and one of very doubtful wisdom, but Joe could see no other.

He sat in the private office until dark, thinking it over and forming his plan for a final assault upon the don's credulity and generosity. Plan as he would, he could not wholly overcome the trepidation into which the emergency had thrown him, and he knew it boded ill for his success that he could not pull himself together and face the event with his usual serene confidence.

It was little better when, after dinner, he set out for Don Octavio's house. There was no reason why he should be aware of the fact that every step of the way he was tracked by a man who slunk along in the shadows of buildings, and who dodged back whenever Joe turned a corner.

Arrived at the don's, Joe was surprised to find that the porter was not in his usual place. Something of his customary nonchalance returned, as he took up the porter's stick and struck one blow on the gong to announce the arrival of a visitor to see the don. He presented a smiling, amused face to the servant who came down, and the latter said: "Don Octavio has been called away suddenly, but he will return soon. I heard him say so when he went out, giving the porter an errand to do at the same time."

"Then I'll wait for him," said Joe.

He went up the *patio* stairway, followed by the servant, and neither heard a sound of light footsteps upon the entrance pavement, as somebody glided hurriedly and cautiously in, and concealed himself among the potted shrubs of the *patio*; and a moment later nobody in the household chanced to observe in the dim and uncertain light of the *patio* a man who climbed one of the pillars in a remote corner, who got over the balcony rail, and who lay down full length in the shadow of it.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHAPTER OF CRIMES.

THE servant ushered Joe into the reception room and straightway departed. The lofty chamber, though brilliantly lighted, was empty.

Joe was not exactly disappointed to find it so. He was conscious constantly enough of the growing fascination that the Senorita Sylvia exercised upon him, and the very atmosphere of this apartment seemed to breathe of her, but just now the cornered business man was to the fore. Oppressed with the conviction that his future absolutely depended upon the immediate possession of a large sum of money, his whole mental energy was bent in that direction to the exclusion of things sentimental.

Therefore, although he thought of Sylvia, as he crossed the room, it was with a distinct feeling of relief that she was not there to intrude her charming presence upon his necessarily commercial thoughts.

As a man will sometimes when he is in a large chamber alone, Joe hesitated a moment before selecting a chair. When at length he sat down he was partly facing the French windows that opened on the *patio* balcony and directly in front of an open door.

This led, as he had learned by this time, to a small room used by the don as his office. Joe had been in it but once, and then for only a moment. It was not a more interesting place than wealthy gentlemen's offices usually are, but naturally enough Joe's eyes turned in that direction when he sat down.

A light was burning there that seemed to focus its rays upon Don Octavio's open desk, and what it revealed there caused Joe's heart to thump vio-

lently. He would not have supposed that he could be so disturbed.

It was almost incredible, even in face of the fact, that the pressing need of money should be so great upon him as to cause cold tremors to chase up and down his spine at the sight of a red morocco pocketbook that fairly bulged —presumably with money.

For a moment Joe sat looking at that article as if spellbound. It will be useless to try to enter into his thoughts, for they were in a pitiful whirl.

"Ugh!" he grunted presently, as he swung about in his chair, shut his jaws together and looked the other way.

There was a sense of deep humiliation that he could not quite understand and would not stop to analyze.

"I'm more rattled than ever," he said to himself, and to get a better grip upon his nerves he rose and began to walk about the room.

He walked as a man with no objective point. One chair was as good as another. He was too disturbed and nervous to sit down. Insensibly he approached the open door, and before he was aware of it, he was standing upon the threshold staring at that purse.

A subtle sophistry was speaking within him. There must be money in that purse. It was hardly likely that Don Octavio would stuff it full of newspaper clippings, for example. Was not the presence of the purse so well filled an omen of good fortune? Might it not be a favorable opportunity to tap the don's generosity when there was so much ready money in the house?

It is only the saint who, in masculine guise, could be in Joe's situation and not think of a dishonest act. At this late day it is hardly necessary to admit that Joe was no saint.

As many a man in the harmless solitude of his own chamber may reflect on what he might be led to do under strenuous temptation, so Joe, standing there, in the presence of what seemed to be certain relief to his immediate wants, considered the abstraction of that purse.

By this it is not meant to convey that he seriously contemplated theft. It was rather that his brain was occupied for a few fearfully busy seconds with contemplation of what might be the possibilities attendant upon such an act, and to be perfectly candid, it must be set forth baldly that Joe suffered the torments of temptation.

As the purse had fixed his eyes at the first, and as it had drawn his footsteps insensibly to the doorway, so it continued to exercise its baneful influence upon him, until he paused with a shock directly beside Don Octavio's desk.

"Ugh!" he grunted again, and he shivered from head to toe. "This is awful, vile, and moreover, Joe Barber, it is nonsense. How do you know, you rattled rascal, that the purse contains anything of interest to you? It may be full of waste paper."

God forgive him! He couldn't help it. He picked up the purse, opened it and saw that it was filled with actual money in the form of Bank of England notes.

God help him! for at that instant, all unsuspected by himself, the Senorita Sylvia glided softly across the drawingroom to the door of her father's office and saw him.

For once the girl's glorious color faded to an ashen hue. Her lips parted as if she would scream, but the sound stuck in her throat, and, with her hands pitifully held before her face, she retreated as noiselessly as she came.

God help Joe Barber! Lying at full length on the balcony, just outside the office window, to which point he had wriggled unseen, lay the man who had slipped into the *patio* past the unoccupied post of the absent porter.

"Great God!" exclaimed Joe, aloud, with a frightful revulsion of feeling, "have I come to this?"

He dropped the purse as if it were a burning coal, strode from the office and across the drawingroom to the *patio* balcony, thence down the stairs, and out to the street, whence he took

his way through unfamiliar avenues to distant parts of the city.

In all the horrible tortures of self condemnation he told himself repeatedly that not for one instant had he had any serious intention of taking the don's money, but he admitted with brutal frankness that the insatiate desire to do so had possessed him. The dreadful episode awakened a perfect fire of self analysis, and he reviewed his career in Ponce, telling himself that if he had not taken the don's purse, he had simply halted at the commission of the overt act that he had been willing to commit —aye, that he had committed again and again indirectly.

He thought of the way he had hoodwinked the caterers, and called it deceit. He thought of his unblushing misappropriation of the forfeit money put up by the don and his friends, and called it larceny. He thought of the scheme by which he was inducing business men of Ponce to invest in an office building, and called it swindling.

In his present mood, no conviction that eventually he would right all these matters by success came to comfort him. What he had done, what he had tried to do, stood out in an awful silhouette of blackness, and somehow, the lines of that silhouette framed themselves in appalling distinctness against a background of sublimated purity which he recognized as the character of Senorita Sylvia.

He had walked two or three miles, tormenting himself thus, when of a sudden he halted, thrust his hands into his pockets and laughed disagreeably.

" So," he said to himself, " I have awakened to the fact that I am a moralist. Who would have thought it? This comes, Joe, of losing your grip on yourself. You thought you were sailing along on Easy Street, and that you had passed the period of emergencies, so when one arose in the shape of the alcalde's ultimatum you proceeded to get rattled. With your grip lost, how could you persuade the Ponce capitalists to put up the money you must have? With your grip utterly gone, how could you possibly escape making a fool of yourself over Don Octavio's purse? Damn the purse! "

By this time, and strangely enough it had not happened before, the steadying cigar came upon the scene. Joe puffed away, and as the cigar burned out slowly, so did his agitation.

He was still conscious of a mortal shame, and he was wholly unfitted by it to return to the don's house and attempt to put through the plan he had formed of raising the necessary money. That was now out of the question. There must be some other way, and he turned his thoughts to an expedient which had occurred to him after his fruitless interview with Vilamil and the others.

He had prepared for it by conveying a cold chisel and a mallet to his office in the afternoon. It was desperate, and it savored of the extravagant, but nothing could be more desperate than the situation in which he found himself, and no means could be too extravagant, if only they would serve to extricate him.

There was now no possibility of depositing fifteen thousand dollars with the alcalde on the morrow. That being the case, the only remedy left to him by which he might save the trolley company and retain the credit of the syndicate was to provide a credible excuse for not being in possession of the funds.

Back to his office Joe went with resolute step. The Calle Real was deserted in that vicinity. The porter of the building, occupied there only by day, was in his own quarters.

Joe let himself in with his latchkey and proceeded to the back room. There his first step was to stuff his handkerchief into the keyhole of the door that connected with the main office. This done, so that no ray of light should issue from the back room, he lit a candle. Suddenly he bethought himself of the window that gave light from the *patio* to the private office.

Out went the candle with an impatient puff. Then, for many minutes Joe worked with the rugs taken from his floor, fastening them upon the window sash so as completely to shade the aperture. Having accomplished this to his satisfaction, he relit the candle and knelt before his safe.

A moment's working at the simple combination enabled him to open the door. Then he took from an interior compartment all the money that lay there and stuffed it into his pocket. His contracts and business correspondence he left undisturbed. Then he closed the door of the safe, turned the handle so that the combination was set, and brought forth his mallet and cold chisel.

With these he proceeded slowly and with infinite patience to drill into the iron just over the lock. It took a long, long time, for though the iron was comparatively soft, it seemed in the solitude as if every blow of the mallet was like the fall of a pile driver, or the report of a cannon. No professional burglar ever worked with more deliberation and prudence.

At last he was satisfied that he had drilled so far that connection had been established with the lock. His next step was to produce the revolver which he had carried to Ponce and never used. He withdrew all the cartridges and with his pocket knife carefully cut away the bullets from the shells. Then he dug the powder from the shells, allowing the grains to fall upon a sheet of paper.

When all the shells had been emptied, he folded the paper into a crude funnel, and applying the pointed end to the hole he had drilled in the safe, permitted most of the powder to roll inside. With a little of the powder left on the paper, he had to stop and think a moment.

Looking the office over, he saw that but a small fraction of his handkerchief was necessary for the plugging of the keyhole. He tore away the greater part of it, and fastened it in the hole he had drilled in the safe, so that the rag hung down. Then he carefully distributed his remaining grains of powder over the handkerchief, and wondered if it would work.

The perspiration was streaming from his brow, partly due to the incessant labor in the close atmosphere, and partly to the excitement induced by the strange proceeding. He looked around, smiled grimly and glanced at his watch. It was a little past midnight.

"Nothing could be more appropriate," said Joe to himself.

Taking the remnant of a candle in his hand, he lay down on the floor in such a way that by reaching his arm out to the utmost he could just touch the flame to his handkerchief. The instant the cloth ignited he drew back and scrambled to the farthest side of the room.

Effect followed cause with commendable promptness. The grains of powder sprinkled upon the rag made an admirable train, and with a little preliminary hissing and sputtering, the charge of powder that had been sunk in the lock exploded. The report was muffled, and the amateur burglar was quite satisfied that nobody's attention would be attracted by it.

Nevertheless he sat perfectly still for a full minute, breathing the choking fumes of burnt powder until the continued silence assured him that the explosion had passed unnoticed. Then he crawled across the room on his hands and knees and pulled at the handle of the safe door. The door came open at once. The lock had been burst to pieces.

After that Joe closed the door, took down the rugs from the window, unstopped the keyhole, cleared up the débris of his operations and went to his hotel.

(To be continued.)

ACCIDENT OR DESIGN?

BY THERESE M. RANDALL.

The balloonist, the parachute jumper, and the German scientist, a triangle of personages whose capacity to furnish forth a tragedy will be understood when it is added that the balloonist was jealous, the parachute jumper is his wife, and the scientist in love with her.

TWICE a year, I visit France as buyer for a large importing house in New York. In Marseilles, I stop at a rather unpretentious hotel off La Cannebière.

Jacques, the real head waiter, when he was a garçon in a Paris café, once helped me out of a scrape, I remember; but that is not what I want to narrate now.

Early one evening, a soft twilight following a day of rain and clouds, I seated myself in a quiet corner of the upper balcony. I had had a busy, tiresome day, and was glad to be alone.

My business at Marseilles was completed, and it was a relief to be free from the oriental merchants with their oppressive salaams and calm mendacity. Thank heaven, tomorrow I could set my face toward the land where human nature even was not inlaid and carved and veneered out of all semblance to itself.

I was gazing at the cosmopolitan, picturesquely dressed people coming into our quiet little street from the gay Cannebière. One by one, the lights began to twinkle, and the moon rose with its face so solemnly white and expressive of eternal silence, framed in the mystery of space, yet breaking into soft smiles and dimples as it glanced into the rippling waters of the old harbor beyond.

Suddenly the gas was lighted in a room behind me. A party of three entered and seated themselves around the table.

There were two men, both fine looking fellows, and a pretty woman. In the careless glance of an indifferent stranger, I saw this, and looked away while they studied the menu or chatted.

But my attention was again called to the room when the slight dark man of the party arose and threw up the window a few inches. The other took advantage of his companion's back, it would seem, to throw a glance full of passion at his pretty little *vis-à-vis*.

The dark man turned with nervous rapidity to the table, and must have seen the look that still burned in the blue eyes of the big blond fellow. But, though he glanced carelessly at the two faces before him, his expression did not change. The pretty woman, I fancied, turned pale and trembled a little.

Somehow I was fascinated by this group, and, my whole nervous system being relaxed after the strain of the past few days, I fell into an imaginative mood unusual to me.

"Here is love," thought I, "trying to draw this fine handsome fellow and this pretty little woman together, while this dark Mephisto sneers at their love or jealously stalks a tragedy to their happiness."

But these three people looked very matter of fact, in spite of my imaginings, as they ate the supper before them. They chatted quietly, eating and sipping their wine with leisurely comfort.

The dark man finished first, and pushed his chair back from the table.

"*Parbleu!* Mignonne, I think it would be well for me to get shaved before we go to the play. I have had no time to think of it even, today. What

sayest thou?" and he playfully seized her hand and drew it over his cheek.

"It is not very rough; it looks very well," answered the little woman.

"Ah, but it will be both rough and unpleasant by tomorrow, and then I shall have no time. It is strange," said he, turning to the other man with a peculiar glitter in his eyes, "that of late I cannot handle a razor myself without wishing to cut my own throat, or some one else's," and he laughed maliciously as his companions, especially the little woman, looked uncomfortable.

"I shall return by the time you and madame have finished supper. I beg that you will not hurry," he continued, with what seemed to me mocking politeness. "You will not mind waiting here with Monsieur Steinert, Mignonne?" he asked, turning to the little woman with that same mocking tone. "Perhaps you would like to sit outside on the *galérie;* but no, the wind blows damp from the sea there. Dost feel it, Mignonne? Ah, thou art in a draft, my little one."

And though the pretty woman protested in a rather subdued way, I thought, that she was very comfortable, he arose, and, with a strange smile on his face, closed the thick wooden shutters with a bang.

This brought me to my senses. I realized that I had been unconsciously playing the part of an eavesdropper. I took my chair, and, going around the corner of the house, seated myself on the other side.

In a few minutes, I became aware of stealthy footsteps stealing along the silent piazza. A chill crept through my blood, and with it a horrible suspicion.

Only a few days before, a stranger had been murdered by a mysterious assassin who stole on his victims in the dark. An Englishman and a German had so far been the choice of this silent murderer; this time, was he seeking an American? I shuddered.

Scarcely daring to breathe, I peered around the corner. I saw a man now, motionless before the closed shutters of the room.

The moon was scurrying along behind a pile of black clouds. It was quite dark, and at first I could barely see his figure. But, in another instant, a small ray of light fell across his face.

I know not whether the expression it revealed was real or the grotesque painting of light and shade, but I saw what seemed like the grinning features of an enraged demon. Only for a moment, he stood there; and then, with muttered curses, he replaced something in the blind and stole softly away.

As he passed through the door at the far end of the piazza, it shut with a loud bang. Something fell with a gentle noise to the piazza, and rolled near my corner. The moon passed out from its grim curtain, and I could just see the small something; stooping, I picked it up.

By the light of a match, I saw that it was a knot of wood, painted green on both ends. I arose, and, walking to the shutters of the little supper room in which I had been so interested, I saw a small hole in the upper part of one of them. The knot just fitted it.

As I was about to replace it, I saw into the room. The fair man was holding the woman's hand; as he relinquished it, he kissed it passionately. They both looked very sad.

I turned away from the window, filled with a strange sympathy for this pair. I did not care to sit longer on the piazza. I felt oppressed.

As I stepped into the hall, I met the trio of my thoughts. They were going out—to the theater, I suppose—and the dark man seemed the easiest and was assuredly the most talkative of the three.

"Ah, Jacques," said I, as I encountered the head waiter at the door of the café, "who are those three people passing into the street from the private entrance?"

Jacques glanced into the hall as the three passed out.

"That is Monsieur Malhomme and his wife. Do you not know them? They are pensionnaires here. But you are here so little, monsieur, that I suppose you have not seen them. Besides, they do not eat in the café; they have one of the little rooms above. It is more private for madame, who does not like to be stared at so much—so monsieur her husband says to me."

"And the fair gentleman—who is he?" I asked again.

"Oh, that is Monsieur Steinert, a German scientist—an inventor. Monsieur Malhomme is the greatest aeronaut of the day, and madame the most daring parachute jumper of the whole world," said Jacques, magnificently, glancing around the tiny room and sweeping his hand in a graceful curve.

I knew Jacques well, and saw that this was an interesting subject. Questions were superfluous, for Jacques could not now be stopped from telling all he knew. He would tell no more—Jacques was that rare being of a higher life, a conscientious gossip.

"Yes," he continued, "Monsieur Malhomme is the greatest of aeronauts, and madame is incomprehensible, superb; her courage is of the most marvelous. Monsieur Steinert has made some improvement on the parachute, that makes it *absolument parfaite*," and Jacques gave a sweeping gesture. "It is safe—there is no danger with this parachute. It cannot fail to open and bring madame safely to the ground."

I was now eating my horse steak, or whatever it might be—but which Jacques politely called "bif stec"—and listened comfortably to my talkative Gaul.

"Madame gives another exhibition with this parachute the most perfect, tomorrow. It will be the last in France. Monsieur must go and see it. It would not do to miss a sight so wonderful. All Marseilles will go."

Jacques now masked his smiles in a Jovian frown, as he strode with measured steps and imposing grandeur toward another guest seeking a seat in the well filled café.

"Does not monsieur think madame very beautiful?" he inquired, returning to my table, where he could keep his eye turned in all directions. "She has all her life been an acrobat, but she is very modest and very good."

Jacques sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Monsieur is jealous, they say; but it is not madame's fault if she is so pretty, and Monsieur Steinert makes eyes at her—as I have myself seen."

He looked mysterious.

"I see many things, monsieur; but I am a philosopher and take no notice of these little affairs, except to sympathize always with the heart."

Here Jacques had to leave me again, and for once I was spared the polite but rather elaborate description of his philosophy.

The next day rose like a flushed nymph out of a bath of dew. It was delightfully sunny and warm, with a fresh exhilarating air.

I drew a long breath as I stepped briskly along La Cannebière. I was following the crowd, and that meant all Marseilles. Its whole motley population was bent on seeing the balloon ascension and the parachute jumper.

The trains were crowded; and I felt as joyous and ready to run as a lot of wild youths who had been confined in the close compartment with me, when we alighted at St. Louis. This was the suburb of Marseilles where the balloon ascension was to take place.

We were too early; and, as I had never visited St. Louis before, I spent the time in walking about its busy streets. I had not gone very far before I encountered Jacques.

I was glad, as the most lonely place in the world to me is in the midst of thousands of my own kind, if I am a stranger and by myself.

Jacques was always more talkative than a barber and more limber than a contortionist, and today he was—Jacques. His eyebrows talked, his nostrils talked, and the tips of his ears talked; his legs, feet, arms, hands, talked.

I enjoyed my cigar all the more from the fact that I was not obliged to listen attentively to Jacques' monologue. He enjoyed his little speeches and fancied himself, I often thought, declaiming to a large audience instead of to one quiet, middle aged individual.

"Ah!" cried Jacques, drawing a long breath, "there is madame!" and he pointed to a lady seated in a carriage before a small house.

It was the parachute jumper. She looked bright and flushed, and eagerly kissed an old man who came forth to greet her.

"It is her father," said Jacques. "She lived here once. See the old father, how proud! He, too, was an acrobat."

The old man entered the carriage. As he opened the door, we passed before it and saw that, besides madame, there was another occupant. It was the German scientist—Monsieur Steinert. Jacques shook his head as the carriage drove off.

"That is very indiscreet," he said.

We followed the miserable shambling horse attached to the carriage, as it meandered down a widening road. We soon found ourselves in a wide open field among thousands of curiosity feeders like ourselves.

The great balloon was inflated and tugging at its moorings, as though the breath within animated it with a savage restlessness.

The scene which followed was characteristically French. The aeronaut made a little speech. He described the parachute and the improvements invented by Monsieur Steinert, who thereupon had to make his bow and was duly applauded.

Then madame was presented and cheered till the crowd of yelling Frenchmen looked like a Paris mob of mad communists. Even her aged father had to be brought forward, and he bowed his old stage bows proudly, as he held his daughter's hand.

"How can he smile?" I said to Jacques, "when his daughter is about to risk meeting a horrible death?"

My philosopher shrugged his shoulders, turned his elbows inward and the upturned palms of his hands outward, arched his eyebrows into inverted V's, and said: "But she is brave and beautiful; he is proud—her father. But oh! see! there she goes, *la brave madame!*"

And Jacques nearly dislocated every joint in his body, as he threw kisses at the parachute jumper fast rising into the clouds.

The balloon ascended very rapidly, and, it seemed to me, in almost a straight line. Even after it had reached a great height, it scarcely appeared to drift at all.

We watched it with that keen relish which always makes a real danger horribly delightful when our own gods are not threatened. Gradually the waving handkerchiefs of the balloonists became mere specks, then passed out of our vision.

I don't know whether the feeling of solemnity which stole over me oppressed any other breast with its uncanny weight; possibly it did, for the wild cheering ceased and a strange stillness eloquent of expectation followed.

With a unity of sentiments that was like the stringing of several notes into a sympathetic chord, we watched for the event of the day. At last, it occurred.

A long drawn intense "Ah!" announced that madame had jumped from the balloon.

Like a bit of vivid scarlet in the clear sunshine, she sped toward us with indescribable rapidity. The parachute had not yet opened.

Our nerves were strained to a dry fierce tension as we watched the shooting figure dart downward. Would the parachute open?

My heart thumped as madly with excitement as must that in the bosom of the woman flashing like a meteorite through the air.

"But," I inwardly panted, "the parachute will soon open and relieve the horrible feeling of being hurled through space at that tremendous rate! She will soon steady into a comparatively floating motion—a gradual descent!"

But alas! seconds shot by, and the parachute was still closed.

Great God! would it never open? A chill of horror swept over us; we craned our necks, we held our breaths, our pulses throbbed, our hearts knocked loudly, our lips grew dry, and yet the parachute had not opened.

Was it hours, minutes, or seconds that we watched? The clock could not measure the time; only the mental dial which writes his hour in furrows and gray hairs marked it on our souls.

A deep groan distracted us for an instant. It came from Monsieur Steinert, who, with pallid face and wildly staring eyes, was gazing fixedly at the figure above us.

Ah, madame's old father! I had forgotten him till I saw him fall on his knees, his blue and trembling lips moving in prayer. His tear dimmed eyes gazed terror stricken upward—only a little way now, only a little way, and yet the parachute had not opened.

With a savage bound, the German inventor sprang past me toward the spot where she must——

But I turned away, cold in my blood, faint and dizzy.

Then a cry of horror rose from the crowd now surging toward—oh, God! I could not look, and staggered rather than walked toward the station.

As a frightful shriek rent my ears, I looked backward and saw the maddened German dash himself forward on something scarlet that was stretched on the ground; while the old father, dazed and half paralyzed, still knelt and mumbled his prayers.

Then the crowd closed around that bit of scarlet, and I saw no more.

Had the aeronaut—my dark Mephisto of the night before—tampered with the parachute? Had he taken this means to revenge himself on his wife and her lover?

Who can tell? I never could, though my suspicions have never slept.

SOULLESS.

HER face, a palace that awaits its king,
  Prepared, and set in order with the gold
  Of truth, the sparkle of the jeweled fold
Of thought, and thrilled with music's joyful ring;
But empty. From her eyes no deeper thing
  Than laughter; from her lips no words but light
  The sick heart shrinks from darkening her sight.
She knows not tenderness, nor the mute touch
  Of sympathy; her path has been too bright;
Nor does she feel the lack, nor mourn it much.
  But we who watch and love her, are most fain
The gates should open to the tender tread
Of womanhood, who enters with bent head,
  Crown'd with the bruised purple blossoms of pain.

Anna Robeson Brown.

BEYOND THE GREAT SOUTH WALL.*

BY FRANK SAVILE.

Being some surprising details of the voyage of the steam yacht Raccoon on a trip undertaken by her owner with a full consciousness of its foolhardy nature, but without the faintest conception of the extraordinary happenings that were to become part and parcel of it.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE DELIVERANCE.

As I raised my eyes again to look on the things of earth, a broad line showed across the seaward cliffs that hedged us in. It increased visibly as I stared at it, and I knew that again the cliffs were rending between the sea and the growing pool.

I leaned across and touched Janson on the shoulder, pointing silently. As he, too, caught sight of the rift the light of hope grew across his haggard face.

"If it cuts down to the sea——" he muttered, glancing to where our ship and the little launch wandered, masterless, among the steam wreaths. He turned to me and pointed to them.

"Let's get aboard, my lord. It's only a hundred to one chance, but it might widen and give channel. Here's only quick roasting at any rate."

"How about the propeller shaft?" I queried sadly. "We shan't be able to get steam on her."

"That's no matter," he said, shaking his head impatiently. "We can get steam in the launch for a tow, or if that takes too long, ten oars in one of the boats would shift her."

"Who's to board her, Mr. Janson? It means swimming."

"I can if nobody else will, but I'll give Rafferty the job. He's a fine swimmer," and he beckoned to the boatswain.

"Board the launch," quoth Janson to him curtly, "and bring her ashore."

Rafferty made no remark on this terse order, but slipped quickly down the ledges that led to the rocks below. He kicked off his boots, dropped his jacket upon the stones, and poising his hands above his head, sprang like a dart into the still pool. There was scarcely a splash as he struck the surface, but he rose almost instantly in a circle of foam, while a shrill yell of agony burst from his lips. He threshed desperately back to the shore, still screaming horribly.

Howling and cursing he flung himself upon the stones, and oblivious of all considerations of modesty, tore off his clothes.

He apostrophized every saint in the Catholic calendar. He squirmed, he bellowed, and believing him struck with sudden madness, we raced towards him, utterly at fault to find explanation of this sudden explosion.

But as we drew near our eyes soon found a cause.

The unfortunate seaman was red as any lobster. His skin was blistered and parboiled. It hung, as he himself explained in no uncertain voice, "in tathers and shtrips." The waters of the rising lake had scalded him horribly.

We caught the unfortunate seaman as he wriggled upon the cool stones, and wrapped him in our coats. One of the men ran back for our blankets,

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nothing, as I well knew, being so dangerous for him as exposure to the air.

What he needed most was thick coverings and oil. But, unfortunately, the whole stock of the latter was aboard the ship.

In this extremity the long black bulk of the stranded whale beneath the cliff caught my eye. It was no time for discussion. Gerry and I snatched up the kicking mariner, and bore him towards the carcass.

We hacked great greasy lumps from its reeking sides, and then, as the blankets arrived, packed the victim tightly in this carrion, twisting the folds of blanket round the layers of lubber. So, muttering condemnation on all and sundry, and sniffing disgustedly as the stench of the putrid wrapping filled his nostrils, we sat him down, while we devised other means of reaching the ship across the steaming lake.

The launch was now only about sixty yards away, turning slowly as the ripples rose from the center of the pool. One of the sailors produced a ball of string. To one end of this we tied a sizable pebble, and Gerry, who is a noted man at throwing the cricket ball, managed after some half dozen attempts to land the stone in the bottom of the boat.

Careful tugs brought her ashore, and in less than a minute we were aboard the ship.

I ran forward and knotted a loose rope to the foremast. Then, taking the slack, we jumped back into the boat and bent to the oars. Ever so slowly the ship got away and followed us, till the grating of the keel against the shallows told us she could come no further. We looked at the cleavage of the rocks. We saw with gladness that it had widened yet more, for the blue horizon line of ocean shone distinct across it, and the peaks of the nearer bergs jutted up into the vista.

The others who had watched us from the heights now began to descend the granite stairway.

In straggling procession, the sailors weighed down with our surplus stores, they joined us as we strained upon the rope. The ladies were quickly ferried across the few yards between the rocks and the ship, and some of us tossed the various impedimenta aboard, while half a dozen ran back up the rocks to collect all leavings.

Then dumping everything anyhow upon the deck, we got a strong crew of six in one of the boats, hoisted the launch aboard, and gradually got the bows turned cliffwards.

The waters were still gushing up and widening upon the basin, the circling eddies helping our towers as they dragged us tediously towards the cleft. The shocks from the mountain came with greater frequency, making the pool shiver into tiny surges that fled across it, to break in ripples on the further shore.

Another of the peaks toppled and fell with a resounding crash.

The fissure began to disappear amid the cloud of low hung steam, and it was with difficulty we steered our course for it. A sudden outcry from the boat that strained ahead made us aware that we were forging with all the powers of six stout oars straight at an opening that was yet a dozen feet above tide level.

It was only by the smartness of the boat's crew, who doubled sharply in their tracks and snatched a rope flung to them from our stern, that we escaped inglorious shipwreck. They tugged lustily in the contrary direction and managed to stop the ship's way.

Then, having us more or less motionless, they rested on their oars, and we floated aimlessly, waiting further developments, for the fissure was still widened.

We were silent, for the awe and anxiety of our position kept us tongue tied, and every one was on deck. The sailors fidgeted up and down, now and again shifting perfunctorily some of the heaped confusion of the decks, but

stopping every minute to gaze inquiringly at the peak, as roar after roar, and shock after shock swept down from it.

We were like malefactors awaiting execution, but hoping desperately against hope for a reprieve.

Then a thunderous boom, fifty times louder than any that had preceded it, broke from the bosom of the hill. The pinnacles swayed, tottered, and bowed earthwards, not one but was swept from its base.

A red storm of lava surged boiling over the crater brim, swelled in a torrent down the channel through the heart of the glacier, and dashed in a cloud of steam into the far end of the lake. A vapor mist, impenetrable as a desert sandstorm, closed over the waters, but ere it fell we saw a huge threatening wave uprise and swing across at us in fury irresistible.

Behind it was all the impact force of the fiery mass, but long ere it reached us the fog rolled down and shut us in in its warm gray veil.

A rending crash broke from the cliff in front, and the cold, hungry ocean came clamoring through, beating upon the outcharging tide. For some furious seconds our ship plunged and reared among the fighting billows like a restive horse.

Then from the boat came a cry as the pursuing wave reached her and flung boiling spray upon the men. Like a toy she was raised and flung towards us. The wall of water struck with a thud below our stern, and thrust us, bow forward, at the gap.

Swifter than paddle or screw could have borne us we sped upon the crest, driving straight into the new reft opening.

A gasp went up from every throat, and not one of us but breathed a prayer. Two seconds more and the dark walls were flashing by on each side. Then with a dying effort the great wave flung us far out into the ice bestrewed main, diffusing itself up the long lanes of floating berg, roaring and clanging amid the splinters of the floe.

Spinning on yet before that mighty impulse, lopsided, with ballast adrift, with foretopmast gone and propeller shaft broken, we fled forth from our prison, dragging the boat astern with her bows out of the water, and from boat and ship alike went up a mighty cheer of deliverance as the great crags faded into the steam cloud behind us. And so did we accomplish our marvelous escape.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

As the great surge sank to ripples, we sprang to work, full of the energy of relief and gratitude. Some set to right our littered decks, some descended into the hold to replace the shifted ballast, while Eccles, debarred from work by his broken collar bone, stood over his subordinates and admonished them with many a good Glasgow expletive to seek drills to rivet a collar on the split propeller.

Rafferty from between his oily compresses roared curses and commands at the deck hands, and all, crew and passengers, were busy as best they knew how. And behind the deck house my love and I found time to seal with a kiss the promise of new life that had had its birth under the very shadow of death.

The red glow of the fire pillar was beginning to pale into the tints of dawn before we had cleared our deck into any similitude of tidiness. All night long we toiled, relieving each other in crews of eight at the towing.

For the heat ashore made the breeze beat landward with aggravating steadiness, and but for persistent effort we should have drifted back on to the sheer cliffs of the wall, and pounded our timbers into matchwood on its iron face.

So wearily the oarsmen toiled and drew the unwilling ship by slow by

ways amid the herding pack ice. And down in the engine room Eccles sat to swing his sound arm upon the gearing and spit imperious blasphemy at his underlings, who drilled and drilled again with stiffening fingers, while forward the carpenter wrestled with a spare spar to raise anew a topmast.

Both on deck and below Rafferty's nimble tongue reached and drove the lagging crew.

Finally with morning came a fair breeze off the land, and getting sail upon the mizzen we lurched easily along, and the weary towers came aboard, full of thankfulness and dropping with sleep.

Then leaving two volunteers to steer —Janson and Parsons to wit—we one and all sank down upon our berths and slept as only those sleep who have labored through four and twenty hours of surpassing terror and excitement.

It was late in the afternoon ere I reached the deck again, washed, changed, and looking rather less like a sweep's apprentice than I had done twelve hours before. Gwen was pacing to and fro forward, and delicious it was to watch her from the companion, and to note, with all the inward glow of love's proprietorship, the golden curl's flutter against her white forehead.

She turned as I stepped out into the sunlight, and came and gave me a good morning with such happy shyness that I entirely lost my head in the exuberance of my feelings, and took thrice as much as I was offered. With sweet felony I might have continued in spite of my lady love's admonishings, but for the audible tittering of Gerry and Vi who were conducting a similar function on the other side of the deckhouse.

It was not an altogether cordial interview I had with Lady Delahay, but on my part it was a very determined one. And she was in no condition to face me boldly.

The stress of the last few days had worn her down, and she made but half hearted defense of her devious dealings with me, and after my explanation that the dignity of the Heatherslies was not to be kept up on an Irish rent roll alone, was almost kind. At any rate, she saw that further opposition was useless, and wisely considering that it was well to agree with her son in law while she was in the way with him, gave a consent that was not entirely a grudging one.

As yet the desperate proposals of Vi and Gerry remained untold, and her temper had not been strained beyond its furthest limits. So I retreated with the honors of victory thick upon me, and in great peace my love and I went back to sit together behind the deckhouse, and what we said to each other is no one's concern but our own.

For three days the flap of a two knot breeze was upon our canvas, and we met an occasional berg. But the fourth morning we woke to an ice free horizon and to the hissing of steam in the boilers; this welcome sound being soon followed by the sight of a pale wake of screw churned foam.

Neither Eccles, nor any man who called him master, had had four consecutive hours of sleep in the last eighty, but thanks to this and to his Scotch determination, we thenceforward swept upon our way regardless of resisting winds. Ten days of half speed, lest we should strain our new spliced shaft, brought us through constant sunshine to within sight of the Falklands.

With the R. Y. S. pennant afloat, and black smoke curling from our funnel we breasted the billows into Port Lewis.

As we drew near the land we were aware of a gallant ship standing out towards us; she, too, had fires new stoked, and her cutwater spurned the foam. At her peak the white ensign floated, and we knew her for a man of war.

Suddenly upon her decks commotion was visible, and the jangle of her engine room bells came distinctly across the stillness. As she slowed, a stento-

rian hail came from a gesticulating figure on her bridge.

"Raccoon ahoy! Is it yourself, then, or a new Flying Dutchman? In the name of heaven, m'lord, how did you get away?"

It was poor old Waller, and across the intervening sea lane his face showed white as the lashed hammocks he stared across. His eyes were starting from his head.

A cheer went up in answer from our assembled crew, and joyously I bade him come aboard to hear our news. In three minutes he was on our decks, exchanging heartiest of handshakings with us all as we pressed round him, and pouring out question on question as he surveyed the ship again unbelievingly.

I left him to the care of Gerry and Denvarre, while I attended to the blue uniformed naval captain who had accompanied him. This individual I could see was under the impression that Waller had grossly and impertinently deceived him with a cock and bull story of our sad plight in the desolate regions of the south.

I gave a hasty *résumé* of our adventures, leaving detail till the evening, which we spent with the man of war's men in much jollification.

Waller had been fortunate enough to arrive two days before us, and to find H. M. S. Bluebell paying her annual visit of inspection. Her gallant captain had promised to start directly government stores were landed, and this promise we had found in the early stages of fulfilment.

We gave him thanks worthy of the accomplished deed. In the morning we coaled anew, and from the warship received help of engineers and artificers, who strengthened our patched propeller and battened down more firmly our ballast.

In the evening we parted with much esteem and desire for future foregatherings—we to turn northward and home by the south seas, the Bluebell setting her course for Buenos Ayres.

As the day died in the crimson of the sunset, my darling and I stood beside the traffrail and watched the ruby glories fade.

We had just interviewed Lady Delahay on behalf of Vi and Gerry. With artful devices had I pictured the latter's probable career in his profession with my influence at his back, and desperately had I exaggerated the possible worth of his share of the Mayan treasure. Denvarre, too, had magnanimously promised that the whole patronage of the family should be exerted to gain him *attachéships* and like lucrative posts.

The result had been a tardy and unwilling, but official, benison of Gerry's aspirations, and in the stern the young couple sat hand in hand with the more or less complacent assent of the lady's mother.

So in perfected content my love and I stood together in the bow, and saw the sun sink into the main and the stars rush out into soft splendors above us.

A thousand miles behind us were the terrors of the land of fire—terrors forgiven, in that they had knit our lives and now loomed shadowy through a mist of happiness.

THE END.

OUR PINIONS.

We rise by the things that are under our feet,
By what we have mastered of good and gain
By the pride disposed and the passion slain,
And the vanquished ills that we hourly meet.

Dr. Holland.

WHAT TEXAS DID FOR A CYNIC.

BY J. PERCIVAL POLLARD.

Why Mr. Magdalen, sickened of society, betook himself to the wilds. The strange circumstances under which a slip into a prairie dog's dugout leads to the reuniting the threads of his existence.

OUT of Pessimism, by Rejection; that was the moral pedigree of Mr. Magdalen, cynic. The pessimism began in his stomach, and ended by settling in his mind; a one time badly digested dinner eventually turned the channel of his thoughts into a misanthropic course.

As for the rejection, that was of the kind that consists of a pretty girl carefully leading a man into a trap, and then just as carefully turning her back upon him. It is only fair, in the case of Mr. Magdalen, to mention that the number of his rejections had been quite formidable—due, most probably, to the film that his vanity was forever drawing over his clearer judgment.

A wounded vanity is not infrequently the beginning of cynicism.

But, however all that may be, the fact remained that Mr. Magdalen, at the time that concerns this narrative, was very much at outs with the world and sick of all that therein was.

Perhaps his dinner had again done him the impoliteness to disagree with him; perhaps another pretty girl had just opened her eyes in delightfully feigned astonishment, murmured "Oh, Mr. Magdalen, I am so sorry!" and left him once more disconsolate; certain it is that he went to his rooms, on this particular evening, and, confidentially addressing the pictures on the walls, spoke aloud concerning many things that oppressed him. Thus:

"Bah! I'm sick of it all. Oh, the hideous rottenness of the whole fabric of civilization! Lies, sham, and hypocrisy everywhere; every one must be believed a scoundrel until the opposite is proved; circle lies within circle of conventions, of rules and regulations, making of man a mere machine. This is not living; there is no freedom of action in all this. At every opening, one is hampered; social usage, good form, and fetishes of that sort are guarding every portal that leads to free will and naturalness.

"And what good does it all do? H'm! it's done me a sweet lot of good, I must say! No, the thing for me to do is to cut the whole shooting match, to pull up sticks and depart for wilds—wilds somewhere where there is no civilization, somewhere out of the world. There is where my free and roving spirit may spread its wings and feel its life. As for this civilization,"—he stopped in his rapid pacing of the floor, stood in front of the window, and shook his fist at the whole world outside—"I shake you! Do you hear? I shake you!"

Mr. Magdalen was really very much in earnest about this matter. The very next morning, he walked over to his friend Major Fewsleer's house, and said to that gentleman:

"Old man, do me a favor. I'm a trifle soured on this part of the world, and I want air. You've got lots of it down on the Texas prairies; I want some of it. In other words, give me a letter to your foreman on the T-Square ranch, telling him I'm coming down for my health, or any other rot like that you can think of. As a matter of fact.

I'm going because I'm sick of this. What do you think?"

"I think," said the major sententiously, "that you're more kinds of an italicized fool than there are in the dictionary. What the Tom, Dick, and Harry do you want to go and frizzle in that beastly sun for, with no one to speak to but cowboys whose talk is all cattle? Mesquite grass and cacti get to be mighty wearing on the eyes, I can tell you, and——"

"Major," said Mr. Magdalen, a trifle wearily, "you mean well, I know; but everything you say only makes me long to get down there. Why, man, nobody to speak to is just what I'm yearning for; and nothing to look at will make my eyes as good as new again. Come, now—will you do me this favor, or won't you? Because——"

"Oh, well, if you put it that way," said the major, deprecatingly, and promptly sat down and wrote the letter needed.

Thus it came about that, in due course of time, there appeared at the T-Square ranch a young man with a tired expression on his face and a letter in his hand. Presently, he was rid of both and was a cowboy like the rest.

The freedom that the prairies stretching toward every horizon seemed to promise filled him with a buoyancy of spirit that he had not known for many a long day, and the absence of all that had been galling him in the world he had left was also soothing to his soul. Among the other cowboys he was accounted, when that happened at all, as a somewhat morose character, which opinion was due to the caustic remarks he occasionally let fall concerning the world of manners and customs.

Whenever he spoke of Texas, it was with unbounded enthusiasm. The novelty, you see, was still all there.

"The way I puts it up," remarked Bad Man Tom, one day, while Magdalen was out riding alone, and the talk of the other men had drifted his way, "is that he ain't a particle more soured on the East than the East is on him. I 'most inclines to the belief that he's been a gettin' too promiscuous with firearms back yonder, and is now here a lingerin' till the smoke blows over."

To which supposition—being, as it was, one so suited to the history of quite a few men who had lately come to Texas—the other cowboys assented without a murmur. Thus was Mr. Magdalen pursued, even into the prairies, by the spirit of distrust.

But, on the whole, he got along very pleasantly with the other men, chiefly by means of keeping silent and evincing no curiosities. These latter are fatal, in Texas.

The one thing that somewhat annoyed him about the T-Square was the presence of the foreman's daughter. He had come down here especially to get away from all that sort of thing; and now one of the first things that he finds is a gipsy-like little beauty who talks Mexican and English in charming alternation, and rides like an Amazon.

However, she was practically a savage, he thought to himself in consolation, and didn't really count. Her father, Mr. Eslington, had grown old on the T-Square; he had married, so Magdalen seemed to have heard, a Mexican or Spaniard, and Miss Mamie had presumably never seen anything but the prairies, and was just about as wild as the cactus growing thereabout.

In consideration of which, Mr. Magdalen smoothed away his first displeasure by the assurance that she didn't count at all. He rarely saw the girl; and when he did she was usually galloping along, with her hair streaming out behind her like some wild thing, or else was humming some Mexican song or other that he didn't understand and didn't want to.

Magdalen had contracted the habit, after work, of taking solitary rides; and it was in the course of one of these that a curious thing happened to him.

He was galloping at full speed across the open prairie, his hat far back on his head, and his eyes fixed on the horizon. That was what brought him to grief—that gazing out into the wide world, and riding meanwhile into a prairie dog's dugout.

The pony stumbled, fell on his knees, and Mr. Magdalen went whirling off over the animal's ears.

When he tried to move, he found there was something the matter with his ankle. The pony had got up again, and was standing still, grazing; but Mr. Magdalen was lying on the sod, groaning and muttering unpleasant things.

"Oh, you brute!" he said fiercely.

As to whether he meant the pony, the prairie dog, or himself, he had no very clear idea.

As the moments went by, it became more and more evident to him that he was certainly in a fix. He couldn't move without hideous pain, and the boys at the ranch wouldn't miss him for hours to come. He wondered what——

And while he was yet wondering, his pony pricked up its ears, whinnied, and turned to greet Miss Mamie's pony, which just then galloped up, its fair rider in the saddle.

In an instant, she had dismounted and was by Magdalen's side.

"My ankle's twisted, I believe," he said, apologetically.

He was glad some one had come, but he would have preferred any one else.

"Yep," said Miss Mamie, after a hasty examination, "and it's a tollably bad twist to, I reckon. Guess yo' cain't walk nohow, what? Wal, I reckon I'll have to——"

Then, before he could even have time for astonishment, Magdalen found himself being carried in this young girl's arms, and presently being placed in his saddle.

"And now," said Miss Mamie, merely breathing a trifle hard, "if we rides home kinder moderate, I reckon you kin stand it till we gets to th' house."

"How shall I ever thank you?" began Magdalen; but she interrupted him with a "Don't!" and he could do nothing but continue to wonder and to gaze furtively at this magnificent young creature who was riding by his side.

It seemed to him now that he had hitherto been curiously blind in the matter of this girl's evident beauty; and it occurred to him, in a swift flash, that here was a girl so different from those others back in the East, so untrammeled and free, so unsullied by the knowledge of conventions, as to be a perfect revelation, an unsuspected delight.

In the days after his accident, when he lay on a couch in the ranch house, he turned this new idea over and over in his mind, fed it with frequent glimpses of Miss Mamie, as she flitted back and forth through the house, and finally came to the conclusion that it was a pretty good idea.

Miss Mamie's eyes, as he looked at them when she brought him some of those mysterious compounds especially intended for convalescents, seemed to him to become daily more fair, and daily he increased in wonderment at his hitherto blindness.

Why, she was a very prairie flower, a rara avis, an unspoiled child of nature, a beauty blushing unseen in the desert. Why should she not be the one in all the world to prove the truth of his firm belief, that good was to be found only outside of civilization?

And so it came about that Mr. Magdalen, cynic, fell in love with Miss Mamie Eslington completely, unreservedly. Everything about her was a delight to him, from her hair, free to the breezes, to her queer Western speech.

As for her, she allowed him to make love to her without doing much herself beyond appearing to like it.

There was a mysterious twinkle in her eyes all the while, that to the disinterested observer would have been

named humor, though to Magdalen it was love light.

"I observes," said Bad Man Tom, one day, as Magdalen and Mamie started away for a ride together, "that this yere couple is a-trottin' together mighty plenteous of late, and I sights it a comin' that they soon goes in harness together. Which it shorely would be a sightly team."

Mr. Magdalen himself had come to this opinion long ago—namely, that he wanted Mamie to be his wife. The many rides they had taken together, the long talks they had had, consisting chiefly of language on the part of Magdalen and smiling silence on Mamie's side, had made him more and more aware of the many beauties of her nature.

Occasionally he had been startled by sudden lapses from her prairie dialect into perfectly pure English; but she had always reverted just as suddenly, and he had forgotten the occurrence a moment after.

So it happened that, as they rode together one brilliant salmon tinted evening, Magdalen leaned over and said swiftly, passionately, to the girl beside him:

"Miss Mamie, I can't keep on seeing you this way, day after day, without telling you—telling you that I—I love you. Perhaps you've seen it—girls usually do, I believe. But I must tell you. And I want you to be my wife, Mamie. Won't you?"

"Gosh!" said Mamie, "but I'm—I'm skeered! I reckon I'd better ask——"

Then she broke into a musical burst of merriment.

"There," she said, relapsing suddenly into wonderfully pure English and holding out her pretty hand to Magdalen, "take it, you silly boy. Yes, of course I've known it all along, and I'll confess I tried to trap you; only," and she hung her head and blushed so prettily that Magdalen, through all his astonishment, wanted to kiss her, "only—I got caught myself. You see, papa got a private letter from Major Fewsleer, advising him of your real reason for coming out here, and of course papa couldn't keep it from me. And so I——"

Magdalen was kissing her hand rapturously. Then he caught his breath sharply and gasped: "But you—you talk so—so differently!"

"Yes, you blind cynic; of course I do. What do you suppose I was educated at Vassar for, and lived for years in Boston and New York, if I can't speak English?"

"Oh!" gasped Magdalen, "and I thought——"

"Yes—pity, isn't it? But you've no chance to escape now. You thought you were finding a flower untouched by the contamination of civilization; and now you see you weren't, you dear blind boy. Isn't civilization a little good, after all?"

She was leaning toward him; the enchantment of her voice and her eyes came to him like a flood; her beautiful hair was lifted by a passing zephyr until it curled before him like a promise of heaven; and then, as he pressed his lips upon hers, he murmured:

"Civilization is beautiful—if you say so, you little witch!"

Before they reached the ranch again, many more things had occurred which proved that a woman's little finger can twist resolutions that have been years in building.

Magdalen had agreed to take her back to the East—back to civilization, and become himself once more a sociable animal.

Finally, the little witch said roguishly:

"And as I am to take your heart back to civilization, don't you think you had better leave your cynicism somewhere out here on the wild and uncivilized prairies?"

And from the fervor of his assent, it is reasonable for us to believe that he did.

A FIGHTING SOLDIER.

BY LE ROY ARMSTRONG.

The man of whom G Troop was proud. The opportunity that gave Buck Lewis the chance to show his mates that he had brains and bravery as well as bravado.

THEY did say Buck Lewis was a fighting man before ever he came to the fort, but he certainly did not look it.

He was not undersized especially; but then he was not big nor husky; and he did not go around with lowering brow and swinging shoulders and clenched fists and the terror compelling voice of a bruiser.

He was rather slender than otherwise; very straight, but beardless and even sallow. His eyes had a perpetual laugh in them.

For we found, before he had mounted guard three times, that he could laugh when angry as well as when pleased—only it was such a trying and unfair advantage to take of an adversary.

What made his prowess the more surprising was his habit of singing and his easily proved acquaintance with lines of life unknown to the rank of the regular army.

He had some books on a little shelf above his bunk; and he had a way of addressing Saddler Smith as "Horatio," and assuring him that there were more things in heaven and earth than any man in G Troop ever dreamed of.

Sometimes, as he sat on the little bench in front of the quarters, burnishing his carbine or buffing his buttons, he would wail a line or two about the heart bowed down, or warble "Come, for my arms are empty," or throw out his chest and beat a sort of bass drum resonance on the words: "The King of kings, and Lord of lords!"

And that was why we thought he couldn't fight.

But then, it wasn't the first time reputation had outrun a recruit, reaching the fort before him, and leaving a long time before he left. And so G Troop waited for a sign.

It came soon enough. Marcus Sheedy, high private from the second squad room, had been detailed for kitchen duty when he thought he should have had a day of leisure.

He was in a very bad temper; and we had long ago learned to agree with Marcus when the world went wrong with him. Of course, we wanted that "trial by battle"; but I think, after all, we felt a little thrill of dread when we saw Buck Lewis strolling down the plank walk from the sutler's store, and knew Marcus must meet him.

"Get out of my way!" yelled Marcus, his terrible front trembling in passion against the very body of the slighter man.

That was about the time of fatigue call; and before the bugler sounded "assembly" for guard mount, the trouble was all over.

Buck Lewis was washing his hands in a warm spring, and looking down at a tattered pair of trousers; for he was a very tidy soldier. And Marcus Sheedy was sitting exhausted on a cracker box, his limp and useless arms at his sides, his heavy head bent forward and buried in the problem we all were studying: "How did it happen?"

After that, Buck Lewis took rank about with a first lieutenant.

Jim Honan came back to the fort from detail duty with the paymaster, and we thought he would challenge this gay young fellow's right to eminence.

But Jim was prudent, and seldom risked his hard won and long worn laurels unless the venture seemed to offer good returns.

He came from a ride up the valley one day, and lay down on his bunk for a bit of sleep. Buck Lewis was sewing a patch on the sleeve of his jacket, and singing something about those days of old, when knights were bold, and barons held their sway, and a lot more of militia nonsense, when Jim raised up and launched a boot at the minstrel's head.

The projectile was heavy enough, and it came with force enough, but the range was bad; and it beat the wall with a thunderous bump, and fell to the floor noisily just as Lewis announced gaily:

> " My love has golden hair;
> My love's beyond compare."

" Shut up!" roared Honan. " I want to get a little sleep."

" Young gentlemen in the military should learn that the night is made for sleeping, and the day for singing—and sewing on patches," responded Buck Lewis, his smile lighting a little, and his steel blue eyes ranging over his weapons there on the wall before they lifted to Mr. Honan's towering height.

Mr. Honan took up another boot and squared to throw it; but Lewis, his tongue still loitering along the lines:

> " Then what care I
> Though death be nigh?
> I live for love, and die—"

with prolonged dwells on the verbs—reached up gently and fingered the hilt of his saber.

It was a challenge read instantly, and the other accepted it as became a swordsman. They were front to front in the middle of the room.

They were in such earnest as " knights of old " themselves could hardly have surpassed. They were fighting with weapons made for mortal combat.

And for what? For nothing. One was piqued and angry at being defied; one was resolute against tyranny.

But both were reckless and prodigal, as becomes a soldier fed on the air of the mountains and fanned by danger.

It was no stage clashing of steel on steel. It was the swift advance, the light retreat, the thrust, the guard, the feint, the fierce right cut, till we slight men, packed between the windows, forgot to breathe, and lived alone with our eyes.

Jim Honan's wrist was bleeding. There was a rent in the tight blue flannel that covered his thigh—a rent which marked a partial failure of his parry. There was a touch upon his forehead, where the red blood looked out but would not flow.

And there was the heavy tramp of a spurred boot down the porch outside, and we knew " the old man " was coming.

" 'Tention—officer of the day!" called the orderly, throwing open the door of the squad room just across the hall.

He would be here in a moment, and all discipline demanded a truce.

But the sound might as well have been the tap of an oak leaf on the roof, as far as Buck Lewis was concerned. He was pushing the fight, his left hand clasped on his back, his right foot advanced, his blade flashing a better obedience to his resolute will with every minute that passed.

Honan, catching the first opportunity, abandoned his guard, and retired to his corner.

" Good thing for you," he growled; for an Irishman's tongue is never vanquished.

Lewis looked at him a moment in surprise and disappointment. Then he said:

"I'll go down to the hay corral with you, Jim, and argue this out."

He found no response, and had but time to stand at "attention" as the officer of the day walked into the room.

"What's the matter with your forehead, Honan?" asked "the old man," for his swift eyes saw everything.

"Scratched it, sir," replied the soldier; for he was loyal.

"Pick up these things, men, and keep your room in order," commanded the officer, and he was gone.

In the moment of that visit, Buck Lewis regained his steady temper, and he dropped his saber in its scabbard again. But he could not forego applying the lesson.

"Don't try to turn day into night in the army, Jim," he remarked, as he threaded his needle anew. "According to general orders, 'taps' don't come for hours and hours yet."

And after that, Buck Lewis ranked any major in the regiment.

Of course, we didn't run from him, or tremble in his presence, or anything like that. When a soldier man, however formidable, wants a fight, he can always get it. That is what recruiting officers are for.

But we respected him. We always followed him into his combats with the belief that he would be "at home."

He didn't look for trouble: but if ever trouble came hunting for him, it found him.

And so it happened that Corporal Quinn went up to the hospital, one day, and troubled the steward for some surgeon plaster and a stitch or two; and Billy Kensel, who maintained a fugitive resort just off the reservation, took to his bed and lay there till his ribs were better; and Monte Joe, who haunted the fort for a time after pay day, shook hands rather awkwardly, his right arm being composed in clay on account of a pistol wound.

But we didn't really prize the man till that time when "The Kid" swept terror into the fort.

You know "The Kid." There is the gayest bandit that ever warmed a stolen saddle. There is the bloodiest robber and most merciless murderer that ever harried the border with his midnight rides.

And there is the slipperiest rascal that ever fled from vengeance, the luckiest dog that ever was outlawed.

He had abandoned the up country several years ago, and we had not been troubled by him; but so well was his character of ranger established that we were not surprised when, one week after having devastated a valley in the Gila country, we heard of him on the Rio Verde.

His last attack was in the nature of a defiance, for the little settlement laid under contribution was almost in sight of the flag at the fort.

The messengers who rode into camp with the news were wild with terror, as well they might be, and were inclined to implore the help of the soldiers.

"Don't beg," cried the commanding officer. "Demand! That's what the army is here for. Blow 'Boots and Saddles,'" he shouted to the trumpeter, standing at the guard house door.

Buck Lewis had come off guard that morning, and, as is the custom in well officered garrisons, he was entitled to a day of liberty.

He chose to clamber up the mountains at the back of the fort, and to stretch himself on the ledge of rock that commanded the valley from Eagle Pass to the warm spring; and there he lay, droning.

He didn't see the messengers ride into camp, and of course didn't hear the bustle they created away down there in that little cluster of adobe houses. But he did hear the bugle call, and he roused to study the situation.

He saw a commotion extending from the adjutant's office clear down to the stables, and he knew that trim dark figure standing alone by the guard house was "the old man," sometimes called the colonel.

Whether it was simply exercise—one of those freaks commission sometimes develops to catch the soldier napping—or whether a raid in earnest, the slim warrior up there on the ledge could not determine.

But he comforted himself with the reflection that "a good soldier never does anything unless commanded," and so composed himself again and watched the movement.

There was a cluster of men about the ordnance room.

"Must be cartridges," said Buck Lewis, pleasantly. "But that may be a part of the old man's play. I hate these mock affairs. There they go to the commissary—getting rations, I reckon. Well, they are making it look like business, any way.

"Don't know as I ever had the entire force of the fort in review before. Position has its advantages, too. Now, for instance, I would rather lie here with my chin in my hands and my elbows on a cushion of moss and leaves, than go sweating around that bloody old fort, or ride like Tam O'Shanter out of it."

He saw the swift forming of the line, knew without hearing it that the men were "counting fours," noted the trot through the gate, and the gallop as soon as the valley was reached.

But what caught his especial attention was the size of the command. Surely every available man in the fort must be mounted and riding down there in the leader's dust—carbine in boot, saber at side, and a haversack of crackers and drief beef on the saddle.

"Peace be with you," he said, softly, releasing one of his hands and wafting a salute down toward them.

He watched them turn into the Warm Spring canyon, greeted the pillar of dust that told they had struck the plain beyond, then started at sight of another pillar of dust just drifting into Apache Pass.

It was another party, and it was coming up the valley.

"Indians—by the Lord!" he ejaculated, and sat upright as his trained eye told him some marauding band had given "the old man" a slip, and was riding straight at the defenseless fort.

That was serious enough. But an instant later, he chilled with something very like fear. For, true as a target shot, clear as bugle call, came to his soul the assurance that this was "The Kid."

"Not another Injun in Arizone would dare——" he began, and was on his feet before he knew it.

He looked down there in the fort, and saw the lieutenant's wife come tripping down her veranda steps and hurry along the walk to the captain's house.

"She doesn't know," said Buck Lewis.

But his speech was lost in impetuous action. Down slopes so steep that coyotes could not climb them, across stretches of rock and arid sand, through chaparral that strove to hold him, till he gained the boundary of the reservation.

The pillar of dust had advanced from Apache Pass, had left the sheep ranch far to the right, had marked a trail across the hay land, and had stopped there just at the edge of the old corral.

"It will take them ten minutes to loot the cook house," said Buck Lewis, as he crept on hands and knees to the cover of the outer buildings.

Hurried steps were coming toward him. He had no arms, and he groaned as he realized that sandy ground produced no missile stones.

But he ran to the edge of the building, determined to pounce on the first savage who thrust his uncombed head into view. The shadow served notice. He bounded out, launched like a catamount, and landed—on the sergeant of the guard!

That sight angered him.

"Are you fellows running away?" he demanded.

"It's 'The Kid' and his band."

gasped a soldier, tossing one fragment of a frightened look over his shoulder, then diving into the sage brush again.

"Do you know the women are down there alone?" Lewis went on.

He was growing perceptibly calmer. In the added demand for fighting men, his spirits lifted, and he trod on the borders of gaiety.

"I'm going in there to take care of them. If you fellows are white men, you'll——"

But his words were lost in the sultry air, and he went on alone.

"Gay young people," he muttered, "and the Government pays them thirteen dollars a month!"

That reminded him of the barrack room ballad,

> "Yes, I think you'd make a soldier;
> Yes, I think you'd make a soldier;
> Yes, I think you'd make a soldier—
> In the year of jubilee!"

and it brought back his spirit of daring.

As he passed the open space between the barracks and the orderly room, smoke pushed through the roof of the cook house, and he knew that "The Kid" had fed.

A barking dog at the post surgeon's quarters told they had crossed the parade ground and were on a tour of plunder.

He struck into the area at the side of the captain's house, hammered on a door, and informed all auditors that he knew a bank—he knew a bank—he knew a bank whereon the wild thyme grew.

The women were there in an inner room, and they blessed every hair of his sunny head as he strode through the hall with a laugh in his eye and a word of good cheer and hope.

He fingered the arms that hung in the hall. There was a gun that he joyed to handle, with a magazine full and every rivet shining. There was a sword that was fit for a king; and he buckled it on him, announcing in a steady tone and audible:

"It is a sword of Spain, the ice brook's temper," then swung wide the front door and strode out on the porch.

They saw him. They were clustered —more than a dozen strong—on the surgeon's veranda, watching the fire on his sitting room floor and fearing the curtains and books would not burn.

They saw him and charged. Two went down, but the rest came on. They knew the strength of the fort, and they had seen it go galloping away.

Fire was rising from the roof of the cook house, red flame was showing in the surgeon's windows, and a chattering, frantic band of Apaches was upon him.

How he fought there alone against them, how he guarded that door and the women behind it, how he laughed when his gun was empty, and nothing but steel was between him and them, what magic hedged him about and turned their bullets away—all these are the wonders of the Rio Verde even unto this day.

The sergeant of the guard didn't know—poor, shamed, recovered hero! Through the tears of his rage, as he rounded the house, he could only see Buck Lewis, alone and in need of succor; could only rush like a demon at the head of his men; could only follow with oaths that beaten band as it fled to the hay corral for its horses—fled into the arms of the furious captain, who had lashed us lighter men across the valley, straight at that double column of flame.

"But 'The Kid' got away?"

Oh, certainly. "The Kid" always gets away. But he went alone, and he never drew rein till he bathed his feet in the Gila River.

"And he'll never come back any more," said the captain, as the women, reading of his ravages down there on the Mexican side, trembled and thought of the day when Buck Lewis stood between them and Apache fury.

And that's why I like a fighting man, even in the army.

A FIND AT THE FORD.

BY FRANK H. SWEET.

The strange addition to the Grooms' household and the sort of investment it turned out to be. The mystery of a madness which brought only good to fellow beings.

NO one knew where he came from, but that did not matter; no one cared.

Inside of a week, he was as much at home as any of the boys; and he seemed to have forgotten how he came to be there, or that there could be any reason for his going away.

Old Grooms had found him near the lower ford. It was a cold day, and Grooms was returning from town with the mail.

The sight of the small sturdy figure trudging on ahead made him quicken his horses. The river was but a short distance away, and the bridge, which had been destroyed by the spring floods, had not been replaced.

Few people traveled in this country except on horseback or in wagons, and occasional pedestrians were accustomed to wait at the fords for passing teams.

Grooms took some bundles from the seat and placed them in the body of the wagon, then he shouted for the boy to wait.

But the small figure trudged merrily on, and his clear whistle came floating back through the crisp air. When he reached the bank of the river, he disappeared.

A few minutes later, Grooms reined in his horses with a sharp jerk.

"Tuk to the water, fer a fac'!" he ejaculated, and, in his surprise, he allowed the whip to slip from his grasp.

Before he could recover it, the swift current had whirled it far beyond his reach.

Out in the river, the boy's head bobbed up and down. Evidently he was a powerful swimmer; for, in spite of the current, he rapidly neared the opposite bank.

Grooms watched him until he emerged and shook himself like a Newfoundland; a moment later the clear whistle came merrily across the water.

"Wall, I declare, ef that ain't the beatenes'!"

And Grooms leaned forward and brought his open palm down upon the nearest horse with a resounding slap. As the animal plunged forward, he caught the reins in both hands. For a moment, it seemed as though the wagon would be overturned; then the horses quieted down.

"Hit's the cur'uses' thing I ever did see," the man continued, as he guided them skilfully across the river; "water cold's ice, 'n' runnin' like mad. An' fer a fac', that chap tuk to hit jes' like a duck. Beatenes' thing I ever did see!"

Chuckling quietly to himself, he urged the horses up the bank and started them into a gentle trot.

Out in the fields, the brown shocks of corn stood like long rows of sentinels guarding the armies of yellow pumpkins which were scattered over the ground. Quail whistled to each other across the dry stubble, and occasionally a chipmunk could be seen scurrying along the zigzag fence, with an acorn or a walnut to be added to his winter store.

As the farmer came opposite the boy,

his chuckle broadened into a good humored laugh.

"Pile in here, youngster!" he called, cheerily. "Ridin' ar' jes' cheap's walkin', an' a mighty sight easier. Come fur?"

But the boy only stared at him with an expressionless face. It was only when the invitation was repeated that he seemed to comprehend. Then he climbed into the wagon with a pleased grin.

He was apparently twelve or fourteen years of age, and would have been handsome were it not for his perpetual smile. Grooms looked at him curiously.

"Come fur?" he repeated, as he once more urged his horses into a trot.

The boy looked puzzled.

"I dunno," he said, doubtfully.

"Wal, whar ye boun' fer?"

Again the face clouded.

"I dunno."

Then the grin returned and the head began to bob vigorously. "Yes, yes; I reckon so."

And he looked as pleased as though he had solved a difficult problem.

Grooms gazed at him pityingly.

"Not all thar," he said, half aloud. "An' hit's a pity, too; fer he seems a likely young feller. Strong an' harnsome an' the bes' swimmer I ever seed."

For some time, they rode on in silence, the boy gazing about with a pleased, half wondering expression, and the man watching him covertly. At length, he asked slowly:

"What's your name, sonny? Name—name!" he repeated, as the boy gazed at him vacantly.

"Oh, yes, yes! I dunno—Jimmie." And he laughed gleefully as he looked into his companion's face for approbation. "Jimmie—I dunno." And once more he bobbed his head vigorously.

"Wal, never mind, Jimmie."

Grooms placed his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder.

"Hit's all right, an' I reckon you'll be tuk car' of like the res' of us. Hev some candy?"

Reaching down into the wagon, he selected a small package, which he opened carefully and offered to the boy.

"I bought hit fer the children," he said, genially, "but I reckon thar'll be 'nough to go roun'."

Jimmie looked at him inquiringly for a moment, then he selected one of the brightest pieces, which he placed in his mouth with evident satisfaction.

But, when he was urged to take more, he put his hands behind him with an odd little laugh; more urging only made him shake his head vigorously.

"Wal, ye've got manners, fer a fac'," said Grooms, as he tied up the package and replaced it in the wagon. "None of my boys would 'a' stopped, so long as thar war any lef'."

Gradually they had approached the foot of the mountains. An abrupt turn, and they found themselves at the entrance of a small valley.

It was a mile or more in extent, and cut through the center by a slow moving river. The ground was low and flat and covered with a thick growth of rowen.

Grooms gazed at it with much satisfaction.

"No sech grass in the country we've been comin' through," he said. "I reckon this valley's the bes' lan' in ten mile."

The boy did not answer. He was looking about curiously and whistling softly to himself.

Presently they left the main road and took a path which followed the windings of the river. Near the upper end of the valley was a small unpainted farmhouse.

Some years before, Grooms had come into the country and selected this place against the advice of the neighbors. It was good grass land, they said, but not safe for a building site: there

was always danger of sudden overflow from the river.

But two years had passed without serious damage, and he was beginning to laugh at their prophecies.

As the wagon stopped in front of the farmhouse, several half grown boys came trooping out.

" Here you, Tom an' Bill, take out these hosses an' see they're rubbed down good. You, Bob, tote them bundles inter the house, an' take car' you don't bust a paper. Now, sonny," turning to Jimmie, who was gazing at the boys with a friendly grin, " s'posen we go 'n' see ef we 'n find something to eat."

With a chuckling laugh, the boy sprang lightly to the ground; but, instead of following him into the house, he turned and helped Bob unload the wagon.

Not until the last bundle was cared for, did he follow the old farmer into the kitchen.

That evening, Grooms and his wife held a long conversation.

" Wal," said the farmer at last, as he began to rake the ashes over the coals, preparatory to going to bed, " I reckon we'll hatter keep him a few days, anyhow. He seems right handy, an' kin he'p the boys 'bout shuckin'. Nex' time I go to town, I'll take him back with me."

But, before that time came, they were all anxious for him to stay. Even Mrs. Grooms declared that he was " pow'ful handy roun' the house."

She set him to cleaning potatoes and washing floors, and, after a time, began to intrust him with the dishes and churn.

He was quick to learn, and seemed anxious to please; but it was always necessary for some one to be with him. When left alone, he would forget his work and begin to chuckle and talk to himself.

Outside, he was a general favorite with the boys. He was always good natured and smiling, and willing to do whatever they told him. Most of their chores gradually became his, and he accepted them with the gratitude of one who has been accorded a special favor.

One or more of the boys usually accompanied him and stood by while he did the work. At first, the old farmer tried to keep them from imposing upon him; but Jimmie seemed so distressed at being deprived of some of the chores, that the boys were gradually left to themselves.

After seeding and shucking, there was little farm work except the chores. During the winter, the boys attended the public school over on the ridge, and Jimmie was left more to himself.

When he was not at work in the house or barn, he was generally down by the river, hunting musk rats and minks.

Late in the winter, there was an unusually heavy fall of snow, and the roads were impassable for weeks. As soon as they were partly opened, Grooms went to town.

When he returned, he looked annoyed.

" Court sits Monday," he said to his wife, " an' I'm on jury. Mebbe I'll be gone a week, an' mebbe more. The roads are that bad, I don't reckon I 'n git home nights."

" Oh, wal, hit don't matter," she answered, placidly. " Thar's only the chores, an' the boys kin do them. You might board 'long of Cousin Sam Varley."

That night, it commenced snowing again: soft and fine at first, but increasing in violence as the wind set in from the northeast.

Monday morning, it was still falling, and the wind cut one like a knife.

" No sorter use to look fer me back till the weather settles," said Grooms, as he put on his great coat and buttoned it up round his neck. " Hit's goin' to be a tight squeeze to git inter town, but I reckon I 'n fetch hit. I

sh'll go hossback. You boys mus' look arter things car'ful."

And he pulled his fur cap down over his ears and tied the strings. "Give the cattle water reg'lar, an' see 't the hogs an' hens don't git snowed up; an' don't ferget ole Charlie's salt."

Jimmie was outside, holding the horse and whistling softly to himself. When Grooms climbed into the saddle, he gazed at him vacantly.

"Wal, good by, sonny," and the man's hand rested for a moment upon the boy's shoulder. "Take car' of the fambly while I'm gone, an' be a good boy. I'll done bring you sompin' from town."

Jimmie stopped whistling, but made no answer. Gazing at his expressionless features, the man's own face clouded.

"Poor fool!" he muttered, as he rode away. "I don't reckon he understood."

All that day and the next it continued to snow; then the wind came round to the south, and it changed to rain.

The country had not known such a storm for years, and Mrs. Grooms and the older boys began to look anxious.

In the morning, it was still raining, and the boys came back from their chores with anxious faces.

"The water's in the barn yard," said Tom, fearfully, "an' hit's still risin'. I reckon we better take the cattle up to the high groun'."

Mrs. Grooms threw back a shutter and looked out. It was barely light, and the driving rain almost blinded her; but she saw enough to make her turn pale.

All the lower end of the valley was a broad sheet of water, and above the noise of the storm could be heard the more ominous roar of the stream as it came rushing down from the mountain.

"Yes, I reckon ye'll hatter be gittin' 'em out," she said, in an anxious voice, as she turned back from the window. "Thar's a heap of snow in the mount'n, an' I 'low the river's goin' to rise furder yit. Drive 'em high up 's you kin, pigs an' all."

It was nearly noon before the boys had accomplished their task. By that time, the water had crept up from the barn yard to within a few feet of the door.

There were still the chickens and the ducks to be cared for, and these were carried into the house, one by one, and fastened in the garret. When all were in a place of safety, Mrs. Grooms returned to the window.

"I 'low we better be movin' up stairs ourse'fs," she said, in a frightened voice. "The water's done hid the doorstep, an' I kin feel the house a-tremblin'. I wisht your paw war here."

After dinner, the rain slackened a little, and the sun came out from behind the clouds; but before night, the dark masses had closed together, and the storm was once more beating against the house.

And, inch by inch and foot by foot, the water advanced upon them.

It crept into the kitchen and drove them up the stairs. It followed them, step by step, until they had to take refuge upon the bed.

When it became dark, they lit the lantern and waited, the older ones silent and watchful, and the younger ones crying to themselves with low, frightened sobs.

Outside, they could hear the lapping of the water as it rushed by. Now and then, the whole building trembled under the shock of a passing tree or piece of timber.

They could hear it as it ground along the side of the building, tearing off clapboards and casings. Often they held their breath in dread of the house going to pieces.

All through the day, Jimmie had been with them, working as though he realized the imminence of the danger; but, as it grew dark, he suddenly disappeared.

As the hours went by, the shocks grew more frequent. They could feel the house tremble and quiver, and feared that every fresh blow would tear it from its foundations.

Suddenly they heard a strange cry at the window: a white face was looking at them through the glass.

Tom sprang from the bed; the water by this time had risen until it was nearly up to his knees.

"Why, maw," he cried, as he threw open the window, "hit's Jimmie, an' he's got our boat! I wonder how ever he foun' hit?"

In a moment, they were all crowding around him. Mrs. Grooms held the baby in her arms. Outside, Jimmie was holding on to the window sill with one hand, while he made eager motions with the other.

At the same time, he was uttering short impatient cries.

"He wants us to git in the boat," said Mrs. Grooms, as she snatched a blanket from the bed and wrapped it around the baby. "Hurry!" as the house again shook under the blow of some passing object.

Tom and Bill sprang into the boat and helped Jimmie hold it in position; then the rest crowded in as rapidly as possible.

Suddenly a black object came rushing down upon them: it just grazed the boat, but the blow was sufficient to loosen the boys' grasp.

As the boat whirled away, Jimmie sprang into the water. Mrs. Grooms heard the splash.

"What's that?" she asked, fearfully.

"Jimmie," answered Tom, hesitatingly. "I reckon he's done gone arter Nettie an' little Fred; they hadn' got in. But hit's no sorter use: nothin' could git this boat back now."

Then he added, under his breath: "But I'd 'a' gone arter him, ef I'd 'a' know'd how to swim."

Mrs. Grooms sank back with a low cry. But, as Tom had said, nothing could be done now; they could only wait.

In the confusion, the lantern had been put out: now there was only blackness —blackness and the roar of the water and the wild beating of the storm.

As the hours went by, they drifted in the quiet places along the banks; they were whirled and tossed by the rapid currents of the river's center; they ran into snags and tree tops, and were beaten and bruised by floating trees and débris.

Morning found them many miles down the river. At last, a current bore them into a quiet nook, and the farmer whose house overlooked the place came down and rescued them.

Back near the foot of the mountains, a horseman was making his way slowly through the snow and mud.

At times, he was obliged to dismount and lead his horse over a deep drift; then he would find himself toiling painfully through a red sea of clinging mud. When he reached the head of the valley, he stopped with a low cry of dismay.

The valley was a broad lake, and where the house had been was only black, mocking water.

For a long time, the man stood there, gazing silently; then he walked slowly along the shore of the lake, searching for something he dreaded to find.

Hour after hour went by, and still he searched on; and his back was bent, and he walked like a man who was very old and feeble.

At last, he paused near a small thicket. As he did so, he heard a sudden cry:

"Daddy! Oh, daddy! Here on the water!"

A quick flush came into his face, and the stoop left his shoulders.

Reaching forward, he parted the bushes, and there, not a dozen feet from shore, was a small raft made of chairs and benches. On it was a little girl of ten or twelve and a small boy.

"Nettie! Freddie!"

In a moment, he was in the water, dragging them to land.

"Where's your maw an' the res'? Ain't they safe?"

"I reckon so; they done went off in the boat. Hit broke loose 'fore we got in. Jimmie come back an' fixed the raf' fer us."

"An' where is Jimmie?"

The little girl's face suddenly became grave and overcast.

"I 'low he's gone dead," she said, soberly. "He done swim behin' us all night, an' kep' off the logs an' things. When hit come mornin', he looked awful white an' tired. I ast him to git on the raf' 'long of us, but he jes' shook his head an' sorter laffed. I reckon he 'lowed 'twarn't strong 'nough to hol' us all.

"By 'm by, he waved his han' to us an' let go. I seen him when he went down."

She paused a moment, and then asked in a low voice: "Don't you think Jimmie was brave, daddy?"

But the man did not answer; he was wiping the water from Freddy's curls. When he looked up, there were tears in his eyes.

TOO LATE.

THE words of love I never said to thee
  I whisper now,
The tenderness I might have given thee
  I offer now,
As at thy feet, who hopeless knelt to me,
  I, hopeless, bow.

The wintry bush in yonder hedgerow growing,
  A rose adorns,
And near and far are snowy clusters blowing,
  Where late were thorns;
But still my heart, nor bud nor blossom knowing,
  Unpitied mourns.

I see the bird that to his mate is winging—
  His mate so dear;
The very heart within his breast is singing
  As he draws near,
And I, O love, too late my love am bringing—
  Thou dost not hear!

Florence Earle Coates.

KIND HEARTS.

HOWE'ER it be, it seems to me
  'Tis only noble to be good;
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
  And simple faith than Norman blood.

Tennyson.

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A TANGLE OF TRAILS.

BY W. BERT FOSTER.

The strange experiences of a customs inspector on the track of a smuggler, who is a particularly slippery customer of the kid glove stamp. A tale of outdoor adventure on the Newfoundland coast.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.

JOHN OLMSTEAD TAKES A VACATION.

THE office of the chief of the Bureau of Customs, in the city of St. Johns, Newfoundland, at three o'clock in the afternoon on one of the few really clear days which visit this "City of Fogs" in the short summer. The silence is disturbed only by the rustle of papers in the hands of the chief, who sits at a desk in the center of the room. Suddenly he leans forward and taps a bell sharply.

"Who's in the office?" he asks the orderly who answers the ring.

"Mr. Olmstead's at his desk, sir."

"Olmstead, eh? Well, send him here."

The door opens and closes again and then opens once more and reveals John Olmstead, assistant customs inspector, twenty four, good height, broad shoulders and muscular frame, with a smooth, clearly cut face crowned by thick hair of a rather lightish brown—altogether a good specimen of the intelligent, healthy, clean blooded Englishman.

"I've some special work for you, Olmstead."

The chief removed his glasses and tapped with them lightly upon the desk while he eyed his subordinate.

"Here's a report from Peterson regarding that case of suspected smuggling. He has been at work on it several days and—as usual—has blundered. He says he had a suspicion that a man aboard the—the—I declare! Peterson writes a shocking hand. The Sea something or other—Seagull, or Sea Eagle, or something of the kind. At any rate, she's a two stick craft, built after the style of these 'pinkies' from up the coast, and is quite speedy in a gale of wind. Peterson's seen her in here once or twice before.

"Well, he obtained some information from this fellow while he was intoxicated that may be of value. But *you*, Olmstead, will have to verify Peterson's conclusions. He gathers that the schooner goes frequently to Fogo—puts in at Seldom-come-by or Little Seldom-come-by for an anchorage—and he thinks her cargoes are landed somewhere near there—perhaps at Joe

Bolt's Arm, or some quiet spot on the mainland.

"However, Peterson has come to a standstill himself," pursued the chief. "He thought he had his man safely housed—left him sleeping off the effects of his potations in a room at Crippett's place on the water front. But this morning the man was gone—and so was the schooner—this Seagull. Whether the fellows suspect anything I don't know; but I've called Peterson off the case.

"Now," concluded the chief, "I want you to go to Fogo and investigate the matter from that end. You can go on the next fishing steamer."

"There's one leaves tomorrow morning that sometimes takes passengers."

"Good! You're to take a trip along the coast for your health, we'll say," and the chief came as near smiling as his dignity would allow, while Olmstead bowed himself out.

An hour later John Olmstead opened the door of a rather nice looking house in the better part of St. Johns. It was already growing dark, but there was no light in the hall or parlor and he entered the latter apartment before discovering that it was already occupied.

There was a sudden exclamation in a feminine voice, a rustle of a gown, and a girl appeared in the gray light which fell through the high window. Behind her was a second figure; it was evident to Olmstead that his arrival had been particularly inopportune.

"Beg pardon—" he began, but the girl interrupted.

"Oh, Jack! is it you? Why, you're early."

"Not very. Time flies—*sometimes*. Saving gas?"

The girl had reached him and with a hand on either lapel of his coat shook him slightly.

"Bad boy!" she whispered, hiding her face against his breast.

But Olmstead reached up and lit the gas. "Let's see the other culprit," he said.

"Aw—now, really, Olmstead," began the man.

He still remained in the background and by the way he stammered and tugged at his yellow mustache it was evident that his embarrassment was real.

"Oh, hullo, Byron! So it's you? I thought it must be one of those fellows from the barracks. They're always hanging around Elsa——"

But his sister had run from the room and did not appear again until dinner.

Meanwhile the two young men grew quite sociable over their cigars. They were distantly related, but the family resemblance was apparent in little but the hair. Cranford Byron was tall and slim, with rather sharp features and eyes divided only by an abrupt partition of nose that was almost beak-like in its curve.

"How's business at the bureau, Olmstead?" asked Byron lazily.

"Slow; in fact, I'm going to clear out for a week or two."

"Y' don't say!" exclaimed Byron. "Vacation, eh?"

"Umm. First I've had in eight months." Olmstead was smoking placidly.

"You fellows in the government offices take it easy."

"Think so? You'd ought to try it, my boy. Why, I feel all run down. Chief said I could go, so I'm off in the morning."

"You look like an invalid. Where you going?" asked Cranford, with mild interest.

"Oh, up the coast somewhere, I guess."

"Deliver me from *that*," said the other. "I was up there last year. Dreariest place God ever made—this Newfoundland."

Just then dinner was announced, and upon Elsa's reappearance Cranford Byron's first words were:

"Should think you'd be awfully lonely, Miss Elsa, with your brother away."

"With Jack away?" repeated the girl, a puzzled frown marring her brow.

Olmstead tried to catch her eye, but it didn't work. "I'm an ass!" he thought. "I should have told Elsa first."

Meanwhile his two companions were getting into difficulties over the announcement.

"He's just told me about it," said Cranford.

"About what?"

"Why, his vacation."

"Vacation! Why, he never told me a thing. Jack! Jack! Has Colonel Mackenzie really given you a vacation?"

"I thought you knew, Miss Elsa," said Cranford. His sharp eyes alternately sought the faces of brother and sister. "Olmstead told me he was going in the morning."

"Where are you going, Jack? And you never told me a word about it!" Elsa forgot to eat in her amazement.

"Why—er—you see——" began Olmstead.

"Hope I didn't let out a state secret," said Cranford wickedly

"No—oh, no! But you see——"

"You never said a thing about it!" broke in his sister. "I believe you were going to try to get off without letting me know. Now, isn't that mean!"

"Nonsense, Elsa!"

"Where are you going?"

"Up Fogo way," said Olmstead desperately.

"To Fogo Island! And you just *know* how much I want to go up the east coast," cried the girl.

"Oh, not in a fishing boat, Elsa."

But his sister still pouted. "You might have planned to go in something different," she said.

"How are you going, Olmstead?" inquired Cranford.

"On Marble & Co's. steamer—the Anita."

"And going up there all alone, too!" cried Elsa. "Suppose something should happen to you? I shan't take a moment's comfort while you are away."

"Nonsense!" and Olmstead laughed. "You and Mrs. Buttrick will get along very nicely without me. By the by, where is Mrs. B.?"

"Gone out. And I shall be just as lonesome as can be!"

"What! with Byron here, to look after you? I'll leave you in his especial care."

"I'd be delighted—I'm sure—to accept the responsibility," Cranford hastened to say. "But the truth is, I'm going up on the Anita myself."

"What's that?" exclaimed Olmstead. "I thought you wouldn't go up the coast——"

But his sister broke in with: "Oh, will you go to Fogo, too, Mr. Byron? Isn't that nice! You'll see that nothing happens to Jack?"

"Most certainly, Miss Elsa, I'll do all in my small power to ship him back to you safe and sound——"

"Labeled 'Glass, handle with care,'" finished Olmstead, grimly. "But I say, Byron. I thought you wouldn't go up the coast again for—for—well, something handsome?"

"Have to do some things we dislike, in this world," returned Cranford, coolly. "I haven't said I *wanted* to go now, have I? But it will be lots jollier to have you along . . . I've got to go for the firm. Some of our shipments didn't tally right last spring. But I didn't know Marble's steamer was going so soon."

"Humph! that's so. You are in the shipping business. I'd forgot you were a member of Chambers & Joyce. Well, I'm delighted to hear you're going," and Olmstead tried to throw real heartiness into his voice.

But as he went to his room he thought: "Now what the mischief shall I do with the fellow when we get to Fogo? And—did he really intend going before, or is this a sudden freak? Bah! I've taken to lying myself and I

must needs suspect everybody else. I'd make a beautiful detective, now, wouldn't I? I don't see but I'll have to drop him overboard to get rid of him. I—I wish Elsa had set her interest in some other fellow, though."

When the fussy little Anita steamed into the harbor at Seldom-come-by, ten days later, Olmstead was still troubled by the same problem. Byron had stuck to him like a burr.

The town—made up of uneven rows of low buildings, with here and there a more pompous one of two or three stories—lay sprawled upon the inner shore of the bay. It was quite a busy place at this season of the year.

There were several vessels in the roadstead and two or three at the wharves, either discharging or taking aboard their cargoes. Some were two masted schooners of about the size of the craft for which he was looking; but it was getting dusky when the Anita made her landing and Olmstead could make out the names of but few.

Some adventurous person, with more faith in the future of Seldom-come-by than good judgment, had erected a three story hotel. Occasionally a tourist stumbled upon the place; the majority of the hotel's patrons, however, were men in the fish trade. The entire town was saturated with the odor of dried fish.

"Nice place this," Cranford Byron said, as they went ashore. "You'll have an interesting vacation, Olmstead. Let's get up to the hotel. Is that all the luggage you've got? You're traveling light for a long vacation."

"Always do," Olmstead declared; but to himself he added: "Now, hang the fellow! What does he mean by his inquisitiveness? I *must* shake him, and that's all there is to it."

Cranford, however, did not propose to be shaken. He took the lead at the hotel and before Olmstead knew what he was about had secured one room for them both.

"Oh, hold on, old man," said the customs inspector; "we'd better each have a room, hadn't we?"

"This is all right. There's two beds in it, you know," Cranford responded. "You leave it to me. I've been here before and know the ropes."

"Well, I may stay longer than you," said Olmstead, rather weakly.

"Time enough to change then, if you do. Besides," and Cranford laughed, "I promised your sister I'd look out for you . . . It's near dinner time and you can get quite a decent meal here; at least, decent as compared with what was served us on the boat."

Olmstead sat down at the table in anything but a pleasant state of mind. He never did like to be "bossed" and Cranford was taking the lead in a most vexatious way. If it had not been for Elsa the customs inspector would have been strongly tempted to seek some cause for quarreling with the fellow.

"Now, see here! You must let me order," Cranford began. "I know this place. We'll have a bit of fish, and then a roast, with something lighter afterward—eh? And something to 'wet our whistles,' too—what say?"

Then he began on the waitress, giving specific directions how everything should be prepared and served.

"Come, come!" said Olmstead. "You'd better go out and apply for the cook's berth."

But he began to feel happier as his appetite was appeased. Certainly Cranford had ordered a good dinner—and he was quite pressing in his hospitality. Especially did he urge the wine upon his companion, who began to be more at peace with the world in general.

Cranford seemed in the best of spirits, too. But when the salad came he declared it unfit to eat and, with much righteous indignation, carried the dish back to the kitchen himself with the firmly expressed intention of showing the cook how to make salad properly. From which he returned in ten minutes or so, smilingly triumphant, with the waitress at his heels bearing

a fresh salad, and with another bottle of wine in his hand.

"See here!" he said, rousing Olmstead from his contemplation of the wreck of viands on the table, "I've found a treasure—besides having taught another man how to prepare salad for civilized human beings to eat. Look at it. It's real port—and old, too, I'll stake my reputation as—as a maker of salads."

"Guess I've had enough wine," objected Olmstead. "I'll try your salad, though."

"Oh, come, now! don't leave a fellow in the lurch that way—with a whole bottle, too," and Cranford poured a generous glass and set it before the customs inspector.

There was a full glass beside his own plate, and he ate and drank, his tongue running almost incessantly.

Olmstead became oddly silent. He ceased eating and lay back in his chair again. Cranford leaned across the table and once more filled his glass.

"Have some more, old man," he said.

"Don't think much of it," remarked Olmstead, bluntly. "It tastes bitter."

"Nonsense! You must be losing your taste."

"I don't know about *that;* but I'm getting confoundedly sleepy," admitted the other.

"This salt air—it's great," said Cranford. "You'll sleep like a log for the first few nights you're here. I did last year."

"Heigh-o! 'Most through, Cranford? I'll be asleep in my chair next." He covered a most prodigious yawn.

"All right. Finish your wine, man."

Olmstead, sitting half around in his chair, raised the glass. Cranford beckoned to the waitress for the reckoning and when he turned toward his companion again the empty glass was just being set down.

"Come along," Cranford said. "I'll have to carry you to bed if you don't come now."

"Never — was — so — sleepy!" declared the other, his words punctuated with yawns. With dragging footsteps he went up the two flights to their room. "Lucky there ain't any more stairs in this bally old hotel," he grumbled.

He removed his coat and vest, then his collar and tie, and kicked off his shoes. Cranford busied himself at the dressing case and kept his back toward his companion.

"I'm—as—sleepy—as——" Olmstead's words ended in unintelligible mutterings. The bed creaked. There followed a prolonged sigh—almost a snore.

Cranford turned quickly. His thin face worked nervously as he approached the bed.

Olmstead had flung himself, half dressed as he was, upon it. His face was buried in the pillow and he was breathing heavily. The other shook him slightly; but he lay like a log.

Cranford turned to the dressing case. His face was pale and his hand trembled as he turned down the oil lamp to a mere glimmer. Slipping on his outer coat and seizing his hat he looked once more at the supine form of Olmstead on the bed. His heavy breathing was the only sound that could be heard in the apartment.

Cranford crept quietly to the door; it opened noiselessly and he was outside and had closed it behind him in a breath.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE FOG.

A FULL minute elapsed after Cranford Byron's departure before any new sound broke the silence in the room. The lamp sputtered a bit and cast a flickering circle of light upon the ceiling.

Suddenly Olmstead rolled over, sat upright in bed and swung his feet lightly over the edge. He landed upon the

floor so carefully that the bed did not creak, and in two strides he was at the door.

For an instant he listened at the keyhole; then his fingers softly turned the knob. The door had been locked on the outside.

"The devil!" He uttered the expletive feelingly. But he was balked for only a moment.

He hastily crossed the room to the window and, in passing, blew out the sputtering lamp. He raised the shade and window sash noiselessly.

The room overlooked a side court. It was absolute blackness below him, but he remembered the general lay of the land about the hotel. Faint pencilings of light came from but two windows on that side of the building.

"Thinks he can drug me and then lock me in, eh—the clumsy fool!" Olmstead muttered. "But I *should* have been up a stump at dinner if that vase hadn't stood directly at my back. Lucky I suspected that wine.

"I've got to find out his game. Strange I should have doubted him from the first! And Elsa—confound these girls! Why couldn't she find some other fellow among all the men we know?"

During this soliloquy Olmstead was not idle. Beside the window hung a roll of varnished rope, one end of the coil securely fastened to an iron arm sunk in the wall of the building. The proprietor of the hotel had the safety of his guests in mind when he placed fire ropes in his rooms.

Olmstead cut the fastenings of the rope and dropped it out of the window. He could not see whether it reached the ground or not; he'd have to take his chances on that.

Slipping on his shoes and coat, and pulling his soft hat down to his ears, he stepped upon the window sill and let himself quickly over the edge.

It was a small feat for an athletic man to perform. He went down the rope swiftly, hand under hand, till his feet touched the ground. Then leaving the rope swinging in the wind he darted out upon the street, buttoning his coat as he went.

A single glance into the public room of the hotel assured him that Cranford Byron was not there.

"The fellow's gone—but where?" he muttered. "He didn't try to drug me and lock me in that room for nothing. What's his game?

"In the first place, he knows my object in coming up here. Or, if he doesn't *know* it, he suspects it. Evidently my respected relative fears I am going to do him—or his friends—some injury. Can it be possible that the firm of Chambers & Joyce is dabbling in smuggled commodities?

"Humph! such things *have* happened before. And Byron is a member of the firm. Thank Heaven, his cousinship with us is several degrees removed. But Elsa—by George!

"Well, this is no time to consider private feelings. I'm willing to bet all my old shoes that the schooner Seagull is up here—right in this harbor. There's no wire to St. Johns. Through my confounded awkwardness Byron learned I was coming here, suspected my business, and has come on to put the crew of the smuggler on their guard.

"Then he's gone to the schooner now. I'm after him!"

He took the nearest lane leading to the water front. On the way he ran plump into a half drunken sailor in the dark thoroughfare.

"Hello, my man!" Olmstead exclaimed. "Can you tell me if there's a schooner called the Seagull in port?"

"In course there be, master," was the reply.

"Does she lie at the wharf?"

"She do not. She's bound t' th' nor'ard of the steamboat dock."

Olmstead hurried on. "We must have passed her as we came in," he thought. "Now like enough Byron will get a boat to row out to her at the

nearest wharf. That would be near where the Anita is lying."

If there is a quieter town after dark in the universe than Seldom-come-by, it has yet to be discovered. The sailor whom he had questioned was the only person Olmstead met.

In five minutes or so he reached the straggling pier to which the fishing steamer was moored. She, too, was deserted; there was not even a watchman on the wharf. But as Olmstead approached he heard the sound of oars in the water beyond the wharf. He ran quietly to the edge; several dories were moored here and one was being pushed out of the tangle into the open stream by its single occupant.

"Byron—for a dollar!" muttered the customs inspector. "That's no fisherman sculling the boat; he's too awkward."

He hesitated a moment, watching the shadowy outline of the moving dory. Then, when it was all but beyond his range of vision, he dropped into the nearest boat, made sure that both oars were in place, and cast off.

He could not see the boat he was after, but he had marked its course well and followed swiftly.

Once out of the gloom cast by the wharf he found it much lighter on the water. Here and there he saw the shadowy hulls and skeleton spars of the fishing fleet lying quietly at anchor. The creak of a block now and then and the lap of the tide against the anchored craft were the only sounds which floated over the harbor.

The yellow eye of some cabin deadlight occasionally peered into the darkness athwart his course. At such times Olmstead could see by the hazy reflection of the light that a fog was quietly settling on the water.

Suddenly, not far ahead, his straining ear caught the sound of an oar flung into a boat's bottom; then the creak of the boat itself sliding along the hull of some other craft. He rested on his own oars. The sound of voices broke out with startling suddenness upon the night; then all was quiet again.

Olmstead plunged his oars in the water and pulled silently. Glancing over his shoulder at almost every stroke, he at length saw the looming spars of a vessel riding at anchor. She had two masts, was a sizable craft, and was painted a dead white, so that, as his dory was carried nearer by the tide, her hull was very plainly revealed.

The deck houses, both forward and aft, were of good size and a bright light shone through the skylight of the after house, dancing in a ghostly manner upon the shrouds.

Olmstead pulled around the vessel. He had seen a dory lying under the schooner's cutwater and was confident that he had come to the end of his chase. On the further side—the seaward side—of the schooner the shadow lay deepest. He crept up softly under her rail.

Nobody was on deck; there was not even an anchor watch. He brought his oars inboard and worked the dory along to the stern. Here he fastened her line to one of the rudder chains, and raising himself on tiptoe, with a firm grasp on the schooner's rail with either hand, carefully scrutinized the length of her deck.

"All clear!" he whispered, exultingly, and vaulted lightly over the rail.

There was the murmur of voices in the after cabin. He hesitated a moment before proceeding. The inside work of the schooner was painted white also, and his dark clothing would show up magnificently against it.

Quickly stripping off his coat he dropped it into the dory. As he did so he caught a glimpse of the name painted on the schooner's stern; at least he plainly saw the first three letters—"Sea."

"I've hit it right," he thought, with exultation. "This is the Seagull. And after I've found out how much my respected distant relative knows about her and her business—for my own pri-

vate information—I'll see if anybody in Fogo knows where she lands her cargoes. Why," he added, "this boat's big enough to cross the ocean. 'Twouldn't be anything for her to run across a cargo from—France say."

He had dropped on his hands and knees now and crept silently forward. His white shirt could scarcely be distinguished from the deckhouse when he remained motionless. Beside, the fog was coming in thicker now to more effectually hide him.

The door of the cabin was shut; but the decklight was half open, and by leaning upon his elbows and craning his neck Olmstead could look into the place. It was quite a roomy apartment. There was a table in the center and a safety lamp secured to either bulkhead.

There were but two men in the cabin. He heard Cranford Byron's voice, though he could not see him; but his companion he could see plainly, for he sat at the opposite side of the table. And Olmstead looked well at him.

He was a brawny, bushy bearded man, in an ordinary fishing dress and with a blue stockinet cap pulled down to his ears. He held the stump of a much blackened pipe between his teeth and there was a bottle and glass before him. Olmstead could not see his eyes, for they were overhung by heavy brows and were bent upon his companion.

The first words the eavesdropper heard were from Cranford.

"I told you Mellin was a fool! You'd ought to get rid of him."

"Why, as to that," said the other, in a deep, slow voice, "any honest sailor man is likely to be got the better of by liquor—now and again."

"And then tattle all he knows to strangers?" snapped Cranford.

"Waal—*I* dunno, and *you* dunno, 'cordin' to your own account, how much Mellin told."

"He told enough so that the authorities suspect your boat and you'll have to run light for a while."

"Waal, let 'em suspect. They can't prove nothin'," declared the sailor.

"You take it easy!" snarled his visitor. "But it means considerable of a loss to some of us. Besides, here I've had to come 'way up to this God forsaken hole to warn you. And if I hadn't got that young fool drunk at the hotel he'd been nosin' 'round here before I could see you."

"Umph!" growled the other. "Like enough. I'm sure we're obliged to ye, Master Byron."

"Well then, you get out of here before daybreak—and stay out while this ass of an inspector is around."

By the sound below Olmstead knew that Byron had risen to his feet. Naturally the bewhiskered man raised his eyes, and for an instant he stared straight into the customs inspector's face!

The fellow started up with a shout that must have aroused all hands aboard the schooner. But Olmstead did not stop to investigate this point. He leaped back from the skylight, in two strides was at the stern, and before anybody had reached the deck had drawn up his boat and dropped into it.

Before he could cast off, however, there were shouts and the tramp of heavy footsteps on the deck of the vessel. The crew were coming aft. The cabin door was torn open and the two men inside bounded out upon the deck.

By this time Olmstead's dory was unfastened and the outgoing tide was carrying it rapidly away.

"Come back here!" shouted a voice which the inspector recognized as Byron's.

Olmstead was standing upright in the dory and his white shirt made a beautiful mark against the fog bank. A pistol cracked on the schooner, its flash for an instant lighting up the group of excited men.

Olmstead swung round from the force of the bullet's impact, and dropped the oar. He clutched at his

arm, tottered for a moment, and then sprawled into the boat's bottom.

Another shot was fired from the schooner, but the fog thickening suddenly, the dory and its freight were shut out of the view of the men on the schooner's deck.

There were no further shots and Olmstead struggled to his knees.

"Bungled again, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "I'm a healthy detective, I am. Wonder what the old colonel would say if he could see me now? Guess he'd pick out some other fellow to do his fine work next time.

"Why, look-a-here!" he added. "I'm bleeding like a stuck pig. That rascal! I owe him one for that, if for nothing else. And he's inveigled himself into the good graces of Elsa, too—a fellow like him! If ever I get back to St. Johns I'll settle *his* hash."

Meanwhile he was stripping up the shirt sleeve which covered the wounded arm. The ball had passed through the flesh at the back of the bone, making a clean wound, which bled profusely. The blood ran down and dripped from the ends of his fingers into the bottom of the dory. He drew out his handkerchief, deftly wound it about the arm above the wound, and tied it tightly.

"I'll have a scar there to remember my dear cousin by, I reckon," he thought. "And now—where am I? And where am I going?"

The fog had shut down and wrapped the dory about like a shroud. The sea heaved gently, and there was little breeze stirring; but the running tide was carrying him rapidly out to sea.

One of the oars had gone overboard when he was shot: now he fitted the other into one of the sockets and tried to scull back toward the land. But he could use only his right hand and every motion so increased the pain of his wounded arm that he was soon forced to sit down and allow the boat to drift.

He drew his coat about him and fastened a button to keep it in place. Slipping down into the bottom, he leaned against a seat, holding his wounded arm in as comfortable a position as possible. Gradually the pain left it—it grew numb instead—and the motion of the sea lulled him into uneasy sleep.

Providentially the dory missed the rocks and shoals of Fogo and also, in her passage out to sea, encountered none of the fishing fleet. An incoming smack might have made a sad mess of the frail boat, as well as of Olmstead's future worldly affairs.

He alternately dozed and woke again till past midnight. Then the wind changed several points and freshened to a stiff breeze. The sea became choppy and the dory yawed so that it was impossible for him to sleep any longer. It did not take much of a jar to set his wounded arm to aching again.

So he got into the stern, put out the remaining oar to aid in keeping the dory's head before the breeze, and waited for daylight. He had no idea whither he was drifting, but hoped, with the morning tide, to be carried back toward Fogo. However, the change in the wind caused the dory to pass—at daybreak—several miles to the northward of Fogo and headed her directly for the coast of Newfoundland itself.

CHAPTER III.

THE BYRE OF MONS HETTER.

OLMSTEAD, unfamiliar with the sea and its ways, had no idea whither he was being carried. The breeze had freshened when it changed after midnight; but he was aware only of its increase. He still supposed the dory headed out to sea.

"Nice pickle, this," he thought. "Wonder what's the nearest land in this direction—Ireland?"

The breeze grew to a stiff gale, though still the fog lay heavily on the face of the ocean. The morning passed and at noon he began to hear strange sounds ahead.

Heretofore the screams of gulls and like water fowl were all that had broken the stillness of the liquid desert. There is nothing in nature so lonely and awe inspiring as the fog enshrouded sea.

"It's a steamer siren," Olmstead said, as the sound grew louder.

But before long it was apparent that no steamboat foghorn was responsible for this noise. It became a continuous roar—rising and falling in volume, but still continuous.

"It's no horn; whales—even a rorqual—wouldn't make such a sound. It's—it's— I have it! It's the sea breaking on the rocks!

"But how can that be possible?" thought the bewildered fellow. "I can't have reached Ireland *this* quick! No; the boat must have swung around in the night. If the sun had shown up as a respectable sun *should,* I'd have seen this before.

"George! what a sea! I'm up against it now—for sure; or, I will be shortly. Talk about being in a scrape—why, if this cockleshell once hits on those rocks I'll be in the saltest kind of pickle in a jiffy. And with this arm——"

He stood up and tried to peer into the fog ahead. But that made the dory bob about in a most ridiculous manner and he sat down suddenly, feeling unpleasantly squeamish.

"I must be going head on for the coast," he decided. "Is it Fogo—or Newfoundland? Not that it matters. The rocks will be quite as hard in one place as another, I fancy. Can I risk turning the boat's head and sculling along the coast till I see a chance to land with some degree of safety?"

But the motion of the sea was bad enough as the boat was headed. He looked at the long swells with the deep green hollows between and shook his head.

"Not just yet," he thought. "I'll wait till the rocks are nearer for *that.*"

It would be the easiest thing in the world for the dory to be overwhelmed if caught crosswise in the trough of the sea. But the roar of the breakers grew apace and between the two dangers which menaced him Olmstead would soon have to choose.

He was more than an ordinarily good swimmer—give him two good arms. But what could he do with one useless member?

The wounded arm was stiff and very, very sore to the touch. Neglected for so many hours the bullet wound had become angry and inflamed. It was going to hamper him terribly when the crash he expected came.

And that moment could not be far off now. The sea dashing on the iron bound coast deafened him. The green swells were streaked with long ribbons of foam. Through the swirling fog he caught shadowy glimpses of frowning cliffs.

He was rushing upon a relentless fate!

Now and again he saw the fringe of hardy trees along the summit of the bluffs. And as the fog grew less dense for a moment he plainly beheld their serried faces. But not a sign of a landing place. The sea was casting the dory like a stone from a catapult directly at the rock.

The fog curled in long wreaths about the steep bluffs, now and then parting like curtains to give him a tantalizing view of the land which he could scarce hope to reach alive. And once, while the dory was still a full cable's length from the rocks, Olmstead saw a deep cut, or ravine, in the bluff which led upward from the sea. In this cut a flock of sheep were grazing.

But the mouth of the ravine which opened seaward was, at its lowest point, several yards above the sea. If there was somebody with the sheep, however—and if that somebody had a coil of rope——

The thought inspired him with a momentary hope. The fog had shut down again, but he knew the dory was driving almost directly for the cut in the

bluff. He struggled to his knees and shouted with the full power of his voice.

There might be some byre near by and his voice might be heard even above the noise of the breakers. He shouted again—a wild, prolonged "Halloo!"

Was that an answer? Or was the sound the product of his imagination? The sea roared and seethed about him with deafening clamor. The frail boat was all but in the breakers now. But again the answering cry reached his straining ears. It pierced the roaring of the sea; it was not a seagull's scream.

"A voice! a voice!" Olmstead cried.

He leaped to his feet in the tottering boat. The curtain of fog was torn aside and the face of the bluff revealed again. Above him, standing upon the very verge of the rock, with a background of swirling mist and half shrouded outlines of the rugged landscape, stood a figure.

Olmstead shouted again; but the shout ended in almost a groan. The figure was that of a woman!

"Lost! lost!" he cried, and sank down again.

But the woman had seen him—and his peril. Swiftly, and as sure of foot as one of the sheep in the ravine at her back, she leaped down the serrated front of the cliff until she stood on a ledge wet with the spray dashed from the breakers.

The long, iron shod staff which had aided her rapid descent was still in her hand. With quick eye she had selected the spot of all others best suited to her work. The broken stump of a pine—worn smooth by the sea itself—stood in a crevice of the rock at her back. She gripped this firmly with one hand.

And now, borne upon the last swell, the dory was cast at the rock. The foam streaked waters seemed to be sucked from under its keel. Olmstead, crouching in the stern, fixed his eyes upon the woman's face.

She was young—even in that moment of terror he realized that she could be scarcely older than Elsa. But the poise of her body as she leaned forward with outstretched staff betrayed wonderful muscular power. He gained hope from her face when disaster seemed overwhelming him.

"Leap!" she cried.

He read the command from her lips rather than heard it. Instantly he cast himself from the boat and the light craft was splintered upon the rock. One blow, and but a handful of broken driftwood remained.

But Olmstead had leaped for the staff held out toward him. He clutched it with his right hand and though he went deeply under water, nothing could lessen that grip while life remained.

He could not fend off from the rock with his other hand, however. That was powerless. His body swung in with the suck of the tide and was dashed cruelly against the wall.

The girl, however, had stepped back, thus drawing him upward. Only his limbs swung inward at the next charge of the sea. His rescuer braced her feet upon the ledge and used both hands to drag him out of the reach of the waves.

Olmstead saw the staff, with his dead weight upon it, drawn up inch by inch—and wondered. The girl's arms were bare below the elbows; they were round and white, with all the shapely curve which those of a well formed woman should possess. But the muscles swelled and the cords knotted beneath the white skin in a way beyond the comprehension of the city bred girls he knew.

This was only a passing impression, however. Olmstead was in no position to philosophize. But the workings of the human mind are not always to be controlled—even in moments of peril.

And his peril was by no means past: not even when he had gained a foothold on the rocky shelf. The ledge was wet and slippery and he was vastly weakened by his battle with the sea.

His rescuer seized his arm and for a minute they crouched against the face of the cliff, panting and breathless.

Then the girl pointed upward and they essayed together the rugged path which she had so swiftly descended to his help.

Olmstead's arm now pained him grievously; he looked down and saw the blood dropping from his finger tips. The handkerchief had become unfastened and the wound had broken open afresh. The moment they reached the grass grown ravine he dropped to the earth in almost a fainting condition. Then, for the first time, his companion saw the blood.

"Oh, sir! you are hurt?" she cried.

"An old wound—it's broken open again," panted Olmstead.

"Let me help you," she said as he struggled with his coat.

She drew the sleeve tenderly from the wounded arm and quickly seeing that the tourniquet had slipped, tightened it deftly, bringing the pressure of the knot on just the right spot to insure the closing of the vein.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Olmstead, admiringly, "my sister'd gone off in a dead faint if she'd seen that wound—and the blood."

"Perhaps I should have done so had it been *my* brother who was wounded," returned the girl, in a very matter of fact manner. "Now, sir, if you can walk so far, let me show you the way to our house. It is not more than a mile away. You are wet to the skin and that wound should be properly dressed."

"Yes, I couldn't be much wetter," admitted Olmstead, rising with difficulty. "And my arm does pain me confoundedly."

"You said it was an old wound, sir?" she suggested, looking at him with pardonable curiosity.

Her eyes were brown, clear and deep. There was a quiet strength to her face which impressed Olmstead strongly. Her features were not strikingly beautiful, but regular and pleasing to look upon.

While the young man thus studied her the question remained unanswered. She repeated it:

"It's an old wound, sir?"

"Ha—yes! It's quite old—more than twelve hours, you know," he said, in confusion.

The thought had just crossed his mind that he could scarcely tell her the entire truth regarding himself and his affairs—at least not on so short an acquaintance.

"You see," he said, hastily, "I've been out in that bally old boat—I beg your pardon! I've been at sea since last evening. Lost one of my oars overboard and was carried out in the night—couldn't get back, you know."

"Where to?"

"Seldom-come-by . . . I expect the wind shifted and with the tide drove me in here—er—by the way, where *is* 'here'?"

"You are near Seal Island Bay—north of Fogo. My uncle's byre is on the bay."

"And you are——?"

"My name is Brenna Hetter: my uncle is Mons Hetter. He is well known at Seldom-come-by."

She added this last in a questioning tone and again Olmstead flushed. "Well—er—you see," he stammered, "I'm *not* well known there. I only came up last night from St. Johns—on a vacation, you know."

Brenna looked at him gravely and made no reply. Of course she could not help being suspicious of him. And yet, his duty would not allow of his stating exactly who he was and the circumstances culminating in his hard experience.

Neither could he bring himself to actually deceive her. In truth, he doubted if he could do so: her clear eyes seemed to look him through and through.

"I—I am deeply grateful for what you have done for me, Miss Hetter. It

was the pluckiest thing I ever saw!" he added, with a sudden burst of admiration. "But I'm afraid you will have to take me somewhat on trust. I—I am situated so that I cannot—at present—explain how I got this wound, nor how I came to be at sea alone in that dory. But my name is Olmstead —John Olmstead; that much, at least, I can say with truth."

The girl nodded gravely. "I do not wish to seem inquisitive," she said; "but this is a lonely coast and we have few visitors. The people at the byre will be sure to ask questions."

"But I cannot answer questions—at present," exclaimed the young man. "My reasons are good—as you shall know some time. I am not a criminal, nor have I been guilty of any wrong—to my knowledge. I am up here, as I said before, supposedly on a vacation."

"You do not look like a bad man," said the girl, frankly. "And if you say your reason for being secretive is perfectly legitimate, I will believe you."

"I do say so," Olmstead hastened to reassure her.

"Very well, sir. I will tell my aunt and Grandmother Elen how you were carried out to sea last night and that the gale drove you in here. And that your arm was hurt, too. But I will dress the arm myself, so that they may not know it is a gunshot wound. I do not like to deceive them, but I have confidence in what you say, sir."

"By Jove! that's good of you," Olmstead declared. "But say—you only speak of your aunt and—and your grandmother, did you say? Surely there are some men on the farm?"

"Uncle Mons and the boys—all but little Fergus—are away in the boat. When they return you will be able to get back to Fogo. They go there to sell their fish."

They had long since left the ravine where the sheep were feeding and the roar of the breaking sea behind and, after crossing a stretch of barren uplands, had begun the descent into a pleasant and verdant valley. The hillsides sloped—gently in some places, rudely in others—to the shores of an almost land locked cove; the Seal Island Bay of which Brenna had spoken. Soon the byre house, low, broad and with a turf roof, came into view. It was a typical dwelling of the Norwegian and Scotch farmers scattered along the east coast.

Brenna descended the hill, rough or smooth though the path might be, with the grace and ease of one accustomed to the country; but Olmstead was sadly out of breath before more level ground was reached.

"I'm afraid you will leave me behind, Miss Hetter, if you keep to this pace," he said. "I shall drop by the wayside. Remember, I have been at sea all night in an open boat, without food or water, and—I expect I have lost considerable blood. At least, I feel so."

"Ah, I forgot!" she exclaimed. "It is a pity. And after your hard experience, too. Come, we will go slower; but it is not far now. I wonder that you have borne up so well. It was very providential I happened to be up there salting the sheep. Had I not heard you shouting, you would have been killed on those rocks, I fear."

"I haven't any doubt of that," said Olmstead; "and I never saw a girl before who had the pluck—and muscle—to do what you did."

She looked at him with amusement in her eyes. "St. Johns girls are not like country girls; is that it, Mr. Olmstead?"

"With the advantage on the side of the country girl, Miss Hetter."

"I'm afraid that is only a gallant speech, sir. But I have lived in the city, too; it was some years ago, however."

And then they reached the byrehouse, their approach heralded by the strident voices of the poultry about the dooryard. Two women—one comely

and fresh faced, and the other much older, though still vigorous—appeared at the door, while a shock headed boy of fourteen came from behind the house.

"Why, Brenna!" cried the younger woman, looking from the girl to Olmstead. "Have strangers come? Is he off some vass'l? Deary me—but he's wet!"

The old lady bustled forward, her hospitable instincts overcoming her surprise.

"Got aften, got aften, friend!" she exclaimed, in a broad, old country dialect. "Ye'll coom in an' dry a bit."

"Thank you, my good woman, I'll do so gladly. I'm about as wet as they make 'em," admitted the visitor.

Meanwhile Brenna was telling her aunt the story in a few words.

"Ye'd better coom in now, an' gabber after the man is warmed and fed," and Grandmother Elen led the way into the house.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNPLEASANT DISCOVERY.

OLMSTEAD had little opportunity to become familiar with the byrehouse or its occupants that night. Grandmother Elen prescribed a great bowlful of a very hot and sticky mixture and counseled bed as the best place for a shipwrecked mariner. He was assigned to a room in the loft, where he slept as soundly as a boy till daybreak.

His wounded arm was a little stiff, but, thanks to Brenna's care, did not pain him. Most of his usual strength had come back to him; the terrible experience through which he had so recently passed seemed more like a dream than reality.

Brenna's clear voice, as she sang a jolly little sea ditty, penetrated to his chamber.

"She's a wonderful girl," he thought; "quite the finest specimen I ever met. How cool and courageous she was yesterday! And I did not get half well enough acquainted with her," he added.

Forthwith he rose, that no more of the day might be wasted ere he could pursue this laudable object. And he found nothing to frustrate his intentions.

These simple people were too hospitable to make him otherwise than at ease. They accepted his advent as a matter of course, after Brenna's short explanation, and frankly made him a member of the household.

The farmer's wife had some curiosity as to his arm, which was allayed when her niece assured her that the wound was doing well. Grandmother Elen treated him as she might her son and called him "Shon" before the morning was over. And young Fergus, having got over his shyness, pumped him thoroughly regarding the wonders of St. Johns.

For the next few days Olmstead led a fairly idyllic existence. Had he come north for a mere pleasure trip he would have been perfectly content, but his mind was not at ease concerning the business which had brought him away from St. Johns.

He wondered what the next move of the smugglers would be. What had Cranford Byron done? What story had he taken back to St. Johns—if he had gone back?

How had his disappearance from the hotel at Seldom-come-by been explained? What terrible story of his drifting out to sea and supposed death might reach his sister's ears? As bold and—he was forced to admit it—as shrewd a scoundrel as Byron, might easily turn the circumstances of his—Olmstead's—loss to good account.

The customs inspector trembled for Elsa as he thought of Byron's possible power over her.

But there was no way for him to get back to civilization until the Hetters' pinky returned. It was not far to Fogo, but there were nothing but skiffs at the byre and only a fourteen year old

boy to assist in navigating them. So Olmstead possessed his soul with such patience as he could command and awaited the coming of the larger vessel.

"The boys will be going to Fogo before long, any way," Brenna told him. "But this is the busiest time in the year for them. You may have to wait a few days even after they return. They don't go to Fogo every trip—by no means. Our summers are so short that we are obliged to work hard during the good weather."

"And do they do well with the fishing?" asked Olmstead.

"They have done very well for the past two or three seasons. So well that Aslak sold the old boat and bought a new one this year. It is a much better craft than the old one—with two masts and two cabins. The boys have painted it nicely, too. It doesn't look much like the ordinary pinky, though the hull is broad and full like the other fishing boats."

"But who is Aslak?" interrupted Olmstead.

"Oh, he is Uncle Mons' oldest son—my cousin, you know. He is really captain of the boat now. Uncle Mons does not often go with them—only when they are extremely busy. You see, there are Aslak, Lars and Dorich, besides Fergus—four boys. They were glad enough to have me come to them; you know, boys can't get along very well without a sister to keep them in order," and she smiled.

"I guess that's so," admitted Olmstead. "At least, Elsa has always considered it her duty to keep right after me. But, I say, Miss Hetter, you haven't lived long here?"

"Six years."

"And before that in St. Johns?"

"Most of my life. I received some of my education in Halifax, however. My father was Professor John Hetter; he taught languages in several colleges. He was some years younger than Uncle Mons and did not leave Norway till long after Uncle Mons and Grandmother Elen were established here."

Brenna told him much about the quiet life at the byre, too. Sometimes it was not altogether peaceful. It was a wild country and the settlers were mostly a law unto themselves. The farmers were scrupulously honest, but there were those whose regard for the property and rights of others was slight indeed.

These outlaws were known as the "Eggers," from the fact that their principal occupation was the gathering of seabirds' eggs from the steep cliffs on a chain of small islands between Newfoundland and Labrador.

Among these rocky fortresses the Eggers lived, bringing their cargoes of eggs south several times a year and, on their way back, pillaging any unprotected byre they happened to come across. The farmers' sheep, roaming some distance from the farmsteads, often suffered in these raids.

"We have not been disturbed by them for some months," Brenna said. "Last year Aslak and the boys were at home when they came and Fergus discovered their pinky in Gander Bay. The boys caught them flaying the sheep they had killed and they thrashed the robbers well. You see, there is no law here—and no one to put it in force if there was. At Fogo they are all afraid of the Eggers when they come down. And it is only once in a while that the farmers are numerous enough to beat them."

"Really, this part of the world isn't quite so dead as I thought," Olmstead replied. "Even a ruction with outlaws should be welcome as a break in the monotony . . . But really, Miss Hetter, *you* must find it almost unbearable here at times."

She smiled at him a little sadly. "It is sometimes hard to be contented—we have so few of the things I used to think necessary in life. Yet I am not really unhappy."

But Olmstead was quite convinced

there was more unrest in the girl's life than she cared to admit. How could it be otherwise, in a place where the return of a smack from the fishing grounds was the only occurrence which broke the monotony?

The Hetters' pinky did not come in on this occasion, however, until Olmstead had been a visitor at the byre for fully a week. His arm, carefully looked after by Brenna, was healing nicely and otherwise he had fully recovered from the effects of his adventure.

The household was at breakfast one morning when young Fergus, glancing out of the narrow window, suddenly sprang up with a shout.

"Here they come!" he cried. "The old pink's coomin' in!" and made a break for the door.

The women folk were highly excited and streamed out of doors after the boy. Olmstead, curious to see the boat and crew he had heard so much about, and perhaps a bit anxious to know how Brenna would meet her cousin Aslak, of whom he had his own opinion already, followed the others.

A good sized two stick craft, neatly painted white, was coming swiftly in from the sea. Her crew waved eager welcome to the group on shore.

The pinky dropped her canvas, came about smartly, and in a moment swung quietly at her moorings off the little dock. As the running tide carried her to the length of her anchor cable, her stern came slowly about.

Olmstead's eye caught the name painted over the rudder and he started forward with an amazed exclamation. It was "Seagull"—the name of the smuggling craft which he had boarded in the harbor of Seldom-come-by!

CHAPTER V.

LOST ON THE BARRENS.

All John Olmstead could do for the next few moments was to stand aside and think. And he thought *hard*.

The Seagull; the very boat to which he had followed Cranford Byron that night at Seldom-come-by: a craft, by all accounts, whose crew were engaged in illicit trading. And this crew were the uncle and cousins of Brenna Hetter, the noble girl who had rescued him from the sea; were the "men folk" loved and admired by the two older women at the Hetter byre. The idea staggered the inspector.

Could Brenna and her aunt and the gray haired old grandmother be aware of the smuggling of the Seagull's crew? Or, did the crew run their valuable cargoes unknown to the women?

There could be no doubt of the fact that many cases of French liquors had been disposed of in St. Johns and in other towns that had never paid duty; and suspicion pointed to the Seagull. His own investigations at Seldom-come-by seemed to bear out those suspicions, let alone the report of Peterson, the other inspector on the case. But Brenna—and the others——

He could not make himself believe that *she* possessed knowledge of any such guilty secret, whatever the older women might know. And then, he told himself, perhaps his premises were all wrong. There might be *two* vessels of the same name.

Yet, that would be strange indeed. Two of the same name, same rig, about the same tonnage, and both painted exactly alike?

The longer he gazed upon the vessel now riding in the little bay before the byrehouse, the more confident he grew that she was the craft upon which he had played the eavesdropper.

Suppose Cranford Byron should be aboard? The thought sent the blood surging through his veins with sudden heat. He *wanted* to meet that individual just once more. Perhaps this was not the best time or place for the meeting; but he would have hailed the fellow's advent with a savage joy, nevertheless.

He looked carefully at the members

of the Seagull's crew as they pulled ashore from the anchored craft. Byron certainly was not among them. There were only three; a gigantic old man and two young fellows, both under twenty. The third boy was not with them.

He heard the women inquire eagerly for Aslak—the eldest son.

"That's the fellow!" Olmstead muttered. "Brenna says this Aslak is really the captain of the pinky. He's the bushy whiskered chap Byron was talking with the other night—sure as shooting! I wonder, if he was here, if he would recognize me? Maybe it's just as well he's *not*."

And yet, in many ways, he could not make his suspicions coincide with the character of these people. Uncle Mons was as hearty in his welcome of the stranger as if his conscience were utterly void of offense. His speech was quite as broad as that of the old lady; but the boys showed the effect of some educational advantages—the result of their Cousin Brenna's instruction, Olmstead had no doubt.

He learned, as the party tramped up to the byrehouse to breakfast, that Aslak had been detained at Fogo, where the Seagull had touched during her trip to sell her fish (of course, the women did not know she had been to St. Johns, but Olmstead knew it) and if he did not get back in a week or ten days they should run across after him.

Meanwhile the Seagull was to start out that very night for a place further up the coast where it was said the cod were running good; the fish she now had on board were to be landed for the women to cure on the flakes near the byrehouse, for Fergus was to go on this cruise in the absence of Aslak.

Olmstead listened to the chatter and asked himself how it would all come out. He wondered if they would at once suspect his identity when his story was told. It hardly seemed possible that they could fail to recognize in the wounded and shipwrecked man, who admitted having been swept out of Seldom-come-by Bay, the spy who boarded the Seagull while she lay at that port, and who had been fired upon in his escape. And when the two stories dovetailed, he was curious to know what would be done with him.

He was absolutely at the mercy of these people. He had not armed himself the night he left the hotel to follow Cranford Byron. His contempt for the fellow was too great to suggest that precaution. Now he might have found a good revolver of great assistance in —well, in bracing his nerves, at least.

Fortunately nothing was said at breakfast which led to questions regarding Olmstead, or the circumstances of his coming to the byre. But the customs inspector knew the matter could not be long deferred. It was sure to come up some time.

Yet, when the meal was over, delicacy suggested that the family might wish to be alone and, excusing himself, Olmstead went out. But he would have given the best hundred dollars he had ever possessed to have remained within earshot.

What would Mons Hetter and his sons do to the man who, they could not fail to suspect, was a spy upon their guilty actions? Olmstead tramped up and down the beach and waited for the storm to break.

But nothing occurred immediately to show him that he had been under discussion. The men soon trooped out of the house and commenced unloading the pinky. The fish they had caught during the past few days had been cleaned, split and packed in salt; but they were yet to be thoroughly cured on the fishflakes in the sun and air. And the work of turning and salting them, and putting them under cover at night, was to be performed by the women while the Seagull was away.

Olmstead, who still wore the clothing that had been given him while his own dried, laid hold with the crew and did quite as much toward shifting the cargo of the pinky to the shore as

any of them. In fact, this exhibition of his muscular power, hampered as he was, too, with a " game " arm, won the admiration of the boys and the commendation of Mons Hetter himself.

" Ye've a graun' back for a city mon, friend," said the old man. " Ye're no weaklin'."

And still not a word or look to show that his identity was suspected. The suspense made Olmstead nervous.

He saw very little of Brenna during the forenoon and at dinner there was no opportunity for him to speak to her. But he lingered at the door after the meal until circumstances made it possible for him to begin a conversation.

Brenna's replies were very brief, and she looked at him so strangely that Olmstead was fairly rattled.

" Things are getting serious," he decided. " Something will drop soon, and the question is, do I want to be here when the interesting event takes place?

" I hate to play the coward and run away; run from something—I scarcely know what. But what *shall* I do? These folks may have already decided upon my final disposal, and possibly intend settling the matter before they leave on the boat tonight. Interesting state of affairs!

" Wouldn't I be a fool to stay here and take what's coming to me? And wouldn't they be fools to let me go? They *must* know that, once back in St. Johns, I'll close up their game in short order.

" Now—I wonder—if I could, by any possibility, get away from this place and reach some settlement to the south? I've got funds. I could hire a boat and crew to take me in to St. Johns."

With this thought in his mind he sought an opportunity, when the women had gone down to the fishflakes to help the men, to go up stairs, exchange the clothing he was wearing for his own, and get out of the house unobserved. In passing through the kitchen he left a bank note lying in plain view on the table.

" At least, I'll pay for what I've eaten," he thought.

He hurried away, keeping the byrehouse between him and the group at the fishflakes. Behind the house the land rose gradually, but was much broken; he was soon well hidden in a chain of ravines and cross gullies and after having put the first ridge between him and the Hetters' homestead, he turned in a southerly direction.

He knew that, somewhere before him, lay several fishing villages, and he hoped to find one at Blackhead Cove, or Rocky Bay.

He had little idea, however, of the distance to either of these settlements. He had started with but slight forethought, but believing he would reach his destination before the next evening, he expected to get along very well.

But something occurred which had not for a moment entered into his calculations. He expected to sleep on the ground in the open and, after the sun had set and long shadows began to stretch across the barren uplands, he sought out a gully where he would be at least sheltered from the wind, and lay down. His clothing was heavy and serviceable and the night was mild—for Newfoundland.

But ere morning a change—which proved a calamity—occurred. He awoke to find a wet, thick fog wrapping the whole world in its clinging garment. He had no watch with him, but guessed the time as near sunrise. At least, he was in no mood to sleep longer.

If the sun rose that morning, however, it did Olmstead but little good. Its rays could not penetrate the mist. Not once did it lighten sufficiently to give him an idea regarding the points of the compass.

He had left his lodging place in the gully; but whether he was going north, south, east, or west, or was simply traveling in a circle, he couldn't for the life of him tell.

He thought once of sitting down and waiting for the weather to clear; but

then the fact that he was unsupplied with food and that the fog showed no signs of lifting, deterred him. He must perforce keep moving in the hope of finding some house or settlement.

There are probably few drearier stretches of country in North America than the same Newfoundland barrens. The herbage even is worthless except in offering very poor pasturage for the flocks of sheep that wander as they will over the uplands. It is a saying among the farmers that the sheep have to cover so large a territory in search of food that they are kept thin by much travel.

And over these barren downs John Olmstead wearily tramped all that long day. It became not only an unpleasant experience, but suggested positive peril.

" I have evidently jumped out of the frying pan into the fire," he told himself. " I had much better have remained at the Hetters' and taken the consequences of being an ass. If ever I get back to St. Johns and retain my right mind I'll let other inspectors play the detective parts. Colonel Mackenzie can't make a sleuth of me; nature has already made me a fool."

But self vituperation did not mend the case, although it might relieve his mind. Night again found him on the unprotected barrens—hungry and well nigh exhausted. He lay down in the poor shelter of a grove of dwarf oaks and arose at dawn to find the hateful mist still shrouding the earth. Sun and sky seemed blotted out.

Fatigue and hunger forced him often to rest that day. Once he found the sea. He could not see it, and only heard the ground swell rolling up against the shore.

The water was far below the highland on which he stood, and although he strove to keep in sound of the breakers he lost even that comfort in circling around a deep inlet, and was soon wandering amid the hills and vales of the interior again.

" I must have traveled more than forty miles," he thought. " If I'd been keeping to the south I'd have passed both Blackhead Cove and Rocky Bay. It seems strange that I've seen no house in all this waste of land. Nor have I seen even a sheep."

But some time after the middle of the day he came upon a grazing flock.

" They may be miles from their owner's byre," he thought. " I shall have to vary my work as a spy by becoming a professional sheep stealer. I've *got* to eat. There's wood yonder and I've both a knife and matches."

The sheep seemed undesirous of becoming more closely acquainted with a stranger, and displayed an intention of scurrying away at his approach. So he was forced to bring one to its knees with a rock.

The others scampered off, but the half famished man flung himself upon the maimed one and, with his knife, quickly ended its struggles.

He flayed one side of the creature in a particularly unscientific manner and prepared several steaks. A group of stunted trees near at hand supplied an abundance of fuel and soon the savory mutton was sizzling in the blaze, " speared " upon the point of a sharpened branch.

And while he was still contemplating the appetizing meat, and with difficulty waiting for it to be properly cooked, he heard a voice calling in the fog behind him.

He started up and listened excitedly. The voice drew nearer and Olmstead could distinguish the footsteps of some person coming down the hill toward him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RAIDERS.

LOOKING up from the little hollow in which he had built his fire, Olmstead saw that the fog on the hill tops was lifting. The smoke from his fire as-

cended in a wavering spiral through the mist and it was doubtless this, seen from the summit of the hill, that had attracted the notice of his unknown visitor.

The voice drew nearer and suddenly he discovered that it was his own name being called.

"Mr. Olmstead! Are you here? Mr. Olmstead!"

He was for a moment speechless, so great was his surprise. After all his journeyings he was evidently near the Hetter byre again, for the voice was Brenna's.

"Mr. Olmstead!" she again shouted.

Suddenly the fog parted like a curtain and she was revealed. She was evidently dressed for a long tramp on the barrens, for she wore gaiters, a short skirt, and carried her staff. For more reasons than one Olmstead had never been quite so glad to see anybody in all his life.

"Miss Hetter!" he cried, springing up. "I am delighted to see you again."

"But what are you doing here?" she asked, looking puzzled.

"Ahem! just getting dinner," he replied with a flourish, bringing the roasting spit into view with the slice of mutton nicely browned upon it. "Won't you join me?"

"I don't quite understand," she said, looking at him gravely.

"This is my first meal in forty eight hours," he answered. "If you'll excuse me I'll begin now. I can talk and eat at the same time."

"You have been wandering over these hills ever since you left us?" she cried, in sudden anxiety.

"As you see."

"I feared it—I almost knew it! Grandmother Elen was sure you had reached Jansens'—the byre to the north of us—and that they would keep you till the fog lifted."

"But I didn't start in that direction. I tried to go south," said Olmstead.

"So I believed," rejoined Brenna, still gravely. "*They* thought you had only gone for a tramp over the hills."

"Humph! Guess they could not have seen what I left on the kitchen table, then."

Brenna blushed and came a step nearer.

"They did *not* see it," she said.

She drew the bank note from the bosom of her dress and tendered it to him.

"If they had found it, Mr. Olmstead, their good opinion of you would not have been increased. In this country an offer of money in return for hospitality is nothing less than insulting."

"Oh, come now!" cried Olmstead. "I didn't mean it that way."

"I know you did not. That is why I hid it from them and return it to you."

He looked at her curiously. "Why didn't you want them to see the money?"

She turned so that he could no longer see her face. "They would have known then that you had gone away—to stay, I mean."

"Would that have mattered?" he demanded, in surprise.

"To them—yes."

"In what way?" inquired Olmstead, curiously.

"I fear they would have lost their good opinion of you."

In the light of this belief regarding the Hetters and their very questionable business, Olmstead was somewhat amused by this reply.

"But you knew I had—er—left for good," he said at last. "I suppose I have lost your good opinion, then? And here you have caught me sheep stealing, too!"

"And you without food for two days!" she exclaimed. "Why, you might have starved to death."

"But you don't answer my question, Miss Hetter," he said.

"And you have no right to expect me to answer it," she replied, gravely.

"But you know why I left the byre?"

"I presume you *thought* you had a good reason for doing so," she returned. "But I can assure you, you need have no fear."

He stared at her, forgetting to eat in his amazement. "Do you know what I am?" he asked at length.

She nodded slowly, her head still turned away.

"Lars told me what happened at Seldom-come-by; but he did not suspect *your* identity. I—I headed off any conversation regarding you while the pinky was in. They went away again that afternoon, you know."

Olmstead fairly leaped to his feet.

"Do you mean to tell me," he cried, "that *you* are in league—er—that is —that *you* know——"

"I know that you were shot while trying to get aboard some vessel in the harbor," she interrupted. "I do not know your reason for doing so. *They* said you were there for no good. I——"

Olmstead had got his breath again. "Do you know *what* vessel I boarded, Miss Brenna?" he demanded.

"No, sir."

He looked down upon her in pity—and relief. Relief to find that she was *not* aware her uncle and cousins were smugglers, and pity that so good and true hearted a girl should be bound by ties of blood to such people.

But he could not tell her the truth. She might not believe him if he did. His own character must remain in doubt until time should prove his innocence.

"Well, what have you to say?" she asked, almost sharply, as he remained silent.

"Nothing, Miss Hetter."

"Will you come back with me, Mr. Olmstead?" she continued hesitatingly. "I do not like to leave you here alone on the barrens."

"Is there any danger?"

"You can see for yourself," she replied. "Men have been known to wander about in these uplands till they died of starvation and exposure. Has not your experience taught you that?"

"But the fog is clearing now. I intended to reach some settlement to the south."

"You are less than two miles from the house, Mr. Olmstead. It would be a twenty mile jaunt along the coast to Blackhead Cove."

"Well, I've eaten," said Olmstead, grimly. "I think I can make it if you'll put me on the trail."

"You *won't* go back with me?"

He stepped close to her and, taking her hand, forced her to look at him.

"Miss Brenna, do you care?"

Her face flushed for a moment and then the color died away.

"I only speak for your good. This is a lonely and barren land," she said.

Olmstead dropped her hand and turned away. "Your desire for my return is evidently prompted by humanity—only."

"You have no right to speak so!" she cried, with a sudden burst of feeling. "I do not *want* to believe you a bad man; but what can I think?"

He went back to her with sudden passion in his voice and manner.

"I cannot make you understand, Miss Brenna; I cannot even be wholly honest with you. The reason you will know some day—and then, when you do understand, you will probably hate me. But, believe me, I do not do my duty willingly. It *is* my duty, however, and must be done. I cannot go back with you and accept the hospitality of your uncle's house longer. In truth, it would be dangerous for me to do so."

She shook her head mournfully. "It is all a mystery," she said. "I do not understand you."

"I know it; but I cannot explain," rejoined Olmstead, desperately. "Miss Hetter, put me on the road to Blackhead Cove. I believe I can reach it by nightfall."

"Very well," she said, sorrowfully. "There is a path along the ocean yonder—on the top of the bluff. I will show you. You can follow that for several miles, at least."

She set off up the long hill again and Olmstead followed. The mist was now altogether swept from the land and the sun lit up the hill tops. Olmstead felt much strengthened after his rest and repast, and was determined to make Blackhead Cove as quickly as possible.

Brenna was silent during their walk to the sea bluff, nor did Olmstead find anything to say. The circumstances were awkward—extremely awkward. Never in his life had the customs inspector met a girl in whom he had become so deeply interested; and with none had he ever appeared at so little advantage.

From the very manner of their first meeting, and out of common gratitude, he would have been forced to admire her; and in his secret soul he confessed that already that admiration had ripened into a much stronger and worthier feeling. For Brenna's sake he would have saved her uncle and cousins from the consequences of what he believed to be their crimes against the government, would he not, by so doing, forswear his duty and murder his own self respect. And, indeed, he felt that a girl of Brenna's character might more easily forgive the treachery he contemplated toward the Hetters, than the dishonor involved in his treachery to the bureau which employed him.

But he will not soon forget that journey to the summit of the sea wall.

"There is the path, Mr. Olmstead," said the girl at last. "It is one made years ago by wreckers, or fishermen, in traveling from our bay—Seal Island Bay—to a now abandoned fishing station five or six miles along the coast."

"Thank you, Miss Hetter," he said quietly.

"Some of the old fish houses are still standing there," she added, looking out to sea instead of at him. "You—you had better sleep there tonight rather than try to go on to Blackhead Cove in the dark."

"I'll see how late it is when I get there—and how clear. If there is no fog the moon should make the way plain."

She turned suddenly and offered her hand. "Good by. I can't let you go without shaking hands, Mr. Olmstead."

His hand closed upon hers; but before he could speak a sudden noise behind them startled both. It came from the sea and was the unmistakable shriek and rattle of blocks which accompanies the dropping of a sail.

Brenna gripped his hand tightly and dragged him back from the edge of the cliff.

"What is it?" gasped Olmstead.

"I don't know; but we must find out," she returned swiftly.

"A fishing boat, of course."

"Not 'of course.' Fishing boats would have small reason for coming in here. There is an anchorage just below us, 'tis true; but it is never used by friends."

"But who are your foes?" demanded the young man.

"Quick! this way," urged Brenna, without replying.

She fled along the path to a break in the bluff, and he followed close upon her heels.

They could not be seen from the sea, but from the point to which she led him they could look down the ravine into a little reef shielded basin where the water lay as quiet as in a mill pond. The spars of a vessel, evidently anchored in the basin near the shore, were visible.

"Who the deuce are they, do you suppose?" Olmstead asked, astonished at the girl's excitement.

"I don't know; but I must find out."

"I'll go down and interview 'em for you," he suggested.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," she responded, sharply. "How do you

know who they might be? The last time the Eggers visited us they landed here."

"Oh-ho! I see. How can they get up here?"

"There's a path up the rocks, leading right into this ravine."

"Then I'll run down the ravine to the head of the path. I can see 'em there without being seen myself, can't I?"

"Yes. I'll go, too."

"Hadn't you better stay here, Miss Hetter, and let me do the reconnoitering?"

But she looked disdainful at this proposition and led the way into the ravine.

Olmstead, however, was thinking, "Suppose this boat proves to be the Seagull and her own friends? Maybe this is where they hide their contraband stuff, and she may now be after a few cases to run into St. Johns along with a cargo of fish. Wouldn't that make a nice complication?"

And when they reached the mouth of the ravine and obtained a view of the vessel, Olmstead thought for a moment that his suspicions were correct.

"Why!" murmured Brenna, "it looks like the Seagull."

"Poor girl," he thought. "Shall I tell her—or let her find out for herself?"

But just then he made a discovery himself that was something of a shock. The vessel at anchor in the basin below was a two stick craft, like the Seagull, and was painted the same; but her crew was made up of an entirely different looking set of men!

There were ten or a dozen of them, and a mighty nondescript lot they were. Most of them wore red or blue "night caps" such as the fishermen from Miquelon and St. Pierre affect, and they certainly were a hard looking crowd.

"The Eggers!" whispered Brenna, excitedly. "And Uncle Mons and Aslak away."

"They won't go to the house, will they?"

"Oh, no; they'd not dare do that. For even we women could defend *that*. But they'll hunt the sheep and kill a great many."

"Where are the sheep?"

"There's one flock not far away. I was out to look them over just now—when I found you."

"Oh, the flock out of which *I* killed one, eh? Well, now; let's see what we can do. How would it do to drive the sheep nearer the house?"

"They could follow. See! they're getting ready to land."

"So they are. Say! but that boat looks like your uncle's."

"Yes, can you see her name?" asked Brenna.

"No. I think—by Jove!" Olmstead almost shouted the word aloud.

"What is it?" whispered Brenna.

"Do you see that fellow in the stern —the one who got into the boat first?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know him?"

"No. How should I?"

"Ah, then, I do!" ejaculated Olmstead.

The individual in question was the man he had seen talking with Cranford Byron in the cabin of the smuggler's craft—the man whom Olmstead had thought for several days past to be Aslak Hetter! This boat was *not* the Seagull, but evidently *was* the smuggling vessel.

In fact, his premises had been all wrong. It was conclusive evidence that his ability as a detective was—*nil;* and yet, he had seldom been so happy in his life as he was made by this humiliating discovery.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOLDING OF THE RAVINE.

"WHAT is the matter with you?" Brenna asked, looking wonderingly into Olmstead's delighted face.

"Nothing more serious than joy."

"Joy—joy? What do you mean?" she murmured, and her eyes wavered before his gaze.

"Joy because I can tell you now what boat it was I boarded in Seldom-come-by roadstead, and why I did so."

"But, Mr. Olmstead——"

"Don't interrupt, please. We've only a minute to talk before they get ashore. Then we'll have to act, I reckon. That is the boat I boarded"—pointing to the schooner in the basin below. "A man who is evidently not now with them, but is of them, shot me."

"Oh, why?" cried Brenna.

"You call these people outlaws. They are more seriously outlaws than you fancy. They are smugglers."

"And you?"

"I'm a government officer—an assistant inspector in the Customs Bureau at St. Johns. I went on board this vessel to get evidence against her."

"But why have you acted so strangely? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because I felt that it was better not to, at first. Afterward—when the Seagull came in——"

"The Seagull!" she broke in. "Oh, I see it all now. You took our pinky for this boat—and Uncle Mons and the boys for smugglers!"

"I plead guilty," he admitted, most contritely; but she was laughing at him.

"Mr. Olmstead," she said, demurely, "I do not think much of your powers of discrimination nor ability as a detective officer."

"You can't think less of them than I do myself," he returned. "But now to business. Those fellows are landing. Is this the only path by which they can get to the top of the bluff?"

"The only practicable one for a mile or more either way."

"Then let us plan our campaign."

"But what can we do? And you with your arm but half healed?"

"Let me plan this. I may be a poor strategist, but I believe I'm a good fighter. And it doesn't take much strategy to lay out this campaign. This is the only path; they must come up it. It is narrow; only one can mount at a time. I can keep it—if I can find a club."

"But, Mr. Olmstead, they'll have guns or pistols."

"Can't use 'em much among these rocks. I suppose they'll drive me out after a while. But we'll gain time. While I'm holding them at bay you can get the sheep nearer the house, can't you? Got any firearms there?"

"A rifle belonging to Aslak and Uncle Mons' old shot gun."

"Good! can you load them?"

"Yes; and I know how to use them after they are loaded," she said, with confidence.

"I don't doubt it," he returned, admiringly. "Well, when you've got the sheep out of the way, go to the house and load the guns."

"And bring them to you?"

"Not on your life! These chaps will drive me out of here before that, it's likely, and they might capture the 'reserves' if you come out to meet me. No, I'll make my way to the byre as best I can, and if they follow me there, why, we'll be able to give 'em as good as they send. Now hurry along, that's a good girl."

"I do not like to leave you alone, Mr. Olmstead."

"That's all right," responded the customs inspector. "Don't you worry about me. I've nine lives like a cat. But, say," he added, more seriously, as she was about to turn away, "I wish you'd tell me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Are you—that is—er—well, are you glad I was able to make the explanation I did just now?"

She looked at him quizzically. "Glad that you were foolish enough to take my uncle and cousins for smugglers?"

" Oh, now, Miss Brenna!" But she ran away, laughing softly. At the head of the little glen, however, she turned and waved her hand to him and there was something in her face that satisfied Olmstead—in part, at least.

" Now, what are those fellows up to?" he muttered, turning toward the sea again.

By going a few steps down the path he reached a point where he could easily see to the bottom of the cliff.

The beach here was very narrow, barely offering a foothold at high tide. The Eggers had fastened their boat with a kedge and were preparing to mount the steep path to the glen. There were eight in the party, and three more remained upon the schooner.

" They quite evidently mean business," Olmstead muttered. " One, two, three guns—and half a dozen butcher's knives. Why, they'll take the whole flock, once they get to work on 'em. And I suppose these sheep are half the Hetters' living."

He crept back into the ravine. There were several trees standing near by, stunted of course, as were all that grew near the wind swept coast. But the wood was heavy and tough. With the aid of his knife he secured a stout limb, as large around as his wrist and nearly four feet long.

" If I tap one of those chaps on the head with this I fancy he'll lose all interest in the game," he thought, returning to the path.

He took up a position behind a projecting boulder which protected him from view. And yet he could see the entire path below him by peering around an angle of the rock. He reached this situation quietly and his presence was not suspected by the outlaws.

They had begun to ascend the path, and Olmstead was glad to see that those with the guns were not ahead. It would be a difficult place for the use of firearms, at best, and with several of their companions on the path before them the men with the guns could scarcely use them to advantage.

The Eggers scrambled noisily up the cliff, expecting no difficulty in their raid. Doubtless, Olmstead thought, they had good reason to believe the Hetters away from home and expected little opposition from the women at the byrehouse.

Besides, this was a lonely spot, a good three miles from the farm buildings, and had it not been for the accidental discovery of their presence they might have accomplished their object and got clear away without the Hetters being the wiser.

The fellow whom Olmstead had set down as leader of the rascals, the one whose conversation with Cranford Byron he had overheard that night at Seldom-come-by, did not come first up the path. The customs inspector was rather sorry for this, as he would have taken considerable satisfaction in trying his club on that individual's head.

The man who came first was a sallow, lanky fellow with a red cap and a livid scar across his smoothly shaven face.

" By George!" Olmstead muttered. " They look like a lot of pirates. I don't blame these farmers for being afraid of them. I reckon I'll have my hands full in a minute."

He crouched a little closer to the boulder and waited. The red cap of the first man bobbed about just below him. The path up the cliff was particularly steep here.

" Hurry up there, Boldy!" called somebody from below. " We'll never git them sheep before dark if ye don't."

" I'm climbin' as fast as I can," growled he of the red cap.

The next instant he struggled up to the ledge on which Olmstead stood. Like a flash the customs inspector darted out from concealment and seized the fellow by the throat, fairly choking off a startled shout.

" What do you want here?" Olmstead cried, fiercely.

"Howly mother!" ejaculated the man immediately behind the leader. "They're ready for us."

"Who's ready for us?—ye driv'lin' idiot!" was the uncomplimentary question of somebody from the rear.

"Don't you move!" commanded Olmstead to his man. "If you do I'll crack your head open."

"What's the matter up there?" roared the crowd below. "What's got Boldy?"

"Them bloody farmers have set a trap for us, I reckon," cried the second man.

"They're not here," declared one of the others. "Didn't I see Aslak Hetter at Apsey Bay? And their old pink's miles away on the Buller Ledge—I seen it with me own eyes last night."

"You'll find there's somebody here, my friend, if you don't scramble down and get aboard your boat again," sang out Olmstead.

"There's only one man!" suddenly cried Boldy, the one Olmstead had seized. "Get up here and help me, McManus."

He began to struggle with his captor. Olmstead had been holding him with his right hand; instantly he shifted the club to that hand and brought it down smartly upon the man's head.

The outlaw fell backward, landing upon the head and shoulders of the Irishman who was climbing to his assistance.

The latter dropped back with an oath, but saved his comrade as well as himself from a serious fall. His rage was mightily stirred, for as soon as he had handed the wounded man over to the keeping of those below, McManus leaped for the ledge on which Olmstead stood.

"Ah-ha, me bucko! I'll settle wid *you*," he shouted.

"But not just now," said his antagonist, with decision. "Get down, my friend, before I crack *your* pate, too. There's not room on this ledge for more than one man at a time."

"Thin I'm the man!" roared the Irishman and pulled a big knife from its place of concealment.

Already the little exertion Olmstead had given his wounded arm had brought about its own punishment; but he whirled the club about his head with vigor.

"You're not sticking sheep *yet*, my friend!" he exclaimed, and the next moment the knife rattled upon the rocks and McManus hung on to his forearm, yelling loudly.

"Kill him!" roared the men below.

"Get down, you, an' give 'em a chance to come up and try it," advised Olmstead, and the disarmed outlaw promptly obeyed.

Instantly the customs inspector seized the knife and retired behind the boulder. And it was well he did, for as soon as McManus was out of range two shots were fired and the bullets flattened themselves against the rocks where the struggle had taken place.

"Shoot away!" shouted Olmstead. "You're only wasting powder and lead."

"We'll see about that!"

It was the voice of the man he believed to be the captain of the smugglers, and he was near at hand. Olmstead sprang from behind the boulder again. The black bearded skipper of the outlaw craft was already climbing upon the ledge, and he held a gun before him.

The moment Olmstead appeared, the fellow pulled the trigger and the revenue inspector could never again expect to be so near death and escape it. The roar of the piece deafened him, while the flame from its muzzle scorched his face and the charge sent his hat spinning into the air!

For a space the defender of the path was staggered and the captain gained a foothold on the ledge. Providentially the gun was a single barreled affair or Olmstead would have been at his mercy. As it was, the captain clubbed the weapon and rushed at his antago-

nist, and Olmstead was barely able to parry the blow.

For several moments club and gun rang upon each other merrily. Olmstead's back was to the boulder and he thus had the advantage of being able to drive the other to the verge of the ledge. One of his swinging blows broke the gun short off at the stock and the smuggler was at his mercy.

"Get down there!" Olmstead commanded. "You don't want me to knock you clean off the rock, do you?"

Evidently his antagonist did not, and, dropping the gun barrel, he scrambled hastily down. Again Olmstead darted back to escape the futile shots from below.

"Talk about Horatius at the bridge!" he muttered. "This beats Macaulay 'way out of sight. I wonder what they'll do next?"

Several minutes passed. Then he heard the splash of oars in the water below. He peered over the edge of the bluff and saw that the boat had been launched again.

"They haven't given it up so quick, have they?" he thought, wonderingly.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PERILOUS VENTURE.

But the outlaws had no intention of retreating. Only three of them entered the small boat. They rowed directly to the schooner, took the remaining members of the crew aboard, and then kept on out to sea. Olmstead was not long in understanding their intentions.

"They're sick of this, I reckon," he said. "That crowd are going to land elsewhere and get up behind me. Then I'll be at their mercy. Yes, they've taken two of the guns.

"Well, they must think I'm a fool if I stay and wait to be captured. Yet, if I leave, and they know it, they'll walk right up here.

"By Jove! It'll be dark before long. Those fellows in the boat will have to go a good way to find another path up the bluff. So Brenna said. They'll be surely an hour—why, yes, it will be nearer two—before they can get me surrounded. I'll wait a while."

But he kept a sharp eye on the path below, and before long saw that one of the men was creeping silently up the bluff.

"I'll have to put a stop to *that*," decided Olmstead.

He looked about him and found a rock as big as his head, which he suddenly let roll down the descent. The smugglers shouted to their companion and he, barely escaping the bounding stone, quickly slid back to the beach.

"Now, don't you fellows try that again!" Olmstead commanded. "I'm right here watching you if you *don't* see me. The next rock I let drive will hurt somebody."

The five men got out of range at once and the defender of the path chuckled to himself.

"This is something of a picnic—just now," he said. "I don't believe they'll risk sneaking up on me again. I'm safe till the others get here. And it will be dark then; it's sundown in half an hour. They'll do a lot of sheep stealing in the night—I don't think! But I suppose they'll hang round until tomorrow," he added, "and then the fun'll likely be on their side. But I ought to be able to defend the house with two guns. And Brenna says she can shoot. By Jove! she's a plucky girl.

"It's a shame these fellows should terrorize this whole coast. But their day is coming. I'll return to St. Johns, get out the warrants, and be on the lookout for them and their boat. Wish I could see her name; wish I could get aboard of her, too, and find out what she's like inside.

"If they dribble in those cases of brandy and the rest, a few at a time, there is probably a hiding place on board for them. Cranford Byron—confound him!—is foxy enough for that. I wonder if I couldn't make a

visit to her just where she is, after dark?"

He thought seriously of the project for several minutes.

"It's a foolhardy thing to try, I s'pose. The Hetters likely know her name. But I'd look like a fool to walk on board this boat in St. Johns Bay with a warrant, and find nothing to back up my accusation. I've no corroborative evidence yet. But I'd hate to stop any more lead." He patted his wounded arm thoughtfully.

"It's growing dark already," he went on to reflect. "I believe I could let myself down the wall on the opposite side of this basin; mortal man couldn't climb up it. I could swim out to the schooner, look her over pretty thoroughly, and get back to the beach yonder while these boobies are fooling 'round ashore.

"Then, when their reserves get here and find the bird flown I can get over to the house as seems best—probably by climbing *this* path. They won't hang 'round here long when they find I've departed. I—believe—I'll—chance it!"

The scheme was one born of Olmstead's reckless temperament, and had little *but* recklessness to assure its success.

He took another look at the enemy. The five outlaws had camped on the narrow beach and were enjoying their pipes.

"By Jove! it looks dead easy," he thought. "I'll run around to the other side of the basin and look the ground over, any way."

He crept up the path into the narrow glen, and was soon on the high tableland to the south of the tiny bay. The sun was just dipping below the sea and the fog had entirely disappeared.

"It'll be clear tonight," he told himself. "I must get through with my reconnoitering before the moon rises."

The formation of the headland south of the basin in which the schooner lay made it possible for him to reach the very verge of the bluff without being for an instant in view of his enemies on the beach. He kept a bright lookout on both land and sea, but saw nothing of the schooner's boat or the rest of the crew.

With keen eyes he scrutinized the broken face of the cliff. It was a "shivery" place, to say the least, and Olmstead hesitated. The game hardly looked worth the candle. Yet his natural obstinacy was against giving up the project.

There were parts of the wall so smooth and steep that the surest footed man who ever lived could not have safely descended them; but other places looked more promising. True, there was no defined path like that which he had recently been guarding; but by letting himself down carefully, and dropping from ledge to ledge, he might safely reach the sea.

There was a spur of the cliff which thrust itself into the basin and hid a portion of the descent from the view of the outlaws on the other side. It was also growing dusky at the foot of the rocks. He could not put off the attempt much longer.

"Here goes for a try at it, any way," he muttered. "I may find out what's aboard the old pinky. That may be worth knowing. I might as well see this whole business through while I'm about it. 'In for a penny, in for a pound.' Heigho! here's for a high trapeze performance—without a net. Ugh! I should be slightly disarranged if I happened to fall down there."

He swung himself carefully, but swiftly, down to the first ledge. Fortunately he was blessed with a cool head and steady nerves. Nevertheless, he glanced downward as infrequently as possible.

He found the fissures and slight footholds upon the rock with marvelous success, taking advantage of every hardy root or branch which thrust itself out of the cracks where the accumulated soil had given birth to shrubs and

bushes. With his body pressed close to the face of the cliff he crept downward like a fly upon a wall.

Each ledge where he could stand with safety marked a thankful stage of the journey. He could breathe in these places and wipe the moisture from his face.

The chill sea breeze was sweeping in with the darkness; but he did not feel it. His exertions—of mind as well as body—would have kept him warm with the thermometer at zero.

Finally he got below the zone of all vegetation. The rock was black and serrated, and the ledges were, in some cases, several yards apart. Now came the real perils of the descent. All that had gone before had been child's play to this.

His wounded arm hampered him, for he could not place the dependence on it he wished. In lowering himself from one foothold to another all the strain came upon his right arm.

At one spot he was forced to turn his back to the rock and slide a distance of quite twenty feet. Fortunately the ledge at the bottom was a wide one, or this narrative would have ended right at this point.

"Whew! talk about tobogganing!" he muttered. "This beats Montreal at New Year's. But I'm a good two thirds to the bottom."

The sun had quite dropped out of sight. The cliffs cast deep shadows into the basin. Olmstead could see the schooner, lying white and ghostly, below; but nothing was to be seen or heard of the outlaws.

"I reckon that crowd in the boat found some difficulty in discovering another path to the highlands," he told himself, exultingly. "Maybe they went as far as Seal Island Bay. If they did, I only hope they won't trouble the house—till I get there, at least."

He kept on down the cliff, scrambling from shelf to shelf, barking knees and elbows a good deal, but finally arriving in safety upon the edge of the water. No life appeared about the schooner, but the low murmur of voices was wafted to him from across the basin. The enemy had evidently not yet suspected his departure from the head of the path.

"Quick work's the word," he told himself, having regained his breath. "The schooner's unguarded yet; but there's no knowing how soon the other rascals will reach the ravine and my absence be discovered. Then it's a ten to one chance they all pile on board for supper—though they'll have to bring their boat round first. They can't very easily retreat to the schooner without a boat—unless they follow my example."

As Olmstead spoke he began stripping off his outer clothing. He dared not enter the water, however, until his body had dried off; with the wisdom of the practised swimmer he took no chances with cramp.

Then he descended carefully into the sea. He reached deep water and struck out for the anchored schooner without making a splash. Only his face was above the surface of the basin, and the ripples in his wake were scarcely perceptible in the deepening shadow. In three minutes he reached the bow of the boat.

Laying hold of a trailing rope he dragged himself in reach of the rail. All was quiet on board; not a sound came from the shore. He stepped on to the deck and crouching on hands and knees worked his way aft.

At the hatch he listened a moment; but the forecastle was evidently quite empty. When he reached the cabin door he found that, too, ajar. With quiet tread he descended into the cabin. Enough light entered behind him and through the decklight overhead to reveal the little apartment quite clearly.

There were two curtained berths on either side, arranged like a yacht's sleeping accommodations. A door led directly into the schooner's hold, as he found by opening it.

As he turned away from this he

caught the sound of something above. He darted to the companionway. There was a splash of oars alongside and the sound of low voices. A row boat bumped against the schooner!

Olmstead sprang up the steps; but already footsteps sounded on the deck.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT OLMSTEAD DID NOT KNOW.

It was near four o'clock when Brenna left the customs inspector in the glen to watch the Eggers, and started herself for the byrehouse on the other side of Seal Island Bay. Her experience in this wild and sparsely settled country had endowed her with a physical courage above that possessed by most women; but she well knew the character of these raiders, and she feared for the safety of the young man as well as for that of her uncle's property.

She knew what was expected of her, however, and instead of making directly for the byrehouse, circled around to the eastward until she overtook the flock of sheep Olmstead had frightened earlier in the afternoon.

Had the dogs been within call her task would have been far easier; but she managed finally to get the foolish creatures started in the right direction and chased them over the hills as far away from the sea as she dared go.

"At least, those men on the schooner will have a very hard time finding this flock of sheep," she decided.

As she passed the head of the inlet on which the house stood, she started a smaller flock and drove them eastward, too. So that it was nearly sunset when she reached the byrehouse.

"Whatever's kep' ye, Brenna?" Aunt Molly demanded. "Why, the lassie's all flushed wi' rinnin'!"

"The Eggers are here," returned the girl. "I met Mr. Olmstead on the hill and he's watching them."

"The Eggers! Save us!" ejaculated her aunt.

"An' Mr. Olmstead—hoo cam' he *that* way?" demanded Grandmother Elen.

"He'd got lost in the mist," replied Brenna, briefly.

"Th' poor young mon!" cried the old lady. "Was he safe?"

"Safe as far as the fog goes; but I don't. know about the Eggers," said Brenna hastily. "I wanted him to come back with me; but he thought he could keep them from climbing up the bluff—at Gander Bay, you know. I've driven the sheep back into the hills."

"Sure, the sheepies are not worth the young man's life," cried the aunt. "Ye sh'd ha' made him come, lass."

"You'd best try making him yourself, auntie. John Olmstead, as you'd say, is 'nayther ter haud nor bind.'"

"Havers!" returned Mrs. Hetter, in disgust. "If I was a young lassike I'd find a w'y to mak' him go *my* gait instead of his ain."

And when an hour had passed and Olmstead did not appear, Brenna wished that she *had* tried further persuasion with the young man. She had loaded both the guns, the windows had been shuttered and barred, and the byrehouse was ready for a siege. The dogs were shut out of the house to give warning of the approach of either enemy or friend.

As it grew dark in the little valley, at the bottom of which lay the calm bay bordered by the tilled fields of the byre, Brenna grew more and more fearful for the safety of the customs inspector. She went to the door a dozen times to look off across the rolling barrens in the hope of seeing him.

"Something must have happened," she declared. "I wish he had not stayed behind."

"Why don't you go a step and meet him?" advised Mrs. Hetter. "He'll not know the way right well by dark."

"Tak' the gun, girl," said Grandmother Elen, as Brenna set out.

So, armed with her Cousin Aslak's rifle, Brenna left the byrehouse, skirted

the edge of the bay, and took the most direct route for the glen above Gander Bay.

It was still light on the hilltops; but in the ravines and gullies which crossed and recrossed each other night had already come. So anxious had the young girl become regarding Olmstead's safety that she forgot the possibility of danger to herself.

She had nearly reached the summit of the ridge and was passing through a particularly rough defile when there was a rush of footsteps behind her, she was seized by both arms, and the rifle wrenched from her grasp.

"Begorra! we've caught a gal!" exclaimed one of her captors.

"It's old man Hetter's niece—I seen her when we was here before. . . . There, there, me pretty! don't struggle that way. We'll not be hurtin' of ye."

"What'll the skipper say to this?" demanded another.

Brenna could only see their faces indistinctly in the dark, but they were a repulsive looking crew. They grinned at her and handled her with a familiarity that made her shudder.

"He'll be claimin' her—as an 'ostage," was the reply, with a wink.

"Yaas—the skipper hogs everything," growled some one.

"Don't let him hear *you* say that, Mellin," advised another. "He's got it in for you yet over that break at St. Johns."

"If he takes her home Net'll tear his eyes out—you mark my words."

"Come, come! what about the girl?"

"Hold on to her. She may come handy. Three of us are enough to fix that fellow above. The rest go back in the boat and take the gal."

At that Brenna tried to free herself and screamed. Instantly the not overly clean hand of one of the Eggers was clapped across her mouth and her voice effectually quenched.

"Don't try that again, my pretty, or we'll have to gag you," was the roughly given advice.

At once the party separated, and the three men who were Brenna's immediate captors led her hastily to the bluff, helped her down a steep ascent near the mouth of Seal Island Bay, and placed her in their boat. They sprang in after her and pulled off from the shore.

The poor girl was well nigh swooning from terror. To be at the mercy of these brutal men fairly shook her self control. They leered upon her and spoke to her in a manner which made her crouch in the boat's bottom and cover her face with her hands.

But the wretches were in too great a hurry to enjoy her misery. They pulled as rapidly as possible back to the little basin where their pinky lay. It was quite dark by the time they reached it.

"Put her aboard and then row ashore and tell the skipper," said one.

"Mebbe she'll jump overboard."

"Lock her into the cabin. The boys ought to be on top of the cliff by this. We want to see the fun when they get that fellow up there."

"Yes—if the ormadoun's still there. . . . Here! git aboard, miss."

Brenna was dragged rather roughly upon the schooner's deck and hustled aft to the cabin.

"Ye'll stay here a bit till we come back," said one of the men, as she was forced down the companionway stairs.

Then the door was closed and fastened on the outside. The skylight above was also closed and bolted, and she was left in the dark cabin.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE SMUGGLER.

BRENNA groped her way to the center of the cabin and found the stationary table. A chair stood before it, and into this she sank. The experiences of the last few minutes had quite unnerved her; her usual calmness and self possession were gone.

After all she was only a girl, and certain peculiarly feminine traits were

asserting themselves. She was almost on the verge of hysterics now.

The loneliness of her situation, even the darkness of the schooner's cabin, frightened her. She heard nothing from her captors without, and at first there was no sound in the place. Her eyes became slightly accustomed to the gloom, and she began to recognize the outlines of objects. She saw the curved stanchions, the lamps screwed to the bulkheads, the curtains before the tiers of berths on either hand.

Of a sudden her straining ear caught a slight and mysterious sound. It did not come from the deck; it was not the sea lapping against the hull of the schooner; it was neither the creak of block nor straining of cordage. It was something, she was convinced, in the cabin!

She sprang up from the table, every sense alert, fear tugging at her heart. The sound was repeated.

"Somebody behind those curtains!" she whispered.

It was better to know than to live in such an agony of apprehension. She darted across the room and flung aside the berth curtains.

Empty! Still apprehensive, she crossed to the other side of the cabin and parted the draperies there. The four berths were unoccupied. And yet she was sure there was somebody else aboard the schooner; she felt a presence other than her own.

And while she stood clutching the berth curtains, one hand on her heart as though to stifle its throbbings, she was horrified to see a door slowly open in the bulkhead before her. It swung back noiselessly on its hinges, revealing the dimly outlined figure of a man. Brenna was speechless.

With a tread like a cat's the figure advanced into the cabin and closed the narrow door. It was a ghostly enough presence to have terrified the stoutest heart. But as her eyes grew more accustomed to the place Brenna saw that the ghostly dress the unknown visitor wore was a suit of undergarments which fitted tightly the man's form.

"Now, I wonder if those fools have gone?" murmured a very unspiritual voice as the figure advanced to the table.

Brenna uttered a little gasp, and the man both heard and saw her.

"Je—rusalem! what have we here?" he demanded, and was across the cabin in a stride. "A woman—as I live!"

"John Olmstead!" cried the struggling captive.

"Who the ——. I beg your pardon, miss!" he returned.

He had dropped her arm instantly, and, feeling along the ledge under the nearest lamp, found a match, and in a moment had lit its wick.

"Miss Hetter!" he exclaimed. "I could not believe my ears—and I doubt my eyesight."

"Oh, how came you here, sir?" she asked. "Did they capture you?"

"Not on your life!" responded Olmstead. "I'm here of my own free will; at least, I have been thus far. Did they lock that door on you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm evidently a prisoner, after all," he said coolly. "But you—have they been to the byre?"

"No."

"Then how came you here?"

"I started out to find you——"

"Ah! against positive orders, Miss Brenna."

"But we did not know what had become of you."

"Well, you've found me," said Olmstead; "though I'm not exactly in fit dress to receive visitors. Did those fellows in the dory go ashore?"

"I believe so."

"How many were there?"

"Three."

"Then the others kept on to the glen so as to catch me?"

"Yes."

Olmstead chuckled. "They'll be finding out I'm not there about this time. I haven't been there for an hour

and a half. There'll be some tall language used, I'm afraid, when those fellows on the beach find that they've been barking up an empty tree."

"And you weren't hurt?"

"No; though we had a rattling good fight. I got a whack at three of them, and then they divided their forces and decided to play a waiting game. When they got nicely settled I circled round the basin, found a place where I could get down the cliff, swam across, and here I am."

"How foolhardy!" Brenna exclaimed.

"Perhaps. I don't know. I wanted to see the inside of this cabin."

"But how will you get out?"

"That comes later. First I want to know if there's a hiding place for smuggled goods here. It isn't in the hold. I've been all through that, lighting my way with matches."

"But those men may come back at any moment."

"Well?"

"Can't we escape, Mr. Olmstead?"

"My dear girl, I don't know yet. We'll hope so. But there's only one small boat attached to this craft, is there?"

"That's all I've seen."

"Well, we shall want that boat to make our escape in. It is now ashore. So are the men. Men and boat are together. I must separate the boat from her owners before we can escape; do you see?"

Meanwhile he was examining the cabin rapidly, yet carefully. The bulkheads were of plain matched stock and could not conceal any sliding panels. The berths had no false bottoms. The spaces beneath the berths were occupied by chests which could easily be moved about.

The table in the center of the cabin was stationary, its legs being fitted into iron sockets in the deck. The sockets came up through the square of carpeting which covered the deck.

"Humph!" muttered Olmstead. "A rug aboard a fishing smack? Rather savors of luxury, doesn't it? Let's see what's under it?"

The carpet was tacked only at the corners. He jerked it back and folded it beneath the table. There was a seam in the deck—and a sunken ring. Olmstead seized the ring with both hands, and, exerting all his strength, raised a trap door!

"Ah-ha! we have it!" he panted.

Table and all were raised with the trap. Olmstead braced it open with his knee, and beckoned Brenna to bring the lamp nearer. A compartment was revealed, nearly two feet deep and presumably the size of the cabin.

"They could stow away a good many hundred dollars' worth of stuff in there," said the customs inspector, letting the trap down again. He replaced the carpeting, and then looked at his companion.

"Business before pleasure, Miss Brenna. Now we'll see about getting out."

"They would kill you if they should discover what you have done," she said in a grave voice.

"I expect so. They feel like doing it, any way. That captain doesn't look like a fellow who would easily 'forgive and forget.' And I landed several good whelts on his head and shoulders. He was just about frothing at the mouth when I drove him down the bluff yonder. . . . But, knowing the character of our enemies, we are naturally forearmed."

Brenna sighed. "You are exasperatingly cool, Mr. Olmstead. One would think you did not realize how serious our position really is."

"I don't admit it is serious yet," he said quickly.

He went to the cabin door and tried it. A stiff bar on the outside resisted his efforts. A glance at the decklight above assured him that that way out was impracticable.

"You see, we are surely captives," cried Brenna.

"Now, don't talk like that," commanded Olmstead, good naturedly. "They forgot all about this door into the hold when they shut you in here; or, rather, they knew you, as a woman, would not be able to take advantage of the hatch as a way of escape."

"The hatch!" cried Brenna. "I never thought of that. But then," she added, almost immediately, "suppose it is battened down?"

"There you go again! Just hunting for trouble," he said. "It's not likely to be fastened when the hold is empty. And if it is, there is another way."

"How?"

"The forecastle. The bulkheads are only matched boards, much thinner than these; I examined them. I can smash off a board and we can get to the deck that way."

"How clever you are!" she cried.

"I'm the cleverest fellow you ever saw—after I'm in a scrape," he said grimly. "But if I was really smart I wouldn't be in."

He took down the lamp again and led the way into the hold of the schooner. It was a contracted, ill smelling place, and littered with casks and boxes.

"Here's the hatch," said Olmstead, halting amidships, and putting the lamp into Brenna's hands. "Hold the light so that it won't shine out if I succeed in sliding back the cover."

He rolled a cask into the right position, sprang upon it, and fumbled a minute with the hatch. The slide was already a bit of a way open—left so probably to ventilate the hold.

"Good!" Olmstead whispered. "Put out the light. I'll help you onto the barrel, and after I'm out myself, lift you out. Ready?"

She was soon beside him. He reached up and grasped the edges of the hatchway; then he drew himself up, though the strain on his sore arm was tremendous, and slipped over the edge upon the deck. The way seemed clear.

"Come on!" he whispered, and leaned over to assist her.

"One hand is enough, Mr. Olmstead. Don't hurt your lame arm," she said.

In a moment she was out of the hold and at his side.

"Now for the boat," he said.

"Oh, no! please don't, Mr. Olmstead! I can swim," she whispered, in apprehension.

"But, my dear girl! you can't swim from here to Seal Island Bay. We cannot climb the cliff at the place I came down. As for the path in front yonder, that would be too reckless, I fear, even for me. We should probably fall right into the hands of the enemy."

"But you will surely fall into their hands if you try to get the boat," she said.

"No, I think not. They won't be watching her, I fancy. I'll just slip into the water and see, anyhow."

He was over the rail before she could file any further objections, and so quietly did he swim toward the shore that she could not hear even a splash. There was no sound from the watching outlaws, either.

Olmstead soon caught sight of the small boat. It was fastened with a kedge anchor as before; but the tide had risen and the craft was afloat and tugging gently at its painter.

The oars were aboard, and not a single person was in sight on the beach. The Eggers had doubtless all gone up the path. The moon was rising, and perhaps the rascals hoped to make their raid on the Hetters' sheep by its light.

"They're a smart lot," thought Olmstead. "I might run off with their schooner while they are trapesing around the hills yonder."

He swam quietly to the bow of the boat, drew the knife out of his waistband, and cut the painter. Then he pushed off into deeper water. When the boat was well under way he drew himself carefully into it.

And then, just as he felt quite secure, he made a most startling discovery. There was a man already in the boat,

and in climbing in he fell half across the body of the stranger!

CHAPTER XI.

THE SOLUTION OF THE NAME MYSTERY.

OLMSTEAD had cast his body upon the lower limbs of the man in the boat, and the fellow, evidently left as watchman by his mates, had been asleep; but as Olmstead's wet body landed upon him he awoke with a howl.

But the cry was stifled in his throat. The customs inspector encircled his neck with his right hand, and, bringing his full weight to bear upon the struggling watchman, held him powerless in the boat's bottom.

With his disengaged hand Olmstead rapidly searched his antagonist, and, finding no weapon but his knife, tossed that overboard.

"Now, my friend, you keep still, or I'll be forced to use this on you," and he showed the man his own knife. "You won't be hurt if you obey orders. Will you keep still?"

The fellow's face was pretty black, and he looked ready to promise anything. So Olmstead withdrew the pressure from his throat, took the oars, and paddled out to the schooner.

"Miss Brenna!" he called.

But she was at the rail.

"Are you all ready? Let this fellow aboard, and then you come down."

"Oh! who is it?"

"The watchman. He was 'asleep at the switch,' so I took him in. Nice spectacle, isn't he? Get up, my friend."

The man climbed sullenly over the rail, while Brenna dropped into the stern of the small boat.

"We're off!" exclaimed Olmstead. "Good night, my friend," to the discomfited outlaw.

"But you're not rowing toward the sea," exclaimed Brenna.

"I'm going after my clothes first. I'm a pretty looking object to appear in a lady's company, am I not?"

Brenna laughed a little nervously, but made no reply.

The boat was quickly at the shore, and the girl kept it off the rocks with an oar while Olmstead disembarked, found his clothing, and slipped into it with as little delay as possible. No time was to be lost, for as soon as they were well away from the schooner the watchman had begun to shout for his associates.

"He'll bring them all down upon us," said Brenna, in some anxiety.

"If they're any distance at all from the shore they'll never hear him," Olmstead assured her. "The cliffs will drown his caterwauling very nicely. . . . Ah, now we're ready," and he stepped into the boat again.

"You must let me help," she said. "You ought not to use your lame arm so much. Besides, the exercise of rowing will keep me warm."

"You're the doctor," he returned. "I obey your mandate. Now we will go back to the house. I'd be glad to eat a decent meal again. We can stand a siege there, eh?"

"Yes."

"Sorry you sacrificed your cousin's rifle to an overweening desire to find me," he said.

"Don't!" she cried. "I'm just as sorry as you are."

"Humph! that doesn't sound very complimentary," he said. But he could not see her face, for she had taken the stroke oar. "By the way," he added, after a moment, "do you know what the name of that schooner is?"

"Why—er—the——" She stopped to consider.

"It isn't named the Seagull, too, is it? But I'll swear it is Sea *something*. I saw that much of it on her stern in Seldom-come-by, and Colonel Mackenzie—chief of our bureau, you know—told me her name was Seagull."

"I know: I've heard the boys speak of her," said Brenna, thoughtfully. "It is—there, I've got it at last!—it is the Seamew."

"Good! I—I wish I'd known it before."

"Then you wouldn't have taken Uncle Mons and the boys for desperate pirates?" asked Brenna, slyly.

"Now, don't rub it in, Miss Brenna. I am sufficiently humiliated, I think."

They were long since outside the little basin of Gander Bay and rapidly skirting the bluffs to the northward. But before they arrived at the mouth of Seal Island Bay the moon was up and Olmstead guided the boat's course further off shore. He was taking no chances on making a mark for a stray shot from the Eggers.

"They won't be pleased to find their boat gone," he said. "We won't put temptation in their way."

Suddenly Brenna, in glancing back, saw something which made her lose her stroke and utter a startled exclamation.

"What's up now?" Olmstead cried.

He turned about himself. There, running swiftly in toward the mouth of the bay was a sail. It was scarcely half a mile away.

"It's the Seagull coming back," suggested Olmstead.

"The sail is too small. No, this is a boat with only one mast. It's coming from the direction of Fogo. Why! it must be Aslak."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes."

"He couldn't come at a better time," said the customs inspector. "I should fancy that he and I ought to be enough for these rascals, eh?"

"He is very fearless," replied Brenna. "But I hope there will be no more fighting."

It was not long ere their boat was discerned by the lone navigator. The course of the little sailboat was changed and was soon in hailing distance.

Olmstead waved his hand and shouted; the face of the man steering the sailboat appeared underneath the flapping canvas.

"Is it Aslak?" Olmstead asked.

"Yes, yes! Let me speak to him," cried Brenna. She stood up and shouted to her cousin across the heaving water.

"Is it you, Brenna?" was the astonished query of the young Norwegian. "What is the matter?"

"Run down here and take us aboard, Aslak," she commanded.

The little boat was run as close as safety would permit, her sail dropped, and Olmstead paddled alongside. Meanwhile he had obtained a good look at Aslak Hetter.

The Norwegian was a yellow haired giant, with a broad, smooth face and deep blue eyes, as gentle as a child's. He embodied Olmstead's idea of what the old Vikings must have looked like.

"Whose boat is that?" inquired Aslak, looking curiously at Olmstead.

"The Eggers'," responded Brenna. "They are at the byre again."

"And father and the boys?"

"Went to Buller's Ledge two days ago. We didn't expect you home so soon."

"But the Eggers—what have they done?" demanded Aslak, running up the sail again.

They left the outlaws' boat bobbing up and down on the waves behind as Aslak's ran in toward the entrance to Seal Island Bay.

"Well, they haven't done much of anything—yet," said Olmstead, reflectively. "They've tried several things, but circumstances seem to have been against them."

Aslak looked questioningly from his cousin to the customs inspector and Brenna hastened to introduce Olmstead.

"You probably have heard of me though you have not seen me before," said Olmstead. "I believe my character has been assailed at Seldom-come-by, by these same Eggers, as you call them. I was caught aboard their boat——"

"Are you the man who was shot at?" exclaimed Aslak.

"I'm the man who was shot—not merely shot at," replied Olmstead, tapping his arm. "I was aboard this Seamew—is that her name?—to get information regarding her crew and their business. I am a government officer, Mr. Hetter. Well, they discovered my presence and I was winged in getting away. I had a nice voyage out to sea with only one oar in the boat, and the next day was driven in here by the gale."

Aslak nodded his head. "I know," he said. "It was thought by the fleet you were lost in that storm."

"Well, I should have been lost had it not been for your cousin here. She saved my life when I landed. I couldn't do much for myself with a game arm, you see."

"And about the Eggers?" queried Aslak again.

Olmstead gave a brief account of the battle he had successfully fought with the outlaws on the bluff, and of the adventure which followed, Brenna furnishing explanatory notes on the same, especially regarding Olmstead's rescue of herself from the schooner's cabin.

By this time they had run through the entrance of the bay and could see the byrehouse. Several figures were revealed in the moonlight running about the house and outbuildings.

"The Eggers!" cried Brenna.

"They've attacked the house," said Olmstead. "Guess we've got here just in time. Haven't a gun with you, have you?"

"No—no gun."

"Well, they're armed—to some extent. Now, there's only one gun in the house——"

"We don't need guns," interrupted Aslak. "We will attack them with the oars."

"Humph! all right. I'm game if you are; but they've got guns."

"Oh, you must not be foolhardy, Aslak!" cried Brenna, excitedly. "Don't attack them—I pray!"

Olmstead glanced from her to the yellow haired giant, and his thoughts drifted from the subject in hand for a moment.

"Couldn't blame any girl for admiring a fellow like him," he told himself. "He's the handsomest man I ever saw. Jack, my boy, I guess you'd best take your wares to another market. You're outclassed here."

But Aslak was saying: "I know these Eggers. A swift attack will rout them. They'll run if we charge bravely. How many are there?"

"Eleven in all. But one's aboard the Seamew—if he's not swum ashore to join his mates."

"We will make a run for the house," said Aslak. "We must get Brenna inside first, of course. Then if they are braver than I give them credit for being, we can retreat there ourselves."

"See yonder!" cried Olmstead, suddenly. "The wretches are trying to set fire to the house."

"No — it's the barn!" gasped Brenna.

"Don't let that worry you," said Aslak, calmly. "The outside thatch may burn, but nothing else. They'll not accomplish much that way."

Suddenly there was a streak of flame from one of the windows of the byrehouse and the report of a gun echoed from hill to hill.

"It's auntie!" Brenna exclaimed.

"Mother has done that to scare them," Aslak declared.

But it was evident the gunshot had done something beside scaring the enemy. A loud yell went up from the Eggers in concert when the gun was discharged; it was continued in solo after the report had died away. Some one of the ruffians had stopped the contents of the weapon and his howls were most doleful.

"Now's our time!" Olmstead shouted, and Aslak ran the sail down.

The little boat was carried into the wharf by the impetus it had already gained and the two young men leaped ashore.

" Don't show yourself, Miss Brenna, till we have cleared a way to the door," said Olmstead. Then he seized an oar and followed his gigantic companion into the fray.

As they landed, the shotgun spoke again. The Eggers, who had gathered about their wounded comrade, presented a mark impossible to miss. Immediately they added their yells to those of the other, and the way they decamped was a caution. Two of them had to assist the victim of the first discharge.

And then Aslak and Olmstead fell upon them. Ten to two was rather heavy odds; but the Eggers already had enough. The shots from the house had taken the fight out of them.

Aslak, stirred by righteous indignation, attacked their rear fiercely with his oar. In his big hands the tough ash seemed as light as a lathe—until it landed upon an unfortunate Egger. Probably that particular crowd of vagabonds had never received such a " paddling " since their boyhoods.

Aslak laid about him mightily, and Olmstead was no mean second. The Eggers did not stop to use their guns, but ran howling away, many limping from the blows of their chastisers.

The latter followed no further than the head of the bay; then they hurriedly returned to make sure that Brenna and the women in the house were safe.

Aslak was chuckling hugely, his rage all passed. " Isn't my mother smart, eh? " he demanded. " Didn't she give it them! "

" She can shoot pretty straight," Olmstead admitted.

" Ah, but that isn't all," said the fisherman. " Those fellows are not hurt much—though they think they are. Mother is too tender hearted for that. She loaded with rock salt—and my! doesn't that smart! "

" Ho, ho! " cried Olmstead. " Now I understand why those great boobies yelled so. She practically won the battle without our help."

When they reached the house they found the door open and Brenna and her aunt crying in each other's arms. The excitement was past and they were —women! The old grandmother, however, sat smoking her pipe.

" Aslak, child, did 'ee beat 'em well? " she asked.

" As well as we could for their running, grandmother."

" And haf they gone back to their vass'l? "

" So I expect."

" It iss bad that your father iss not here. Then you might haf giv' them such punishment as they would long remember."

" Remember!" exclaimed Olmstead. " Why, my good woman, half that crowd won't be able to sit down—with any comfort—for a fortnight."

" You don't know these Eggers as we do, Shon," said Grandmother Elen, shaking her head.

But at daybreak the Seamew and her crew had gone from Gander Bay, and Olmstead felt pretty sure that before they could make another raid on the Newfoundland byres the scoundrels would be in jail at St. Johns.

CHAPTER XII.

TO THE SMUGGLERS' STONGHOLD.

THE afternoon following the raid of the Eggers, the Seagull returned with a heavy catch from her fishing trip to Buller's Ledge. She reported having passed the Seamew that very day, running smartly to the northward, evidently bound for home.

Lars and Dorich, as well as little Fergus, were terribly disappointed that they had not been on hand when the raid occurred, that the thrashing of the Eggers might have been more complete.

" If we'd only known what they'd been up to we could have boarded them today and finished the licking you began," Lars declared, regretfully.

"Oh, that I should have such bloodthirsty boys for cousins!" Brenna said, shaking her head reprovingly.

"This iss a harrd land," said old Mons to Olmstead. "It mak' de boys rugged an' strong; but it not de plas for women folk."

But Olmstead did not take heart from this. He saw Brenna's evident admiration for her cousin Aslak and he made up his mind that the young giant, in his own quiet, shy way, loved her. Olmstead was too much of a man to try to usurp another's place and he put his former thoughts regarding the girl as far from him as possible.

There were other things to think of, too. He was very anxious to get back to St. Johns, particularly for his sister's sake. Yet his duty pointed in another direction first.

It was all very well to lay plans for the capture of the Seamew and her crew; but to make a clean sweep of the entire matter, the smugglers' stronghold must be discovered and the whole band broken up. From Aslak he had gathered several bits of information which, set down in their order, seemed to suggest but one course of action.

In the first place, the young Norwegian had told him that his adventure at Seldom-come-by had made very little stir. In fact, only the fleet lying in the roadstead had been cognizant of the trouble aboard the Seamew on the occasion when Olmstead was shot. And the fishermen, well knowing the character of the Eggers, had set the matter down as a mere row among themselves and paid very little attention to it.

Aslak had heard nothing concerning Olmstead's disappearance from the hotel, so the latter presumed that Cranford Byron had found some means of keeping *that* quiet. Aslak could not tell him, of course, whether Byron had left Seldom-come-by, or not.

"Now," thought the customs inspector, "I don't know what story the scoundrel will carry back to St. Johns. But I *do* know just about what he thinks regarding me.. He believes he'll never see me again. It must be a nice feeling for a man to think he's committed murder. Maybe Byron doesn't mind a little thing like that, however. Oh, but won't I just—never mind! I won't make threats till I get him in my clutches.

"But he thinks I'm a 'past proposition' and won't figure on me again. That hairy faced skipper of the Seamew quite evidently did not recognize me—how should he? He only saw me just for an instant at Seldom-come-by. I believe I'm in this game to the finish!"

He also learned from Aslak and the others a good deal about this outlaw people of whom the crew of the Seamew might be called the traveling representatives. The islands on which they lived were well known to the Hetters.

"We used often to meet up with them when we fished in White Bay," said Aslak. "They made it so unpleasant for us all that few Newfoundlanders go there now, though White Bay is a good fishing ground."

"Why, I should think you fishermen would have banded yourselves together before this, gone up to where these people live, and cleaned out the whole crowd."

"That would certainly be a brave undertaking," was the reply. "There are over a hundred of them—men, women, and children. And the women will fight like wild cats."

"It would be a good deal of a job, then, would it? Well, are you afraid to go up there?"

"Afraid?"

"Humph!" said Olmstead, reflectively. "I guess I won't put it that way. I doubt if you know the meaning of fear. I'll tell you. I want to go up there and get the lay of the land; learn where these fellows hide their smuggled goods, and all that. There's little doubt in my mind that it's there, and not at Fogo, they have established

the depot. I want to see what the islands and channels look like, so that I can send a government vessel up there to clean 'em out if it's necessary. You see?"

Aslak caught at the idea eagerly. "I'll help you," he said. "We'll all be glad to. We will take the Seagull —just as soon as her cargo is attended to."

"Very well. I'll engage your whole outfit on my own responsibility."

"But we will do it for nothing," Aslak declared. "If there's a chance to drive the Eggers out of those islands, or cow them so that they will let the farmers alone in the future, we'll be glad to help."

So the compact was made and two days later the expedition to spy out the smugglers' stronghold sailed. Uncle Mons and Fergus (the boy much against his will) remained at the byre and the four young men manned the Seagull. Grandmother Elen and Mrs. Hetter looked upon the cruise as much like other fishing trips; but Brenna, who knew more regarding Olmstead's plans than they, was visibly anxious.

"I hope you'll get into no danger," she said. "Don't be reckless, will you? I wish Uncle Mons was to go with you."

Even Aslak smiled at her anxiety and his brothers laughed at her outright. But Olmstead thought: "Now, she thinks I'm such a reckless sort of a chap that I'll get Aslak—and the others—into trouble."

So to reassure her he took an opportunity to say that he should ask nothing of her cousins but that they manage the boat.

"If there is anything else to be done, I'll do it myself," he said. "Don't you worry for a moment, Miss Brenna. I won't allow anything to happen to those boys who love you so dearly. They'll all come back safe and sound."

She looked at him a little oddly. "But what about yourself, Mr. Olmstead?"

"Well, you know I'm going because it's my duty to do so, and because I must gain certain information as instructed by my chief. If anything happens to me, it won't matter so much—only to Elsa. But, pshaw! nothing is likely to happen to me."

"I hope you will come back safely, Mr. Olmstead," she said, after a moment.

"Thank you, Miss Brenna. It is kind of you," and he sculled himself aboard the schooner that he might not see the parting between Brenna and—her cousins. The Seagull ran out of the bay before dusk and with a favoring breeze sailed northward.

It was a three days' cruise to the neighborhood of the Eggers' rendezvous. The islets inhabited by these people were of too little importance to find a place on many maps; only the sailing charts notice them. Both the high tablelands of Labrador and the heavily wooded hills of Newfoundland were in sight and the islands themselves were as dreary a chain of black rocks as can be found along the entire northeast coast.

Among the tall "chimney" rocks and crags lay several little plateaus, some well wooded and watered, and these the outlaw folk had preëmpted. There were three or four good anchorages, too, for vessels of moderate tonnage, but well hidden from the sea. The Seagull approached the chain of islands from the northwest, the islets at that end being uninhabited, and came to anchor just after dark.

"Now," said Olmstead, taking command as soon as Aslak relinquished his place at the wheel, "I'm going to go ashore. You lie here till daybreak and if I don't come back, you'd best up sail and get out of the vicinity of the islands. Come back again at night and anchor just as near here as possible. I may have to keep to cover all day."

"But you won't go alone, Mr. Olmstead," cried Lars Hetter.

"I certainly shan't let any of you

boys go with me," responded the customs inspector. "I promised you should run no danger. All I want is your boat."

The three brothers looked at each other.

"You have a right to do as you see fit, sir," said Aslak, slowly. "But as long as we don't hear from you, the Seagull will lie right here—day and night. We shan't stir a cable's length till you're back on the boat, safe and sound."

"The Eggers may see you."

"Well, we'll see them," responded Aslak, grimly. "We'd like to."

Olmstead laughed. "All right," he said. "Go your own gait; and I'll have to go mine. I'll be back if I can by dawn; perhaps before."

But the night passed without his return. The sun rose and still no sign from Olmstead, nor did he appear as the day wore slowly on.

"He has got into trouble; I know it, brothers," Dorich, the youngest boy declared.

"If he has we must rescue him," said Lars.

"You are right," added Aslak grimly. "We can never return home without him."

But if the Eggers had captured the customs inspector, they made no attack on his friends. The rocks seemed deserted but for the sea fowl which screamed and circled around their nests.

"I will go and look for him myself tonight," Aslak declared.

But just as darkness dropped upon them Dorich descried a small boat approaching. He hastily called the others from the cabin.

"He is coming back now!" cried Lars.

As the boat drew nearer, however, the sharp eyed Dorich said: "That is not our boat, brothers." A moment later he added: "Nor is the man sculling, John Olmstead."

"Who can it be then?" murmured Lars, and they waited in suspense the approach of the lone voyager.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TESTIMONY OF MELLIN.

The stranger was sculling his skiff rapidly toward the Seagull and would soon be alongside.

"We must let him aboard and then find out who he is," said Lars Hetter, decidedly. "We have no boat, you know, and we don't want to scare this fellow off."

So he and Dorich descended into the cabin while Aslak hid in the forecastle. The skiff soon came alongside and its occupant leaped aboard the schooner.

"Hullo! where is everybody?" he exclaimed, looking about the empty deck. "Hi, Boldy! where are you?"

He stepped quickly aft, and, after a moment's hesitancy, stumbled down into the gloomy cabin.

"Hello Boldy!" he called again. "What's the matter, are you drunk or asleep? The skipper wants to know why you didn't come around to the cove and anchor instead of lying off here?"

As the stranger ceased speaking Dorich scratched a lucifer and lit the lamp. Lars had crept around to the companionway and was right at the fellow's side. The latter glanced about the cabin and uttered a startled oath.

"What am I up against?" he demanded, and turned quickly to the exit.

But he was forestalled. Already the opening was filled by a figure whose appearance not only startled him, but astonished the Hetters as well.

It was John Olmstead, and he had evidently been overboard. He was very, very wet and otherwise seemed to have been through a hard experience.

"Aha! just in time," he said, pointing his index finger at the stranger. "You've bungled again, haven't you? Let's see—Mellin is your name, isn't

it? Yes? Well, Mr. Mellin, you weren't cut out for this business—not at all, sir."

"Hold on! Don't draw your gun. We're too many for you, any way." Aslak now appeared behind him in the companionway. "Four to one, you see. Yield gracefully, Mr. Mellin."

The fellow was speechless and fairly cowered before them.

"See here, boys, you've got to do some quick work," added Olmstead, rapidly. "I stove a hole in this fellow's boat and cut her adrift. You must get your anchor inboard and slip out of here as quick as you can."

"But what about this man?" queried Lars.

"He goes with us. Oh, yes, you will, my friend! You aren't fit to be an outlaw; you're not smart enough. Lars, take away his gun. That's it. Now, to work, boys. I'll stay here and watch him—and get on some of your clothes, Lars. My work is finished on shore. I've found out all I need to know."

The Hetters hastened on deck and Olmstead locked the door and began rummaging in Lars' locker for dry apparel.

"Sit down, Mellin, and make yourself comfortable," he said to the prisoner. "We might as well get acquainted now as any time. I've heard of you before."

"I—I don't know who you are."

"No? Well, it's not necessary you should. I know *you*, and when I say I think you're a failure as a—a smuggler, for instance, I believe the facts bear me out."

Mellin had dropped into a chair, but at Olmstead's last words he sprang to his feet and turned to the door. His face was white and his lips trembled.

"Sit down, sir. The door is locked," said the customs inspector, sternly. "Now, Mr. Mellin," he added, having finished dressing and taken the chair across the table from the trembling man, "we will talk business. You are now going to be carried to St. Johns just as fast as wind and weather will permit. You know what is waiting for you there. Now, hadn't you better make a clean breast of it?"

A cunning look came into the prisoner's face. "What will you give me to tell what I know?" he asked.

"Mellin, you're a treacherous scoundrel!" exclaimed Olmstead, in disgust.

"Well, they ain't treated me fair," he growled. "The skipper's been down on me ever since——"

"Ever since you got drunk in St. Johns and told more than you ought, eh?" interrupted the customs inspector.

"You're a government detective!" exclaimed Mellin.

Olmstead bowed. "I consider that arrant flattery," he said grimly. "Or was it meant in sarcasm, Mellin?"

"Hey?"

"You don't understand, do you? Well, never mind. Only I'm the poorest detective that ever walked, I believe."

'You're the man Mr.—er—who was shot at Seldom-come-by," gasped Mellin.

"I'm the man Mr. Cranford Byron shot—yes," said Olmstead. "Don't mince matters. I know more than you think—about some things. For instance, did you stop any of that rock salt at the Hetters, the other night?"

"You were there!" exclaimed the prisoner. "I know you now. You beat us off the cliff that day, and took the girl out of the schooner afterward."

"Perhaps. But we'll talk about you, if you please. Frankly, I have learned all that is necessary to put your whole crowd behind the bars. But your testimony may be of some value as a clincher; and as I think you are too big a fool to be a great villain, I'll do my best for you when the matter comes to trial, if you'll make a clean breast of it."

"I'll agree, sir," said the fellow, offering his hand. "Will you shake on it?"

"I won't take your hand, Mellin," was the contemptuous reply. "You are too slimy a rascal. You see, I'm frank. Now tell your yarn."

The man began rather sullenly.

"I ain't one of those people—you know that, sir?" he said.

"Oh, yes; I know it."

"I only j'ined 'em last year. I ran away from a Liverpool freighter while she lay at St. Johns. I—I had some trouble with the mate——"

"Go ahead," said Olmstead, nodding. "Never mind ancient history."

"Well, I j'ined the Seamew. There's some of those men up here who came the same way I did—run away from ships, you know. I didn't know what I was up against at first; but when we made a voyage across in that little pinky, why, I was on to the racket."

"To France?" asked Olmstead.

"Yes, sir. We got good cargoes; three of 'em since I've been with the Seamew. We always brought the stuff up here to the islands and hid it——"

"I know where," interrupted Olmstead. "I haven't been snooping around ashore for twenty four hours, without bite or sup, for nothing. Go on."

"Well, we'd run the cases down to St. Johns, a few at a time. Take a load of fish and eggs along, you know, land them, and then at night take the liquor ashore. This here Mr. Byron——"

"The villain!" interposed his listener.

"I guess he is, sir, though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth he's that pleasant spoken. Well, he's in a firm that deals in such goods——"

"Chambers & Joyce—yes."

"But here's something you don't know, sir. I learned it from a hearing of 'em talk. The other members of the firm don't know of the crooked work. The liquor is landed and this 'ere smooth spoken Mr. Byron and one of the clerks at Chambers & Joyce handle it and pocket the proceeds. That I know for a fact."

"Humph! now you've begun to tell me things that are up to date," admitted Olmstead.

"I can tell you more," Mellin declared. "The skipper has got it in for the Hetters. He swears he'll take a crowd down there in the Seamew and raze every building to the ground. But he won't try it till fall. They're going to take a lot of cases to St. Johns first. You see, they think—both he and Mr. Byron—that you was put out of the way at Seldom-come-by and that they are safe. Mr. Byron was going back to St. Johns to be ready to receive the stuff when the Seamew gets in."

"Are you sure of that, Mellin?"

"Oh, I'm giving you the straight tip."

"About the proposed attack on the Hetters, I mean?"

"Yes, sir. They'll go to St. Johns first—sure. They're only waiting for the schooner to come in before they start. Boldy and three other fellows went off fishing in her and somebody saw your boat lying off the Chimneys tonight and thought 'twas her. So the skipper sent me over to find out the trouble——"

"And here you are," finished Olmstead. "All right. Now, Mellin, you're a prisoner, but you'll be treated well as long as you behave. I think we'll put you in the forecastle for the night."

He unlocked the door and led the way on deck. The Seagull was under way and the Eggers' islands had been swallowed up in the darkness behind. There was a good breeze.

"We'll put this fellow in the forecastle, boys," said Olmstead. "He's on parole, and if he doesn't behave he'll have to suffer for it. Now, give me something to eat and I'll get to bed. I haven't slept or eaten since I left you last night."

While he ate he related to Lars and Dorich (Aslak was at the wheel) how he had played at hide and seek about the islands in his endeavor to find the

smugglers' headquarters and keep from being discovered himself. He had been obliged to sink his boat to avoid having it found and the suspicions of the smugglers aroused, and had finally discovered, more by good luck than good management, the cavern where the contraband goods were stored.

He had seen Mellin start for the Seagull, and swimming out ahead of him had waited in the shadow of the schooner till the unsuspicious fellow boarded her. The sinking of the skiff was, perhaps, an unnecessary precaution; but he wanted to keep the smugglers " guessing " as long as possible.

" When their own schooner comes in they'll think ours was some fishing smack lying off here, and that Mellin missed her in the darkness. They won't be sorry to lose Mellin, I reckon."

" And what will you do with him? " asked Lars.

" Take him to St. Johns. You must land me at Fogo and I'll find transportation to the city from there."

" Why shouldn't we take him all the way to St. Johns, Lars? " suggested Dorich.

" I believe you! " exclaimed his brother. " Then we'll see the thing through, eh? "

" That suits me," said Olmstead, as he turned in. " Talk it over with your brother."

So in the morning when he awoke, the inspector found the Seagull on a course which would bring her into Seal Island Bay again.

" We will stop and speak to father about going to St. Johns," said Aslak. " We might take a cargo of fish there. We'd get better prices than at Fogo."

And Olmstead was not sorry to see the byre—and its people—once more. On the third day the Seagull dropped anchor off the little wharf and the family trooped out to welcome them. Olmstead found an opportunity to say to Brenna:

" You see, Miss Hetter, I have brought them back safely."

" But the boys tell me you were just as reckless as usual, Mr. Olmstead," she responded.

" Well, that didn't matter so much. I kept *them* out of it."

But she did not seem very enthusiastic in the expression of her gratitude for her relations' safe return, and somehow Olmstead felt disappointed.

" I'm making a fool of myself over this girl," he thought; " and she's another fellow's property, too. I'll get away from here as soon as possible."

So he urged haste in their preparations and the Seagull was ready for her cruise southward within two days. Olmstead took particular pains that his good bys should be of a general character, and included the entire family in convention assembled.

" I hope I shall see you all again some time," he said. " But it's hard telling when I'll get another vacation," rather grimly. " I've had enough excitement on this to last me some time."

Soon the Seagull's sails were shaken out and she slipped out of the little landlocked bay, Olmstead wondering, as he stood in the stern and looked back at the homely byrehouse and the little group on the shore, if he should always regret, or some time be glad, that he had ever seen the place.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CARD OLMSTEAD DID NOT KNOW WAS IN THE PACK.

THE Seagull had to fight every foot of her way to St. Johns. Squall followed squall and there were three or four days of head winds that seemed to keep the pinky standing still.

It was with vast relief that Olmstead finally saw spread before him one morning at daybreak the expanse of St. Johns Bay, with the terraced city on its inner shore.

He arranged with the Hetters that they should tie up at the fish dealer's wharf and deliver their cargo as usual,

while he went to report to his chief. Mellin was to be kept a close prisoner in the forecastle until Olmstead had conferred with Colonel Mackenzie.

Besides, there was a possibility of the smugglers' craft being already in the harbor and it would never do for any of her crew to see Mellin.

Olmstead was desirous of keeping out of Cranford Byron's sight—for the day, at least. He was terribly anxious to see Elsa and learn if all was well with her; but he dared not run up to the house for fear Byron would hear of his arrival.

In fact, he made his way to the Customs Bureau in such a nondescript outfit of blue jersey, oil cloth trousers, and grain leather boots, capped by a drooping sou'wester (all the personal property of Lars Hetter) that the orderly objected to letting him pass into Colonel Mackenzie's private office.

"For heaven's sake! Where did you get that rig, Olmstead?" demanded the chief, after a second look at his uncouth disguise. "I wouldn't have known you from Adam."

"Before, or after the apple eating incident? I don't think Adam wore a sou'wester—and boots like these—in the Garden of Eden. But if I am effectually disguised, colonel, it is the first instance of my having shown ability as a secret service officer."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I fear I wasn't cut out for a detective."

"What! Have you bungled this thing, too?" cried the chief, in vexation. "And that boat is back here in the harbor, Peterson tells me."

"She is?" Olmstead leaped to his feet.

"Yes, sir."

"When did she get in?"

"Last night. She's unloading a very innocent cargo of fish at Maccomber's wharf."

"But she's got something else aboard—I know it!" cried the excited inspector. "We must get our warrants at once—for the whole crew, and two men ashore besides."

"Easy — easy!" said the chief. "What is all this about?"

"They've got liquor aboard. I know where they land their cargoes when they bring 'em across—I've seen their headquarters. I know who handles the stuff here for them. I also know how the cases of spirits are hidden aboard the schooner when she comes in here so innocently to unload fish. And in addition, I've brought back one of their own men a prisoner; and he's ready to tell all he knows."

Colonel Mackenzie dropped his eyeglasses on the floor in his excitement and trod on them with a very generous, thick soled boot; but he did not notice this catastrophe in his surprise.

"And you say you're no detective?" he cried.

"Well, if you knew what I'd been through, you'd not praise me. What I've accomplished is just by 'bull luck,' that's all. Now, let me report."

The chief called the orderly and sent for a stenographer. While they were waiting he said: "Your sister has been here twice for news of you. She wanted to know how long you expected to be away and seemed worried that you had not written."

"She is all right, then?"

"She was day before yesterday. She was in then with young Byron—do you know him? Cranford Byron—to inquire."

"Do I know him?" echoed Olmstead. "Better than he does himself!"

But the thought smote him that the disaster he was about to bring upon Byron might fall upon Elsa, as well.

"It can't be helped," he told himself. "She'd better learn the fellow's true character now than when it might be too late."

When the stenographer arrived he talked steadily for an hour, Colonel Mackenzie listening with ears a stretch to the story of his adventures. Then there was the stenographer's transcript

to be made and the warrants issued for the apprehension of Cranford Byron and the clerk in Chambers & Joyce's (name unknown), and for the captain of the Seamew and her crew. It was noon when these were ready.

Olmstead hurried back to the Seagull, after arranging for four special officers to await his call at the Customs Bureau. But on his arrival at the wharf, he learned something which quite set his plans at naught.

Lars hurried him into the cabin the instant he appeared. "Mr. Olmstead!" he exclaimed, "the Seamew is here in St. Johns."

"So I am told," replied the inspector, wondering at his young friend's excitement.

"But she has just got under way and is steering out of the harbor."

"No!"

"Yes, sir. We have all seen her, and Aslak and Dorich are all ready to cast off if you wish to follow her. We've stopped unloading our fish."

"You are lads after my own heart!" Olmstead declared. "How far out is she?"

"Running out of the harbor this minute."

"Then we can't stop for my deputies. Do you think we can handle that crowd? They are evidently scared."

"We are ready to try it," declared Lars.

"Good! Get under way at once."

Lars darted on deck. In a few moments the pinky sheered off from the wharf and flitted away for the harbor mouth. Far ahead, running out to sea with a fresh breeze at her heels, was the smugglers' craft—the Seamew.

"They're a long way to the better of us," Olmstead said, when he had got into his own clothing and come on deck again.

"Wait till we get outside," responded Aslak, his handsome face aglow with the excitement of the chase. "If we east shore boys can't outsail those lubbers, why call me——"

"Too late for dinner," finished Lars, sticking his head out of the forecastle. "Mellin and I have been getting a bite. Hadn't you fellows better eat?"

"Mellin!" exclaimed Olmstead. "I had forgotten him. Set him to work, Aslak, if you need an extra hand."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Aslak. "He can take the wheel now while we eat. Keep your eye on him, Lars."

When the inspector and Aslak returned to the deck the Seagull was outside the bay. Thus far her prey had had the best of the race; but now the Seagull got the full strength of the off shore breeze and she fairly laid down to it.

"We're going two feet to their one," Lars declared. "Those fellows don't know how to sail a boat."

"But it will be night by and by."

"Not for hours yet. Don't croak, Mr. Olmstead."

But the customs inspector paced the deck in anything but a quiet frame of mind. While he was off here chasing the schooner, Cranford Byron might be getting away. If the crew of the smuggler had taken fright it was very probable that their friends ashore were warned also.

And it was Byron, more than anybody else, that Olmstead was after. His triumph would be a mockery indeed if the man who had so injured him escaped.

But they could not fail to bring the Seamew and her crew to book. That fact was apparent in less than an hour after passing the highlands at the entrance to St. Johns Bay. The Seagull was outsailing the smuggler on every tack.

The Hetters had an old fashioned seaglass aboard and Dorich brought it up and leveled it at their prey.

"There's a power of folks aboard of her," he said. "D'ye think they'll fight?"

"Let 'em fight," growled Olmstead, his hands thrust into either side pocket of his coat. "I'm armed this time."

"And we've the old shot gun in the cabin," added Lars.

"Those Eggers have got my rifle, I s'pose; I'll get it, once I'm aboard there, and use it on 'em, if need be," Aslak calmly remarked.

Olmstead laughed heartily at this.

"I guess we won't have to fight much. They'll know better than to make the charges already filed against them more serious. They're not such arrant fools as all that."

Suddenly Dorich cried, excitedly: "See here, boys! there is a woman aboard of her."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, there is. I'm sure I can see her skirt fluttering in the breeze. Yes; there she is again."

"Let me see," said Lars, coming forward with Olmstead. He fitted his eye to the old glass, but handed it to the inspector after a moment. "*I* don't see any woman," he said.

"Nor I," agreed Olmstead, after a squint through the glass.

Dorich took it again. "She's gone," he said, ruefully. "I don't see her now. But she's aboard, just the same."

The others laughed at him, however. Aslak had taken the wheel again and his eyes roamed incessantly from the little binnacle beside him to the boat they were following.

Olmstead paced the deck, his hands clutching the hard rubber handles of the revolvers in his pockets. His excitement was growing; but his face did not reveal his emotion.

Another hour passed. A stern chase seems always a long chase; but now the Seamew was being rapidly overhauled. Her pursuers could plainly see everybody on her deck. If there was a woman aboard, as Dorich claimed, she was below.

Olmstead counted eight men beside the one at the wheel. The latter, he made sure, was the bushy bearded captain with whom he had had a bout on that memorable afternoon at Gander Bay.

"He'll be real glad to see me," Olmstead thought. "I'll keep my eye on him when I go aboard."

It was evident that the crew of the Seamew now knew they were being pursued, whether they had realized it before or not. They had crowded on all sail and stood at the rail staring back at the Hetters' boat.

Aslak ordered the foretopsail broke out, and the instant the wind got into that balloon-like canvas, the Seagull began to walk.

Although the two boats seemed so much alike, in outward appearance, their sailing qualities were not to be compared for a moment. The Seagull walked up on her antagonist hand over hand.

"We'll get 'em on the next tack!" declared Aslak.

"They may dodge us."

"I'm going to take their wind so they can't. You watch me," returned the young Norwegian, with confidence.

The Seagull came about, her sails shook a moment as the booms swung around, then the wind filled them. She seemed almost to leap forward—like a horse that feels the bit in his teeth—and the sea hissed and foamed under her bows.

As a bolt from a crossbow she flew down upon her rival, and the wind hummed through her cordage like the groaning of an African war drum.

The man at the Seamew's wheel saw her coming and put his boat about. But he was too late. The pursuing craft—a great, white winged bird of prey—swooped down upon the other until Olmstead could have tossed one of his pistols onto her deck; then she came up into the wind's eye and stood there, with her sails all a shake and completely shielding the smuggler's craft from the breeze.

"Lay to, there!" Olmstead shouted, at the rail. "I'm coming aboard."

He motioned Lars and Dorich to get the dory over the side.

"You come aboard here an' ye won't

get off alive—whoever ye be!" roared the skipper of the Seamew.

Meanwhile his men had seized oars and were trying to work her out of the lea of the other schooner.

"Jump in, boys, and row me over," commanded Olmstead.

He leaped into the dory himself and as the Hetters bent to the oars stood up and drew his pistols.

"I've warrants for you all—every last one of you!" he shouted. "Drop those oars!"

The men were disconcerted. The captain fairly frothed at the mouth. In a minute the dory was under the Seamew's rail and Olmstead was on her deck.

"Who the devil are you? And what d'ye want?" demanded the captain. Then he got a good look at Olmstead's face. "I know ye!" he yelled, dropping the wheel and darting toward him. "You and I've got an account ter settle—curse you!"

Then he stopped. Just as he was about to lay hold of the customs inspector the black muzzle of a revolver was poked into his face.

He fell back a step; Olmstead advanced upon him steadily and the fellow backed away, step by step, until he landed against the rail and could go no further.

"What are you fellows gaping at?" he finally shouted to his crew. "Go get a gun and shoot the fool!"

"Hold on! What's the matter with you, skipper? We want no shooting here."

The voice startled Olmstead so that he almost dropped his weapons. He whirled about, taking pains that his back should be to the stern so that nobody was behind him. Cranford Byron was standing at the top of the companionway stairs.

For a moment a fierce joy filled Olmstead's soul. *His enemy had not escaped!*

He leveled one of his weapons at Byron's head. The villain went white to the very lips for a moment; but Olmstead knew it was not fear of the pistol that caused it. To Byron his appearance was like the resurrection of one from the grave; for weeks the man must have believed him drowned at sea.

Slowly the color crept back into his cheeks; he fumbled at his shirt collar as if it choked him. Then he found his voice and it was as smooth and well modulated as ever.

"Ah, Olmstead! What an unexpected pleasure. Back again from a foreign shore, are you? How pleased your sister will be to see you. She's been quite worried—I assure you."

He stepped aside from the companionway. Olmstead's hands dropped to his sides.

"Quite a romantic chase, following us 'way out here, wasn't it? If we'd only known it was you. We were running out for a little fishing, you see. I'd promised Miss Elsa and Mrs. Buttrick a week ago."

Olmstead's hands were quickly hidden in his coat pockets. There were hasty steps and the rustle of skirts below.

"Oh, what is it, Mr. Byron?" cried Elsa's voice and Elsa herself appeared at the cabin door with Mrs. Buttrick looking over her shoulder.

Olmstead, stunned and speechless, had fallen back. Cranford Byron was alone equal to the emergency.

"Come up, Miss Elsa—and Mrs. Buttrick. You could never guess who's here! Such a romantic incident."

Elsa flew up the steps and into Olmstead's arms.

"Jack!" she cried.

"Isn't it delightful?" Cranford said. "Olmstead must have heard we had gone fishing and followed us out here. Our captain couldn't make out what this other boat could possibly want chasing us. Why, it will read like a romance—*in the newspapers*—how the returning brother followed his sister out to sea in his impatience to see her. I only hope the villainous reporters won't suggest an elopement."

Elsa's arms were about her brother's neck and she was hugging him delightedly. But Olmstead, both hands still in his coat pockets, looked over her head and straight into Byron's eyes.

And if ever murder lurked in John Olmstead's heart it lurked there then. He could have shot his enemy down as he stood, and shot him gladly!

CHAPTER XV.

AND THERE WERE OTHER CARDS.

DURING those few seconds of utter silence, Olmstead's brain worked rapidly. He saw, of course, the double meaning in Cranford Byron's words.

If he made a scene here—if he placed the crew of the Seamew under arrest, Byron included—his sister's name would be sure to be mixed up with the affair in the newspaper reports! And, besides, there was the understanding which existed, he felt sure, between Elsa and the rascal. If she really cared for him his arrest would be a fearful shock to her.

Love for the sister who had been his closest friend and confidant from childhood, pitted itself against his duty to the government. That was the proposition.

His own enmity to Byron sank out of sight. He would have allowed his long hoped for triumph to drop in an instant; but this was not his personal affair. He was here to arrest these offenders against the law—*and the arrests must be made!*

"What is the matter, Jack? Aren't you glad to see us?" Elsa cried, in wonder.

Mrs. Buttrick bustled up with a voluble welcome, also. "Mr. Byron was kind enough to make arrangements for the trip," she told him. "*So* kind of him. I—I hope you approve, Mr. Olmstead?"

"I can always trust to *your* discretion, Mrs. Buttrick," responded Olmstead, finding his voice. Then to his sister: "Why, I'm delighted to see you, Elsa, you know that. But I am —er—facing a rather serious problem just now. A—a—matter of business, you know. Now, will you do just as I tell you, without asking any questions —like a dear girl?"

"Why, yes, Jack," she answered, looking frightened.

"Now, don't get worried. It's all right. Just a little matter of business," went on Olmstead, talking rapidly. "I want you and Mrs. Buttrick to get into the dory yonder and go on board that other schooner."

"But why?"

"No questions, remember," said Olmstead, shaking his finger at her, playfully. "Do as you're told. You shall know later. My friends over there will take you back to St. Johns."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'll follow you right in. Don't be afraid."

Byron went to the side to help the ladies into the bobbing small boat.

"I am quite heartbroken to think that our fishing trip must be cut short," he declared, with unruffled manner. "Your brother, Miss Elsa, is such a terrible man of business. Now I——"

He was about to step into the boat after the ladies. Olmstead was beside him in one stride.

"Stay where you are!" he whispered, fiercely. "If you don't, I'll fill you as full of holes as a flour sieve!" Then to the wondering Hetters: "All right, boys. Tell Aslak to keep near us. Look out for the ladies."

There was a movement toward him by all hands, as the dory pulled away. Instantly he leaped back to his station near the wheel.

"You are under arrest, every man of you!" he said, in low, penetrating tones. "Don't make a mistake—now. I am a custom inspector and I carry warrants for the apprehension of this boat and her whole crew. I am in command here and the man who disobeys me will stop lead.

"Captain! take the wheel. Byron! stand right where you are. I won't allow a man of you to go below—try it and I'll riddle you! You'll all keep in plain view, where I can see you. I'm taking no chances with chaps like you."

The men sullenly obeyed his orders. The bushy whiskered skipper steered as directed and Cranford Byron was so careful not to move that his feet seemed glued to the deck. Olmstead's final threat had really cowed him.

With his hands gripping the revolver handles in his coat pockets, the customs inspector stood beside the wheel while the Seamew was worked back to St. Johns. The wind had shifted several points and the tide helped them some; but darkness had fallen before they entered the bay.

Fortunately Colonel Mackenzie had heard of the Seamew's departure and that Olmstead had gone in pursuit. Like his subordinate, he believed the smugglers had become frightened, so he sprang the trap at once, arrested the confidential clerk of the firm of Chambers & Joyce (the man who had worked with Cranford Byron) and loading the deputies into a tug, sent them after the two schooners.

The tug came alongside the Seamew just as she entered the bay and Olmstead drew his first long breath.

He stayed by his prize, however, until she was docked. Then he rushed over to the Seagull's wharf and found that Elsa and Mrs. Buttrick had been taken home in a carriage by Aslak.

"*I* wanted to take 'em home," grumbled Lars; "but old Aslak wouldn't hear of it. Never saw him so attentive to anybody before. But, then, your sister's a mighty fine girl, Mr. Olmstead."

Olmstead went away laughing at this frankly expressed admiration; but he was serious enough when he reached the house. He must tell Elsa the truth at once regarding Cranford Byron.

She met him eagerly.

"What *is* the matter? You must tell me everything, Jack. You don't know how worried I've been. I couldn't get those Hetter boys—aren't they nice? That big one, Aslak, looks like a Viking, doesn't he? I couldn't make them tell me anything. I know it must be something *awful*. Is it about Cranford Byron?"

"Well!" he exclaimed, looking puzzled. "You seem to view the prospect coolly. Byron *is* mixed up in it."

"Oh, dear, and we've had him here so much, too! Really, he's been quite attentive since his return from Fogo—where he left you."

"For heaven's sake!" gasped Olmstead; "is this the way you talk about your——"

"My what?"

"Why—er—about *him*," said her brother in confusion. "I—I thought you liked him."

"Why, he's quite amusing," said Elsa, coolly, but looking a little angry.

"I don't understand. I thought you were—well, interested in him. You know, when I came in from the office the day before I went away——"

"And found us two in the parlor?" Elsa laughed merrily. "Why, yes; there was something a little serious then—on his part. He was just about to—er—propose, I think; and fortunately your appearance nipped it in the bud. Since then," Elsa looked down demurely, "I have headed him off whenever I have seen like indications."

"And you don't care for the fellow?"

"Why, he's amusing," repeated the girl.

Then Olmstead related his adventures and explained Byron's villainy.

"And you thought I could care for such a man?" she cried, with indignation.

"I hope you'll forgive me, dear," he said, contritely; "but I judged from appearances."

"And appearances are very poor things to judge from—especially if they're about a girl."

And when he was alone the words

came back to Olmstead. "Jove! I wonder if that's so? I don't believe my judgment of a woman's real meaning is any better than my judgment as a detective. Now, I wonder if Brenna——"

* * * *

The Hetters were detained at St. Johns for nearly a fortnight as witnesses against the smugglers at the preliminary hearing. And the Olmsteads did all in their power to make their visit pleasant.

Although their lives had been spent at sea and in the wild country where John Olmstead had first met them, they were intelligent and not uneducated men. Elsa, who was always enthusiastic, if anything, was charmed with them.

"They are such open hearted, nice boys," she declared to her brother. "And Aslak is the handsomest man I ever saw; so much better looking than even *you*, John."

"Ho, ho!" thought Olmstead, "sits the wind in *that* quarter?" and he trudged down to the Seagull's wharf and found Aslak in the cabin laboriously polishing his boots.

"Oh, I was just coming up to see you," exclaimed the big fellow, with some confusion.

"That's right," said Olmstead, heartily. Then he added, "Go up and see my sister. I'll be back at the house before long."

Aslak stopped in his polishing and looked at his visitor seriously. "Do you think she'll *care* to see me?" he asked.

"You'd better ask her that question yourself, old man. *I* can't answer for her."

"But you are her guardian, Mr. Olmstead," pursued Aslak, more firmly. "I want your permission to ask her."

"How about your cousin Brenna?" blurted out Olmstead.

"Brenna? Brenna?" repeated Aslak, "I don't understand."

"Oh, don't you? Then I do."

"You do *what?*" cried the astonished Aslak.

"I understand that I am even a bigger ass than I had thought," declared Olmstead.

Then seeing his friend's puzzled face he added: "My dear fellow, you have my permission to ask Elsa any question that may be in your heart. She is her own mistress—in this case at least. I wash my hands of the whole business. I have come to the conclusion that I know less about woman and her ways than any man living."

But before Aslak was out of earshot he called after him:

"I say!"

"What is it, my friend Olmstead?" demanded the other, putting his radiant face into the cabin again.

"When are you going back home?"

"Tomorrow. We're to pilot the revenue cutter to the Eggers' islands."

"Well, I think I'll go with you. I left some luggage in the hotel at Seldom-come-by, you know; and then, I'd like to see the folks at the old byre once more."

THE END.

THE RAINBOW.

A RAVELED rainbow overhead
Lets down to life its varying thread,
Love's blue, Joy's gold, and fair between
Hope's shifting light of emerald green;
With, either side in deep relief,
A crimson Pain, a violent Grief.

Mrs. Whitney.

THE GRAY FOX OF GIBRALTAR.

BY E. W. MAYO.

A story of the Rock, the grim guardian at the portals of the Mediterranean, and embodying a romance in which Cupid and Mars played equal parts.

CHAPTER I.

A TRYST ON THE ROCK.

THE silvery notes of a bugle sounded along the slopes of the Rock, signaling the sentry changes. It was almost the only sound that ever disturbed the quiet of the spot.

There were no parades here, no marchings back and forth to the music of noisy bands in the year 1704, so turbulent in most parts of Europe. One little company, of barely a hundred and fifty men, was all that Spain could spare from her wars to defend the noblest fortress of the continent.

They were hardly enough for guard duty, a man and a half to each of the great guns, looking from the face of the cliff across the stormy entrance to the Mediterranean.

But for that matter, what foe would venture to attack Gibraltar, the Rock, which nature had made more secure than any fortress ever devised by man? The throne itself might topple and invaders trample Spanish fields, but the Rock would remain, symbol of the eternal power of Him who fashioned it.

So thought every man of the little garrison, so thought every Spaniard. And thus there was a note of proud security as well as a stern summons in the sunset call of the bugle.

The measured, pulsating tones floated above the huddled group of houses that formed the town, and out to the little boats bobbing up and down on the heaving billows of the bay. They climbed the surface of the Rock itself and reached the ears of a girl who was mounting up the zigzag path that led toward the summit.

At the sound she turned and looked down upon the bugler whose strutting figure was like that of a game cock at the distance. Then, shading her eyes with one slender hand, she gazed at the sun hanging low in the western sky.

"It is true," she said aloud, although the deserted slope had no ears for her words. "It is but a half hour to sunset. I must hasten or Carlo will think I am not glad to see him."

Gathering up her short skirt with one hand and swinging her broad hat in the other, the girl bounded up the path with the agile grace of a young gazelle. She gave no pause to her flying steps until she reached a clump of locust trees which grew on a projecting ledge that formed almost the only break in the steep ascent of half a thousand feet.

Here she halted, breathless, and looked expectantly about.

There was nobody in view and only an indistinct echo came back in answer to her low call.

After gazing in every direction to make sure that the spot was deserted, the girl uttered an exclamation of impatience and threw herself upon the roughly fashioned seat formed by a projecting boulder.

As she rested, half recumbent upon the seat and with eyes closed, she formed a picture that must have been pleasing to the most critical eye. The rich blood had been stirred by the rapid ex-

ercise until it seemed as though the cheeks were bursting with soft color, like the young peach trees when the hot days of spring come on.

The lips, crimson almost, but not too full for beauty, were parted in a half curve at the quick indrawing of her breath. She had brushed the dark hair from her rounding forehead and it fell in a careless tangle across her shoulders.

The setting of this plenteous beauty was a gown of dull green, its soft texture bearing testimony to the skill of some oriental weaver. Across her shoulders was flung a scarlet shawl of lace, and the trim ankles peeping from beneath her skirts were incased in spangled Moorish boots.

It would not have been an easy matter to decide the young woman's nationality. Had she chosen to reveal her name, Anita Courtney, it would have been of small assistance in solving the question.

The easy curves of the figure, the brilliancy of the lips and the heavy dark hair, all betokened that African race whose sway held this southern peninsula in leash for centuries. The unconventional freedom of dress as well as the fervent expression of the face, even in repose, suggested another origin.

The eyes, usually the index of a woman's nature, when unveiled by the sweeping lashes now closed above them, were inscrutable, the color of the summer sky when a sultry haze is in the air and one can look into it an endless distance without fathoming its depths. One who knew all climes and all peoples could have said of this girl only (what was the truth) that she seemed the incarnation of Gibraltar, which the ancients wisely named "the end of the world."

It is the end of worlds and the gateway of worlds, where North and South and East and West meet and mingle as do the waters of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean between the Pillars of Hercules.

The girl lay for some moments in her idle posture, with no thought apparently except to recover from the exertion of her hasty ascent of the steep path.

Presently an irregular sound came from higher up the slope. It was like the careless footfalls of a man or animal in a hasty descent of the hillside.

The sounds drew rapidly nearer until they were close to the arbor within which the girl was sitting. She heard them and her lips moved a little as though counting their approach, but she did not change her position nor open her eyes.

When near the little grove the heavy steps subsided into cautious footfalls that advanced slowly around one side of the arbor. Then of a sudden two arms reached out, covered the girl's eyelids and drew her head backward until the owner of the arms could reach her lips.

The girl gave a little cry and made a pretense of struggling to free herself. Finding this in vain she sank back with her head upon her captor's shoulder and encircled his neck with her arms.

"Ah, Carlo! It is you, then?" she said. "I have waited so long. I thought that you were not coming, that you had forgotten me. Say that you had not forgotten me."

"Not for a single moment, my adored one. I have been longing all day to kiss you again—like that, and that, and that."

The girl breathed a sigh of contentment.

"But you are late. You did not come when you said."

"As soon as I could I flew to your side. You should have seen me leaping down the side of the cliff like a great chamois. I could not wait to take the path. But I was detained. The commandant sent for me. I have news to tell you; such news! I am going away."

"Ah!" The girl stood suddenly erect and drew her breath in sharply.

" I knew it, I felt it. That is why I have been so sad all day."

"That is impossible, my flower, for I knew it not myself an hour ago, when the commandant sent to tell me that I was to bear a message to the capital."

There was a joyous note in the young man's voice in spite of his attempt to seem indifferent. The girl turned quickly toward him and her glowing eyes searched his face.

" Yes; you are going away and you are glad."

There was reproach in her voice.

" Glad? Why not? Is it not an honor to be sent as messenger to the court? There are half a dozen above me in rank who might have been selected, but the commandant chose me because, he said, I was both brave and discreet. Why should I not be glad?"

The young officer sat erect and struck his hand proudly against his breast.

" There speaks the Lieutenant Carolus Mertrez and not my lover Carlo. It is ever the way with men. Honor is everything to them, and love nothing. A word from the commandant and I am forgotten."

" Not so; it is not that, my crimson flower. The sun shall not shine for me a moment while I am away. I shall think only of you. But I supposed you would rejoice at the honor that has come to me." Mertrez in turn showed that he was hurt.

The girl put her hands caressingly against his bronzed cheeks.

" Yes, I do. I am pleased, but the thought that you are going away makes me very unhappy."

" You do not think that in a week I shall forget you?"

" Oh, no, *mio* Carlo, I do not think that you will ever forget me, even though you cease to love me."

Something in her quiet tone seemed a menace and sent an unpleasant thrill through him. He realized that it was possible to fear this girl who seemed all passion and tenderness.

" Do not shrink from me," she said, noticing his involuntary movement. " I do not mean that I am going to hate you now, but you know the old saying about us."

Throwing her head back and letting her eyes wander out past the tall white rock long since named the Virgin's Shrine, she recited the couplet:

" Love a Moorish woman
And you sharpen a sword;
Let your love turn from her,
And its iron shall pierce your own heart."

" But you are not all Moorish," objected her companion.

Again the girl raised her head proudly.

" I am of the Moors. Think of me always as such and be proud that it is so. True, the old witch Zanosa says that I am also of the Romany blood, of the Shir Abbas, the oldest of the Romanies. And the witch says that while one drop of Romany blood remains in one's veins it will claim its own. But that she says when she wishes me to look kindly upon the suit of her son and I do not believe it all; I feel that I am Moorish to the last drop in my veins."

" Have little to do with Zanosa," said the young man, his brow darkening at thought of the old hag who lived in the Witch's Cavern high up the rocky slope, and who leered at him with evil eyes whenever he passed.

" Have little to do with her," he repeated. " Naught but ill can she do to thee."

" Is that because she is a witch, or because she has a handsome son who loves me?" asked the girl with a teasing uplift of her long lashes. " I do not fear Zanosa's arts and she has taught me many things. As for Brulo, it is true that he has a beautiful mustache, and it is said that he is the chief of a band of brigands, so he must be very brave. It is true also that he loves me madly and has threatened to carry me off if I will not wed him."

The girl laughed outright as she saw the jealous light that kindled in her companion's eyes. She put up her wrist for him to kiss.

"But he is not like my own noble Carlo," she went on. "Put your lips to the blue veins and be glad that they hold none of the gipsy blood else I might like Brulo better than I do."

The officer swept his mustache up the course of the delicate blue tracing to the elbow. Then raising his head he went on:

"When I spoke, I thought not of Romany blood, but of English."

The smile vanished from the girl's face and there was a harder tone in her voice as she said:

"Yes, my father is English, but I have nothing of him except perhaps his cruelty, as I sometimes think. No," interrupting his angry gesture, "he is not cruel to *me*. He robes me in silks and gives me many attendants and such jewels as shall dazzle your eyes when you see them. But I cannot love him. I would forget that I have aught to share with him. Let us talk of other things. To speak of my English blood makes me angry and today I am unhappy because you are going away."

"Be not too unhappy over that," said the young man, although his face showed his pleasure at her words. "In five days, or at most a week, I shall return to you."

The girl was looking out across the water once more. "A week before I live again," she said dreamily.

The officer kissed the cheek that was turned toward him.

"Fie, fie, foolish one," he said. "Speak not so. Shall I not return to you as quickly as I can?"

"I know not. I hope so. I will pray the Virgin so, but something in my heart makes me afraid."

"Then think not of it, but let me sit down here beside you and tell you over and over again that I love you and am ever yours."

A long time they sat there, side by side upon the rough seat against the locust tree, until the shadows that had been creeping up the side of the great rock began to close about them.

At Gibraltar the darkness does not fall from the wings of night, but it creeps upward like a great tide ingulfing the town, the fortress, and last of all the summit of the rock itself.

As it crept on and on, it shut out all beneath the two lovers until they seemed to be far up above the earth, away in a world of their own, as lovers ever are.

At length the young officer arose.

"*Caramba*! It is late," he exclaimed. "I must get back to the fort, for I take the road early in the morning."

"And I must slip away home," said the girl, "it would fare ill with me if my father knew of my wandering about thus unattended."

But she still clung to her lover's arm. "What is this evil errand that takes you from me?" she questioned after a pause.

"That I cannot say because I know it not certainly myself, but it is rumored among the officers that the commandant is sending for reinforcements of men and arms. You know that our country is at war and that the Rock is ill defended. An English fleet is in the Mediterranean and its admiral might choose to try his guns against us. He could not take the fortress, but in such matters it is well to be secure.

"That I think is the mission that takes me to the capital and it urges me to haste even as does the thought of my adored one waiting for me. You will be here to meet me on my return, will you not, precious one?" he inquired anxiously.

"I will, my lover, and every day while you are gone I shall come here to sit before the Virgin's shrine and pray that she may keep you safely."

"And my heart shall rest here with you and my thoughts be ever of you as I journey to the north. When the moon rises I shall blow her a kiss and tell her as she shines through your chamber

window to press it to your lips and you will know that it comes from me.

"To the breezes I shall tell a secret and as they pass you and touch your cheek they shall whisper in your ear: 'He loves thee; he loves thee,' and you will know the message is from your own Carlo."

The girl's only answer was to throw her arms about her lover's neck and to press her face to his, but he felt upon his cheek the warm tears that had sprung from her eyes.

Another long kiss and then they turned away, the girl taking the path that wound along the slope toward the town and the young lieutenant returning by the way along which he had come.

Once the girl paused to look back. Her lover had reached a projecting point near the summit and stood there motionless, dimly outlined against the fading color of the sky.

She wafted a kiss toward him, although the shadows of the lower heights screened her from his view. Then she went quickly on her way, her heart in a sweet tumult of joy, as is always the case with a maid who loves to be loved.

CHAPTER II.

A HOME SCENE.

THE town to which the girl descended was already in darkness save where veiled lamps shone uncertainly through latticed windows. Higher up on the fortifications lanterns hung at the end of each sentry beat, looking like dim stars set in the hillside.

Outside the harbor were other lanterns slung to the tops of high masts, and rocking to and fro like restless fireflies.

These beacons were too distant and too indistinct to relieve the pall of gloom that hung above the irregular collection of houses forming the town. There were no public lights along the crooked streets to relieve the encompassing darkness through which pedestrians picked their way, with more or less rapidity according to their knowledge of the surroundings.

It had once been proposed by the Spanish governor that a lantern watch should patrol the streets after nightfall. But this suggestion had met with opposition from some of the most influential citizens. Their consciences and their purses both flourished better in the darkness.

As it was, there was nobody whose business it was to hear or heed the strange, black boats that passed many times to and fro between the shore and the larger craft in the offing, bearing goods that would never pay tribute into the treasury.

A less experienced pedestrian would have found it a difficult matter to keep footing in the uneven passageways that formed the Gibraltar streets. But Anita seemed in no wise troubled by its many irregularities.

She tripped quickly on, suiting her pace to the rough surface and instinctively moving to one side or the other to avoid the greater depressions and the heaps of rubbish that burdened the path at frequent intervals.

Now and then she passed dark slouching figures that moved along within the deeper shadows of the house walks. They glided by silently and without greeting, like uncanny spirits of the night.

The girl gave them no heed though she knew that each dark cloak hid a desperate knife.

As she was well aware, the vulture scent of these evil night birds was keen only for the gold of roystering sailormen or fat waisted traders. So if one's purse was light he might give the laugh to fear in Gibraltar, but woe betide him who had more coin in his pouch than was matched by the stock of discretion in his skull.

In a street that ran close to the water front the girl paused before a house

built, like its neighbors, with a single entrance and a heavily latticed balcony projecting overhead. To all outward appearance the dwelling might have been deserted, for not a ray of light escaped from it.

The girl halted a moment as though listening to learn if any one was approaching. The street was deserted and as silent as a churchyard vault. Even the soft tap, tap of her fingers on the panel of the low entrance gave back a half echo.

In response to her summons the door swung inward, noiselessly and quickly, and the girl disappeared within the dark recess thus formed. Quickly and noiselessly the door closed again under the hand of the Ethiopian woman who had admitted her.

Although the building from the exterior had the forbidding aspect of a dungeon, it revealed itself, as soon as the girl had passed through a short, dark hallway, as a spacious and handsome mansion.

The room into which she emerged was like a court in form, with a lofty ceiling that rose to the height of two ordinary stories. This apartment was lighted by a score of swinging lamps, with sides of cut and colored glass, from which a diffused light was shed throughout the place. The walls were hung with Moorish tapestries and a pleasant incense rose from a slowly burning brazier standing in one corner.

Its fragrance was wafted to all parts of the room by the vigorous movements of a second black woman who wielded a huge fan before it.

There was an oriental luxury in every detail of the apartment's furnishing, which was the more surprising because of the unpretentious appearance of the house on the outside and its location in the roughest quarter of the town. It seemed as though the owner, through motives of fear or prudence, had given his abode the meanest possible showing to the passerby, and had atoned for this sacrifice by fitting its interior with the most sumptuous products of the Orient.

Passing quickly across the court, the girl turned aside at a curtained doorway, beside which a third woman was stationed. Thence she mounted a narrow stair that led upward and toward the rear of the building.

This terminated in a room almost as large as the first, though not so lofty.

From the abandon with which the girl flung herself down on one of the silk canopied couches, as well as from the eagerness with which two black women advanced to offer their attendance, it was evident that this was her own domain.

It seemed in truth more like the retreat of a princess than the room one would have imagined as belonging to the girl who had dashed up the hillside in such helter skelter fashion a few hours before.

The women moved swiftly and noiselessly about their work, removing her garments, bathing her with perfumed waters, and then bringing a long gown of costly jet covered cloth in which they proceeded to robe her.

When they had completed these operations another woman attendant, older and of less ebon hue than the others, approached and draped above the gown a long lace veil that fell from the girl's dark masses of hair to the floor and trailed behind her as she walked.

To this woman the girl spoke for the first time since entering the house, inquiring if her father was at home.

"He is," the woman answered, "and now waits for you to join him at table. When he asked for you I told him that you were dressing and I trembled much when the hour grew late and you did not come. Some day you will bring my old back to the lash."

"Not so," said the girl, patting the older woman's wrinkled cheek. "If I raise not my hand against you none

other shall dare to do it. Besides, you know that I may always be ill."

"How many times has that tale served already?" queried the woman, parting her lips in a voiceless smile, "and each time your bright cheeks pronounce it a falsehood. No, if you will be so forward of your goings, you must return more promptly. But hasten now, for the master waits."

With an indolent air, as though to indicate that she moved at her leisure, the girl, transformed to a queenly appearance by her change of costume, advanced across the room, descended a stairway that led to a long hall softly lighted and passing through this, entered another room. This, from the freshly laid table in the center, proclaimed itself the dining hall. Its walls were paneled, and there was an array of gleaming silver upon the sideboard.

At one side of the table a man was already seated, the master of the house. The two greeted each other politely, but with no show of affection. Neither their manner nor their appearance suggested that they were father and daughter.

From the richness with which the dwelling was furnished and from its oriental atmosphere, one might have imagined it the house of some large girthed Moorish merchant or of a Syrian Jew or some one of half a dozen other types familiar on the borders of the Mediterranean, who turned empty palms toward the world, but within their own homes reveled in richness denied to princes.

The man who sat with bowed form and blinking eyes before this shining board was like none of these. The thin, wiry body, the straggling beard that had once been a chestnut color but now was faded and streaked with gray, and the steely cold blue eyes, proclaimed Andrew Courtney a native of the British Isles and a descendant of the race of St. Andrew.

The richness of his surroundings contrasted strangely with the unkempt appearance of the man himself, and the plainness of the food before him. He was making his meal from dry bread and washing it down with gulps of a thin red wine from the flagon at his elbow.

As he raised his eyes now and then to gaze about the room, they blinked like those of some night bird, unaccustomed to face so much light. Within the eyes themselves there grew a look of peculiar cunning as they rested upon one object after another as though the sight recalled some memory in which their owner exulted.

For some moments the two sat in silence while the serving women noiselessly entered and departed bearing various dishes. At length the man ceased his busy crumbling of bread and addressed his daughter, while his unspeaking eyes still roved about the room.

His voice possessed a distant, foglike quality that seemed to have the saltiness of the sea in it, as he said, speaking in English:

"Have you been well today, Anita?"

"Quite well," replied the girl. She did not add the word father.

Another silence ensued. After a time the man resumed:

"How like you the life here? Does it please you to sit all day in the house, to veil yourself when you venture out, and to see only your serving women?"

The girl glanced up in surprise. It was not like her father to talk in this strain. For a moment she fancied that by some means he might have learned of her frequent excursion about the town and up the rock.

But the crafty eyes were again roving about the room and the furrowed face betrayed nothing. So she answered calmly:

"It suits me well. It is what I have always known. I have many women to attend me, rich gowns and beautiful jewels, and what more could I desire?"

The man raised his cold eyes to the girl's face for a moment as though he doubted she had spoken all she felt. Then he went on with no change in his voice.

"There be other towns in other countries, like Lunnon say, where it is different. There a lass can go about as she likes and show her face openly and do much that is denied her here. Would not that please you more?"

The thought of going away blanched the girl's cheek. She was betrayed into a surprised exclamation.

"What. Would you go from here?"

The shifting eyes had contracted again as though their owner feared to speak too freely, even within his own home. He shook his head wearily as he replied:

"I know not, lass, I know not. I was only thinking of what might happen before these many days; that we might go hence and live among gentlefolks and get you a fine husband if you willed. But let it bide until the time comes and that happens as may happen."

He relapsed into silence again and did not speak until the meal was ended. Then he said, without raising his eyes:

"Give no thought to what I have told you, for if change there is to be you shall know it soon enough. Tonight I shall be occupied in the warehouse, so do you charge Zara to see to the barring of the doors."

The girl bowed her head in sign that she understood, as she arose to leave the room.

She had no thought of asking Andrew Courtney more than he chose to reveal. He had never told her what the business was that kept him occupied so many nights in the dingy building behind the dwelling and facing on the harbor. She knew that it was vain and dangerous to inquire too closely into his affairs.

But she had seen the black boats slip away at night from the shadows of the old warehouse and she knew that they came not back empty.

Tonight, however, there was something so unusual in her father's manner that the girl's curiosity was piqued. He had never spoken before of leaving Gibraltar. To Anita herself the possibility of such an event had never occurred.

She knew nothing of the world aside from those eddies in its currents that flowed about the base of the Rock. Her lover had spoken of great events that were stirring, of war, of the possibility of an attack on the fortress.

Did her father's words refer to the same thing? He was an Englishman. Had he in mind some plan against the Spanish?

Anita had no liking for Spaniards. Her Moorish women, to whom such education as she possessed had been intrusted, had taught her to look down upon them as an upstart and a mongrel race.

But she felt a great desire to satisfy her newly kindled curiosity, to learn what her father had meant, for he never spoke without some well thought out intention behind his words. Besides, she might obtain some information which would interest Carlo on his return.

Revolving these thoughts in her mind, she hesitated for a few moments and then, making sure that the coast was clear, she slipped noiselessly down the passageway which her father had already traversed.

At its further end she listened intently for a moment and then called in a low voice:

"Sartor! Sartor! It is I, your mistress."

The door slid noiselessly back and a huge, swarthy fellow whose earrings glittered in the dim candlelight that came from beyond, peered cautiously out.

"Sartor," said the girl, speaking now in a tone that was commanding

although no louder than a whisper, "is a visitor expected tonight?"

"Yes," answered the servant simply.

Apparently no thought of evading her question entered his head.

"I have a wish to see who it is. You must help me to the little niche where I used to hide from nurse Pandour and from which it is possible to see above the partition of the inner room."

The Moor looked at her in surprise. It was years since she had made such a request. Not for many months had she so much as entered the warehouse.

"If it were known, my life would pay for it," he said simply.

The girl made an impatient gesture.

"My hiding place will not be discovered, and if it were you know that I would not betray you even to save my own life."

The man offered no further objection, but whispered:

"Return in a half hour's time then. The master will be busy with the accounts and will not notice even should you make some slight noise."

The girl thanked him with a smile and moved away to replace her heavy gown with one more suitable for her undertaking.

From her conversation with the attendant, it was evident that she exerted an authority greater than her father himself and that in this house of many secrets there were some unknown even to its master.

CHAPTER III.

THE GRAY FOX OF GIBRALTAR.

HAD the town been all Spanish or all Moorish, or like any other in existence, the peculiar nature of the business carried on by Andrew Courtney, trader, might have aroused suspicion, or have led to inquiry on the part of the authorities. But since it was what it was—Gibraltar, the meeting place and exchange of the best and worst among mankind, nobody thought it worth while to pry too closely into his neighbors' affairs lest the attention should be mutual.

Courtney's was not the only business in Gibraltar that flourished in devious paths and in defiance of the port regulations.

Trade must go on and where it has been convenient for generations to forget the ordinary laws of commerce, each man must be his own law and must overreach others in order not to be himself overreached.

In Courtney's case there was little ground for those inclined toward speculation to go upon and the old man saw to it that this little was made less wherever possible. Though he had lived for twenty years in the town, he was known to but few of his fellow residents and these few, for good and sufficient reasons, were inclined to keep their knowledge to themselves.

To the traders, of all nationalities and of none, whose ships plied the Mediterranean and the Straits, the grizzled form and bent figure of the old man had long been familiar.

When they dropped anchor at dusk, off the narrow point that curved out from the great promontory and made the bay a quiet and sheltered spot, they would wait for his silent sloop, black to its very crew, to come alongside. They would save their choicest fabrics for him, knowing that no lack of caution on his part, no careless error, would ever involve them in trouble with the harbor master.

Few, even of those who thus had dealings with him, knew Courtney's true name. To them, one and all, he was known as the Gray Fox of Gibraltar.

How this name originated it would be difficult to say. Certainly it was scarcely accurate to describe Courtney as a pirate in spite of the peculiar enterprises in which the black sloop sometimes indulged on her own account when business of the ordinary kind was dull.

There was, however, a certain aptness in the title which made it agree with the old man's appearance and the reputation he bore among the captains. Therefore he remained "the Gray Fox," and was likely so to remain to the end of his trading days in Gibraltar.

Many stories of his bloody and hair raising exploits were spun by the younger officers of the ships that put in at the little port, but when it came to the matter of facts they were all forced to admit that they knew absolutely nothing concerning the past of this remarkable man.

In the town itself the mystery concerning him was no less profound.

He seldom appeared upon the street, never by day. Those who had business to transact with him came to the tall warehouse with the blackened walls that stood behind his residence.

Apparently there was no connection between these two buildings. In reality the tangled grape vines that grew in the garden behind the house screened a stone walled passage that led from one to the other.

It was the same with all Courtney's affairs. The sloops that rocked idly in the water all day long in the shadow of the warehouse, seemed never to have any other occupation. The strapping black fellows who formed their crews were always to be seen lolling about the decks or sleeping in the sun.

When the safe cover of darkness enveloped the Rock, however, the sloops, bat-like, spread their black wings and sped away to the great ships from over seas that lay at anchor in the harbor. And always, before the morning light dawned, these same ill formed night birds came winging back to the pier, shaping their course by the lantern that gleamed through the star shaped aperture in the roof of the warehouse.

Oftentimes, too, the walls of the bleak building itself echoed with sounds remarkably like the unshipping of cargo. But in Gibraltar those who had no concern abroad remained behind barred doors after nightfall and those whose business sent them astir were well content to leave others to their own devices even as they wished themselves that others would leave them.

While the eye might be deceived as to the relations between the house with barred windows and the windowless warehouse, there certainly was no connection between the latter and the shop upon the main street of the town where a smooth faced Moor and many Moorish assistants dispensed all manner of merchandise at most attractive prices.

Yet the goods upon the shelves of the bazar were curiously like the goods that went over the side of the black bellied sloop, and every night the master of the shop journeyed down to the warehouse with the ledger in which was written down the day's sales and the bag in which were the day's receipts. There Andrew Courtney pored over the book and pocketed the gold and gave instructions to the smooth voiced Moor.

Perhaps that was why the unknown master of sloops and shop and men was not a familiar figure on the streets of the town. Those whom he willed to see came to see him at the dark hour when they knew he could be found in the little tight walled office at the rear of the warehouse.

They moved silently as did all about this strange man and his household. They were admitted by silent attendants who conducted them to the presence of the man with knotted brows, whose chill blue eyes made them move uncomfortably on their chairs.

While Courtney shunned acquaintance made only for acquaintance sake, he made it his business to know certain men—and officials. So it happened that there were often callers in the warehouse.

Once a quarter the Spanish governor came, unattended, uttered the password like the others and was ad-

mitted as were they. And his coming never occasioned surprise.

It was the governor's business to purchase supplies. If these supplies had never paid duty to the treasury that clearly was none of his affair. If he bought at rates below the ordinary it was clearly within his right to put the difference into his own pocket.

Andrew Courtney had pointed this out to him several years before when he was new to the position and its duties.

There had been a time when the governor, filled with the zeal that follows a first appointment, had set out to make new regulations and to enforce old ones for the business of the port.

He had wondered at the idleness of the black sloop lying beside the warehouse and had set two men to watch her. One of the men had been found soon after lying at the foot of the stone pier.

Evidently he had fallen off the wall in the darkness and the rough stones had broken his skull. At any rate, it was badly crushed and the man was quite lifeless.

The other man never reported to the governor. On the day following this accident to his companion he entered Andrew Courtney's employ.

The governor wondered at this, and being a man unaccustomed to fear, he went himself to inquire into the business of the black sloop. He was received politely; apparently he had been expected.

He talked long with Andrew Courtney and he had been coming regularly ever since. And the business of the sloop and the warehouse went on as before.

It might not have gone on so easily if the governor had known of all the riches possessed by the man whose customer he was. But Courtney made no display of what he owned.

He wore a threadbare coat to receive the most distinguished of his visitors; he kept his wealth hidden behind his house door, which never opened to friend or stranger, and in strong boxes secreted in vaults of which he alone knew.

Sometimes he visited the vaults and poured out the shining contents of the boxes. There upon his knees he thrust his knotted hands through the shining heaps of coin and counted its worth, and chuckled over it in miserly delight.

Always when he left, there was the glow of a half devilish satisfaction in his chill eyes and a curse upon his lips. The delight was for the treasure; the curse for the land that had given the treasure, for a government that knew not of his existence, and for the soul of a man long dead.

It had been so for twenty years, and every year the glow of cupidity in the narrowing eyes and the curse from the thin lips had grown stronger.

Perhaps he was thinking of the gold and the curse tonight as he sat at the rough table in the little office. At any rate the eyes were narrower than usual and the lips were drawn thin in an unpleasant smile which seemed to waver and to shape itself into unuttered anathemas under the changing light from the Arabian lamp that hung above him.

He was expecting a visit and apparently a visit of an unusual nature. The rough garments that he ordinarily wore had been replaced by others of better make and costlier texture. His coat was of braided velvet and the cloth knotted in sailor fashion about his lean neck was of rare Persian silk.

Upon one finger of the hand that rested on the table was a ring from which a glowing diamond flashed with a warm radiance that made his chill eyes seem more lusterless than ever.

The hour glass standing on the table had been moved thrice and the hour was midnight before the visitor came. He was ushered silently through the outer darkness and stood unannounced before the office door as it slid noiselessly back.

The light from the steady torch beside the entrance revealed his face against the darkness outside. The light always shone thus on Andrew Courtney's visitors, leaving himself in comparative shadow.

The figure outlined by the light was that of a well knit, youthful man with a pleasant English face. He bore himself with the stiff erectness imparted by long seasons of drill, and his bronzed cheeks showed the bluish tinge common to military men, and resulting from the daily visits of the razor.

At present his face wore a somewhat puzzled expression. Evidently he did not know what to make of the strange manner of his reception.

But he displayed no sign of fear and advanced calmly to take the chair to which Courtney motioned him.

For a moment the two sat in silence, while the narrowing blue eyes of the older man took in all the details of the other's appearance. Then he broke silence, saying:

"You come——"

"From Sir Admiral Rooke, on the advice of Captain Powelton," interrupted the young man whose uniform proclaimed him an officer of the British navy. "I am Lieutenant Calthorpe, though I dare say that my own name does not signify in the present matter."

The elder man paid no attention to the latter portion of the remark, but inquired with a faint trace of eagerness in his voice:

"Did Captain Powelton give any word for me?"

"He asked me to say, 'Remember the Barbary Chief and keep faith.'"

The eyes of the older man shifted from the other's face on which they had rested for a moment. The knotted hand on which the jewels shone, drummed upon the table, and the bent figure straightened in the chair. He spoke with sudden vigor:

"Aye! It is because I remember and because I am keeping faith pledged long since, not to man but to the devil in hell—that is why I sent to him."

The young man shifted uncomfortably on his seat. The strange nature of his surroundings, the mysterious atmosphere of the place and the remarkable words of the man before him made the whole affair seem uncanny.

His eyes were fascinated by the flashing jewel upon his companion's restless fingers.

After a pause, Courtney spoke again.

"I am glad that Dick Powelton remembers me. We were shipmates many years ago."

"He led me to believe that you would have something of importance to impart," put in the officer, anxious to escape reminiscences.

"Of importance—something of importance?" Courtney chuckled over the words, though there was no trace of a smile upon his lips now. Once more he turned toward the young man with a sudden access of energy.

"Yes, it is something of importance," he said. "I want you to go to your admiral and to say to him: 'Why don't you take this Rock of Gibraltar for the glory of England and the humiliation of this accursed nation of Spain?'"

The eyes, burning with a gleam of polar lightning, looked straight into those of the young man as he put this query abruptly. His earnestness and the novelty of the suggestion startled the officer.

"Take Gibraltar?" he faltered. "It is impossible."

"Impossible! I tell you it is not," replied Courtney half angrily. "How many guns, how many men think you defend this fortress, a fortress in name alone?"

"Many hundred. I do not know how many, but enough to sink any fleet before it could come to shore."

"Fools!" interrupted Courtney ex-

citedly. "Fools are the Spaniards that it is not so; fools the English who believe it so. Well then, I will tell you. There are today upon this Rock barely a hundred and fifty ill fed Spanish troopers and a hundred rusty guns that could not fire fifty shots all told."

The young man's eyes glowed with the excitement of this information. He had borrowed some of the magnetic power of the other, but it ran warmer in his younger blood.

"Can this be true?" he asked, less as a question than in surprise at the unexpected disclosure of the Rock's weakness. "How am I to be certain of it?" he went on. "Pardon my suggestion, but you are unknown to me. I must avoid a trap, to speak plainly. It might be pleasing to the Spanish to have our fleet batter itself to pieces against their fortress. If you will give me some proof to show——"

"I give you the proof of a word that has never been broken in promise to a friend or threat against an enemy," interrupted Courtney. "Let your admiral ask Dick Powelton if that is not sufficient. It is not I who would profit by the fall of Gibraltar."

"Then why do you desire it?"

Courtney rose from his chair, but after a moment he sat down again.

"But there——" he said, more gently than he had before spoken. "I will tell you the story, not because you ask, but because it pleases me to do so. Murat, bring some more of this wine, and do you, sir, make yourself comfortable."

Then Anita, crouched beside the little aperture at the top of the partition heard for the first time the story of this man's life and of her own.

CHAPTER IV.

A TALE OF CRUELTY, TREACHERY AND REVENGE.

The young officer sat in silence waiting for his companion to begin. But for many minutes Courtney said nothing.

It was his own suggestion that he should tell the story of his hatred for the Spaniards. Had Calthorpe asked him to do so he would have refused.

He felt the desire to confide in some one; a strange, new desire it was for Andrew Courtney, and it surprised even himself a little.

Nor was it easy to overcome the silence which had become the habit of his life. To no human being had he ever before spoken of his past. He hardly knew how to begin.

At length, however, he cleared his throat and said, speaking more to himself than to his companion:

"The starting of the story is a long way back. It must be forty years or more. That was when I first knew Dick Powelton. We shipped together as boys on the Barbary Chief. A good ship she was for those days, trading with the Mediterranean and the African coast.

"There was bad luck in her naming I guess. At any rate, she ran us onto a sunken rock just inside the Straits yonder, and while we lay there helpless along came one of the Barbary pirate ships and overhauled us. Almost before we knew what had happened we were chained together like cattle, working in the gardens of the Sultan of Morocco with a black devil over us who never let us forget the lash for long at a time."

Courtney struck his hand upon the table and writhed in his chair as though the memory of it all cut him like the whip itself.

"My back will show today," he went on speaking sharply now, "the marks put there by the slave driver's lash. Aye, and worse than that. It bears the sears of white hot irons pressed into my flesh when I dared to raise my hand against that hound of hell.

"Those were rough times, young sir, worse times than those we live in now. England had no time to look after the

fate of common sailors imprisoned as were we. The only escape from the living hell into which we had been thrown was to dig our way out.

"I need not tell of all our efforts to escape or the tortures that our failures brought upon us. It was the work of years to prepare for the final attempt, to shape the edges of a few broken tools into weapons, to gather the few coins that would bribe a single keeper.

"We succeeded at last. We served our overseer with the death he deserved, by the tortures he had inflicted on us. We cut our way through the guards, a handful of desperate men fighting for death. But at the end Dick Powelton and I were the only ones left.

"Do you know what it is to be made a beast of burden for twelve years, to be broken in body and spirit each day of it all, until your very blood turns to gall and all your strength is taken up in hating and you know that if you could no longer hate you would cease to live?

"Of course you cannot understand it, but if you could you would understand how we felt when we left that land where we had been robbed of the best years of our lives. You would understand the vow we made at parting to be revenged for all we had suffered there.

"We went our own ways to seek the revenge that was our due. His led him to the service of England; mine led to my own service. I lived for one thing alone—to bring about the destruction of the man who had destroyed my soul and who had done his best to destroy my body."

Calthorpe shuddered at the other's malignant tone, but forbore to interrupt him.

"When I had become master of a ship of my own, no matter how," went on Courtney, "I took tribute from the sultan until he had paid many times over for every lash that our shoulders smarted under in his servitude. My boat was the fastest in the Mediterranean; her crew feared neither man, devil nor the gallows.

"I made it my business to know all the sultan's affairs and it came about that he could not send a grain ship across the Mediterranean that we did not ease her of all the best of her cargo. It was not piracy, though such it might have been adjudged.

"To my mind I was only collecting a heavy debt and the scars across my back, put there by the sultan's command, felt the easier whenever I lightened one of his vessels or sent one of his officers off the end of a plank.

"I took good care for my own protection. I paid for it well to the governor of one of the Spanish coast provinces. I cared nothing then for the gold I took, and I spent it more freely than there was any need for me to do.

"But it was right for me to take it. I had earned it by my own toil and I collected it by force until every blow laid across my shoulders in those old days of slavery had been paid for with a thousand golden doubloons from the sultan's treasure.

"All this has little to do with our present affair, but I am coming to that. It all runs in together in my own reckoning as you shall see.

"It pleased me sometimes to visit the African coast, to walk through the sultan's capital and past the sultan's palace, my pockets heavy with his gold. It was there that I met one day an old Gitano who, like myself, was seeking revenge for a wrong inflicted upon him by the evil wretch who was the master of the country.

"The Gitano was a prince, he told me, the chief of a clan whose blood could be traced back half a thousand years, to the earliest of his race. To that part of his tale I gave little heed, but when he told me he sought the life of the sultan I was more than ready to listen, for that idea had long been in my own mind.

"It seems that the ruler, having

taken a violent fancy to the Gitano's daughter, had seized her and made her one of his wives. A Moor would have looked on this as an honor, but the Gitano considered the Moors no better than dogs. He thought only of avenging the outrage.

" For many months he had watched about the town, always with a long knife beneath his cloak, waiting until some time when the sultan rode forth in state and he could come near enough to kill him.

" I was ready to help the old man carry out his scheme and we arranged between us, first to rescue the woman and then to make the sultan pay for his misdeeds.

" My familiarity with the palace and its grounds was a help. I succeeded in getting some of my men within the walls, in communicating with the woman, in arranging everything for her rescue.

" It all turned out as we had planned except one thing. On the morning when the rescue took place the sultan had ridden out at an earlier hour than usual. As we fought our way through the palace gates his party, returning, came upon us. Then there was fighting in truth.

" Our men struggled like demons. Each one had some score of his own to settle. But we were outnumbered, and while each of our knives and sabers counted over and over again, our men fell one after another, hacked to pieces by the simitars of the sultan's guard.

" Even the woman, who had been placed between the Gitano and myself, was cut down. I saw that our only hope was in flight, but as I turned to take to my heels, I noticed the woman's child still lying unharmed upon her breast.

" I snatched up the child and fled. At the same moment I heard a shriek such as never came from a man's throat before. It was the last cry of the old Gitano, whose knife in that moment had reached the sultan's throat.

" In a second after he was fairly cut in pieces by the weapons of the remainder of the guard. In the excitement that attended the fall of the ruler I was able to get safe away still carrying the child."

The old man paused a moment and took a sip of the wine before he resumed his narrative. Then he went on:

" My revenge was satisfied. The sultan was dead. My score with him was settled. But still I was not to be permitted to rest.

" The sultan's successor pursued me to the Spanish coast. There the governor to whom I had paid more than all his province beside yielded, whom I had served in many ways, sought to betray me into the Moor's hands.

" Warned by one of my men I escaped. I saved my live and saved the girl whom I had carried off from the sultan's palace, but I was stripped of all else. For months I was compelled to hide like a hunted beast in the fishing villages and in caves along the coast.

" That gave me a new hatred, more fierce than the old one. To my mind treachery has ever been the worst crime that man can commit. This treachery, coming at the moment when I had resolved upon the quiet and honest life that other men lead, destroyed whatever softness of heart might have been left to me.

" All the anger I had felt against the Moor, aye, and tenfold more, now burned against the Spaniard and against Spain. From preying upon the one, I turned to prey upon the other.

" The governor died. I could tell you how, but it does not matter. I came to Gibraltar. For nearly twenty years I have lived here and in that time I have taken from Spain a thousandfold of all that she took from me through treachery.

" During all this time I have kept the girl with me. She has been brought up in surroundings as fine as those amid

which she was born. She does not know that she is not my own daughter. And I have been well repaid for my care of her, for the sight of her before me all these years has kept my hatred warm.

"I am getting to be an old man. It has long been in my mind that if I could inflict one more humiliation upon Spain, one greater than all the rest, I should be content. If I could see this rock, her proudest fortress, pass from her hands I could die in peace, or I could go away to my own land and live quietly what few days may be remaining to me.

"There was a plan once—but no matter. Now the chance has come again and it is England's chance as well. It lies in the power of your admiral to take the rock from Spain forever."

The old man ceased speaking and the two sat in silence for a time. Then he raised his head and looked at the young officer keenly.

"I have told you tonight," he said, "what has never before passed my lips or reached the ears of any other man. Do you understand now why I desire the downfall of Spain, the capture of this Rock? Is it enough?"

Calthorpe had listened in rapt attention to this recital which seemed to him like a story from some thrilling book of adventure, except that it had been told with all the vividness of reality. Now he roused himself and spoke slowly, as though weighing each word.

"It is enough. I believe thoroughly all that you have told me and I shall recommend Sir Admiral Rooke to act upon your plan."

"Let him act as soon as possible," rejoined Courtney. "The task is easy while the Rock remains defenseless. Should reinforcements arrive, it would prove more difficult."

"If the admiral thinks well of your plan," answered Calthorpe, "he will not delay long before putting it in execution. The ships must be put into condition; that is all. Within the fortnight the fleet will lie outside the harbor, if it comes at all."

"It is well," said Courtney, as though the affair were entirely settled. "You shall have word of me there."

Rising, he summoned the same attendant who had ushered the lieutenant in and who now was to accompany him to the little vessel that had brought him hither.

Long after he had departed Courtney remained sitting by the table, deep in thought. The lieutenant himself, pacing the deck of his scudding sloop, marveled at the strange man he had just left and who had spoken of bloodshed and murder as though they were mere incidents of his life.

Then as he went over the romantic story in his mind he muttered to himself:

"I should like to look upon that young woman, though. The daughter of a sultan! Here's hoping that we take the Rock, and then perhaps I shall see her."

CHAPTER V.

THE WITCH WOMAN.

ANITA had not moved, had scarcely breathed, during the narrative detailed in the previous chapter. Straining her ears to catch every word and pressing one hand upon her lips to prevent an outcry, she had remained in her cramped and uncomfortable position, which would have been insupportable at any other time.

But so intent was she on the conversation that she remained silent, not realizing even where she was.

So then it was true, what she had felt and what the witch Zanosa had told her! In her veins there was the blood of the Gitanos and the Moors, the two oldest and proudest races in civilization—the blood, too, of kings.

Yet there was no exultation in the

girl's mind at this thought, only a feeling of satisfaction at learning the truth of something she had long felt, but had been unable to clothe in the form of a tangible thought.

The latter part of the interview, with its exciting revelations, so engrossed Anita's attention that she gave no thought for the time being to the earlier portion of the conversation. In fact, it was not until she had returned to her own apartments and while the sloop that carried the British lieutenant was well on its way with the message of Andrew Courtney to the English admiral that this side of the subject recurred to Anita's mind.

She had no love for the Spaniards or their cause. For the English, typified to her mind by the personality of her father, she felt a fierce dislike which it would have been hard to explain. Had she known in earlier years what she had learned tonight this feeling might have been more kindly.

Under ordinary circumstances she would have given little thought to a strife between combatants both of whom she despised. But there was Carlo! If Gibraltar fell into the hands of the English, what effect would it have upon him?

He had gone for reinforcements. He would return to find the Rock in the enemy's possession. Perhaps he would himself become a prisoner in their hands. But if he came in time?

She had gathered from her father's conversation with the young officer that if the garrison was strengthened the English could not hope for success. Oh, if only Carlo would return in time! It would mean relief to the garrison, doubtless also promotion for him, and he had said that as soon as his rank was increased they should be married.

The girl slipped from her couch and going to the end of the room where stood a little shrine with a crucifix and the figure of the Virgin, she prayed long and fervently for the safety of her lover and for his quick return. In spite of her pride in her Moorish origin, she had been brought up a devout Catholic and no thought of doubting the religion of her adopted country ever entered her head. It was her custom to pray to the Virgin twice each day and sometimes oftener still.

But in her present state of mind, prayer was not enough. She must have action. She wondered whether she could do anything to hasten the return of Mertrez, and so make more certain the result which she so much desired.

She half resolved to consult with the witch Zanosa under some excuse when she visited the Virgin's shrine, according to her custom.

With this possibility in mind, though still only partly decided, she mounted the steep path that led to the summit of the rock before her accustomed hour on the day following.

She would pay her usual devotions and perhaps when they were finished she would take the narrow path that led around the side of the cliff to the point where the gipsy witch was generally to be seen sitting.

She was spared the necessity of a final decision on this point, for while she was still kneeling at the rough shrine, she heard the familiar voice of the old woman behind her.

" This is not the divinity to whom you should pray to keep constant the heart of an absent lover. She cannot dower you with the wealth or noble birth which alone can hold him to you."

The girl rose from her knees and faced about. It was in her mind to give the old woman a scornful response, but in truth Anita was a little afraid of Zanosa who seemed to know all her secrets so well.

So she merely stood there, her cheeks bathed in angry blushes, not knowing what to say.

Zanosa saw the confusion she had caused and continued:

"Even now if you could see him you would understand that you have need of such prayers."

Anita felt a little frightened at this, but she answered boldly enough:

"You cannot move me by such words. Even if what you say were true, it would be impossible for you to know anything of it."

Zanosa turned her piercing black eyes upon the girl.

"I said naught of believing," she went on. "It is nothing to me whether you believe or not. But you know full well that my vision is not as that of others. I have told you truth before when you thought that it was not so.

"They call me a witch. Why? Because I see what their poor blind eyes cannot penetrate. That is the only reason. And so I tell you that at this very moment I see your lover taking leave of another woman. He speaks soft words that bring the blushes to her cheeks even as they did to yours. He bends forward toward her closely. Ah! he kisses her hand—he——"

Her monotonous voice was interrupted by a cry from Anita, who had stood pressing her nails into the flesh of her palms as she listened to the recital.

"It is a lie—I will not believe it." Zanosa looked up once more and there was a momentary gleam of angry passion in her glance, but it died away before she spoke again.

"Very well, if you do not wish to hear, I will not speak. But I will tell you how you may know for yourself whether my words are true.

"Your officer promised to return within the week, did he not? Certainly the journey may be made in that time. I tell you then that he will not return before the tenth day. Ask him where he spent the time, whether he did not kiss a fair lady's hand at parting. He may lie to you, but it will cost him some confusion."

Anita turned aside that the other might not see the sudden pallor that she felt overspread her face.

"Go away," she said. "You are a wicked woman."

The gipsy made as though to reply, but apparently she thought better of it and strode away muttering to herself.

Anita remained where she was, sinking down on the stone seat where she had sat on the day when Carlo parted from her. She went over that time again, telling herself that the words of the witch were false, though that in nowise helped to dismiss them from her mind.

Having grown up surrounded by superstition, it was small wonder that Anita was ready to believe in witches, sorcerers, and all the weird magic of the East. Besides, she had had evidence of Zanosa's power many times in the past.

Anita sat long in silence after the witch had disappeared. Her head was bowed upon her hands, and she was thinking of the old woman's words.

Over and over she said to herself: "It is false; I will not believe it." But she could not shake off the sinister influence of the witch woman and her warning utterances.

At length, when the evening shadows began to climb the Rock, the girl made her way slowly homeward. She had thought to send some warning to the commandant, to give him word of the proposed English attack that she had overheard from her place of concealment in her father's warehouse.

Now, with Zanosa's mocking words sounding in her ears, she decided to leave it all to fate. Let fortune decide for—or against—her. But even as she so decided she breathed a silent prayer that the decision might not be against her—or her love.

Zanosa, in her cavern, was thinking at the same moment of the rankling wound her words had caused. She did not know that they were helping to destroy the Spanish dominion over the

Rock of Gibraltar. If she had she would have laughed even more grimly.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ENCOUNTER IN THE FOREST.

At the hour when Calthorpe, on board the sloop that was taking him back to the English fleet, discerned the first gray light of dawn, Lieutenant Carolus Mertrez, clad in his long military cape, rode past the sentinel at the northern outpost of the rock guarded fortress, and along the narrow embankment that led across the ancient mole.

Although he was leaving love behind him, the lieutenant carried a light heart under his cloak. He was young, and youth can cherish dreams of ambition as well as dreams of love.

He was proceeding on an important mission, the first that had been intrusted to him, and with the favor of the commandant he already saw himself a captain.

More to his liking than all else, he was journeying toward the capital. Even a glimpse of the gaieties that surrounded the palace promised an agreeable change from the dull monotony of life in the rock girt, southern fortress.

With a thought for each of these things, the lieutenant rode on his way. Every now and then snatches of a love song rose to his lips and in those places where the road was too rough or the ascent too steep to permit his horse to keep to its gallop, he let stray lines of the song escape him in a voice that was clear and strong.

The frequent recurrence of the name Anita in the song led him to think of the girl from whom he had parted the night before on the Rock. His mind went back to their first meeting, when he had come across her standing on a lofty ledge and looking out to sea like some radiant celestial bird poised for flight.

He lived over their first conversation and the frequent meetings. He thought how they had gone on and on until he had told her of his love and had received her answer on his lips.

Before that he had known nothing of her, who she was or whence.

Since then she had told him a little of herself, her father's name and her dislike of him, her strange life and her loneliness, but beyond this he knew nothing nor sought to inquire.

Mertrez had been brought up to understand that he must marry into one of the noble or wealthy families of the country. His own parents were poor though of excellent blood. Only a judicious marriage could save him from spending all his life as a struggling sub officer of the army.

But he had never sought such a marriage, and since he had known Anita the very thought of it had grown distasteful to him.

"Such beauty is better than noble blood," he mused, as he rode along. "What a pity that she has neither high birth nor great riches? My parents would never forgive me if I married her, but how can a man resist her? It is easy to see, too, that she loves me."

Mertrez's story was one that could be duplicated many times in nobility ridden Spain. The son of an old family that supported an ancient title on a marvelously slender purse, the only career open to him was that afforded by the army.

Mertrez was more fortunate than some of his fellow officers, however, in that he had a natural liking for the only vocation that he could adopt without losing caste. He loved the very accouterments of military life and balked at none of the privations that it involved.

In spite of his somewhat effeminate manner he was a skilful swordsman and a daring soldier.

He was as quick to find an insult or to avenge one as he had been to make love to a pretty girl. Altogether little

more could be said of him than that he was a young Spanish gentleman of good parts and more than ordinary promise, with rather more than enough of pride and none too little of bravery.

Although the young man's thoughts traveled at random all the way, from the lonely girl on the Rock behind him to the fancied gaieties of the capital ahead, he did not permit his horse to slacken its pace nor his glance to wander from the path before him.

He knew that his message was urgent. As he had guessed, it set forth the commandant's reasons for the immediate despatch of the troops that had been promised often, but had never come to reinforce the little garrison in the southern fortress.

The road was little traveled, and parts of it were frequented by bandits. Therefore Mertrez let one hand rest always near his pistol holster, where it could grasp a weapon without delay.

He saved his horse as much as possible, not knowing whether he could procure another at the infrequent inns along the way.

For the first few hours of his journey he made good time across a comparatively level country and at midday found a comfortable meal, with feed for his horse, at a little village which had been a garrison town, although at present the post was deserted.

Soon afterwards he struck into a more broken country and started to climb the range of hills beyond which, the distance of a day's journey, lay Cordova.

Until an hour after sundown Mertrez followed this road, mounting higher and higher among the hills and passing no houses except woodcutters' cottages or abandoned sheep huts.

His horse was weary and plodded on with drooping head. For himself, the lieutenant would not have objected to a bed by the roadside with his saddle for a pillow, but he was anxious to find an inn in order that the horse might be stabled and refreshed in preparation for the next day's journey.

Accordingly he kept on until the last of the evening twilight had faded from the sky and he dared go no further for fear of losing the path.

He was peering about in the thickening shadows for a spot in which his horse could find a good cropping of grass when he discerned through an opening in the trees some distance ahead the dim outline of a low building.

Even such poor shelter as that afforded by a deserted sheep hut was preferable to a night in the open. He pushed on to it.

From the appearance of the place it was evidently, as he had surmised, a shelter used by shepherds in the late autumn when the grass in the open pastures failed and the sheep were driven to these woodland meadows, where the protecting trees kept the grass sweet and green throughout almost the whole year.

The hut stood at the edge of a meadow which seemed to be many acres in extent. From one side of the building a line of low sheds extended for a considerable distance. They were intended to afford shelter to the sheep against the chill north winds.

The place was silent and in darkness. Mertrez dismounted before the door of the hut and knocked upon it on the chance that it might be inhabited. His summons brought no response, and it was evident that nobody was within, for the door was fastened with a chain and locked on the outside.

This was unusual, but might indicate merely that the hut was private property and not to be used by any person who chanced along the road.

Finding that the place yielded nothing in the way of hospitality, the lieutenant turned his attention to the sheds. Near their further end he found a store of hay from which he promptly pulled down enough to fur-

nish a plentiful supper for his horse and a good bed for himself.

Fastening the steed to one of the upright supports of the shed and lying down near by with his cloak wrapped closely about him, he was soon asleep.

It must have been several hours later when he awakened. The moon, now in its second half, was well up in the sky.

He had a dim idea that he had heard voices close at hand, but although he listened intently no sound came to his ears. Even the breathing of his horse was so low that he scarcely caught it.

Nevertheless the impression that human beings were close at hand was too vivid to be shaken off readily. To convince himself that he had been misled by some dream, the lieutenant rose from the hay and moved along toward the hut, keeping beneath the shadow of the shed.

He had not advanced far, putting his arms before him as he walked, before he encountered the soft coat of a horse tethered beneath the end of the shed nearest to the house and opposite to the one that he occupied.

The shock of the sudden contact set his nerves aquiver, and he stood silently awaiting developments. Beyond this horse he presently made out the dim outline of a second one.

The animal beside him uttered a low whinny, but gave no other recognition of his presence.

Mertrez paused for a few moments to decide whether he should make himself known to the persons who were now undoubtedly within the hut. He decided that it would be wiser to reconnoiter before doing so.

He was more fully convinced of the advisability of this course by perceiving, as soon as he had passed around the horses, a ray of light shining through a broad crack at the end of the shed where it joined the house.

Stepping cautiously forward, he knelt upon the ground and applied his eyes to this crack. The interior of the hut was dimly lighted by a fire which had been kindled on the hearth, and within the circle of light he could see three men sitting.

His first glance at the men convinced him that he had been discreet in approaching them thus cautiously.

Two of them were as rough and forbidding of aspect as could well be imagined. The third was undeniably handsome, but his face was that of an outlaw and the manner in which he kept his short weapon, half musket and half pistol, lying across his knees, suggested that he was a man accustomed to taking desperate chances.

One of the men wore the costume of a shepherd and looked like a native of the region. Mertrez judged that the other two were the travelers whose horses were fastened beneath the shed.

One of them was a man of slight stature with an unkempt beard and eyes that glared in the firelight like those of a fierce animal.

The third man aroused the greatest interest on the part of the watcher. He was tall and broad of shoulder, with the flashing dark eyes and handsome face of the Gitano. His clothing was better than that of his companions, and he carried himself with an air of authority no less marked than was the deference of his companions.

The three men were talking together in a jargon unintelligible to Mertrez except for fugitive words of Spanish. From these he gathered, however, that two of the men were members of a band of outlaws and that the third was a shepherd from a nearby village who played the part of an informer and had come with news of an opportunity to loot some traveler.

Mertrez was surprised that the men had not observed him, but they were evidently familiar with the place and had fastened their horses beneath the shed without taking the trouble to make a light.

He debated with himself whether he should remain where he was or take his own horse and endeavor to slip

away unobserved. He had no mind for a meeting with the men at this time, after what he had seen and heard.

He returned to his horse's side and sat down to think over the matter. Before he had finished examining his weapons in the pale light cast by the moon beneath one corner of the shed the question was solved for him by the sound of two of the men emerging from the hut and coming toward their horses.

Mertrez cocked his pistols and sitting upright on the hay, prepared to use them should occasion arise. He heard the two men talking together and grumbling at their horses, but they struck no light and with small delay departed as they had come.

The third man evidently had no horse, for the young officer neither saw nor heard him depart.

He sat in silence until he could no longer hear the hoofbeats of the two animals. Then lying down upon the hay once more he slept till morning.

This chance meeting with men who were evidently bandits or outlaws of some sort would have made small impression upon Mertrez save for the appearance of the larger one. For him the lieutenant felt an instinctive dislike, why he could not explain.

He wondered at it again as he set out on his journey the following morning. Then of a sudden the resemblance of his long black mustache, his brilliant eyes and the gipsy's cast of his countenance to Anita's description of the old witch's son convinced him that this was Brulo, the bandit.

This knowledge increased his aversion for the man. He knit his brows as he thought again of the girl's words concerning Brulo's admiration for her.

" I'll wager the cutthroat knows not the honorable use of a sword," he said to himself, " but I should like to teach it to him on his own carrion frame, and if ever we come together I shall do so."

He smiled as he thought how little likelihood there was of such an event coming to pass.

Therefore it seemed a safe pastime for Mertrez to threaten what he would do if ever he came to a crossing of swords with the outlaw. But events sometimes march more quickly than their reckoning, and so it was to prove in this case.

It was well toward noon on his second day's ride and Metrez was descending to the first of a series of valleys that led down to the plain of Cordova, and was in good humor over the prospect of a more favorable road.

He was humming the song that had been running through his head all of the preceding day when he was brought to a sudden halt by the sound of a pistol shot some distance ahead of him, followed immediately by a woman's scream.

To a man of spirit, be he king's messenger or sheep tender, such sounds can suggest but one course of action.

Clapping spurs to his horse Mertrez rode down the hillside at a breakneck pace, at the same time drawing one of his pistols from the holster against the chance that there should prove to be need for its use.

(To be continued.)

FIREFLIES.

THE flowers of maiden Spring are flung aside,
So fair and frail they lasted but a day ;
And in their place is set this brave array
Of jewels the matron Summer wears with pride.

THROUGH DEEP WATERS.

BY MAURICE SAXON.

The desperate straits to which poverty reduced a clergyman, and the strange march of destiny which linked a great temptation with the man who was bearing succor to distress.

I.

THE Rev. Oswald Campion sat deep in thought in a small room in Walworth. His thin and naturally thoughtful face wore a worried and hopeless look, and his tall figure seemed to stoop under some heavy burden. "How will it all end?" he murmured; "God help me in this trouble." Wearily he rose and crossed to the fireplace. He strove to warm his numb fingers over the small handful of embers in the grate, then with a sigh rested his arm on the mantelpiece. Again he sighed and passed his long, thin hands over his brow. A sudden terrible thought occurred to him. "God of mercy," he cried, "add not *that* to my cup of bitterness!"

He started violently as the door was opened, and a gentleman entered quietly.

Campion tried to speak, but his dry lips refused their office. Seeing his agitation, his visitor said, calmly:

"I congratulate you, Mr. Campion; you have a son."

"And my wife?"

"Is doing as well as can be expected; but, as you know, she is far from strong, and requires every care."

"I know," said the clergyman, sadly. "May I go and see her?"

"Certainly, but do not excite her."

Campion's pale face flushed, but it was by excitement rather than joy, for the weight on his heart was too heavy to be easily raised. With merely a slight bow to the medical man, he went up stairs.

During the few minutes he was allowed to remain in his wife's room he strove desperately to hide his anxiety and encourage the girl mother, who glanced at him wistfully as he looked at his newborn heir.

"Cheer up, Edith, my darling," he said, brightly, as he kissed her pale face, "you will soon be well again now, and then we will get away from this dreadful London."

"Ah! Oswald," she whispered, pressing his hand affectionately, "if we could do so! But I am so troubled to know how we shall manage now."

"You musn't bother yourself, dearest. We shall do splendidly. I have heard of a first rate curacy, and I have every hope that I shall obtain it. So keep up your spirits."

"But meantime, dear, what are we to do?"

"Do? Why, pull on as best we can."

"But have you any money, Oswald? You know you told me yesterday you did not know what to do for some."

"Yesterday! Oh! that was a long time ago. I have plenty now. Robinson has paid me that thirty shillings that has been owing so long, so for the present we are quite rich," he said, gaily.

"But, Oswald——"

"There, darling; Dr. Thornton said you were not to be excited, so I must not let you talk any more."

He kissed her again, as an old woman, who was doing duty as nurse, entered, and then quietly withdrew.

He paused on the landing, and a

look of blank despair settled on his features.

"God forgive me for those lies!" he thought. "But I could not let my poor girl lie there, weak and ill, and fret about money affairs. It is bad enough to have to do so when you are well and strong, but for her now it would be terrible."

He reëntered his room and sat down at the table. Then he proceeded to turn out his pockets.

He found a solitary sixpence and fourpence halfpenny in bronze and placed it before him. He surveyed his possessions and murmured bitterly:

"Something must be done at once. I will cast my ridiculous pride on one side, and will call on Mr. Pearson. I don't suppose it is much after three, so I shall have time to catch him today."

Without hesitation he put on his hat—which unfortunately gave too evident signs of its owner's impecuniosity—and left the house.

Oswald Campion's was a common case. The only son of a struggling professional man, he had received a good school education and had finally been sent to the University of Oxford.

He obtained his degree with honors, and then had decided to take "Orders." Almost as soon as he had done so he obtained a curacy in the Midlands, with a stipend of £80 a year.

Here he had met Edith Burton, the orphan daughter of a local lawyer, and their acquaintance had speedily ripened into love. Meanwhile, Campion's father died, leaving only sufficient property to insure his widow a bare maintenance.

As the time went on the young man pressed his sweetheart to marry him at once, and painted such glowing pictures of their future, brightened by love and ennobled by their religious work, that the girl at last consented.

Their bright views early received a rude shock. Campion's marriage much displeased his rector, who fully understood that a "single" curate made a church attractive to the spinster element of the congregation.

So one day, when Oswald had preached a sermon embodying bold and striking views, the rector seized the opportunity to cast doubts on the young man's orthodoxy and gently to hint that he might find a more congenial sphere of work elsewhere.

The curate's sensitive nature was wounded, and, without weighing the consequences, he promptly resigned his charge. Then he came to London, where he thought his sincerity would insure his success.

Alas! He knew not the modern Babylon. Too proud to play the toady, he was overlooked by the powerful. Too sincere and intellectual to preach commonplace, but "taking" sermons, he could not impress the masses, and, lacking assumption and confidence, he was pushed aside by inferior but stronger men.

Thus it was that after six months' struggle he felt that he had exhausted every resource, but found himself with a sick wife and young infant to provide for on a capital of 10 1-2d., and prospects nil.

II.

Wearily, and with flagging footsteps, Campion took his way along the Borough, and over London bridge. He looked longingly at the omnibuses going westward, but he felt that his small capital would not justify the expenditure of even a penny; and so he plodded onwards.

It was February, and snow was falling thickly, so that the streets were slushy; and the cold air affected even the well clad.

The poor curate, in his threadbare clothes, and without an overcoat, felt the keen weather intensely; and his sensitive body suffered an amount of discomfort that coarser natures never experienced. Every step reminded him that his boots were worn down at

the heels, and a suspicious " whish " and feeling of dampness to his toes warned him that one of them was not even weatherproof.

At last he paused in front of a large warehouse in Cannon Street. He glanced up, and saw the name, " Pearson & Co., Papermakers," and knew that he had reached his destination.

He paused, however, on the threshold, feeling that terrible sinking that occurs to nervous men when they find themselves in a position repugnant to their feelings. At last he summoned up sufficient courage to enter the office.

A dapper young clerk stared at him rudely, and then, with an easy air of insolence, asked him what he required.

" I wish to see Mr. Pearson."

" Hum! I know he is very busy. Can you state your business?"

" Certainly not, to you, sir," said the curate, in a tone that caused the other evident surprise. He, however, crossed to a senior clerk and made a whispered communication.

The elder man glanced round, and then said in a tone loud enough to reach Campion: " Oh, you had better take up his name. The governor's always willing to see a parson."

The young man recrossed to the curate, and taking his card disappeared into an inner room.

Presently he returned, saying, " Step this way, please."

Campion followed his conductor, and was ushered into a plainly but comfortably furnished office.

He saw before him a stout pompous gentleman seated at a desk, who glanced up as his visitor entered, but hope died out of the curate's heart as he caught the look of complacency on the florid countenance.

Mr. Pearson pushed his papers on one side, and with a pious look, said:

" Take a seat, Mr. Campion; I am always glad to see the ministers of God, although I am unusually busy just at present."

" I would not willingly disturb you; I can call some other time."

" By no means, my friend. My motto has always been God's work before worldly affairs, and I judge by your garb that you come in His name."

" I trust so," said the curate; then plunging into his business, he continued; " I saw your advertisement in yesterday's *Telegraph*, asking for clerical or lay workers for your East End Mission, and I thought——"

" That we could utilize your services. Indeed, we can. There is work enough for all in the Lord's vineyard. Have you an appointment in London?"

" Unfortunately, I have not at present."

"And, naturally, you do not wish to waste time that is so precious and can never be recovered. We will gladly enroll you among our workers. The harvest is great, but, alas! the laborers are few," said Mr. Pearson, turning his eyes upwards.

Campion paused, then said desperately: " I fear you do not quite understand me. I am anxious, most anxious, to work, but I have a wife and child to consider. What I therefore seek is employment that will afford at least some slight pecuniary return. I thought you might——"

" What?" interrupted the other, opening his eyes wide in astonishment. " What do I hear? Do you come to tell me that you wish to enter our grand cause from mercenary motives?"

" Certainly not, sir, but surely 'the workman is worthy of his hire.'"

" Alas! that holy text is too often made an excuse for avariciousness," said the other, raising his hand deprecatingly. " But let us not bandy words. If *I* give *my* services, surely I have a right to expect others to do the same."

" Truly, sir, but you are wealthy; you can afford it. If you had a wife and child wanting the bare necessaries of life, would you then be willing to do so?"

"I see," said Pearson, raising his eyebrows superciliously. "I quite misunderstood you. I did not think you were one of those unscrupulous individuals who don the garb of a clergyman as an excuse for begging."

"Sir," said Campion, indignantly, "I am at least entitled to my costume; I am fully ordained, and——"

"Well, well," said the other, "I have neither time nor inclination to listen to your private affairs."

Then he struck a bell, and as his clerk entered, said:

"Johnson, show this person out."

Campion retired, feeling terribly humiliated; as he opened the office door he heard the clerk, with a laugh, say to his colleague, "I thought he looked too seedy to be up to much."

Utterly dejected, Campion walked back towards London Bridge.

It was five o'clock, and the streets were, comparatively speaking, quiet. The snow was still falling, and an east wind drove it fiercely into the faces of the pedestrians.

He had tasted nothing since breakfast, and paused as he came to a confectioner's. The simple cakes looked very tempting to the hungry man, but heroically he moved on, determined not to lessen his small store.

Just then an elderly gentleman came out of the shop, and turned up the street in front of the curate. The young man followed aimlessly, and almost unconsciously kept his eyes fixed on the figure before him. Suddenly the stranger placed his hand in his pocket and drew out his handkerchief, apparently to wipe the snow from his face. As he did so Campion noticed something fall into the snow.

He quickened his steps, uttering a feeble "Stop, sir!" but the wind carried away his voice. He stopped and picked up the article, and shuddered violently when he found a purse in his hand, that from its weight seemed to be well filled.

Visions of the importance of the treasure to him flashed through his mind, and for a moment he determined to retain it. Then the natural honesty of his nature asserted itself, and he looked round for the owner.

The delay, however, had been fatal; he just caught sight of the old gentleman stepping into a hansom, and then the vehicle rolled off, leaving the young man too bewildered to follow it.

With mingled feelings that he could not analyze, the curate walked homewards. He forgot his weariness and his hunger; even the biting wind and cold driving sleet affected him not, for he was at war with himself.

A terrible temptation was before him. On the one side was his upright nature, and on the other his love for his helpless wife and child.

III.

In his own room once more Oswald took out the purse and examined its exterior carefully. Then he opened it, and turned its contents out on the table.

His head swam as he saw the unusual glitter of gold; and with amazement he counted the coins.

Five sovereigns, two half sovereigns, and a total of sixteen shillings in silver.

He surveyed the treasure with startled eyes, and murmured:

"It is a fortune; such a sum would tide us over our present difficulties, and with Edith strong again I could once more try for work."

Then he pushed the money from him, crying, "I will not be tempted; I will not imperil my soul; I will return it!"

He half turned as if to carry his purpose into instant execution, but suddenly remembered he had no means of tracing the owner.

As the thought occurred to him he once more examined the purse, but, despite himself, he could not help feeling relieved when he found neither name nor address.

Stay! In his hurry he has overlook-

ed the ticket pocket. What is in it? A card! He draws it out, and in astonishment reads—" Mr. George Morley, 59 Burton Crescent, W. C."

" What!" he cried. " This is indeed miraculous. My father's friend, the man who owed so much to him. Surely the hand of the Almighty is in all this! I will go to him. He will help me for my father's sake.

" Ah! but will he? Did I not write to him some months ago? Did I not open my soul to him, and yet he has not even deigned to reply to me? Alas! my last hope is dead. Doubtless he will take his money, and leave me and my darlings to starve.

" Yet no! For myself I care nothing, but they shall not suffer. Let the sin and its consequences be mine, and mine alone; I will keep what God has given into my hand."

He paced the room excitedly, still dragged first this way, then that, by conflicting emotions, till he was roused by the entrance of his landlady.

She paused as she noticed the strange, stern look on the curate's face. Then, standing by the door, said:

" I'm mortal sorry to trouble you, Mr. Campion; I'm sure it grieves me sorely to think of your good lady ill up stairs, but I am in great straits myself, and if I don't get some money I'm sure I don't know what will become of us."

The young man looked at the woman gravely as he answered:

" You have been more than kind to us, Mrs. Martin; you have helped us when you were ill able to do so; and, believe me, I am not ungrateful. Is your present need so very great?"

" Indeed it is, sir. You know I'm a widow with no one to help me, and now the baker says he won't leave any more bread without the money; and the landlord has just called for the rent, and declares he'll distrain tomorrow."

" I owe you two pounds, Mrs. Martin. Will that be sufficient for your wants?" said Campion, quietly.

" Oh, yes, indeed, sir, more than enough," answered the woman, her face brightening.

" God be merciful to me, and pardon my sin!" said the curate to himself; " I cannot let this woman and her little ones suffer on my account, the temptation is too great."

Then aloud, " Take your money, Mrs. Martin, there is plenty on the table."

As his landlady stepped forward he turned to the window so that she could not see his face, for he feared that his emotion would betray itself.

" Oh, thank you, sir," said Mrs. Martin, as she picked up the coins. " I'm truly glad to see you with so much, as much for yours and your dear wife's sake as for my own."

Then, as he did not speak, she withdrew quietly.

Campion turned from the window, trembling violently.

" Thus," he cried, " are my fetters forged. Now, there is no escape."

Then he added, bitterly, " I am fit to be neither saint nor sinner. As I have fallen, at least let me face my crime like a man. If I have lost my soul, I will take its price as my reward, and behave like a man, not like a weak minded boy."

He gathered up the money, and without waiting to give himself time for further reflection ran up stairs to his wife's room.

The girl was awake, and received him with a look of love. She noticed at once his excited face, and, gently drawing him towards her, said:

" Have you had good fortune, dear!"

" Yes," he replied, cheerfully. " Indeed I have; see here!" and he showed her his hand full of gold and silver.

The girl's face flushed with pleasure. Not for a moment did any possible suspicion of his honesty enter her mind.

She trusted him to the fullest extent, and was too weak to question how he had become possessed of so much.

She kissed him as he bent over her, and murmured:

"I am so thankful, Oswald. Now I can go to sleep comfortably; tomorrow you shall tell me all about your wonderful good luck."

Some one tapped gently at the door. The nurse came over to him, and whispered, "You are wanted, sir."

He rose quietly, and, with one fond glance at his sleeping wife, descended the stairs.

Then he underwent a sudden revulsion of feeling. He pictured to himself that the police were waiting for him to charge him with theft. Before his mind rose a vision of his denunciation by the owner of the lost purse, and in a state of nervous agitation he laid his hand on the knob of the sitting room door.

IV.

As the curate paused irresolutely at the door, Mrs. Martin handed him a card; but his head swam so that, in the dull light, he in vain tried to read it.

Mastering his emotion, he flung open the door, and, with the pasteboard still in his hand, entered the room.

He stopped, and almost staggered back, as he saw a short, stout gentleman standing with his back to the fire. Instinctively he recognized the owner of the purse.

His crime had found him out full soon, and, with the desperation of despair, he advanced like a culprit to his doom.

But as the mists cleared from his eyes he saw that his visitor's face did not bear the look of an avenging Nemesis. His mouth was parted with a genial smile, and the soft eyes shone with good humor.

The stranger sprang forward as he saw the curate, and, grasping the young man's hands in his, said, in a voice quavering with excitement: "My young friend, I am delighted to find you at last. Believe me, this is a happy meeting to me."

Dumfounded at his unexpected reception, Campion was silent for a moment; then he exclaimed, in a stiff manner, the better to conceal his agitation: "Sir, I am at a disadvantage. I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"What!" said the other, in surprise. "You have my card in your hand. Do you not recognize the name? I am George Morley, your father's friend."

"True, true," murmured the curate, absently; "but what has that to do with me?"

"Surely you are not well. What has it to do with you! I intend it shall have a great deal to do with you. Besides, did you not write and confide in me?"

"Yes, but that is long ago. You did not answer my letter."

"Now look here, young man, don't be too ready to take umbrage. Your letter only reached me two weeks ago, when I returned from the Continent.

"You gave me your address at Middlethorpe, and a nice hunt I've had to find you. I went down there at once, but your late rector could not tell me your present place of residence. I've been looking for you ever since, and had almost given up in despair, when, not an hour ago, I luckily thought of Pearson; he knows all the parsons, and, by a curious coincidence, he said you had only just left him; in fact, your card was still on his desk; so I came on at once."

"Did Mr. Pearson tell you why I had called on him, and how he received me?"

"I don't remember that he said anything special; but he mentioned you were looking for work, though I don't know whether that's quite a correct word to use with respect to a clergyman's duties."

"And why have you sought me out now?" asked Campion huskily, his intense feeling making him brusk and almost discourteous.

"Oh, look here, Campion," said Morley, rising, "your whys and where-

fores are getting too much for me. Don't you know your father helped me very materially in my early days, and now I want to do something to repay the debt."

" And how can you tell that his son deserves your assistance?" Then springing to his feet he cried: " I cannot, dare not tell you why, but you *shall not* help me; I am unworthy of it!"

Then he sank down on a chair and buried his face in his hands and groaned in anguish.

" If I had but waited!" he thought. " Had I but resisted temptation for one short hour all would have been well, and I should have been an honest man. Now, I can never hold up my head again."

Morley stood looking at the young man for a moment in silence, then he gently approached him, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said kindly:

" Campion, for your father's sake, you *must* let me help you. Whatever wrong you have done, or think you have done, need not affect the question. You are overwrought, and doubtless exaggerate matters. But, be that as it may, whether your fault is real or imaginary, it is not against me."

" You! Yes, it is against you and God, that I have sinned. Did you not lose your purse today?"

" Yes, I did; but how do you know that?"

" I saw you drop it. I picked it up. I, that you have imagined honest and upright, have stolen your money and paid my debts with it."

" But you did not know to whom it belonged?"

" I did. Your card was in the purse."

" Ah!"

" I see," said the curate, almost with relief. " Now you appreciate the true character of the man you offer to assist. Go, call in the police, and give me up to justice."

Morley's face became overcast, and a look of deep sorrow settled upon it. He sat in silence for a few moments, that seemed an age to the man cowering before him.

Then the other said, in an authoritative yet kind voice, " Campion, I am an old man, and your father's friend. I beseech of you to look on me as standing in his place, and tell me all about this sad affair. Do not seek either to condemn or excuse yourself, but tell the tale simply, and as straightforwardly as though you were speaking of another."

Thus abjured, the young man described in detail the doings of the day, nor did he in any way seek to palliate his offense.

The elder man listened to him attentively, but in silence, then as he concluded he took his hands in his, and said:

" My poor friend, your tale has greatly moved me. Believe me, the money is of no importance to me, but I dare not ask you to look lightly on your sin. You used the hard term theft for your act, but I do not think it is that. I am not a lawyer, but I imagine the law has a milder term for such offenses.

" However that may be, now more than ever I claim my right to help you. If you accept my assistance, a useful career is before you, and your error will serve as an incentive to future work. Then I ask of you to think of your young wife and helpless child; surely *they* appeal strongly to you to take the help I offer you."

" You heap coals of fire on my head," the young man answered brokenly.

The two men sat talking far into the evening, and when Morley rose to leave he had gained his point.

The curate had learned the lesson, that oftentimes appears so hard to believe, that God is willing to forgive, it is meet that man should not condemn himself too severely, and should accept human forgiveness if fully and freely offered.

A BATTLE WITH MISFORTUNE.*

BY UPTON B. SINCLAIR, JR.

A tale of trials in the great metropolis, wherein is shown that the fight with poverty and illness may have all the exciting features of a contest with life threatening conditions in the wilder regions of the earth.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

BRONSON and Owen, two young men from the country, come to New York to make a living with their pens. Owen, of timid, shrinking nature, has the idea of becoming a great poet, which Bronson, the practical, who has had a longer experience of city life, speedily knocks out of him. They take a small room together, and endeavor to make both ends meet by writing jokes for the comic papers, while Bronson has also under way a serial story which an editor has told him he may be able to use when it is completed. So the future takes on a rosy tinge, with no hint of the dark clouds which are already lowering to the horizon.

CHAPTER VII.

IN A PALACE PRO TEM.

WHEN Owen once more reached the room he found the trombone still at work, but that Bronson had not yet returned. He therefore sat down and wrote out some of the jokes he had thought up. Then, as his friend still did not put in an appearance, it occurred to him that he might make one more trial of his luck, so he shoved the jokes into his pocket, together with several shorter poems, which he selected after a good deal of hesitation.

This time he made his way straight toward City Hall Park. He did not venture toward the dreaded *Globe* building again, but presented himself at the office of another paper, and there, after being shown to the proper editor, he brought out his collection of jokes.

The anxious young man watched the other glance over them hurriedly, and he could scarcely restrain a cry of delight when the editor stuck one of the slips of paper upon a file on his desk.

" I'll keep that," he said. " Good morning."

He turned once more toward what he had been writing, but Owen still remained; he was not yet quite convinced by Bronson, and he ventured one more attempt.

" I—I have something else," he stammered, " some—some poetry; I should like you——"

The editor never looked up from his writing.

" No time for poetry, stick to jokes!" he said.

And Owen, with a sigh, turned and made his way out of the office, at last fully realizing the fact that he had walked from East Greenville for nothing.

He had scarcely reached the street again, when glancing across the way, he happened to catch sight of his friend hurrying through the crowd.

Owen rushed over and joined him, breathlessly inquiring as to the fate of the " Prisoner of Devil's Island." He saw from Bronson's expression that the news was good.

" Oh, I tell you they can't beat us," Bronson chuckled, " my fortune is made!"

* *This story began in the February issue of* THE ARGOSY, *which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.*

"Then the editor really liked it?" cried the other, delightedly.

"He said it was just what he wanted," replied Bronson, "and that if I could get it finished in another week he would begin it in the next Sunday's issue; and then, just think of it, we shall have fifty dollars!"

Owen was as much pleased as his friend—so much so that for a while he forgot to tell about his own success; they were small triumphs, but they meant a good deal to these two young men in their struggle against the fates.

This was the culmination of their triumphs, and it seemed to them as if all the world lay open to their conquests.

"You finish that story," laughed Owen gaily, "and I will write a few hundred jokes in the mean time, and then we shall be fixed."

Inspired by his present affluent condition, Owen made haste to declare his intention of engaging another room.

"I want to get out of your way as quickly as I can," he said, "I am going to find out if there is not another room near yours."

"There's one right next to it," rejoined Bronson; "it is even a little smaller, but as you haven't a trunk, the thing will just about be evened up. I advise you to wait though until you have increased your capital just a trifle."

As it turned out, however, all discussion upon this point was a waste of breath, as something occurred which completely changed their plans.

Just as the two were on the point of turning to enter the house, they espied the postman coming down the street.

"I am always interested in the postman," Bronson declared; "let's wait."

He was evidently acquainted with the man, who nodded familiarly.

"Any jokes today?" inquired Bronson.

"I don't think so," said the postman, "but I have another letter for you—one which I brought yesterday while you were out."

Bronson took a glance at it. It was postmarked "Westport," and he gave an exclamation of interest.

"It is from Uncle Josiah," he said, as he tore it open.

Owen surmised that it must be the uncle with whom Bronson had lived in Connecticut; while he was debating the matter his friend was reading, and as he did so he emitted a startled cry.

"By Jove, it's today!"

"What's today?" asked the other.

"That he comes; I can hardly believe my eyes. Uncle Josiah is on his way to New York!"

And then he proceeded to read the letter aloud.

DEAR DAVE:

You will be surprised when you get this letter to learn that I am on my way to New York. I am all ready to start as I write. I have decided rather unexpectedly to drive down and sell the two colts, as they are too good to be of any use around the farm. I calculate to take two or three days to make the trip, so I am likely to get there early on Thursday morning. It will be a flying visit because we are just taking in the harvest and everything is busy and I shan't stay there but one night. I will hunt you up first thing, and so good by until we meet.

In haste,

JOSIAH HOOKER.

"Thursday morning!" exclaimed Bronson breathlessly, as he finished. "Why, he must be in town now; I wonder if he has come yet?"

He bounded up the steps and banged on one of the doors, inquiring for the housekeeper. When that personage put in an appearance she answered Bronson's inquiry with the information that no one had yet arrived.

With that he hurried down and rejoined Owen.

"He is likely to be here any minute," he gasped. "And say, old man, but you will see some fun! I don't think he has been to town for ten years, and he is a regular old hayseed if ever there was one."

"Where will you ever put him?"

Owen asked. " You surely cannot ask him to live in a room like ours? "

" I should say not," said Bronson, " I was just thinking of that myself. You see in the letters I wrote home I haven't given him the least idea of the real condition of things—how I have been scratching around; he thinks I have taken the town by storm."

" I am afraid," laughed the other, " his mind will be disabused when he hears the trombone and the baby."

" That is just what I am thinking about. We were just talking about getting another room—why can't we move in time to fool Uncle Josiah? "

" How do you mean? " asked Owen.

" Why, you see, he is driving in from Westport with a team of horses; they are a pair of thoroughbreds, with a pedigree about a hundred years old, and they are beauties, I can tell you. They are too good for the country, and he wants to sell them and take back another pair that are not worth so much money. As he says, it is only for one night, so what I propose is that we hustle around and hire some real sporty rooms that will make the old gentleman stare; let's not bother about the expense, because we will both be rich in a little while. We can hustle our things over and hustle them out again just as soon as he leaves."

Bronson had grown quite enthusiastic over the scheme, which brought out all the mischief there was in his nature. Owen was inclined to be more cautious.

" What is the use of going to all that expense? " he protested. " What good will it do? "

" You don't understand," explained Bronson. " You don't know how Uncle Josiah used to keep at me about my wasting my time at writing. Since I have been on here I haven't given him the faintest notion of how cheaply I'm living—in fact, I have been making up all kinds of yarns about the wealth I was accumulating by literature. I'd do most anything to keep him from finding out the facts before the year is up, and that is why I don't want him to discover where our room is. He must be in town now, and is likely to be here at any minute."

After a little further thought Bronson announced that he had hit on the details of his scheme.

" Have you noticed that big private house on the next block," he asked. " It's a regular palace, but I stopped there to inquire when I was first looking around and before I had any idea of prices. They have two enormous rooms which are just exactly what we want, if they are not taken by this time. Let's go find out about them now."

The two made their way up the street, and a few minutes later they were standing on the steps of the house to which Bronson had referred.

On his inquiry the landlady informed them that the rooms were still vacant, and they hurried up to look at them. The " apartments," (as they were termed) covered the entire second floor of the house, and they were " swell " enough to make Owen stare around him in awe.

There were high frescoed ceilings, large, gold framed mirrors, plush portières and furniture, and " all the modern conveniences," as the landlady assured them.

" We will put Uncle Josiah in the front room, and you and I can take the back," said Bronson.

He then explained to the landlady that they desired to engage the rooms by the day. When he inquired as to the terms, Owen was horrified.

" Three dollars and a half a day," was the answer.

But Bronson was not in the least frightened.

" Very well," he said quietly. " We will send all of the baggage around immediately. Please have the rooms fixed up."

And with that he turned and made his way down the steps.

" Come on," he said to Owen, " we

have got to get that trunk over here before Uncle Josiah shows up."

The two rushed up stairs and hastily bundled up their few belongings—epic poems, saucepans, joke ledgers and clothing, and then locked the trunk, which they dragged bumping down the steps.

And the last sound they heard as they passed out at the door of their old home was the melancholy strains of "Wotan's Farewell" on the trombone.

Bronson's "sending" of the trunk developed into its being carried by the two, and they had scarcely landed it in their spacious apartment, when they turned and hurried back to await Uncle Josiah.

"By Jove," exclaimed Bronson, as they were crossing the street, "there he is!"

And as Owen followed the direction of his friend's gaze, he saw a tall, powerfully built old man in a broad straw hat and a long linen duster. A pair of farm boots, the usual umbrella and a large green carpet bag completed the paraphernalia.

The old gentleman was just turning off the avenue, seeking the number of Bronson's address; but fortunately he had not succeeded in reaching it and discovering the shabbiness of the place.

"Hi there, Uncle Josiah!" cried a voice behind him.

He immediately whirled about, and the next instant to the glee of all witnesses of the scene, he dropped his carpet bag and umbrella and grasped his nephew by the hands, while a broad smile of delight overspread his features.

"Wal naow, Dave!" he cried. "Haow do ye do? By gum, but I'm glad ter see ye!"

And then began a most prodigious hand shaking which lasted for fully a minute.

"Glad ter see ye!" roared Uncle Josiah again.

"Same to you," responded Bronson. "How is Polly?"

"She's well," was the reply, "but you ought to know most about it. I think she writes to you every day."

Owen meanwhile stood meekly by until it was his turn to be introduced; when that came to pass he found himself wishing that he was elsewhere.

"One of my literary friends," said Bronson. "Allow me to present Mr. Clarence Owen, the famous author of the 'Hero of Manila.' You can hardly have failed to hear of the new poet, Uncle Josiah. He has taken the town by storm."

Bronson rattled on, describing Owen's prodigious achievements, until the poor fellow was ready to run. The old gentleman from Westport was struck with awe; in fact, he scarcely ventured to touch the hand of so important a personage.

"By the way, you were going in the wrong direction," remarked Bronson. "I have changed my address since you last wrote me. I found my last place a little expensive, considering the present state of the literary market. Our dwelling is a very humble one, but probably you won't object."

"Anything 'll suit me," answered Uncle Josiah.

The three turned and made their way down the street.

"When did you get to town?" Bronson asked.

"Airly this morning," was the reply.

"And where are the colts?"

Uncle Josiah gave a significant chuckle.

"The colts are all right," said he. "They are sold!"

"Sold?" cried Bronson in amazement.

"You bet!" Uncle Josiah answered. "I will tell you all about it just as soon as I get a chance."

"And how much did you get for them?" Bronson inquired.

"Oh, I don't want to spoil my story," was the reply. "It is too good a one; just you wait till we get settled."

Bronson took charge of the carpet bag, and Owen the umbrella, and thus the trio made their way down the street, the new arrival gazing about him with open eyes and mouth.

" How anybody kin live in all this racket is more than I can see," he muttered, half to himself; " but I suppose you boys git used to it. They tell me it is ' Greater New York ' now, but I be durned if I can see as it looks any greater than it did the last time I was here."

Uncle Josiah gazed at his nephew in surprise as the latter had hauled out his note book and proceeded hurriedly to scribble a few words in it; the old man did not know he had made a joke. Nor was that the only time in the course of the short walk that the same operation was gone through.

" Look ahere, Dave," he suddenly remarked, " I meant to ask ye. Haow do you suppose it happened that that fellow up on the elevated railroad station come to know me? "

The two boys gazed at each other significantly.

" So he has been meeting a ' green goods ' man, too! " was the thought which flashed over each of them.

" What man do you mean? " asked Bronson.

" I clim' up at one of the stations 'way up taown," was the reply, " an' there was a fellow sittin' behind the winder sellin' tickets. ' Good mornin ' says I, ' haow much do you cal'clate will be the fare daown to nephew Dave's? ' an' do ye know that fellow answered jest as quick as a wink— ' Five cents! ' There was sech a crowd a waitin' that I never got a chance to ask him haow he come to know me."

The joke was duly noted, but by the time Bronson had succeeded in choking down his laughter the party reached their new dwelling place, where they were admitted by the landlady.

Bronson escorted his uncle up stairs, big with inward anticipation. He flung open the door of the great room and ushered in his uncle with due ceremony.

" Here we are," he said; " I repeat my apologies, but I suppose you can get along here for a night! "

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF A HORSE TRADE.

Uncle Josiah paused on the threshold and gazed about him in consternation.

" Why, why——" he gasped.

" Oh, there is a larger room down stairs, which we can get for you, if you like," observed Bronson suavely. " You could engage the two, if you like; but you see we literary people have to be more modest in our tastes."

" By gum, how that boy is moving up in the world! " the old gentleman muttered to himself as he pulled nervously at his white beard. He advanced into the room slowly, gazing about him right and left.

Uncle Josiah gazed in turn at the great plush covered chairs, evidently seeking out some less ostentatious one to occupy; but it could not be found, and at last he ventured to place himself upon the edge of one, clutching wildly at the arms when it sank with him. He let himself down gradually until he made sure that it would at last sustain his weight.

Bronson, meanwhile, with an air of careless abandon sprawled himself out in one of the other chairs, and gazed at his uncle inquisitively.

" What do you think of it? " he asked after a short pause.

" These rooms beat Westport! " was the awed reply. " Hain't seen anything so fine sence the last time I come down. That was when I went to see Cousin Henry, ye know; did I ever tell ye that story? "

" I don't believe you did," replied Bronson; " and even if you have, Mr. Owen would like to hear it, I am sure."

" Fust time I ever was to the city," said Uncle Josiah, " Me and Maria

come down together, an' I tell you we was just as green as they make 'em. Cousin Henry was staying at a hotel or some such place, fixed up like this, an' there was a colored feller bowin' and scrapin' around at the door. He asked us for our cards. I didn't know what in the world he meant, and neither did Maria. 'I've got a pack to home,' says I, 'but I didn't cal'clate to need 'em.'

"An' then the man pinted to a little door at one side; 'will you just step into the anteroom?' says he, an' that settled it. Maria and me concluded that we had struck one o' them gamblin' places we'd heard tell about, and I tell ye we got out in a hurry!"

The point of this joke was rather lost from the fact that Bronson had heard it told at least a hundred times before, and Owen was no more versed in the uses of cards and anterooms than was Uncle Josiah.

Bronson came to the rescue with a change of subject.

"Oh, by the way, how about those colts?" he inquired.

"Sure 'nough," said Uncle Josiah, as he settled himself back in the chair and crossed his legs preparatory for the yarn. "I tell you what, Dave, it will be a story to tell the boys after I git back home; I sold them colts before I had been in this city half an hour!"

"How in the world did you manage it?" gasped Bronson.

"I stayed in a little place over night, only about ten or fifteen miles out, so the horses was just fresh and right when I got to town. I drove down that big avenue they call the Speedway. I was right in it there, too, because there was a whole lot of fellows out trotting, an' I tell you what, there wasn't anything on the whole path that could beat my two!

"I had been jogging along for about five minutes when I heard horses behind me, and up come a spanking pair. There was a redfaced, jolly looking man driving them, and as he hauled up to go by he took out his whip.

"'Here goes for a race!' he says. An' I tell you, I'm not the man to take a challenge like that. I jest let them colts out and we had it lickety split for a while.

"When we got through, we was down to the other end of the road, and t'other feller's horses was jest about five yards behind; and he was about the sickest looking chap you ever see, I can tell you. I kind of slowed up and let him join me once more, and ez I cal'clated it warn't very long 'afore he got to talking bizness.

"'Pretty good pair of horses you've got there,' sez he.

"'They'll do,' sez I, lookin' at his kind o' significant like.

"Then he drove on for a minute or two more. I watched him out of the corner of my eye, and I seen right away that I pretty near had him; I ain't been in the horse business five years for nothin' or without bein' able to tell from a man's face when I've got a hold of him. But I never played my cards better 'n I did in that job.

"'You seem to be a stranger in taown,' sez he, kind of sociable like.

"'Yes,' sez I, 'I just drove in from the country—a hundred mile in two days and fifteen more this mornin'.

"He looked sort of funny at that, and I didn't say anything more for a spell; then I thought I would draw him on a bit, so to speak.

"'Kin you tell me a good place around here whare I kin git some breakfast and put these horses up while I am goin' about taown?' sez I, and I seen him look kind o' pleased like.

"'Why certainly,' sez he, 'I am just going daown to the club. Won't you come daown with me?'

"I hung back and fooled around a bit, because I wanted him to urge me; there ain't nothing like getting a feller all on aidge when he wants to buy horses, and I knew that every advance he made was money in my pocket.

"Finally though, I sed I would go with him. He kept on eying of the two

colts all the way daown; but he never sed a word about 'em.

"I drove along just ez unconcerned ez you please, but you kin bet I managed to put them horses through their purtiest paces all the way; I've got 'em taught to turn without ever techin' the reins—you hain't seen 'em for a long while, Dave, but I tell you what, they're a slick lookin' pair.

"I put 'em up in the stable at a fine lookin' place an' then we went in to breakfast. The stranger introduced himself to me as Jedge Fuller, and I can tell you he played his game purty well—tryin' to find out whether I came to taown to sell them horses; you can bet I didn't let him know, though, an' so he hadn't no handle to take a hold of. He had to come right out plumb, and I think thet cost him about a couple of hundred.

"'Thet's certainly a fine pair of colts you've got,' sez he; 'you wouldn't like to sell them, would you?'

"'Them colts was bred on my farm,' sez I, 'an' they've got a pedigree from 'way back—as I can prove with dockiments. There ain't many horses in this country kin equal 'em, an' anybody ez wants to buy 'em will have t' give pretty near what they're wuth.'

"'I hev hed quite some dealins' with horses myself,' sez he; 'thet pair I drive is usually considered pretty fine.'

"'Oh, they'll do,' sez I, 'I suppose they're good enough for the city.'

"'They can beat anything out on the Speedway,' sez he, lookin' kind of riled.

"That was the most ondiscreet thing he hed sed yit.

"'They won't much longer,' sez I, 'when my nephew comes out with them two colts.'

"He looked kind of sulky after thet, for he seen he wasn't gittin' along very promisin'. I kept him talkin' abaout other things until after I was through breakfast, and then I got up to go. I knew I had him after that, so I never give him much attention.

"'I should like to go over and take one more look at them colts before you go,' sez he, and we went over together.

"He kept a walkin' around 'em, eying 'em up, but I didn't pay no attention to him at all, until just as I got 'em all cleaned off and all ready to start. I knew he would have to make his break then, an' sure enough he did.

"'Haow much did you say them colts was wuth?' says he.

"'I ain't never cal'clated about it,' sez I, 'but I refused nine hundred dollars for 'em last year at the fair.'"

"At the fair?" interrupted Bronson, looking puzzled, "I never knew anything about the fair."

"Sho' now!" said Uncle Josiah, grinning. "This was horse trading!"

"Any way," he continued after a hearty laugh, "the judge opened his eyes and looked horrified."

"'Nine hundred dollars!' he gasped.

"'I reckon you ain't used to high class horses down here in the city,' sez I, laying it on kind of thick. 'It was a city feller what made me thet offer; I reckon I hed better keep the colts.'

"An' meanwhile I was a gatherin' up the reins and a gittin' all ready to start, though I hadn't no more idea of startin' than of flyin'.

"'Would you take nine hundred dollars for 'em *naow*?' sez he, tryin' his best to look indifferent.

"'They're only a year older naow than they was a year ago,' sez I, 'an' they drive better naow than they did then—as you seen yourself,' and the jedge bit his lip and looked annoyed.

"I could have sed the next sentence myself, for I knowed just what it was goin' to be.

"'Would you take a thousand for 'em?' sez he.

"'I don't know,' sez I, 'but first I would want to git the offer. If you know anybody you cal'clate would like——'

"'Naow see here,' sez the jedge, gettin' madder than ever, 'I don't like to higgle around over a bargain.'

"'Neither do I!' sez I, 'nor don't mean to.'

"'My name is Jedge Fuller,' sez he, interruptin' kind of short, 'and everybody in this club knows me; I will pay you one thousand dollars down for them two colts as they stand, if you will take it.'

"'Without the harness?' sez I.

"'I'm buyin' the colts,' says he.

"'Very well,' sez I, 'they're yourn!'

So we went into the club, and he wrote out a check and a feller in brass buttons took it away and brought him back the cash. I got it pinned up in my hind pocket right naow an' its jest three hundred more 'n I cal'clated to get for them colts when I set aout from Westport!" and Uncle Josiah finished with a chuckle.

To the above narrative the two young men had been listening with considerable interest. The old farmer's spirits had arisen as he continued the tale, and he was thoroughly at home by the time he had concluded. He settled back with the comfortable feeling that the chair was none too good for a man who had a thousand dollars in his pocket.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE CALAMITY.

Uncle Josiah next inquired of Bronson in regard to his literary adventures. The latter told his story, with variations, of course. It may readily be believed that he laid more stress on the "Prisoner of Devil's Island" than he did on the joke factory; besides when he mentioned that he had written eleven hundred jokes, he did not think it necessary to add that he had only sold a few dozen of them.

Uncle Josiah was accordingly not a little impressed.

"I reckon I will have to get somebody else to 'tend to them potatoes after all," he said; "I hope ye'll always be as prosperous."

When lunch time arrived Uncle Josiah insisted upon "treating," much to the relief of Owen, who was still worried at the reckless extravagance of his friend.

Bronson, who declared in an aside that he had not had a square meal for six months, took care to steer his uncle into a sufficiently expensive place.

When the repast was over, both Bronson and Owen felt as if they would need nothing more to eat for a week. Uncle Josiah then announced his intention of completing the business for which he had come to town.

"This is a lucky day for me," he said. "So I want to make the most of it; I cal'clate to have to pay about two hundred for a pair of horses, an' take the rest home."

Ordinarily, Bronson would have hesitated about trusting his uncle around the city by himself; but he knew that if there was anything on which his uncle was safe it was in the matter of horses, and so after directing him to several large dealers, he excused himself and Owen on the ground of their literary occupations.

Owen had declared his intention to start out with some more jokes, and Bronson was anxious to hurry the completion of his famous novelette, so all three were satisfied when they parted company at the door of the restaurant. None of them had the slightest idea of the calamity which the fates had in store for them.

Uncle Josiah stepped upon a north bound cable car, and Owen and Bronson turned and made their way down the street. Neither spoke, for each had enough to keep his mind busy.

They had gone on thus for perhaps a minute, pushing their way through the crowd; when suddenly the thunderbolt fell.

There was so much noise in the street from the rattling trucks and shouting newsboys that at first an extra noise was not noticed, but there was a roar of voices which kept swelling louder

and louder, and suddenly defined itself into a yell of "Stop thief!" There was no mistaking that voice; but if any further confirmation of their suspicions was necessary, the two very speedily received it.

A crowd of men and boys were rushing down the street at the top of their speed, and ahead of them, his broad straw hat lost and his linen duster streaming to the wind, was Uncle Josiah, running with the speed of an express train, yelling furiously, "Stop thief! stop thief!"

The confusion was so great that the two horrified witnesses were scarcely able to comprehend the true turn of affairs. They noticed, however, another man a short distance ahead, who plunged into the hurrying crowd and was lost to sight just as Bronson and Owen started for him.

They rushed through the throng, and at the same instant Uncle Josiah reached the spot still yelling at the top of his voice.

Just how the next incident happened neither of the two young men could possibly say. As Bronson chanced to turn and gaze over his shoulder he was astounded to see that Uncle Josiah had stopped abruptly in his race. A man behind him, and who seemed swifter than the rest, had clutched him by the coat tails, and was hauling him back!

"Let me go! Stop thief!" yelled the infuriated countryman. But the man hung on.

And the next instant Uncle Josiah whirled about and flung himself on his opponent with an exclamation of wrath.

"You jackass, you!" he roared; "he is gettin' away!"

The farmer struck out lustily and flung the fellow backwards; once more he turned to run, but by this time several others of the crowd were up with him.

And to the amazement of Bronson, they too, flung themselves on the unfortunate Josiah, clutching him by the arms and by the coat.

Completely wild with wrath, the countryman laid about him savagely; he was a powerfully built man, and he scattered his enemies about him in fine style, meanwhile still struggling desperately to make his escape, and still keeping up his cries of "Stop thief!"

Owen was completely helpless before the extraordinary situation; but Bronson, with more presence of mind, immediately comprehended that his uncle himself had been taken for the thief.

He sprang forward to interfere, and warded off a savage blow which one of the men was in the very act of landing on the unprotected face of the countryman.

An instant later Bronson found himself mixed up in the affray.

"An accomplice! An accomplice!" they yelled. "Grab him!"

"Good for you, Dave," roared Uncle Josiah, and for a minute more there was a lively scrap. "Sock it to 'em!"

Poor Owen had also rushed forward, and would have been involved in the fracas in precisely the same way, but fortunately several policemen arrived at that moment.

The infuriated crowd had surrounded Bronson and his uncle, who were essaying the difficult task of explaining and fighting at the same time. It was well that they stopped their struggling as the officers appeared, for it no doubt saved them a clubbing.

To the horror of Owen the policemen dashed through the crowd and laid hold of Uncle Josiah and his nephew.

"That's right," yelled the crowd, "arrest 'em."

The old countryman was fairly sputtering with rage.

"You tarnation jackasses!" he gasped. "Don't you see you have made a mistake? I ain't the thief; I was chasing him!"

"Yes, of course," cried Bronson. "You are out of your senses!"

But to his dismay the officers merely tightened their grips.

" Oh, yes," said one of them, " that is the old story. Come along."

And then as if to cap the climax, a hatless and breathless man pushed his way through the crowd. He gazed at Uncle Josiah, and then exclaimed triumphantly:

" Good ; you've got him ! "

Several of the crowd recognized the new arrival.

" There he is," they cried ; " the man who was robbed ! "

The fellow darted a quick glance at the countryman's clothing ; something suddenly happened to catch his eye. He pointed eagerly.

" There it is down in the pocket of that duster ! " he yelled.

The policeman thrust his hand in to the place indicated and hauled out a watch and chain !

The crowd gave a roar of delight, and Bronson a gasp of utter consternation.

" I knew it," cried the victim of the robbery. " That is my watch ! "

And without another word the two policemen whirled their prisoners about and dragged them off down the street, followed by the hooting crowd.

Only one person was left behind, a white faced young man who had staggered back against a lamp post, his eyes fairly starting from his head. It was Owen.

CHAPTER X.

BEHIND THE BARS.

OWEN was so completely dazed at the rapidity with which events had happened that he stood there where he was for a minute or two, absolutely incapable of collecting his faculties. It had all occurred with the swiftness of a stroke of lightning, and when at last he managed to realize where he was, the crowd was already several blocks down the street. Instinctively he turned to follow. He had no idea where the prisoners were being taken, but it seemed to him that with their disappearance he was left without a home or purpose in life.

Rack his brains as he would, he could think of no possible explanation of the extraordinary occurrences ; his first idea was that Uncle Josiah had been robbed of his money, but the incident of the watch had completely upset that and left Owen without the slightest clue.

He broke into a run and soon caught up with the crowd ; from those in the rear he strove to pick up some hint of how the trouble had arisen, but the accounts were so various that he could learn nothing in that way. And before he had time to attempt anything else, the procession came to a sudden standstill.

Gazing up Owen saw his two friends, now each in the grip of a couple of policemen, marched rapidly up a flight of steps.

A moment later the door, which was that of the police station, closed upon them, and then it was that the last gleam of hope left the young countryman's mind. An entire stranger as he was, and knowing nothing about the laws of a great city, for all knew it might be years before his friends ever came out from that building.

The idle crowd gradually dispersed, leaving Owen wandering aimlessly up and down in front of the building. Again and again he gazed up at the heavy doors, but there was no sign of their opening.

It must have been fully an hour before, realizing that there was no more use in spending any more time in that way, exhausted and sick at heart, Owen turned to retrace his steps toward the direction of home ; he found himself still more lonely and helpless there, however, for the silence of the great rooms was most oppressive.

" I knew nothing good could come of our hiring this place," he groaned as he stood in the doorway and gazed about him forlornly.

He knew no one upon whom he could call for advice, and he flung himself down upon a sofa and tried to think of some course of procedure.

There was only one that occurred to him. Standing outside of the station house he had once or twice thought of attempting to enter and make inquiry, but he had not been able to summon up the courage. Now, however, it seemed clear to him that this was the only possible way in which he could get an inkling as to the fate of his friends.

He trembled as he thought that they might arrest him too, but he realized that this was a cowardly motive for hesitation. And so he was soon out of doors again, and hurrying back toward the station house.

It was a long time before Owen could summon the resolution to approach the door, and when he finally did so, it was only to knock in the same timid fashion as at the portals of the *Globe* editorial room.

No more attention was paid to him here, however, and at last he found courage to enter.

It was not a very terrifying scene which met his gaze inside, for there were only two policemen lounging upon a bench at one side, and a sergeant seated at the desk, busily writing.

The latter looked up as Owen appeared and demanded what he wanted.

The young man still kept close to the door, as if to make his escape if necessary; from his stammering reply the sergeant made out that he wished to inquire for some prisoner.

"What is the name?" he asked impatiently.

"David Bronson and Josiah Hooker."

"Oh, yes," said the sergeant. "They are here; what about them?"

Owen gazed about him nervously.

"When will they get out?" he stammered.

The sergeant looked at him in surprise, and the other two policemen burst into a roar of laughter.

"I—I mean," Owen continued quickly, "I want to know what they are arrested for—what is the matter?"

"One of them is charged with picking a pocket," replied the sergeant, "and the other with being his accomplice. The watch was found on them. So it is likely to be a long time before they get out if that's what you want to know. They will be arraigned in the morning, in the court up stairs," and the sergeant once more betook himself to his writing.

Owen gazed at him blankly for a minute or two, and then turned toward the door. All he could do now was to wait in trembling impatience until the trial occurred.

He spent the night in the great lonely rooms, which seemed to mock him with their splendor and desolation. Tired out as he was, it was almost daylight before he got to sleep, and then so nervous and fearful of missing the trial was he, that he was awake and out again in a couple of hours.

There was almost no one about at that time, and the young fellow found that he had only another weary wait until the opening of the court at nine. Probably of all the unfortunates who had dealings in that building, none was more woebegone and despairing than the young man from East Greenville.

Time had never passed more slowly, but at last the hour arrived, and the doors were flung open; the crowd which had gathered streamed in, and Owen among the last of them.

After standing irresolutely in the doorway for a while, he seated himself in an inconspicuous corner, where he sat gazing about him in uncertainty.

It was half an hour more before the judge arrived and the court was officially opened. Owen expected to behold an imposing looking personage, in some kind of a uniform, but he was surprised to see a rather stout and red faced old man, who nodded pleasantly to all the officers as he seated himself behind the railing.

There was a little business of one kind or another to be transacted before finally a door at the other side of the room was opened and a file of prisoners, with a policeman at their head, were brought in.

In his eagerness Owen rose to his feet. Among the very first of them he saw his two friends, looking somewhat pale and disheveled from their fight, but otherwise apparently none the worse for their misadventure.

It chanced that the judge was concealed from their view by several persons who were leaning over the railing to talk to him.

In the mean while, however, Bronson had glanced around the room and caught sight of Owen's pale and terrified face.

He greeted him with a smile, which made the young fellow's heart give a bound of unexpected delight.

Owen would have gone forward to speak to his chum, but he dared not make the venture, so he sat waiting in breathless suspense, which was ended in startling fashion.

The clerk announced the first case, and as the persons who had been addressing the judge stepped aside, Josiah Hooker and David Bronson were led forward to the bar.

The instant he caught sight of them a look of astonishment swept over the judge's face, and he half started from his seat.

"Why, is it possible?" he gasped.

At the same moment the old farmer's eyes began to stare like saucers.

"By gum!" Owen heard him shout, and then he sprang forward with an exclamation of delight.

The judge had risen from his chair and stretched out his hand across the bar.

"Josiah Hooker!" he exclaimed.

"Ef it ain't Jedge Fuller!" roared Josiah.

The remainder of the incident was soon closed; there was a short consultation, not a word of which Owen could hear. He was refreshed, however, when he noticed that it was intermingled with considerable laughter among all persons concerned.

Owen now recognized the man whose watch had been stolen. He, too, joined in the conversation, and a minute or two later was shaking hands in the most friendly manner possible with both of the prisoners.

Scarcely had Owen been able to grasp the meaning of this strange state of affairs before the three turned and walked through the gate into the body of the court room, Uncle Josiah coming last after an enormous amount of handshaking with the judge.

A moment later Bronson had rushed forward and clasped his friend by the hand.

"Hello, old man," he laughed. "What in the world are you looking so glum about? Come ahead!"

"Where to?" gasped Owen.

"Why, outside!" said Bronson.

"You don't mean you are free?" cried Owen, delightedly.

"Why, of course!" replied the other, "Why shouldn't I be?"

Then he led his astonished companion out of the door and down the short flight of steps to the street.

If he had spent half of his life in a prison Owen could not have welcomed the free air with more delight. He was still almost too astounded to ask any questions, but Bronson told the story, laughing merrily meanwhile.

"It was precious lucky the judge happened to know us," he said, "or we might have been in serious trouble."

"Who was he?" Owen cried. "How did you know him?"

"It was Judge Fuller," put in the old man, "the feller that bought the colts!"

"But how in the world did you happen tò be arrested?" Owen wanted to know.

"Oh, it was a queer affair," replied Bronson, "and might have gotten us in considerable difficulty. It seems that

this man whose watch was stolen and Uncle Josiah had just got on the car, and were standing next each other. The man raised the cry of 'Stop thief!' and Uncle Josiah set out to chase the pickpocket, who was trying to dodge away in the crowd just as we started in. The man mistook him for the thief."

"But the watch was found on him—how in the world did that happen?"

"Why the real thief dropped it as he ran, and Uncle Josiah snatched it up; it happened to be just as they were going around a corner, and so nobody saw him. The thief got away, and we were arrested, as you saw. But 'all's well that ends well,' as my friend Shakspere remarks. All I regret is that I've lost half a day on the 'Prisoner of Devil's Island.'"

"And I would have been a good ways toward Westport by now," growled Uncle Josiah. "Dog gone pickpockets, anyhow! But I'll start this afternoon, sure."

The first thought of the party was to get some breakfast, a suggestion which was most welcome to Owen, since he had eaten nothing for almost twenty four hours.

Afterwards when Uncle Josiah had again boarded a cable car to make another attempt at purchasing the horses, Bronson and Owen, after arranging to meet him at the same restaurant for lunch, turned to stroll homeward; then it was that the eye of the former was caught by a clock in a window as he was gazing about him, and he sprang forward with an excited cry.

"Good heavens, man, we have got only ten minutes!"

"What do you mean?" asked Owen, dreading new calamities.

"Another three fifty!" cried Bronson. "Run for your life!"

Owen still failed to comprehend, but the other dragged him on.

"Don't you know?" cried he. "We engaged that room for twenty four hours, and the landlady said she would charge us strictly; we must get our things out of there in ten minutes or we are lost!"

CHAPTER XI.

A RAIN STORM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

BRONSON was, of course, half joking, but Owen took the thing seriously, and the two sped down the street at the top of their speed; and in a short while they were carrying their trunk back to their little top floor room.

Bronson paid the bill, incidentally remarking to Owen that it was lucky he didn't have to put up another such sum.

"I have been writing almost no jokes recently," he said, as they tugged away at the trunk. "All my time has gone in on that story, and I am pretty nearly out of cash."

The dulcet strains of the trombone served to guide them toward their old home, and Bronson was soon seated on the trunk, scribbling away unconcernedly, while Owen stretched himself out on the bed and proceeded to "get the wheels of his joke machine in order," as Bronson put it.

The two worked away cheerfully for several hours, in fact, until their appetites reminded them that it was time to meet Uncle Josiah.

"He will certainly have bought his horses by now," said Bronson. "It was lucky I thought of not letting him come back to that house."

The possibility had occurred to both of them that he might propose to stay another day, but Bronson had known that he was in too much of a hurry to think of it. But that dreadful thought was again brought to their minds by a distant rumble which they heard as they reached the street again. Both glanced up nervously at the sky, where a dark cloud loomed up threateningly.

"Good heavens," Bronson gasped. "Suppose it should rain!"

But before they had any time to discuss the possibility, they had reached

the restaurant, where they found Uncle Josiah, carpet bag, umbrella and all, awaiting them at the entrance.

His first announcement was most reassuring.

"I got 'em!" he said. "They'll be all ready for me to start in an hour."

And so it was with light hearts that the two young men sat down at their lunch. In celebration of his departure the gentleman from Westport ordered what he described as a "bang up spread."

But as it turned out, he was the only one of the three who enjoyed it. They were scarcely seated at the table before Bronson and Owen exchanged glances of consternation.

Again had come that ominous roll of thunder!

This time Uncle Josiah heard it too.

"By gum," he exclaimed, "I hope it doesn't rain!"

"So do I," said Bronson, weakly.

And then as it dawned over him that it was not a very polite utterance, he hastened to add that he had left his umbrella at home.

"Oh, you needn't worry," said Uncle Josiah, "I've got mine an' its big enough for three. Of course you know I can't start in the rain."

"Oh, certainly," replied Bronson.

"But—but I guess it won't storm," added Owen.

And then came another roll of thunder!

Gazing out of the window they saw that the dense cloud was spreading with most appalling rapidity.

"By gum, it certainly looks ugly," remarked Uncle Josiah. "Do you boys reckon that you could put me up for the night again without too much trouble?"

"I—I guess we could," Bronson managed to stammer out. "Er—er, how very long that lunch is in coming!"

Meantime the sky grew darker every instant, and the rolling of the thunder became louder and more ominous.

"Perhaps—possibly it may blow over," suggested Owen faintly.

"Them clouds don't look much like it!" remarked Uncle Josiah. "By gum, but it's gittin' black!"

The waiter had by this time brought in the lunch and set it down.

"Git to work there, you boys," laughed Uncle Josiah. "You bean't afraid of thunder, be ye?"

Any one who had watched the pale faces of the two young men would have thought they were.

At that moment came a clap louder than any before, accompanied by a vivid flash of lightning; at the same time a rush of wind bore a cloud of dust up the street, and set the awnings to flapping violently.

"I reckon I won't git very far today," remarked Uncle Josiah, stabbing at a piece of bread with his fork. "What's the matter with you boys? Ain't ye hungry?"

A minute or two later the storm broke!

First there came a few scattering drops of rain, then followed a rushing downpour that sent pedestrians flying for the nearest shelter.

That settled the matter for Bronson and Owen; they were in for another night!

It seemed as if the elements knew of their situation, and took especial delight in tormenting them. The rain fell in perfect sheets, flinging itself against the window near which they were sitting. And any hope which they may have had of the storm's ending was soon speedily disposed of by Uncle Josiah, who assured them, as he munched his lunch that "the roads would be too muddy anyhow today."

Bronson's spirits were fortunately too elastic for him to remain in helpless despair very long; once having made up his mind that the calamity was inevitable, it was not very long before the humor of the thing struck him, the woebegone look on Owen's face serving to heighten the effect.

He was soon rattling away, laughing and joking at a great rate, while Owen watched him in wonder, utterly unable to comprehend how it could be possible for him to be merry under such circumstances.

Bronson now kept assuring his uncle that it would give them the utmost delight to take care of him for another night—for two nights—for another week if necessary, and implored him under no circumstances to think of leaving them.

"It would never do to start today," he cried. "The storm may last all day tomorrow, too, as storms quite frequently do in this climate!"

Uncle Josiah assured him that he need not worry, for he would promise to stay.

The rain continued to fall, but the first violence of the storm had slackened, and so the three then determined to make their way home.

"We won't have to bring our trunk back," Bronson whispered. "He doesn't go into the other room, and so it is just as well."

The landlady was astonished when the three rather damp travelers appeared again. Bronson managed to prevent her from giving the thing away, however, and soon Uncle Josiah was once more in his quarters, while with admirable nonchalance Bronson again settled himself to his writing.

Thus they passed the day, while the rain, which had now settled into a steady downpour, showed no signs of letting up. Bronson, however, refused to yield again to despair, and waved aside all Owen's whispered inquiries of how he was ever to get a second day's rent for that room.

"Go think up jokes," he replied. "That is the way we will do it. You will never accomplish it by worrying."

And so night came on, and the two lay down to sleep in the great bed; Bronson was soon snoring in the liveliest fashion, and Owen was so exhausted that he, too, was soon asleep.

But before the first light of dawn was visible he was up and at the window; a moment later Bronson was awakened from his slumbers by a horrified voice whispering in his ear.

"Good heavens, do you know it is raining harder than ever?"

Bronson growled out a sleepy reply, but there was no putting the other aside; Owen insisted that his friend get up and witness the dreadful state of affairs with his own eyes.

"What are we going to do? We will have to stay still another day," poor Owen groaned.

"Well, it does no good to make a fuss about it," replied the other. "We will simply have to stay here until we get the money for the story, and then we can pay the bill and clear out."

"But for heaven's sake, man, it may be weeks!" protested Owen. "It is getting worse every hour!"

"I don't know what we can do," said Bronson gloomily.

"Why—why don't you tell Uncle Josiah?" suggested Owen.

Bronson gazed at him with a look of disgust.

"Not much!" he said with emphasis. "Tell Uncle Josiah indeed! And spoil the result of all my six months of starvation! Pray don't mention it to me again."

"I don't know what else we can do," groaned the other.

"I am going to sleep again," declared Bronson, and he proceeded to carry out this resolution.

But he didn't sleep very soundly, for all the time he was conscious that his companion was prowling up and down the room and gazing out of the window at the streaming torrents of rain.

When getting up time arrived, Uncle Josiah joined them in watching the scene.

"By gum, boys," he exclaimed, "I guess I am in for another day!"

He went on to make profuse apologies for imposing upon them so long, Bronson of course protesting. After-

wards the three prepared to set out for breakfast.

But before they got started still another burden was laid upon the shoulders of the unfortunate young men. As they were going out of the door the landlady came hurrying down the stairs, and approached Bronson.

" I should like to see you just a moment," she said, and she led him to one side.

" What is it?" asked Bronson in some surprise.

" I am sorry," began the woman, " but I shall have to ask you to pay for this room now, and afterwards for every day in advance; it will be seven dollars if you intend to remain another day."

The expression on Bronson's face must have shown the horror with which he received that announcement.

" Why is that? " he gasped.

" That is the rule," was the reply, " with people who have no baggage."

And then Bronson thought of that miserable trunk!

He knew at once that the landlady's suspicions had been aroused by their carrying it away. Upon inquiry he learned that such was the case, and realized that there was only one way of getting out of the difficulty.

" I am sorry to say," said Bronson, " that I have not the money with me, but I will see that the trunk is brought back at once, if that will suit you."

The woman, after some objection, consented to this arrangement.

" It will be enough if you pay me for one day," she said, and poor Bronson poured out the contents of his pocketbook.

It proved to be just the necessary sum, and as he handed it over he realized with a sinking heart that he was without a cent in the world.

" The trunk will be brought back this morning," he said grimly, as he turned to leave.

Meanwhile Uncle Josiah and Owen had been making their way up the street. Bronson soon caught up with them and together they entered the restaurant once more.

" Since I'm imposin' on you boys," said Uncle Josiah, " you must at least let me treat while I'm here."

Which was at least one comforting circumstance for the unfortunate pair.

As soon as their guest was once more in his room, Bronson acquainted Owen with the state of affairs as to the trunk.

" There is nothing for us to do but to go over in all the rain and drag that confounded thing back," he declared. " It would be just our luck to find Uncle Josiah waiting for us on the doorstep."

But when they returned from the trombone haunted lodging house, the landlady herself opened the door, and Uncle Josiah was not in sight. So that calamity was averted at any rate.

But there was still not the slightest sign of the cessation of the rain.

" We are in for another day, and how in the world we are ever going to get that money is more than I can tell you," groaned Bronson.

It was a matter of life and death now, and the writing of the " Prisoner of Devil's Island " went on at railroad speed. Owen's brain was likewise working furiously, grinding out jokes at a startling rate.

" I have a dollar or two coming to me from different papers," Owen remarked. " And I can go out this afternoon and sell some more jokes to Marner."

That program was carried out; in spite of the pouring rain Owen trudged out with a package of jokes in his pocket.

He found the little artist still busy with his Biblical illustrations.

He informed Owen that he had not as yet had time to sell any of his jokes, and so the poor fellow was obliged to return home empty handed. But still he was not left without some encouragement, for the artist picked out at least eight or ten of his jokes which he promised to " draw up."

That would not pay the next day's rent, however, and there was gloom on Bronson's face as he heard the news.

Uncle Josiah, too, was restless and annoyed, for he was eager to get home. The rain continued, however, lasting, in fact, all through that day, and when darkness settled about the dreary rooms there had been no sign of clearing.

The two unfortunates slept scarcely at all that night, and in fact Owen spent fully half his time at the window, trying to discover some slight let up. Bronson meanwhile was racking his wits in vain over the money question.

It would be several days yet before the "Prisoner of Devil's Island" was ready, and he did not dare ask the editor for an advance until the story was definitely accepted. The only possible plan which occurred to him was that of pawning his watch, and that was a thing he hated to do.

"And I will get but three or four dollars on it, any way," he muttered. "It is only silver."

The next morning dawned dreary and desolate, and the landlady promptly presented herself with a request for the money. She was evidently suspicious of people who carried their trunks in and out in strange fashion, and there was nothing for Bronson to do but to steal around the corner and join the line of unfortunates in one of the pawnshops.

He was inexperienced in the matter, and was too proud to higgle with the broker, so he got only three dollars by the venture. Owen was therefore obliged to contribute half of his one solitary dollar in order to make up the necessary sum.

"And if it doesn't stop raining today, the Lord only knows what we will do!" groaned Bronson.

But it did not stop raining for all that; and to make things worse, Uncle Josiah observed that the roads would be so muddy that it would be impossible to drive over them for a long time yet.

So there was one more dreary breakfast, and then several hours of furious but not very successful attempts at composition. Next came a dreary dinner, after that still more writing. Poor Owen was by now far beyond the possibility of thinking up jokes, and Bronson kept savagely tearing up page after page of much blotted and corrected manuscript.

Uncle Josiah kept pacing up and down the room like a caged animal. Things were approaching a crisis.

(To be continued.)

COMPENSATION.

If all our lives were one broad glare
  Of sunlight, clear, unclouded;
If all our paths were smooth and fair,
  By no soft gloom enshrouded;
If all life's flowers were fully blown
  Without the sweet unfolding,
And happiness were rudely thrown
  On hands too weak for holding—
Should we not miss the twilight hours,
  The gentle haze and sadness?
Should we not long for storms and showers,
  To break the constant gladness?

WHILE THE TRAIN HALTED.

BY MARY E. STICKNEY.

A phase of affection on the part of a bride which produced a cloud on the honeymoon, and a luckless happening which proved after all to be a blessing in disguise.

THAT he was the happiest man on earth, Frank Field, for three days the husband of the girl he adored, had repeatedly declared to his Ethel; but at the same time, so imperfect at best are earthly joys, he could not have denied within himself that, even before the triumphant strains of the wedding march had ceased ringing in his ears, he had been conscious that, with all his bliss, there had still been room in his heart for a tiny shoot of discontent to attach itself, with hint of vigorous growth.

He had been warned of just this danger by his particular friend and adviser, Tom Blaisdell, in whose judgment on all matters he had the greatest confidence; and without doubt, as is usual in such cases, he had been the more sensitively alert to perceive the grievance because of the candid advice of this zealous mentor.

" She is a charming girl, and I don't blame you for taking your chances, all things considered," Tom had coolly observed when congratulating his friend upon the engagement, nonchalantly smiling with that air of " tell truth and shame the devil " candor which distinguished him.

" I dare say you will find yourself as happy as the proverbial sunflower," he went on, " if you don't object to playing second fiddle to your mother in law," this last with a sort of patronizing pity which Frank had found particularly offensive at the time and had frankly resented in good set speech.

But none the less the words had lingered ominously in his mind, filling him with unacknowledged foreboding.

In truth, he had found his dear one's mother a somewhat trying factor in his courtship. Never, he was persuaded, could there have been a more dutiful and loving daughter than sweet Ethel Neeley; but, while he loved her the more for this childlike docility and clinging devotion, there were still times when these dominant traits in her character had seemed more exasperating than admirable to the lover, who, an only son himself, had been taught to regard his own desires as of paramount importance.

It was Mrs. Neeley who always settled whether her Ethel should drive or walk or do this or that, as her lover desired; it was she who, upon plea that she could not yet resign her only child, had delayed the marriage until the last remnant of Frank Field's patience had seemed exhausted; she it was who, when finally the happy day had been conceded, had advised and planned every detail appertaining, with such vigor—and withal, it could not be denied, with such rare good sense—that Frank had fairly come to feel that it was only through kindly sufferance that he was even allowed to play second fiddle in this domestic orchestra.

He had fondly fancied that the wedding bells would ring out the knell of this suave despotism; but he was to discover, in respect to this dutiful daughter whom he had wedded, that absence but seemed to make the heart grow fonder; that, with every mile put between them by the flying train, poor Ethel but thought in more faithful tenderness of the mother whom she had left.

Indeed, though even to himself he would scarce have owned it, with Blaisdell's mischievous words ever rankling in his heart, there had come moments of exasperation even in these three days of idyllic bliss, when his Ethel had reminded him of nothing so much as of one of those French dolls whose repertoire of speech stops short with that one word: "Mamma."

St. Paul had been the first stopping place on their wedding journey, for the very cogent reason, to the young husband's mind, that they had no friends there, and thus he might hope at last to have his darling quite to himself, promise of bliss unspeakable after the relentless chaperoning from which he had so long suffered.

For the place itself, he had only that tolerant indifference which the average citizen of Chicago is apt to accord to all places beside his own windy city; but, though ready to vote that unfortunate spot of earth as pitifully poor in points of interest, and though now in a mood to demand as little as might be in the way of outside entertainment of any sort, he was still a somewhat conscientious traveler of the American type, bound to miss as little as might be of whatever time and chance might be holding out as he journeyed.

But here, to his surprise and growing dismay, he found the plans which he was restlessly ready to devise for every hour of the day continually hampered and hindered, as it seemed, by the interminable letters which Ethel conceived it her first duty each day to indite to her mother. And even if Frank, who would never write a letter himself where he might possibly shirk the duty, could have seen reason for this indefatigable correspondence, he must still have been more or less irritated by the continual reference to that tenacious parent in Ethel's artless talk.

A jealous suspicion grew up in his mind that the thought of being with her mother again counted for even more than her present happiness, in his darling's heart. However strenuously he might insist upon his joy, he felt himself strangely disquieted, while ever more clearly in his fancy he could see Blaisdell's mocking smile, hear his sardonic "I told you so."

And on the evening on which they resumed their journey westward from St. Paul, it happened that this gathering cloud was no little deepened for the time by the fact that they narrowly escaped missing their train, and all because of a postscript which Ethel was moved to add at the last minute to that daily bulletin home.

It was a matter of no real moment, indeed, whether they caught that particular train or not; but Frank Field had the true masculine horror of getting left, whatever the matter involved, and, once a plan had assumed shape in his mind, was always keenly tenacious in sticking to its conditions at whatever cost.

In particular did he find the present cause of delay most exasperating.

"I cannot imagine what you could have left to say to her, when you have given her the most of the day already," he rather ill humoredly remarked, when they were seated in the carriage, the driver promised an extra fare if he got them to the train in time.

"Would you like to read the letter?" she tartly retorted, always hating to be hurried, and being no little ruffled because of his brusk impatience.

"My curiosity is not quite so excessive as that, thanks," with sardonic courtesy; "and it would be a pity to have any more time wasted on the effusion, don't you think?"

This was rather brutal; and, perhaps a little ashamed of himself, perhaps somewhat frightened at his own temerity, he subsided into silence, while Ethel wrathfully ignored his existence until they had for some time been settled in their sleeper and on their way, when a sudden anxiety urged her to impulsive speech.

" You have forgotten to mail my letter, Frank—I am sure you have," she cried, accusingly.

They were just moving into the station at Minneapolis as she spoke, and Frank sulkily delayed his answer for a full minute, staring abstractedly at an engine on the next track.

" I believe I did, now you speak of it," he slowly admitted, nonchalantly feeling in his pocket for the missive he knew well was there. " But I suppose it does not matter. It will keep."

" Keep? " in a key of indignant dismay. " Not matter—my letter to mamma—when I promised her that I would write every day—when my letters are all that she has to comfort her? You must not forget that we have never been separated for a day in all my life until this."

Poor Frank, meeting the reproach in her eyes, began to feel himself a brute, and, with the unreasonableness of man, was but goaded to more reckless savagery by the feeling.

" I am not likely to forget it," he dryly retorted, " seeing that no less than twenty times a day I am informed afresh of that interesting fact. It has begun to suggest the probability that you regret too much your separation now."

" I shall regret it if you are subject to very frequent attacks of your present temper," retorted Ethel, sharply.

" I am afraid the attacks may become chronic if——" breaking off abruptly, glancing about to assure himself that the section behind them was unoccupied.

Then, after a moment, in a gentler mood, he added almost imploringly, bending over her so that his mustache brushed her averted ear: " Do you know, I am wondering, dear, what are really the relative positions of a husband and a mother in a wife's heart? Which has the first place? "

" Nobody can ever take a mother's place," with compressed lips. " Nobody should expect it."

" I am sorry that you did not tell me that sooner," looking pale as he abruptly turned away. " I will go and attend to your letter now, if you will excuse me," his smile not pleasant to see.

" But——" she began, in a qualifying tone; but he was gone.

Looking out of the window, she saw him hurrying away, evidently searching for a letter box; watched him with strange, fascinated gaze, as though she saw him now for the first time.

It was perhaps the first time that she had fully realized the vast moment of that step which had exchanged a mother's adoring service for a husband's untried love. She, indulged and petted all her life, had never been called to think for herself in any emergency before; mamma had always been at hand to assume every responsibility and shape every plan or opinion.

Frank Field had charmed her girlish heart with his robust, masculine beauty and ardent love making, and, with mamma's approval, it had seemed simply natural to drift on into this marriage, with no thought of any possibility of ill. But now she lay back in her seat with a chill sense of surprise, looking toward the future with dismay.

Frank was plainly jealous and of her mother, and it appeared quite clear that he was capable of being both ill tempered and unreasonably exacting.

And to go through such a crisis without her mother at hand to advise and arrange the difficulty seemed to the poor child a weight of trouble simply overwhelming.

Frank, meanwhile, having mailed the letter, was walking up and down outside in a perturbed and repentant frame of mind, heartily ashamed now of his peevish outburst, the first cloud across the brightness of their honeymoon.

The brief storm had, as it were, cleared the atmosphere so that he seemed to see the situation in better perspective.

Had this been the way to win his darling for his very own? She was but a child, after all, bound to her mother by the unquestioning habits of a childhood's love. She would grow to womanhood in his arms, and her woman's heart would make him rich with all that tenderness for which he hungered so impatiently.

And now he had been so foolishly precipitate, angering her, repelling her by that bullying show of temper.

He burned to make amends, to recover the ground he felt for the moment lost; and with the desire came the masculine impulse to buy something for her, to fetch her something which might please her.

He looked about hastily for flowers, fruit, anything.

"How long does that train stop here?" he called out to a passing porter.

"Ten minutes, sah," returned that worthy, hastily glancing over his shoulder as he shot by.

But seven minutes of the allotted time had passed when Frank came hurrying back with a box of Huyler's daintiest confections and a book which Ethel had expressed a desire to read.

He thought how he would lay his peace offering on her lap, with a plea for forgiveness so tender in its words that it must win for him the forgiveness his heart so craved.

Eagerly dreaming his dreams as he hurried on, he suddenly stopped short in startled awakening. The only train upon the track seemed certainly headed the wrong way.

"What has become of that Western express?" he called out sharply, to a shabby man lounging near.

"Become of it?" repeated that individual, listlessly gazing down the tracks.

"Where has it gone, man?" sorely fretted by this show of callous indifference in so vital a matter.

"Don'no's I know the next stop beyond this," drawled the shabby man, a gleam of teasing humor in his half closed eyes.

"Do you mean to tell me it has gone?" yelled Field, in a frenzy of dismay.

"Did you s'pose it tied up here for the night?" with a derisive grin; but poor Field was too much overcome by the calamity which had befallen him to heed the taunt.

But one idea was clear in the chaos of his mind.

"I want a special engine to overtake that train," he cried, looking as if he would board the first one he saw.

"Well, I hope you may get it," retorted the other, with a laugh which conveyed a mocking incredulity of any such result; but Field was already beyond earshot, possessed of another frenzied purpose.

"I want to send a message immediately—without an instant's delay," he breathlessly cried to the clerk, whose eye he happened to catch as he thrust his head in at the telegraph window.

"Then you'll have to go up to the other office," returned that person, calmly turning upon his heel. "We're full of work for the line. Can't do anything for you for half an hour."

"But, heavens! man, it's a matter of life and death! You must take it!"

The young husband's lip quivered boyishly as he wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead.

The clerk looked faintly interested.

"I'm left here—got off the train to mail a letter—and my wife—I must catch her with a message! She has never traveled alone—she has never been separated from her mother for a day in her life until now!"

The agony of shame and contrition that possessed him as he unconsciously drifted into that hated formula. To think that he had taken her away from that mother's care to let anything like this happen!

The clerk discreetly wiped away a smile with the edge of a blotting pad.

"Oh, I see," he said, comprehensively. "Well, write your message; and as soon as we can finish what we are on for the road, we'll put it right through for you. There's plenty of time—Northern Pacific, was it not? Well, your wife will hear from you at the first stop.

"And I say—better wire her to get off at Bismarck and wait for you, if you are going that far. There's the Manitoba express goes out in fifteen minutes, and beats the Northern Pacific in time. Will get you into Bismarck ten minutes ahead of your wife, after all, and you can give her a pleasant surprise. Oh, thanks, no—one is enough," with a cheery laugh, as Field would have thrust upon him the entire contents of his cigar case. "Good by, and good luck to you."

Ethel, who had been prepared to give her lord most unmistakable evidences of displeasure upon his return, began, after a little, to grow restless when he did not return to receive the scathing speeches she had composed for his discomfiture.

Assuming that she wished a glass of water, she had loitered to the end of the car, glancing about for him, by no means soothed in spirit to discover him, as she thought, sulkily smoking by himself out on the back platform, his broad shoulders leaning against the door.

With an elaborate affectation of indifference hiding fresh displeasure, she returned to her seat.

But Ethel's anger was always as a flash in the pan; being, moreover, a most gregarious little person, she was soon desperately lonely, to the end that after half an hour the last remnant of her dignified wrath had dissolved in a burning desire for Frank's society. It was easy to invent a pretext to call him to her, and she eagerly hurried again to that car door against which the smoker's back had rested; but now no one was there.

A frightened look crept into the blue eyes as she stared out upon the deserted platform in the fast gathering darkness. It was before the day of vestibule trains, and an awful fancy flitted through her mind of her handsome husband, by some heedless step, hurled from the car and lying now upon the track behind, mangled, suffering, perhaps even dying there in the darkness alone!

But, of course, this was absurd, she quickly told herself, as she returned disappointedly to her seat. Frank, of all men, so strong and brave, would surely take care of himself under all circumstances; he had merely gone into the other car.

Perhaps he meant to punish her a little by staying away like this. It was not like him, not like the lover she had known up to this; but she might have hurt him more than she had meant by her hasty words—he did love her so!

A porter was passing, and she hastily called him to her.

"Will you find my husband, please, and tell him that I would like to see him?" blushing prettily; it was such a novel experience still to be saying "my husband." "He is in the other car, I think."

It was some time before the porter returned, and then he was alone.

"The gentleman that was a sitting here, I can't find him nowhars, ma'am," he said, apologetically.

"But he must be on the train," cried poor Ethel, growing pale, the dreadful fancy of her Frank lying in helpless suffering upon the deserted track recurring to her mind with sickening force. "You must find him—you must look again—he must be on the train somewhere."

And the conductor, coming along just then, sympathizing with her alarm when the situation was explained to him, promptly offered to join in the search.

"I'm afraid he got left at Minneapolis," he faltered, uncomfortably, when he came back from the fruitless quest.

"Oh, no—I saw him after we had left Minneapolis; he was standing on the rear platform of the car, smoking —I saw him," moaned the unhappy girl, a look of horror in her eyes. "He has fallen off! He is—oh!" drawing a long terrified breath, her voice sinking to a shuddering whisper, "God has done it to punish me!"

"Not a bit of it," retorted the conductor, cheerily, but full of kindly sympathy for her evident despair. "It was some other fellow you saw—must have been. Only had a look at his back, any way, did you? Exactly; and it was easy to be mistaken in the darkness. We'll have a wire at the first stop, explaining that your husband got left somehow and will be along by the next train; now, just you wait and see."

"I am afraid something is the matter. Can I be of any help?" asked a sweet voiced woman, coming from the other side of the car.

When the conductor had explained, making as light of the matter as he could with courtesy to the unhappy wife, the newcomer seated herself sympathetically beside the white faced miserable girl, taking one of the cold hands in a tender clasp, while, with cheery confidence, she strove to reassure her.

"How unfortunate! But of course you will not allow yourself to feel nervous. You will surely have a telegram at the next station, explaining everything."

"Oh, no, I shall have nothing; I shall never have anything again," in utter hopelessness. "I must telegraph to mamma—she must come.

"But what can she do?" in a voice of anguish. "She cannot give him back to me! I do not want her!" breaking into a passion of despairing tears with the realization that, for the first time in her life, she faced a trouble beyond any remedy a mother's devotion might devise.

"Oh, but you must not give way so," urged the sweet voiced woman, compassionately. "Surely you have no reason."

"No reason? When my husband may be—dead?"

"But I am sure it cannot be so bad as that. Be brave, my dear, and trust in the Father who does not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men," murmured the other, softly.

"Ah, but He punishes," the girl retorted, heart brokenly, turning her shoulder upon the kindly comforter with a sort of sullen defiance. "But oh! my dear, dear Frank! If he had only known!"

"But I am sure that he does know," with a soft caressing note of laughter that seemed, somehow, wondrously reassuring. "And you shall tell him again tomorrow."

And, as had been predicted, when the train came to the next station, the conductor hurried into the sleeper, his face radiant with sympathetic delight over that coarse buff envelope which he bore in his hand, the telegram which seemed now to Ethel as a message from heaven.

As all the others had readily assumed, Frank had been left at Minneapolis; but he hastened to assure his wife that he would meet her at Bismarck in the morning. Meanwhile she was to be brave, and the conductor would look after her; he had sent a special message to that gentleman, putting her in his charge and explaining about the tickets, while finally even that prosaic bit of brown paper was made to add Frank's love to its message of cheer.

Amid the smiling chorus of congratulation and "told you so," the blushing happy girl could not refrain from carrying that blessed paper to her quivering lips.

"I never was so happy in all my life," she whispered to her smiling neighbor, her eyes shining like stars.

But she was even happier, when, at Bismarck next morning, she was fold-

ed close to her husband's throbbing heart, in an embrace which left her fairly breathless.

She screamed a little in the first happy shock, not having expected him to be there before her, when he had been left, at last accounts, so far behind; she could not imagine how it had been accomplished, but she hardly listened to his incoherent explanations about that Manitoba express, looking up at him with a world of impassioned tenderness in her eyes, her face glorified to such beauty as even Frank had never seen it wear before.

"Oh, Frank, I love you so! I love you so!" she murmured, with sweet irrelevance, the moment they were sheltered in a carriage. "Indeed, indeed, I scarcely realized how much until I thought I had lost you."

"My darling!" drawing her more tenderly close to him. "And you have forgiven me for the hateful jealousy and ugly words that I have been repenting ever since?"

"I only remember my ugly words, dear, which I have been repenting. And I have been thinking," the soft eyes diamond bright with unshed tears, "you must never be jealous again, dear. It is not that I love poor mamma less than I ever did; you could not wish that, sweetheart, for I love you so differently—so infinitely more than all the world beside. I cannot tell you—I don't know how to express it so that you will understand——"

"But I do understand, sweet," he whispered, stopping the tremulous lips with kisses. "I understand that my love is at last my own, even as I would have her—my own true wife. God bless her!"

GEMS IN VERSE.

I THOUGHT the sparrow's note from Heaven,
  Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
  He sings the song, but it cheers not now,
For I did not bring home the river and sky—
  He sang to my ear, they sang to my eye.

Emerson.

WHEN COMMON MEN ARE GREAT.

IT is not merely now and then
We find such hearts in common men—
Such hero souls enwrapt away
In swathing folds of common clay—
But standing face to face with fate,
All common men are always great.
For men are cowards in the gloom
  Of their own little, selfish fears—
Not when the thunder steps of doom
  Stride through the trembling years,
And in an open fight with fate
All common men are always great.

Sam Walter Foss.

BY FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE.*

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

The story of John Ashton, involving the quality of a sin and a coincidental mystery, being a tale in which New York and London are links in a chain of extraordinary incidents.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

In London Lord John Hertford, ninth earl of Ashton and Cowingford, is married to Lady Mercy Covington, and on the very night of the wedding reception Lord John is summoned from the room and fails to come back. The bride seeks to hush the matter up and with the aid of a faithful servant, Robert, remains hidden away in the house, awaiting her husband's return, while her friends are under the impression that the bride and groom are traveling abroad.

Meantime, in New York one John Ashton, trusted employé of Henry Hollister, banker, who believes himself to be Mr. Hollister's nephew and is practically the fiancé of his daughter Hope, in seeking to shield the prodigal son of the family is himself accused of theft. The banker then announces to him that he is not his nephew, that he is merely a foundling who was picked up on a doorstep, and declares that now, having brought such disgrace to those who have befriended him, the best thing he can do is to kill himself. A struggle ensues, the banker falls, and striking his head against the safe, is left for dead by Ashton, who writes a note stating that he is responsible for the deed, and then wanders forth in a sort of daze, expecting each instant to be arrested for the crime. But to his amazement, no attempt is made to interfere with his movements; he takes ship for foreign shores and for nearly a year travels in new lands, striving to forget and failing miserably. Then, reaching London, he has about decided that the only thing to do is to return to New York and give himself up, when he is accosted in the street by Robert, Lord John's servant, who takes him for his master. Ashton protests vainly, but finally humors Robert—who thinks his master's mind unbalanced—by going home with him, where he stops the night. They discuss at length the meeting, and Ashton tells laughingly of a tattooed mark above his heart, when, to his utter amazement, Robert proves by letters the existence of the same mark on the heart of the missing earl. Lady Mercy discovers from Robert's manner that something has occurred, so he tells her the situation. She determines to see this man, herself unseen, and in the morning hides behind an easel and a family portrait from which Robert has removed the eyes. Ashton is taken to the library where Lady Mercy's eyes, looking straight into his, move him strangely; seeing this she cannot restrain a moan, and Ashton snatches away the painting, revealing her exquisite, tear stained face.

CHAPTER X.

THE ONLY WAY.

THE anger which had been his motive in dashing the portrait aside, died away the instant Ashton saw the living, breathing picture behind it.

He remained where he was, and for a second she retained her position, neither speaking, while Robert crept slowly away towards a near by window where he concealed himself behind the curtains.

"John?" said the countess then; "John?"

Ashton did not reply, and she moved forward, stepping through the now vacant easel and approaching slowly the spot where he was standing.

"John?" she repeated, gliding still closer to him and reaching out both hands appealingly. Then she paused, without touching him.

Still he did not move. He felt that he could not trust his own senses; his powers of utterance were paralyzed, his position unprecedented, inexplicable, confounding; and all the while there was something in the eyes of the woman so strangely introduced into

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his presence which held his own in spite of himself; which commanded his silence and his respect.

But Lady Mercy could endure no more. She realized that he looked upon her with unrecognition, and the sustaining power which until now had upheld her in her effort to play the part she had undertaken, gave way.

She threw herself forward upon his breast, clasping her white, soft arms around his neck and without a sigh, or sound, lost consciousness.

She would have slipped from his grasp to the floor of the library, had not his own arms sustained her, but he caught her as she would have fallen, and lifting her gently, placed her in one of the big library chairs. Then, straightening up, he looked sharply around for Robert.

The old servant, however, was still concealed behind the curtain and was too greatly frightened, or perhaps too wise to make his presence known.

"Robert! Robert!" called Ashton, but there was no reply, and the American glanced again at his companion in the chair, discovering that her eyes were open—that she was already recovering from her swoon.

"I am rejoiced that you are better, madam," he said, coldly. "I think, now that you are not in need of assistance, and lest you might have a second attack, I will leave you."

He turned to go, but her voice compelled him to wait.

"Stop, sir; stop one moment, I pray you!" she gasped. "Do you not see that I am suffering? Oh, for the love of God do not leave me yet!"

He fell back a step or two and paused again.

"Why do you wish me to remain?" he asked, regarding her intently and with some curiosity in his glance. "Why are you suffering? Is it because you, too, insist upon confounding my identity with that of the lost earl of Ashton?"

"Yes," she faltered.

She had not strength enough to move; indeed she seemed to possess barely sufficient energy to speak. The trying experience through which she had passed while concealed behind the portrait, the continued repression of all her emotions, followed by the sudden and alarming dénouement, had undone her completely.

In that instant she experienced greater despair than she had felt during all the long year of sorrow and waiting that had just come to a close. The hope upon which she had lived until that moment, seemed blasted now.

Ashton studied her face closely before he ventured to speak again, and then his question was uttered so deliberately, so coldly, and—to her—so cruelly, that it started her into instant life, and she sprang from the chair, apparently electrified.

"Madam," he said, "may I be so bold as to inquire who you are?"

Then it was that she started up and confronted him with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks, reanimated, newly armed and equipped for the battle that she must wage with the most subtle foe in the world, forgetfulness.

"I was, before I knew you, Lady Mercy Covington," she said, deliberately. "Now, I am Lady Mercy Hertford, the countess of Ashton and Cowingford, *your wife.*"

"Good God!" was all that Ashton could ejaculate, and he started back as though stricken by a bullet.

He had not imagined that she could be the countess. Robert had told him that *she* was on the Continent, and he had supposed, if he had supposed anything, that the woman before him was some relative or friend of the family whom Robert had smuggled into the house to assist him in convincing his guest that he was the missing earl.

Here was a complication—one which bade fair to prove more trying than anything that Robert might have conjured up, and Ashton did not know

how to meet it; and while he stood there, half dazed by the announcement that she had made, the countess spoke again, calmly, and slowly.

"John," she said, "there must be some way to make you remember. Won't you try to help me? No matter how thoroughly you may be convinced in your own mind that you are not John Hertford, won't you have patience with me, and help me? Won't you, John?"

"Help you to convince me that I am your husband?" he almost shouted. "My good woman you are mad! You must be mad!"

"No, John," she responded, as calmly as before, "it is you who are mad, not I. Do you think that I could be deceived? I, who have loved you since we were children together? I, your wife, if only in name? Robert, who has known you from the cradle, might be deceived, but not I. The whole world might be deceived, but not I. My own eyes and ears might be deceived, but not my heart, and that tells me that you are John Hertford—that you are my husband who has come back to me after a whole year of waiting. Would my own heart fail me in an extremity like this?"

He could only gaze at her in consternation and amazement.

"Is this an asylum for the insane?" he muttered. "Am I the plaything of a lot of maniacs?"

"No," she replied as unmoved as ever, for she was determined not to give way again, "there is no one here who is insane. You have forgotten, that is all. You are in your own house, in the presence of your own wife.

"You were called from my side the evening of our wedding day, one year ago yesterday, and I have never seen you since that time. Yesterday, Robert met you and brought you home. Home, John, home! Has the word no significance for you, even if the name of your wife has not?"

Ashton did not immediately reply. He was thinking—trying to decide what was best to do in order to convince her of her error, and presently he decided.

There was only one way, only one. He would tell her his own history; tell her about Hope; about that scene with her in the counting room of the bank, and the one that followed it which had ended so fatally. It would wrench his heart strings apart, but he would tell her. It was the only way.

He crossed the room to the chair that she had occupied, drew it forward, and then stepped back again.

"Be seated, madam, if you please," he said. "I have decided to tell you a story about myself, and perhaps, when you have heard it, you will not be so eager to claim me for a relative; but first, permit me to ask you a question."

She took the chair and waited expectantly.

"Robert told me that you were abroad," he continued. "Will you tell me how it happens that you are here at this time?"

"I have never left the house since I entered it on your arm, a bride," she replied.

"Am I so like your husband in everything—voice, articulation, features, motion, mannerisms?"

"Yes; you speak with more directness, perhaps, than you used to do, but the change is very slight. One year's travel in America might produce it."

"Listen, then, madam, and I will tell you my story; I see there is no help for it."

CHAPTER XI.

A WOMAN'S DESPERATE PLEADING.

"When I was a baby, possibly two or three weeks old," Ashton began, "I was found in a basket on the doorstep of the residence of a banker in the city of New York. That was nearly thirty one years ago.

"The banker took me in, kept me

and reared me with as much tenderness as if I had been his own son, and indeed, until one year ago yesterday, I believed myself to be his nephew. Then he undeceived me, and how, you shall hear before I have done.

"There was nothing about me to indicate that I had a name, and he gave me the name of a friend, an Englishman who had been his chum in college; the name is John Cowingford Ashton. The only way in which I can account for the coincidence in names, is that the father of your husband was the friend for whom I was named.

"I grew up in that family as happy as a boy could be made by tender care and love. I addressed my benefactor as uncle, and regarded his daughter, who was born eight years after my advent, as my cousin. Her I loved with the only love that ever came into my life.

"When I became old enough, I entered the bank as a clerk, and step by step rose to the position of cashier, which place I held until one year ago yesterday, when I—when I gave it up and came away.

"The daughter's name was—is Hope," he continued, after a moment's pause. "You heard me utter it when I stood before the portrait, and looking into your eyes, fancied that I saw something in them to remind me of her. We were to have been married, but because of an act of a man whose name I must not mention, even to you—an act which I assumed, in fact declared to be my own, the ceremony never was and never can be performed. I cannot explain that act to you except to say that she believed I sinned beyond her power to forgive—sinned beyond redemption in her eyes, because of the terrible effect its revelation had upon her father, to whom it brought back immeasurable grief and suffering which he believed to be buried and forgotten."

Again he ceased speaking. Only the extremity of the moment could have compelled him to undergo the agony that he was at that moment enduring, but he controlled himself by a violent effort, and continued:

"There is here, a part of the family history which it is not necessary that I should mention. I expected a certain man to call upon me at the bank, in the middle of the night. For certain reasons I wished to bring him and Mr. Hollister together, and I sent a request for the latter to come also. The principal actor in the drama, I had so carefully prepared, did not come; Mr. Hollister did come, his daughter with him.

"To them both, I confessed my guilt of that crime which another had committed. They would not believe, but I convinced them. The banker sent his daughter away in their carriage and confronted me alone. Then he besought me to take my own life, but I had once promised Hope that I would never take my own life, and I therefore would not consent. Ah, well, he tried to kill me then; we struggled. I threw him from me. He fell, striking his head against an iron safe—and died.

"I left the bank. I wandered through the streets all that night and throughout the following day. I visited a barber and had my beard and mustache shaven. I changed my name to Cornell, and I cannot understand now why I did not give that name to Robert when he met me on the corner of St. James Street, unless it is that I had about decided to return to New York and give myself up for the crime I have committed.

"The remainder of the story, you know. The recital of it has given me more pain than I can describe, and I sincerely hope that it has served the purpose for which I have intended it—that you are convinced of the error into which you and your servant have fallen because of my strange and unaccountable resemblance to your husband. Are you convinced, madam?"

He regarded her earnestly as he ceased speaking. Then, when she raised her eyes to his, and he saw that they were as steadfast as ever, and that his recital had had no effect upon her other than to assure her that he was struggling under the effects of an hallucination, he started back in anger, finding it difficult to believe in his own senses.

"John," she said, rising and coming closer to him, "what could have put all that awful history into your head? Did you dream all those things while you were ill and have you carried that frightful sorrow around with you ever since you recovered? I am your Hope, John. There is no such banker, or if there is, it is somebody whom you have met while you were still ill, and the remainder of the story, you have imagined. Can you not see it so?"

"I regret, madam, that I cannot," he replied, coldly. "With your permission, I will go."

"Not yet, not yet!" she cried, extending one hand with a rapid gesture, and detaining him.

"I insist, madam, that I must go. I have already remained too long."

"Wait; wait. What is the name of the banker?"

"Must I tell that, also?"

"To please me, yes."

"His name was Henry Hollister."

"And now, his address."

"Why that?"

"You have been endeavoring to convince me that I am in error, and now it becomes my duty to convince you that it is you who err."

"Indeed! In what manner?"

"I will cable to New York at once. I will ascertain if there is a banker there, living, by that name; if so, if he ever had in his employ or ever knew such a person as John Ashton, and if that is also true, what was the manner of his leaving his employ."

"I cannot consent to it."

"Why?"

"The cable would find Hope. She would suffer anew. It cannot be done."

"You mistake me. Hope shall know nothing of it. I have a friend who resides in New York. I will cable to her. She will make the inquiry for me at the bank. I will not spare words in the message. I will instruct her how to act in everything.

"Wait. I will write the message now and you shall approve of it before it goes. Robert will send it for us. If the reply confirms your story, I will believe. May I write it, John? May I?"

"Yes, write it if you must," he said, shrugging his shoulders and dropping into the chair. "It seems to be the only way to convince you, and I shall return to New York and surrender myself to the law, any way. Write."

She hurried to the table where Ashton had written the letter of dictation for Robert, but he did not see her when she discovered it. She gave a sudden start, seized and folded it, and hastily thrust it into the bosom of her morning robe. Then she took up the pen and wrote.

"Listen," she said presently, rising and returning to the chair where Ashton was seated, "I will read the message to you; or do you prefer to read it for yourself?"

"No, read it."

"It is to the friend of whom I spoke. We were schoolmates and inseparable while she remained in this country. She married an American. Listen."

"I listen, madam."

"'Is Henry Hollister, banker' (giving the address) 'alive? Has he ever had in his employ or does he know John Ashton? When to both. Reply immediately full particulars. Vital importance. Strictly confidential.' Can you suggest anything to add to the message?"

"Nothing, madam."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite so."

"Will you wait for me while I call Robert?"

"Yes."

Robert, anticipating that he was about to be summoned, stole from behind his curtain through the door into the hallway, and having permitted sufficient time to elapse after she rang the bell, reappeared.

When the countess had given him his instructions and he was gone, she returned to Ashton who was standing in the middle of the floor.

"You will await the reply, here?" she asked anxiously.

"No, madam."

"You must, John, you must. It is only fair."

"It is impossible. Many hours must elapse before you can receive an answer, and I know already what it will be."

"You believe that you know. Don't go, John, I pray you do not go until the reply comes. You do not know what it will be. You said you would consent that I should try this test."

"Shall I tell you what the reply will be?" he asked, smiling cynically.

"Yes," she replied, "tell me."

She only thought of gaining time so that she could conjure up some plan that would keep him there.

"Your reply will read something like this: 'Ashton murdered Hollister one year ago. Arrest him.' Good heaven, madam, I left my written confession on the desk when I went out from the counting room that night. Do you think there can be any doubt concerning the reception accorded your friend when she goes there to inquire for me? Don't you realize that it will involve her, and do you wish to do that?

"There is such a thing as outfollying folly, and all of my manhood revolts against the thought of permitting myself longer to remain a party to it. I must go. When your reply comes, you will be convinced. If you suffer while you await its arrival, you will feel all the more respect for me because I did not remain to be a witness to your regret for this scene."

With a quick motion Lady Mercy stepped between Ashton and the door, and stood facing him. A physiognomist might have discovered infinite possibilities in her countenance.

Its startling beauty was greatly heightened by the excitement of the moment. Her eyes, always brilliant, gleamed with a new light which dazzled and held him, and he almost recoiled before the intensity of her gaze. She seemed to have grown taller and stronger in that brief instant, and by sheer force of will to have reached out and seized control of the situation.

"You must not—you shall not go!" she exclaimed, although her voice was not raised and her words were as calmly spoken as any that she had uttered during that unprecedented conversation. "No matter who you are; whether you are my husband, or the man whom you claim to be, you have no right to go out now, and you shall not go! You shall not go!"

"Lady Mercy——" he began, but she raised one arm and stopped him.

"You refer to your manhood," she said, attacking him on another point, and permitting the suggestion of a ring of scorn to permeate her tones; "do you think it is a manly thing to do, to leave me now in order that you may seek your own pleasure while I remain here to suffer alone? I think it is cowardly."

"Cowardly, madam?"

"Yes, cowardly. There is no other word to apply to it."

"I think it is cowardly for me to remain, when I know what the result will be—it would be an act of the most abject kind of cowardice. I must go."

"You cannot go unless you put me away from this door by force. I will not step aside to permit you to pass."

"In that case, madam, I shall feel compelled to do that very thing," he said, icily.

"What! You would do that?"

"If necessary, yes."

"Oh, God, is there nothing that will induce you to remain?"

"Nothing."

"Then do it," she said, desperately. "I shall not stand aside. Use your man's brute strength against a woman's pleading, if you will. You shall leave this room in no other manner."

She stood facing him with her arms, half bare, thrown widely apart and covering the doorway, and when he took a step nearer to her, she did not move, nor did she turn her gaze from his.

She was breathing heavily, for deep down in her soul she believed this to be the one struggle of her life. There was no doubt in her mind; only conviction, made the stronger by Ashton's determination to go.

Perhaps he had masqueraded in America as John Ashton. Perhaps he had secured a clerkship in a bank over there. Perhaps he had known Henry Hollister, and Hope, and had, during the tortuous vagaries of his unbalanced mind, learned to love her, or to think that he loved her.

Perhaps, even, it was true that Henry Hollister was dead and that he had fallen by this man's hand. Perhaps all this and more, still he was none the less her husband. That she did not doubt. That was her conviction; and if all those possibilities were true, was it not all the more vital that she should detain him there?

The cable might say that the banker was dead, and that he had been killed by John Ashton, but it certainly could not say that John Ashton had been known to them above a year. She would wait. She would know how to act when the message arrived.

In her heart she believed that word would come that Henry Hollister was still living, and that he did not, and never had known John Ashton.

The man was in a difficult position. He was determined that he would depart from the house before that cablegram could arrive, and yet facing him was the unpleasant situation of being compelled to thrust aside, by force, the woman who opposed him with such vehemence that he could not doubt her sincerity.

Indeed, it was the very fact that he could not and did not doubt it, which rendered him all the more determined to go.

"Perhaps it is possible for us to temporize," he said, presently, grasping at the only plan that presented itself. "Will you listen to a suggestion I have to make?"

"I will listen, John."

"If John were not my name," he replied, shrugging his shoulders, "I should resent your constant repetition of it. Under other circumstances, I should be glad to have you so address me. This is my suggestion: I will return to my hotel and there await the arrival of Robert, whom you will send to me with whatever message, verbal or written, you care to despatch after you have heard from New York. Will that suffice, if I give you my word that I will do as I say?"

"Wait; if the message I send is for you to return here, will you do so?"

"No."

"Not even to hear my apologies, if apologies are necessary?"

"They will be unnecessary in any case."

"You do not reply. If I request you to return here, will you do so?"

"No."

"Then I will not consent. I demand as my right, that you remain here."

"And I insist that I go."

"You shall not go."

"I must go—I will go. Stand aside, Lady Mercy, and spare yourself and me the indignity you threaten."

"It is you who threaten; not I."

"Will you step aside?"

"No."

"I beg that you will do so."

"I refuse."

He regarded her earnestly for a mo-

ment, but there was no sign of faltering in her steady, unflinching eyes. Then he moved a pace nearer and stretched forth one hand until it rested on one of her uplifted arms.

"Beware!" she whispered; then, suddenly, before he could reply, she threw her arms around his neck, and with unnatural strength, forced him back into the room, over against the couch and down upon it, exerting all her weight and power to hold him there.

"Don't go! Don't go! For God's sake, don't go!" she moaned. "I will die if you go now! Don't leave me. I pray, I beg, I entreat, remain! Remain until the message comes! Cannot you see that this is killing me? Don't go! Don't go! Oh, God, help me to keep him! God help me! God help me! God help *him!*"

Her voice died away in a moan. Her arms relaxed and fell from around his neck, and she sank back upon the couch, mercifully unconscious.

Ashton straightened up, placed the woman more comfortably on the couch, adjusted a cushion under her head, and with a tenderness such as he had not experienced since his parting with Hope, bent over and touched his lips to her forehead.

"Poor child," he murmured. "I doubt if you have suffered more than I during this interview, but you will approve my course when you have read the message from across the sea."

Then he turned away and went out of the house, down the street, and was soon lost in the shuttle-like crowd of a London thoroughfare.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW FREAK OF FATE.

THE emotions which held possession of John Ashton when he departed from the residence of the earls of Ashton and Cowingford, are indescribable.

He was determined, but dazed. A chain of circumstances as inexplicable as they were remarkable had compelled him to discuss his own affairs with another, when he had utterly and for an entire year declined to discuss them with himself.

He had been forced into a betrayal of the incidents of that last night in New York; he had permitted a cablegram to be sent; he had voluntarily placed himself in a position from which he deemed there was no escape, and he had decided—irrevocably decided, he believed—to return to the city of his birth, to surrender to the law, and voluntarily to stand trial for the killing of his benefactor, Henry Hollister.

Nor was this all. The scenes of the preceding night, with its inexplicable entanglements and the interviews with old Robert and with Lady Mercy might have overwhelmed a stronger man than he was.

If he could have doubted her sincerity; if he could have believed that she was mad; if he could have accounted for her extraordinary belief in any logical way, or in any manner satisfactory to his own mind, even though illogical in itself, he might have smiled at the whole thing and have gone on his way, reserving the incident only as a memory; but he could not do this.

His only connected thought when he departed from the house, was devout thankfulness that he had escaped, and firm determination that he would avoid every possibility of a second interview. It was his intention, vague though real, to return at once to his hotel—fortunately, he had not mentioned its name—and to remain in seclusion until the time for the sailing of the first steamer for New York.

Everything else was a jumble in his brain. He started out in the direction he wished to walk much as a drunken man reels towards home—instinctively.

He passed people on the street with-

out seeing them. He crossed crowded thoroughfares, dodging in and out among the swarms of cabs and busses without realizing that he dodged, without knowing that many times he barely escaped collision with horses and wheels, without hearing the angry and warning shouts of drivers, "bobbies" and pedestrians, who, less absorbed than himself, regarded personal welfare and physical immunity from harm as worth attention.

Not he. He might have been in Cairo, in Paris, on desert plains, or in a wilderness, and it would have been the same.

His thoughts were in New York; his eyes saw only Hollister's bank, and Hope, and her father; his soul was wandering beyond the limits of its earthly sphere, and the power of locomotion alone seemed to have remained with his body.

He turned into Piccadilly, striding on as rapidly as the crowds on the street would permit him to do, jostling, colliding, and bumping his way through the throng, unheeding the angry gestures and rough words that often were hurled at him because of his clumsiness, and so arrived at Dover Street.

There, however, the throng of vehicles was so dense that he continued still farther on his way, and presently attempted to cross among the maze of horses and wheels so that he could turn into Albemarle Street, for he was stopping at Browne's, which has an entrance on both streets.

For a moment he hesitated, waiting for an opening through the crush, and at length, believing that he perceived one, he darted forward, leaped past one madly driven horse, dodged behind another cab, slipped, pitched forward like one who dives from a pier into the sea, and plunged headlong directly against the glistening shoulder of another rapidly moving animal.

Much sooner than could be expected—almost suddenly—traffic on that side of the street was suspended; carriages and cabs came to a halt as though a word of command had been given by one in authority.

A driver or two leaped to the ground, "bobbies" ran towards the scene, and the gentleman whose horses had caused the disaster stepped down and hurried forward to the spot where the prostrate man lay, directing his coachman to pull up to the curb and wait while he followed those who bore the stricken man to a chemist's.

The crowd which always collects at such scenes, gathered there, and it was with difficulty that the gentleman made his way through it; but he succeeded, and presently stood near those who were bending over the injured man in the effort to determine if he still lived.

Presently he framed the question that was uppermost in his mind.

"No, he is not dead," replied the chemist, "but he is severely injured. Perhaps you may know him, my lord," he continued, recognizing his questioner; "he is a gentleman."

"Indeed."

Without another word the owner of the carriage pressed forward and bent over the senseless form, but he started back instantly, apparently overwhelmed by what he saw.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "It is Lord John!"

But he was a man of action, even though he was startled out of his composure by the discovery he had made.

"Quick!" he continued, authoritatively. "Get a litter of some kind. Haven't you a cot, or a mattress here, my man? Get it. Officer, drive that crowd away from the door. Eh? Who is he? Lord John Hertford, the Earl of Ashton and Cowin—ah, doctor! I am glad that you happened to be near.

"It's Lord John. I didn't know that he was back—must have come last night or this morning—haven't seen or heard a word of him in a year or more. Will he live? Is it very bad, doctor?"

"Bad enough. Broken head and broken ribs. We can't move him far, but he must be got out of this before he revives, if he ever does. Where can we take him, my lord? Isn't there a club——"

"Yes—the Sachem—right around the corner—just the place—have some of these fellows carry that cot—Bobby, clear away that rabble—Doctor, the chemist, here, will send for whoever you wish to help you. Come, now, men. Be awake! A minute may mean life or death to my best friend."

Thus it happened that John Ashton was carried, insensible, to one of those quiet little clubs with which London abounds. This particular one had in the past been a favorite resort of the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford and here he was perhaps more intimately known than in any other place in England. And as though fate took a wicked delight in playing with the destiny of this self condemned outcast, the man who believed that he recognized and took him there, had been the most intimate friend and constant associate of the lost earl, by name, Lord Archie Quinlan.

The club was deserted at that time of day. Most of its members had not breakfasted when the accident occurred, but the news spread, as such news will, and it was not long before the clerk was besieged with inquiries concerning the condition of Lord John.

To every question the same reply was given: "He is still unconscious, but the doctors do not regard the injury as fatal."

When everything had been done that that could be done, but while the doctors were still struggling to overcome the coma into which the accident had thrust their patient, Lord Archie descended to the lounging room, where he found a group of the earl's friends awaiting him.

"How did it happen?" "When did it happen?" "Where did it happen?" "What the devil were you thinking of, to run him down?" "When did he get back?" "Did you know that he was in town?" "Is he out of danger?" "Where is he hurt?" "Are any bones broken?"

These are specimens of the questions that were hurled at him as he entered the room, and after he had replied to them as best he could, he said, suddenly:

"There is one question that I would like to ask, if anybody could answer it."

"What is it?" somebody inquired.

"Did the countess return with him? Somebody must go and tell her, you know."

"True enough! Look here, Archie, I have an idea," exclaimed another intimate friend of the earl.

"Let me have it, then; I confess that I am done up. Good God! If he should die, I would feel as though I had killed him."

Lord Archie turned away from them then, and walked to one of the windows where he stood looking out upon the street, tapping the panes with his fingers and struggling manfully to control himself. They left him to himself, and presently he rejoined them, as calm and direct as ever.

"Well, Buxton, what is your idea?" he demanded.

"Why, Jack's man—old Robert, you know. He's in town. I saw him on the street yesterday. We might send for him, and—er—it seems to me that —er—he'd be the best one to go to the countess; eh? If you should show up there, old man, she'd be frightened out of her seven senses before you said a word—she would, 'pon my soul, for you're as white as a ghost now. It's got to be done quick, too, for the thing is blazoned all over town already, and the news'll be fired at her like a shot out of a gun if we don't hurry."

"You're right, Bux. But we'll not send for him. I'll go fetch him myself."

"Pshaw, man! That won't do at all."

"Why not?"

"Why, you'd have to go to the house. Lady Mercy would see you, don't you know. She'd be sure to be at one of the windows, and all that. It always happens that way when one wishes to break bad news; eh? I mean when one is *obliged* to break bad news. We'll send one of the lads after Robert and have him here; eh? Don't you think that is better?"

"Perhaps so; yes."

"Good, then. You write a note to Robert——"

"Damn it, old chap, what do I want to write a note for?" interrupted Archie. "I'll take your idea and improve upon it. Here, my lad, come here. What is your name?"

"Mike, m'lud."

"Do you know where the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford resides?"

"Yes, m'lud."

"Well, go there as quickly as you can, ask for Lord John's man Robert, and tell him that his master has met with an accident, and——"

"Say that he has sprained his ankle, or something like that, you know," broke in Sir Thomas Buxton.

"——and say that he has sprained his ankle," continued Archie, as if he had not heard the interruption. "Tell him that it is nothing serious, and that he is not to alarm the countess on any——"

"That's just the best way to alarm her," interposed Buxton, hastily.

"Be quiet, Bux. He is not to alarm the countess, but he is to tell her that the earl is injured—slightly injured, mind you, and—er—what the devil more *can* he say? Crandyl, you speak. You've been gaping like an owl for the last ten minutes."

Geoffrey Crandyl lowered himself an inch or two in his chair, blew a column of smoke towards the ceiling and drawled, lazily:

"Well, if I were Mike, and I was sent to see Robert, I should say, 'Please, sir, Mr. Robert, Lord John wishes your attendance at the Sachem at once, and please, sir, tell my lady that he will bring a friend home to dinner with him.' Least said soonest mended, you know, Archie. It's all rot, you know, making up messages for this sort of thing. Just tell the truth."

"What?" exclaimed Buxton. "Do you mean to say that it is best to send word that Jack's nearly dead, and may be so before they can get here?"

"Yes, if that were the truth, but fortunately it isn't. Send word to what-d'ye-call-him, Robert, that Hertford is here and wants him at once. That's enough, and it's the truth, too."

"You are right, Geoff.," said Lord Quinlan, and so the boy was despatched.

It so happened that faithful old Robert, having delivered the cable message to be forwarded, had hastened back to the house, fearful that his mistress might sorely need him in the crisis that was taking place in her life, and he arrived there only a few moments after the departure of John Ashton.

Hastening at once to the library, he found Lady Mercy still unconscious upon the sofa and his guest gone.

For a moment he believed that she was dead, and he stood beside her, not daring to move, overwhelmed by the dread of what he might find if he searched for cause.

Her face was like wax, with just that faint suggestion of color beneath the skin which might have been placed there by the brush of an artist.

She reclined quite at ease, as though she were sleeping, yet there was no gentle rise and fall of the lace which covered her bosom; there was no expansion and contraction of that white throat, no quiver of the eyelids, no fluttering of the long, black lashes that fringed them.

She was very still—so still that Robert was appalled.

That last, frantic embrace that she had bestowed upon Ashton, and the scene which followed it, had torn away the fastenings at her neck, as it had loosed the ripples of dark hair, which now clustered pathetically around the white, still face, framing it, in that darkened room, in what seemed to be a mass of ebony, and rendering her appearance more deathlike than it really was.

Robert paused only for an instant, however. Then he fell upon his knees beside her and began chafing her hands, calling her by name, and entreating her with all the eloquence he possessed to open her eyes and speak to him; to tell him that she was not dead.

And thus he sat, stroking her hands and calling upon her, how long, he never knew—hours it seemed to him; until at last she sighed and breathed, and the old man knew that she was coming to herself again.

But it was some time longer before she was conscious of what was passing near her, and Robert waited. Even his master was forgotten during those moments of agony when he feared that his lady would never speak to him again, and now that consciousness was returning he could wait.

"John," she murmured; then, slowly, she opened her eyes—great, sad, wondering eyes which did not yet comprehend what they looked upon.

She fixed them upon her faithful servant and held them there, staring idly while she tried to remember; and bit by bit, it all came back, piece by piece, it all returned to her, and the old man saw tears gather and glide downward, although she manifested no other sign of weeping.

At last, after what seemed to be hours of waiting, she spoke.

"Has he gone, Robert?" she asked, whispering the words.

"I fear so, my lady," was the heartbroken reply.

"When?"

"I do not know, my lady. He was not here when I returned."

Again she was silent a long time; and then:

"How long ago was that?"

"An hour, perhaps. I do not know."

She closed her eyes again, to think, but after several moments opened them again.

"We will follow him, Robert," she said.

"Follow him, my lady? How? We do not know where he has gone."

"Yes, Robert, I know. At least I know where he will go. He will take the first steamer that sails for New York. He almost told me as much as that. We must be passengers on the same—hark! What was that?"

Robert, too, had started at the sound, for it had not been heard in that house in a long time.

"It is the front door bell, my lady. Shall I attend to it?"

"Yes—yes. It may be that he has relented and returned. Go! Go quickly!" and she sprang from the couch and began pacing the floor while Robert hastened to reply to the summons.

The short time that he was away seemed interminable to her, though it was in reality but two or three minutes; but old as he was, he came back on a run, his face beaming, and his whole being convulsed with the joy of the news he brought.

"He is found! He is found!" cried Robert. "Oh, my lady! I believe that he has come to his senses at last!" and the old man plunged into a chair and sobbed with joy.

The countess started forward and seized him by the shoulder.

"What do you mean? Tell me!" she demanded.

"He has sent for me."

"Sent for—*you?*"

"Yes, my lady; from the Sachem. He is there. The boy said so. I was to come at once. Lord John needed

me. At the Sachem, my lady; Mr. John's favorite club—the little one in Albemarle Street. He is there—there at the Sachem, with Lord Quinlan and Sir Thomas Buxton. Don't you understand? He has gone there—there with his friends, and they have done what we could not do; they have made him remember who he is. He is safe—safe—safe! He has remembered. I must go at once—at once; I may go?"

"Yes—yes, Robert, go! Hasten! Return to me as soon as you can; or, if you are delayed, send a messenger to me. I shall——" but she ceased speaking, for Robert was gone.

"Has he really remembered?" she mused, "or is it merely that he has chanced to encounter one or more of his friends, again denied his identity, and they have sent for Robert to assist them?"

She walked steadily up and down the library floor for nearly an hour, her brows contracted, her hands clenched behind her, her head bent forward, her whole attitude that of one who is confronted by a crisis which one false move will render fatal, and she was preparing to encounter that crisis proudly, bravely.

Presently she crossed the room and stood before a mirror, gazing long and intently into the clear, earnest, steadfast depths of her own honest eyes; peering, by the aid of the glass, into the utmost recesses of her own soul; estimating her own strength; invoking to her aid, by prayer and by concentration of mind, the power of God and every dormant power within her.

"No more sighing; no more weeping; no more fainting," she murmured to the reflection. "I am fighting for my life and I must not falter. I am struggling for him, and I must be strong and fearless. There shall be no hesitation now; all must be firm and unyielding. Pleading cannot win, force will. Argument will not avail, determination must prevail. He shall see me, not as I am, but as I was. God is on my side, and something tells me that all will be well."

She left the library, went up the stairs to her own apartments, and an hour later, when Robert returned, he found the shutters open, the house alight, and its mistress prepared for any emergency that might arise.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FANCY OF DELIRIUM.

JOHN ASHTON, still unconscious, still shrouded in that awful coma from which the utmost efforts of the doctors had failed to rouse him, was conveyed to the house of the lost earl and laid upon his bed. The *Times* and *Telegraph* and other papers recounted at length the story of the accident, describing with considerable effect how he had been run down on the street by the horses of his best friend, carried to his favorite club, and finally taken to his home.

They complimented the countess upon her remarkable fortitude in bearing up under the shock, for at the time of going to press it was by no means certain that the earl would live. And then—Heaven only knows how they obtained the news, and got it so exactly alike, too—they related how he had returned from the Continent only the evening before he met with the disaster; had come back intending to open his town house for a short time only and then to retire to Hertford Hall for an indefinite period.

A short quotation from the *Times* will not be amiss, as bearing upon the manner that the world took to deceive itself, and to compel this utter stranger to assume the title and estates of one of the oldest and best families in the United Kingdom.

> The earl was on his way to the Sachem club at the time of the accident, for it is the favorite resort of his most intimate friends. He knew that it had long been the habit of

Lord Quinlan to breakfast there, and believed that he would encounter him.

The year that his lordship has spent in travel with his bride has been as replete with happiness as the most earnest well wishers of the earl and his countess could desire, and it was his intention to complete the long holiday by having at the hall a selected few of his intimates, and in that way to atone for the long period of silence that has endured since that beautiful morning when Lady Mercy Covington became his bride.

Now he is stricken down. Death crouches close beside his couch awaiting an opportunity to leap upon him unawares, and to tear him away from those who love him; but there are those on the watch who will be unceasing in their vigilance, and the grim destroyer must be spry indeed if they are outwitted.

The countess rarely leaves his bedside, and then only when fatigue overcomes her, and she is forced away by her friends. By some extraordinary paradox she has infinite faith in his recovery, even when the eminent physicians in attendance upon his lordship shake their wise heads in despair.

It is unnecessary to dwell further upon the period during which John Ashton was unconscious of all things. It extended into weeks, and often during that time despair entered the house only again to be expelled by hope; and at last he opened his eyes in the light of understanding—opened them, and saw, looking into his own, the great, wistful, but steadfast eyes of Lady Mercy.

He was too weak to utter any protest then, and he closed them again, wondering.

He was conscious that she bent over him and that her lips touched his forehead. He knew that her hand rested upon his brow, and somehow it gave him a sense of infinite relief, so that presently he slept again.

After that it was always the same. Each time he opened his eyes, it was to encounter hers, always tender, always wistful, but also unflinchingly direct, unfalteringly earnest, unqualifiedly determined, and he sighed and wondered, knowing that he must wait for an explanation of things that he could not understand.

"The cablegram—what of it?" he managed to whisper on the second day.

"You must not think of that now," she replied. "Wait until you are stronger; then I will read it to you."

"You received—an answer? Tell me; I must know."

"Yes, I received a reply."

"Read it to me."

"Not now, John. When you are stronger I will read it to you."

"Read it to me now. I must know what it said."

She realized that it was best to comply with his request, so she sent to her apartments for the message and read it aloud.

"'Banker Hollister alive and well. Does not know John Ashton.' That is all, dear."

"All?"

"Yes, that is all the message contains. You must not dwell upon these things now; wait until you are better and then we will discuss them."

"Does not know John Ashton? Does not know John Ashton?" murmured the sick man, as if he could not believe the evidence of his senses. "What does it mean? Alive! Thank God for that! I thought I killed him. He lives. Thank God! But does not know John Ashton? What does it mean?"

"Listen to me, dear," said Lady Mercy, quietly, but firmly. "I shall not permit you to talk any more of this matter, but to set your mind at rest, I will tell you a little more if you will promise to dismiss the matter from your mind until you are well. Will you do that?"

"I will try."

"My friend has written to me since she sent the message——"

"Written to you? How long ago was that? How long have I been here?"

"Nearly three weeks. Not another word now, or I will leave you. Will you obey me?"

"Yes."

"Nellie said she could not imagine why I wished such strange information, but nevertheless she went at once to procure it. She found Mr. Hollister. He received her at once. She describes him as a fine looking man past middle life, with smooth shaven face, bushy hair and brows, and piercing black eyes. Wait, I will get the letter and read to you from it, and then you must go to sleep again. Will you be patient while I go to my room?"

"No; tell me. It will be as well," he murmured.

She took one of his hands between her own and stroked it gently while she continued:

"Mr. Hollister received her very kindly, and she told him that she had called to inquire if he knew or ever had known a man named John Ashton, whereupon he shook his head and replied calmly that he knew no such person, following up the answer by inquiring why she asked him such a question. Nellie told him that a friend of hers in London had requested the information, and she read the message to him, omitting my name, of course."

"Ah! Well? What did he say then?"

"He replied: 'Inform your friend that I do not know and that I never have known a person whose name was John Ashton.' That is all, dear, and I must insist that you do not permit the matter to disturb you any more. When you are strong enough, you shall have the message and the letter to read, but you must not refer to the subject again. And now I am going to leave you, for you must rest. I fear that I have done wrong in permitting you to refer to it at all."

She bent over him, and for one instant her lips touched his; then, silently, she left the room.

But though John Ashton closed his eyes, he did not sleep. His mind kept busily at work in the effort to unravel the tangled skein in which he had become involved.

"It is fate," he thought; "a conspiracy of fate. But Henry Hollister spoke the truth; he does not know and never has known a person whose name was John Ashton, for the name was never mine by any right. But he is not dead. He lives and I have one less burden to bear.

"I can see it all now. The blow only stunned; it did not kill. He recovered, he found my confession upon the table and destroyed it. Only Henry Hollister and I know about that scene in the bank. My sudden departure has been accounted for in some other way, and I have been repudiated. He does not know and never has known a person whose name was John Ashton. So be it. I am not John Ashton. I never was John Ashton. Who am I? *Who am I?*"

He thought he laughed aloud, but he made no sound that the nurse sitting at the far end of the room could hear.

"*Who am I—who am I?* Perhaps I *am* Lord John Hertford. Perhaps I *am* the earl of Ashton and Cowingford. Everybody has conspired to make me so; it *must be so*. Yes—yes, it must be so. They are right and I am wrong."

He thought—he believed that the words were shouted aloud with his utmost strength. He imagined he was standing again in the library and that Robert and Lady Mercy and a throng of people were assembled there.

He could see them. They were all pointing their fingers at him and shouting, yelling, screaming at him that he was John Ashton. He knew who he was. He was Lord John Hertford, the lost earl, but he could not make them believe it.

They derided him, scoffed at him, scorned him, and in that fever of imagination which had taken possession of him, he leaped upon them; he thrust them from him; some of them he struck with his fists; others he spat upon; oh, how he struggled.

He could not make them believe.

He could not drive them from the room. They leered at him from every shadow, screeching, "John Ashton! John Ashton! John Ashton!" until the whole world rang with the denunciation, and in all that room there was only one who believed him, and that was Sir Roderick.

True, he had been dead for centuries, but his eyes still lived, and they believed him. Yes, those wonderful eyes believed.

"John Ashton! John Ashton! John Ashton!" yelled the jeering crowd, which had now augmented to a multitude; and again he attacked them, fiercely, murderously.

"I am not John Ashton!" he shouted—and he did shout it aloud this time, leaping from the bed and striking fiercely at his imaginary foes, mad with the fever that was consuming his brain.

The nurse sprang towards him. Lady Mercy, Robert, and one of the doctors ran into the room and attempted to seize him. He brushed them aside as though they were feathers, seeing only the scoffers, the deriders, the horde of fiends who would not believe.

"I am not John Ashton! There is no such person as John Ashton! There never was such a man! He does not live! He never lived! Away, I say! Mock me—mock me if you will, I am not John Ashton. What! You do not believe? Ask Robert; he knows. Ask old Sir Roderick; he knows. Ask the countess; she knows. Everybody knows but you—everybody! I am not John Ashton! I never was John Ashton! There never was a John Ashton, so how could I be he?"

He broke into a wild laugh and again brushed his enemies aside, but the unnatural strength was wearing out.

"Who am I?" he continued, changing his tone, and fixing his eyes intently upon the countess who was nearest to him.

All the violence was gone now; only the fever remained; all of his unnatural strength was succeeded by weakness so great that he tottered where he stood and swayed as if he would fall, and Lady Mercy ran quickly to him and put her arms around him while she led him gently but firmly towards the bed.

"Who am I?" he repeated, feebly. "You told me who I was. Tell me again. You know; Robert knows; everybody except myself knows who I am. Tell me who I am. I cannot remember. There is something wrong here that will not let me remember;" and he placed one hand to his head in evident pain.

Gently she forced him back upon the bed and drew the clothes over him; but when she would have stepped aside, he seized her hand and held it tightly in his own.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me who I am! I cannot remember."

"You are Lord John Hertford, dear," she murmured, "but more than all else, you are my husband."

"Yes—yes, that is it; that is it; I am Lord John Hertford. I will remember now. I will not forget again. Strange — strange — strange, that I should have forgotten. And you are Hope, are you not? You are Hope?"

"Yes, I am your Hope. Will you be quiet now, John?"

"Yes—yes, I will be quiet if you are Hope—my Hope. You said that, did you not? My Hope? Let me hold your hand and I will be very quiet. I am so tired; so tired. I have had a long tramp—such a long tramp. Yes—yes, I will rest now; but I am not John Ashton; you know that I am not John Ashton, do you not? Tell me!"

"Yes, I know that you are not John Ashton, dear."

She motioned to the others to leave the room, and when they were gone, she fell upon her knees beside the bed, and still holding his hand clasped between her own, she bowed her head

upon his breast and prayed; and while she was praying, sleep crept silently into his brain and took possession; and the burden of her prayer was a thanksgiving to God that even in his fevered dementia he had remembered who he really was; and she prayed that when his understanding returned, he might still remember; that he might be permitted to awake from his slumber, master of the faculties that she believed he had lost.

So at last she rose from her position and stood beside him, looking down upon him with all the love of a woman's soul in her calm, unfaltering, steadfast gaze.

Presently she turned away and calling the nurse to his bedside, went silently to her own room, where behind closed doors she sank upon her knees again and prayed on, earnestly, fervently, beseechingly.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING CONVALESCENCE.

The relapse into which John Ashton had been thrown by his interview with Lady Mercy proved to be serious, so that for many days after the occurrence, his life was despaired of. But the crisis passed and hope returned to the weary and anxious hearts that were watching over him.

Days lengthened into weeks and weeks into nearly two months, however, before he was strong enough, propped by pillows, to sit up in bed, and respond to questions addressed to him; and as such questions had only to do with his physical condition, they were infrequent and unimportant so far as his convalescence was concerned.

Never, during that anxious time, was the subject that was uppermost in his thoughts referred to in any way by anybody.

Lady Mercy, who, throughout his waking hours, was almost constantly by his side, avoided the subject as she would have avoided a deadly poison, and if by chance she detected an expression in his eyes which portended a return to it by himself, she escaped from the room without delay.

But, if she could have known, he was as determined to let the matter rest as she was. He thought of it often—indeed, it was rarely absent from his mind, but he had decided not to refer to it again until he was once more possessed of sufficient strength to face the world alone.

What he would do when that time came, he had not decided. There was time enough for that, and in the mean time he could think and plan, and that is what he did, unceasingly, but never with that calm judgment and care which was an essential part of the character of the man.

His faculties, like his muscles, were weak and emaciated, incapable of deliberation and consecutive reasoning, and the nurses and the doctors, and such others as entered his presence, "milorded" and "lord Johned" him without interruption or protest on his part.

During the first days of returned consciousness, whenever the countess was within the range of his vision, his eyes never left her face.

He watched her all the time with an intermixture of wonder and awe and reverence; and she met his gaze always with a smile of reassurance, and went about her duties with an unvarying calm and assurance of possession which created an impassable barrier between her and argument or opposition.

He made no comment when she addressed him in endearing terms; he had not the strength, nor the energy, and he knew that objection would do no good; and so, while he gradually became better and stronger, he permitted things to drift along as they were, without in the least realizing that

he was, day by day, getting deeper and deeper within the maze of a tangle from which extrication would some day be next to impossible.

Lord Archie Quinlan called every day, and sometimes oftener during the twenty four hours; but he was not permitted to see the patient, although Ashton was told of his visits, his solicitude and his anxiety.

Other members of the Sachem, and of other clubs where the earl had held membership, were also indefatigable in their inquiries, and in many of the clubs bulletins were posted every evening, stating with great minuteness the condition of the injured man.

Cards were left at, or sent to, the house by the hundreds; letters expressive of sympathy surfeited the post bag; messages came from abroad, and the whole world seemed to know that Lord John Hertford was at his London home, battling with death.

But Ashton knew little or nothing of these things, and heard of them only when card, letter, or message came from some one who had been an especial favorite with the earl—then, indeed, the countess mentioned it casually, in the hope that there would be some expression of appreciation on his part; but always without success.

One day she said to him, quite suddenly:

"John, dear, I have received such a lovely letter from Agnes Dunmore. She is in Egypt with her mother. Would you like me to read it to you?"

"No," he replied; "I do not care to hear it."

"You used to be so fond of her, John."

"Did I?" he smiled in reply, and made no further remark; and after that, the countess rarely reminded him of absent friends.

One day he asked for Robert, and when the old man, rejoiced by the summons, came to him, he said:

"Robert, do you remember telling me about Mr. Richard Hertford?"

"Certainly, Mr. John," was the reply. "We talked about him the evening you came home. I remember it very well."

"Do you know his present address?"

"No, sir."

"Is there any way in which you can find it out?"

"I fear not. His bankers might know it, but sometimes they are months at a time without news of him."

"I wish you would make the effort. If his address can be ascertained, I wish you to write to him at once and request him to return without delay. Will you attend to it?"

"Immediately."

"Very good. Let me know when it is done. That is all at present."

Robert repeated the conversation to his mistress.

She thought deeply before she replied; but at last she said:

"It is a good plan. I heartily wish Richard were here, but he dislikes being called home, and I greatly doubt if he will come, even if he receives the word."

"Refuse to come when Mr. Jack is so ill?" exclaimed Robert, aghast.

Lady Mercy smiled.

"You forget, Robert, that Mr. Hertford is probably so far away that it will take months for a letter to get to him, and more months for him to get here. He would argue that the letter had been so long on the way, and it would consume so much more time for him to reply to it in person, that his cousin would be either recovered, or—dead before he could get here—and he would not start.

"He would be rejoiced by the first condition and pained by the other, for we both know how fond he always was of the earl. He cares nothing for the title and he does not want the estates. No, he would not come, unless he had completed his tour, and in that case he will soon be at home, any way. You may procure his address, if it is pos-

sible, and I will write to him, leaving the matter so that he can act upon his own judgment when he receives the letter."

The address was, however, not procurable, and so Robert told Ashton when he was again called to the bedside; and the stricken man only sighed and closed his eyes.

Nearly three months had elapsed after the accident, before John Ashton was able to don his outer garments and sit by the window where he could look out upon the street, but after that he spent every day there, with Lady Mercy at his side. They conversed upon almost every subject which the ingenuity of either could suggest, except that one which was uppermost in the minds of each, affecting her with a terror unnamable, lest he should still have preserved the hallucinations of the past, and him with reluctance, against the time it should be necessary, to call up in her earnest eyes that expression of pain and horror he had once seen there.

He meant that the time should come when he would speak again, and to some purpose—but not yet—not yet. When he should be stronger; when he was well again—but not till then.

There was only one way in which he offended her now, and she noticed it with dismay, although she made no comment.

He never used any name in addressing her. True, he did not call her madam, as he had done when they talked together the first time, for he noticed that when he did so during the first days of his convalescence, it pained her; so now, he used no form of address whatever; nor was it necessary, for when she was in the room, she was constantly at his side, and whenever he raised his eyes, her own warm, sympathetic glance met them.

Thus they drifted on, becoming more and more intimately acquainted, she, on her part, detecting many traits of character and disposition that were different from those possessed by the man she had married, but attributing them all to what she regarded as the natural cause; and he, on his part, learning more and more each day of the beauty of her matchless character, of the infinite goodness of her soul and of the indomitable steadfastness of purpose which actuated her every impulse.

All the love she had bestowed upon her lost husband, she gave ten times over to the man upon whom she lavished such tender and unceasing care. It vibrated in every tone that she uttered; it glowed in every glance of her expressive eyes; it thrilled in every touch of her taper fingers; it dwelt in her presence, and filled the room when she entered it—remained there when she was gone.

A human being may not plunge headforemost into the sea without becoming wet, nor can he become ingulfed in an ocean of love without feeling and realizing, and at last succumbing to the irresistible element that surrounds him.

Goliath, sleeping, may be chained down by pigmies. John Ashton, dormant, passive, submissive, could not escape the influence which closed tighter and more tightly around him with every hour of every day.

Whenever she entered the room, he was instantly aware of it, although he heard no sound. If she came behind him and reached out her hand to touch his brow, he knew the beginning of the act as well as the end, for he could feel the increasing warmth that came with its nearer approach.

If, from a distant part of the room, she permitted her eyes to dwell upon him, he was instantly conscious of her gaze, and it soothed and quieted him; and when, hours at a time, she sat beside him with his hand clasped in hers, he experienced something akin to the rapture of a babe resting on its mother's breast—that absence of all emotion, which is the purest and the holiest peace induced by the fullness of love.

If, by chance, she was absent from his side longer than was her habit, he became fretful, uneasy, anxious, impatient, and he would convince himself that the bright light through the window was oppressive, and order his chair turned so that he could watch the door through which she must appear when she came to him; and when she came, he would turn again towards the light, forgetting that it had annoyed him.

Thus, steadily he became stronger. The chair at the window, with every journey that he made between it and the bed, became less distant and easier of accomplishment.

He realized that the time was approaching when he must fulfil his destiny, and go; but the anticipation of it instead of giving him joy, inspired him with dread—indefinable, unreasonable, relentless dread.

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH OF TWO EVILS?

WHILE John Ashton was daily becoming stronger, his friends were more and more impatient to see him, and among the most persistent of these were Lord Archie Quinlan and Sir Thomas Buxton.

Geoffrey Crandyl contented himself with sending a short note in which he said that he kept close watch of the bulletins, but that he would not attempt to intrude himself upon his old friend until he was assured that his presence was desired. In the mean time, etc., etc.

Ashton, on the other hand, steadily resisted these advances and paid no heed to a message that Quinlan sent him, protesting that unless he was soon received, he would be forced to the conclusion that Lord John censured him for the accident, for which he was really in no way responsible.

One day, however, while he was smoking his cigar by the window, having arrived at that stage in his recovery when he could go about the house, Robert came to him with the information that Lord Archie was in the library and would not take no for an answer—in short, that he insisted upon seeing his friend, or upon being told that the acquaintance was no longer desired.

"Be it so, then," he replied. "I do not wish to see him. I do not blame him for the accident; you may tell him that as strongly as you can put it; but I do not care to see him or anybody."

Robert was in the act of turning sadly away to deliver the message, when they were both startled by the sudden appearance of Quinlan himself, who had followed Robert up the stairs and was standing in the open doorway.

"I'm here, Jack, any way, whether you like it or not," he said, advancing into the room. "You are obliged to see me for a moment. What in the world is the reason you are so offish? Surely you do not blame me for that unfortunate accident."

"I certainly do not," replied Ashton, coldly. "I alone am responsible for it."

"Then why have you so persistently refused to see me?"

"I am not well, and I prefer to see nobody. That is the only reason."

"But you are nearly recovered now."

"Nearly, yes. But not quite."

"You are not at all like yourself, Jack," said Archie, after a moment's pause.

"Not as you expected to find me, you mean. No, I am not. I doubt if I ever will be just what you mean."

"Nonsense! Why do you feel that way, old chap?"

Ashton smiled, and replied, coolly:

"There are physical, mental, moral, logical, and personal reasons, too numerous to mention."

Quinlan laughed heartily.

"Then, for heaven's sake, do not go into them. I won't pretend to have

the capacity to understand them; but that reply sounded more like you than anything you have said since I entered the room. Do you know that Bux, and Geoff. Crandyl are quite as anxious and done up about your exclusiveness as I am? Won't you see them, Jack? It will do them no end of good."

"After a while—perhaps. At present, no."

"What the devil is the matter with you, any way?"

"I have grown weary of attempting to explain what is the matter with me. You stated a moment ago that I am not at all like myself. Suppose we let it go at that."

"You may, but I won't; nor will the others. Are those broken bones all mended?"

"Yes; every one. Physical strength is all that I need now."

"You won't be long in regaining that."

"No; another week or two will fix me all right."

"And then? I say, you will let us give you a dinner; eh?"

"No, I think not, thank you. As soon as I am able to travel, I shall go away."

"Where are you going?"

"I have not decided."

"Well, I won't bore you any longer now, and I distinctly refuse to pay any attention to your coolness today. Shake hands now, as proof that you forgive me for running over you, and I'll get along and tell the fellows what an insufferable bear you are."

He extended his hand and Ashton took it. For a moment they were both silent, and then Quinlan spoke again.

"That's more like you. You'll get out of this condition soon. In the mean time, do not suppose that we are going to permit you to have your own way, for we haven't the slightest intention of doing so."

When he was gone, Ashton began to reflect.

"This is only the beginning," he thought. "There is worse, far worse to come. I must get well quickly and go away. I wish that I were strong enough to travel now; I would go to-night—but that is not to be thought of."

He leaned back and closed his eyes in the effort to plan out the form of leave taking he would adopt when the time came for his last interview with the countess. Methods innumerable suggested themselves to him, but one by one were thrust aside as impracticable, ineffectual, inconsistent, or impossible.

Lately—since he had been able to do so—he had read the papers exhaustively, and he knew that the whole world in which the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford had lived and moved, was familiar with the accident, its cause and its results. For the first time, a realization of the full effect that his sudden and unexplained departure would have upon the countess, forced itself upon him—and he shuddered when he thought of it.

At that moment, too, she entered the room for some article that she had left there, spoke cheerily to him and passed out again. Ashton sighed, and then groaned aloud, for she had brought with her something that he had not faced before—a realization of the full effect that his sudden and unexplained departure would have upon himself.

He had not forgotten Hope Hollister. He thought of her daily—almost hourly—but he dwelt upon her memory as the recollection of one who was dead, while this new love had something within it that had never formed a component part of his love for Hope.

She had been the passion of his life; Mercy was its completeness. Hope had preëmpted the ardor of his youth and growing manhood; Mercy was the acme of all things desirable to attain. Hope was a memory; Mercy was a living, breathing, present fact.

Hope had taught him the rudiments of love; Mercy completed the educa-

tion. He saw in the present, the fulfilment of every dream of the past. Through Hope, he had created an ideal; in Mercy, that ideal existed.

The plain, sad truth came home to him with all its force, now that he thought of tearing himself away from the presence of that gentle nurse, that constant companion of his bedridden hours, that loving woman, and he realized that all the agony he had suffered by reason of his separation from Hope Hollister was only a drop in the bucket, compared to the awful moment that would bring him face to face with eternal separation from Lady Mercy Hertford.

Still, full justice must be accorded to John Ashton, for it was not of himself that he thought; it was of her, and the effect that his going would have upon her.

"This world of hers believes that I am the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford," he thought. "It knows, or thinks that it knows—and it is the same thing—that the earl is here. It believes that we, the countess and I, have been abroad during the past year—that we returned to London together. It knows nothing of the disappearance of the earl, or of the terrible trials through which the countess has passed. It expects me to appear—or, as that same world would term it, to reappear, and to assume all the prerogatives of Lord John."

He hesitated, and shuddered; and then his mind plunged again into that chaos of circumstance which surrounded him on every side.

"Suppose that I permit things to drift on as they are until I am strong enough to travel and then, at the first opportunity, steal away like a thief in the night, forever, leaving only a letter for her, explaining why I go; telling, perhaps, of my love for her; going over, for the second time, that history of the past which I would rather forget; reaffirming my true identity with all the force at my command; repudiating, utterly, all knowledge of the earl, of his past, his present, or his future; reasserting that I never in my life saw Robert until the moment when he met me on the corner of St. James Street and Piccadilly, and mistook me for his master—that I never in my life saw her until I looked into her eyes through the holes that Robert had cut in the portrait of Sir Roderick. I will recite my duty to her, to the world in which she lives, to the friends of the lost earl, to the Hertford family, to Richard Herndon Hertford, the cousin who should succeed to the title—to God!

"What will it avail? She will not believe. No, no; it would be better—far better, if I should go and say nothing. Better still, if I should go without denying the identity with which she and others have invested me, leaving behind me the impression that it is some other and unnamable reason that drives me hence. Better still, for her sake that I should drive a murderous knife into that tender heart, and so still it forever, and end its sufferings for all time, and to eternity.

"Then, if I go, what is the legacy that I leave behind me? I condemn her, forever, to the very torture that for an entire year she has so heroically combated. I condemn her to a lifetime of regret, remorse, suffering, shame; for she will feel the remorse and imagine the shame even though there shall exist no cause for either.

"I drag the name that she has struggled to preserve inviolate through this trying time—I drag that name into the realm of rebuke, I cover it with shame and ignominy, I destroy forever the character of Lord John Hertford, I estrange his friends, I hold him up for all time to censure and to contempt.

"She will never believe that I am not her husband. The world will never believe that I am not the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford. I cannot prove that I am not he. I have nothing except the baptismal right to the name

that I have always borne, and Henry Hollister will deny me even that right.

"There are those in New York who would know me, but have I the right, or is it my duty to call upon them to the chagrin and public shame of the woman who claims to be my wife?

"I cannot prove my identity. I cannot convince Mercy of the truth. I cannot convince this world of hers of its error. I cannot bring sorrow, perhaps death or insanity upon the woman I love and who loves me with all her heart and soul and strength.

"Oh, God, in mercy make plain to me the path that I must tread! In pity, show me the way that I must go! In charity for all, invest me with the knowledge to choose between two great evils, that which is the less."

Tears of anguish oozed between his fingers as he bowed his head upon his hands.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FINAL EXPEDIENT.

John Ashton did not raise his head again for a long time, and when he did, the same doubt and perplexity were in his eyes and upon his face.

"Let me look upon the other side of the picture, in all its hideousness," he murmured; and then lapsed again into thought.

"Suppose that I were to remain? Suppose that I were to accept, passively, the decree that has been passed upon me? Suppose that I no longer deny that I am the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford? Suppose I usurp his prerogatives, his title, his estates, his personal effects—*his wife!*"

He rose from his chair and crossed the room; turned and retraced his steps to the chair again.

His hands were clenched; his face was white and drawn; his lips moved, although he uttered no sound; his brows were wrinkled, and his eyes looked wild and haggard.

"What then?" he mused.

"That Lord John Hertford is dead, I verily believe—but the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford lives. He cannot die until the family becomes extinct. He lives in the being of that cousin Richard who is wandering, God knows where, in search of game and adventure. I would to God that he were here. Something tells me that he would listen to and believe me—that he alone could convince Mercy of her error.

"If I remain, the day of his return will come—what then? Will he also deceive himself as the others have done? Will he insist, even against my protestations, that I am Lord John? Will he, too, force me into the retention of estates that are really his, and address me by a title that should belong to him?

"Or will his penetration be keener, clearer and truer, and when I go to him, as I surely will, if that time ever comes, and tell him the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—what then? *What then?*"

Again he got upon his feet and strode across the floor, pausing at intervals while he walked, passing his hands in despair across his forehead, and sighing deeply.

"What is the quality of the sin that I commit if I remain? What is the quality of the sin that I commit if I go away?" he asked himself. "There is no question here between right and wrong; it is a question between sin and sin.

"Shall I sin against Richard Hertford, or shall I sin against Mercy? Shall I steal from him, a title for which he does not care, and estates which he neither values nor needs, or shall I steal from her, her happiness, her reason, perhaps her life?

"Shall I, in order that he may inherit that which he has never expected to attain, condemn her to misery?"

"Shall I, in order that he may assume the title of earl, trample upon her

pride, and put an indelible stain upon the name of Hertford?

"If I remain, there is only one course for me to pursue; proud assumption of all that is expected of me, wilful murder of my own memory, secret marriage—remarriage, she will call it—with the countess. If I go, there is only one journey that I can take—suicide.

"Yes, that is it. It is the only way. That is the solution. I will kill myself," he cried aloud. "It shall be suicide. It is the only outlet that is left. She will forgive and forget. Her world will forget and therefore, forgive.

"The *Times* will say that Lord John, suffering from dementia induced by the unfortunate accident on Piccadilly, in a moment of madness took his own life. She will mourn for me, but she will not censure. She will grieve for me, but she will love again, remarry, and forget. Yes, yes! That is the solution. Suicide. I will kill myself. Ah!"

He had turned and found that Lady Mercy was standing not three paces away, and he knew that she had heard the words he had uttered aloud.

Her face was deathly white, and her eyes were wide with horror; but when she spoke, her words came calmly and distinctly.

"John," she said, "what is it I heard? What were you saying? I did not hear aright, did I?"

He went nearer and took one of her hands in his.

"Sit down, Mercy," he said tenderly.

It was the first time he had ever addressed her thus, and it brought a flush of pleasure to her cheeks—a flush that fled almost as soon as it appeared.

"The time has come when we must go over again that old subject that is your despair, but we will go over it calmly now. It shall be discussed without excitement, and as there is a God above us, whose blessing you deserve, you shall pass judgment upon me, and by your decision I will abide. Will you be calm and listen to me with care, and if you can, with confidence in my sincerity, even though you still regard me as the victim of an hallucination. Will you do that?"

"Yes, John."

"Will the repetition of all that I have said to you on this subject, influence you? If I again, with all the power at my command, deny that I am your husband, that I am the Earl of Ashton and Cowingford—will you believe?"

"No, John, I will not believe. It is not a matter of belief with me, it is knowledge. I know who you are." She spoke calmly.

"Do you believe that I am in my right mind?"

"Yes."

"Then how do you make what you regard as a fact concerning my identity consistent with my denial, unless I am insane?"

"I believe that you are as sane as I am. Your denial of the fact is the result of forgetfulness induced by some illness or accident. The things that you believe that you remember are fruits of the imagination, resultant from the same condition or conditions. That is how they are consistent.

"And is there not proof positive in the cablegram I received from Nellie, supported by the letter she wrote later? The man whom you supposed you had killed, is alive and well. He does not know and never did know a person by the name you claimed as your own."

"Is there nothing, Mercy, that I can say, that will convince you of the error into which you have fallen?"

"There is no error, and therefore there can be nothing sufficiently powerful to convince me that one exists. Robert recognized you. I recognized you. Your club friends recognized you. The world has recognized you."

"When Richard Hertford returns, if I desire to do so, will you go with me into his presence and hear me while I assure him that he is the rightful heir

of the title and estates of Ashton and Cowingford?"

"No. I cannot prevent you from committing an act so foolish, if you are determined to do so, but I can and will refuse to be a party to it. John, dear John, why will you be so——"

"Hush, Mercy! Be calm. Remember that I have told you that I will abide by your decision. You have decided. I will not falter. But there are conditions upon which I must insist. Who pronounced the words that made you the wife of Lord John Hertford?" and then, with a smile, and before she could reply, he added: "If I was there, I have forgotten."

"Sir Malcolm Douglass, the dean of the Church of the Annunciation."

"Do you know him personally? I inquire as a stranger, Mercy, not to give you pain."

"I believe you, John. Yes; he is a dear friend to us both."

"Will you send for him to come here, and will you permit me an hour alone with him, so that I can tell him the truth as I see it? And after that, if his religious scruples will permit him to act, will you let him marry us—as you would say, again, but as I say, will you let him utter the words that will make you my wife?"

"John! John!" she cried. "What is it you would force me to do? Go again to the altar with a man who is already my husband?"

"No, no, Mercy. Stand here in this room, if you will, with only those present whom you shall yourself select; Robert, perhaps, and one or two others. The dean will arrange for the license if he will consent to perform the ceremony—and he will keep the secret. It is the only way, Mercy. It must be that, or—nothing."

"Suicide?" she whispered.

"No, that is unnecessary now, since you overheard me; but it is that, or I must go away forever."

"You will not leave me again, John! Promise me that you will not."

"If the dean bids me remain, I will obey him, and may God bless you and have mercy upon me."

"So be it, John. I will send for the dean. Are you strong enough to see him now? Shall I send for him at once?"

"Yes; at once, Mercy, at once."

(To be continued.)

AT MILKING TIME.

Heigho! and where is the milkmaid gone? Untouch'd lies the painted churn;
The dairy vacant and hush'd and still, seems waiting her slow return.
  But work grows hard on a day like this; who wouldn't the truant play
  When the brooks and flow'rs and the whisp'ring trees are beck'ning one away?
So down the pasture, and thro' the bars, and up past the rustic mill,
And across the bridge sweet Chloe goes, till she climbs the vineclad hill.
  Chloe! Chloe! it's time for the milking now!

And what of Robin, the sturdy lad whom the farmer sent, at morn,
To banish the vagrant, saucy weeds that riot amid the corn?
  He has tied his horses to the fence; they are idly nodding now,
  And the impudent nettle grows apace, unhinder'd by the plow.
Ah, well! did Chloe, the naughty witch, as she pass'd him in the field,
Just murmur a bashful "Come with me!" so sweet that he could but yield?
  Chloe! Chloe! it's time for the milking now!

Nelly Booth Simmons.

IN THE STORM.

BY ROBERT C. D. MEYER.

A daughter's device to save her father's honor, which, after all, had no need of such saving, and the way in which the tangle was worked out.

IT seemed to Calvert that the sea washed air was full of gulls. Heavy clouds were piled in the west, and the flecks of foam that scudded to his feet quivered with the coming storm.

He could not trust himself to go to the cottage just yet. He had thought himself strong enough to come down and meet Lydia Ramage and forbid her to do this monstrous thing, but when he reached the village he found that he had overestimated his strength.

How long he had been acquainted with Lydia, and how short the time since he discovered that he loved her! Not until she had written that letter in which she accused herself of the theft of the money did he know what she was to him.

The thought of her in such dire disgrace worked on him a feeling he now knew had been slumbering for years. He loved her. And he knew her pride, the pride of the Ramages.

She had confessed to a grave fault, and in that confession she had given up all that the world held for her. Nay, as Lydia was, she must have given up heaven itself when she owned herself a thief.

A bell boomed out above the roar and rattle of the water. It was the bell of the factory, *his* factory since the death of his father—the factory where Lydia's father was superintendent, the factory from whose safe the thousand dollars had been abstracted.

What had Lydia wanted with a thousand dollars?

Calvert could give but one answer to that question; the money had gone to that scapegrace, Sam Williams, the son of the widow Lydia's father had married and buried within a year.

Williams had long cared for Lydia, all Lydia's little world knew that, and in his numerous escapades Lydia had shielded him from her father's wrath.

It all appeared to Calvert now, her protection of the man, her taking blame from her father for the man's sake, and he knew why she had taken the money.

A heat leaped into his face. Lydia a thief! It would have gone hard with any one to accuse her to him thus; but she had been her own accuser.

And to love such a man as Williams! Yet who may guarantee the sort of man a woman will love! But Lydia!

A great gull with its lonesome storm cry swooped into the curve of an incoming wave, then rose and sped out across the black tide and was lost in the immensity of cloud and mist.

The factory bell had stopped ringing, the hands must be at work again after the dinner hour. Now was the opportunity to go to Lydia and command her to silence, to assure her that her sick father should not forfeit his place in the factory because of what she had done.

This had been the tenor of her letter, the asking that her father should not suffer for her fault.

And years ago! years ago he had seen Lydia with her great eyes filled with a light he had not then comprehended. He comprehended it now—she had liked him then, and he had been blind to the fact.

Going away from her, letting her think that she was nothing to him, what was more likely than that her pride had resented his lack of sight, and she had let the love of Sam Williams prevail with her!

A gull came so close to him that he dodged to escape its dripping wings, and he watched it labor out into the wrack of the storm. Had not Lydia's life become like that?

Calvert turned landward. There were some old trees beside the road, and under these came a rude ox cart.

It must be the shop keeper, Saul's. If Lydia's crime were known in the village, Saul would freely ventilate it; he must know the truth of that.

The noise of the surf was loud, and he reached the cart before the man walking beside it saw or heard him.

"That you, Mr. Calvert?" said Saul. "Storm comin'. Goin' to the fact'ry? There's part o' the fact'ry;" he pointed to a long box in the cart, along with some other wares. "For Ramage," he said, laconically.

"Why," began Calvert, with a start, "surely——"

"No," interrupted Saul, "not dead yet. But I takes things in time. Ramage was never sick before; now he's sick his pride won't let him have people say he got sick only to get well again. Sorry for Lydia; *she's* a woman, that's what *she* is, and I don't keer who knows it. She's a *woman*. Wish she wasn't, so Sam Williams couldn't git her. Must hurry. Storm's nigh."

Calvert watched the cart jog on.

So it was currently expected that Williams would marry Lydia. And the taking of the money was not known. Thank God! he had come in time.

A dog barked. Lydia's Newfoundland was leaping in recognition round him.

"Tige!"

Calvert patted the huge animal which had been Lydia's brute companion for years.

The joyous barking of the dog must have been heard in the cottage when Calvert reached the picket fence, for the door opened suddenly, and there stood Lydia, pale as ever, calm as ever, more beautiful than ever in his sight, now that great sorrow shadowed her.

When she saw who was outside a slow color mounted to her face, only to go and leave her pale as before.

Calvert had gone in and closed the door against the blast before either spoke.

"I did not expect you," she said, placing a chair before the fire. "You are wet through. The storm will be heavy; the gulls are wild."

Calvert dropped into the chair.

"Your father?" he queried.

"I think he will not live," she said simply.

She filled a pipe, as her father always did when the factory owner came to the cottage, and handed it to him, along with the paper that came daily for her father.

Calvert's eyes were riveted on the fire of sea wood, the varicolored spirits of the flames reflected in his worried eyes.

Lydia wiping the dinner dishes, watched him. She had confessed to a grievous fault, and the man she had confessed to had hastened to her. Why?

Her heart beat convulsively. That the man she had wronged had hastened to her, told her one thing—he meant to shield her from the consequences of what she had told him she had done.

And she resented this. He should not do this, even though he did it from the respect he gave to her father. He should not.

But had he received her letter?

She went up to him and touched him on the shoulder. He turned and fiercely confronted her.

"Lydia," he said, "listen to me. One thing I must be told—why did you take that money?"

Her eyes looked into his. Her heart nearly broke. The blame in his face was almost more than she could bear.

She had placed him away from her forever; a madness had told her to write that letter, and she had waited to see what he would do, but the blame in his face now was almost more than she could bear.

"Answer me—yes or no," he went on. "Was it for Williams?"

She saw her chance. He should not know how she had regarded him. Her love was safe and her one cherished possession.

Name was gone, respect was gone—she had voluntarily thrown them away in writing that letter to him—but her love for him remained and she must guard it with all her strength.

"Have you the right to ask me that question?" she asked.

"Forgive me," he returned; "I have not. Nor have I the right to say that I grieve that your love could lead you to such extremities. You should have remembered your father."

He saw that her hands clenched.

"Your father's name is above reproach. He is the man my own father trusted beyond others, and my father's trust has come down to me."

"I have done what I have done," she said, in a low voice, "and my father need not be brought into this discussion. He knows nothing of what I have written you. He is dying. When he is dead I must suffer for what I have told you I have done."

"And do you think I should allow this?" he demanded. "I owe your father too much for that."

"I will have it as I say," she said, sharply. "I will not allow you to excuse me. I will *not*."

"I do not excuse you," he returned. "Let the thousand dollars be my wedding present to you. That is what I came to say."

Without another word he left the cottage.

Lydia stood there petrified. The very thing she would have hindered had come to pass; she was to be defended by this man, and he was to think she loved Williams, and he forgave her confessed crime because of the respect he owed to her father!

A moan from up stairs reached her. She went slowly to her father.

Ramage lay in his bed raving as he had raved for days about the money.

This raving had kept all friends from him; Lydia had allowed no one to see him. Scarcely the doctor, for she had gone to the physician who looked after the health of the wood splitters, and got the needful medicines from him.

"The money!" said Ramage, hoarsely. "Don't let any one know. Guilty! guilty! guilty! And my name has been so honored. Guilty! guilty! guilty!"

The word was repeated over and over again, as had been the case for days ever since the night he came home so oddly and fell and hurt his head, and in his fever said that word, "guilty!"

And it had been this word which caused Lydia to keep the world apart from him. He might die, but the world should not know that he was a thief. God would understand; for surely the fever had been on him when he took the money, and hid it somewhere unknown to her.

No, her father must die an innocent man, so she took his guilt upon herself. The Ramage pride! Nay, it was the Ramage love—her father's fair name should never be smirched.

"Guilty! guilty!" came the hoarse voice.

Now that Calvert had come she must know for certain how long her father had to live. She threw a shawl over her head and went out, Tige going along with her as usual.

The doctor, in his rough garb, was at the door of his cabin. He had seen that she was anxious lest her father should get well, as he knew of Will-

iams' preference for her and Ramage's dislike for his dead wife's son, and the doctor's feeling toward Lydia was scarcely friendly.

She had asked him the same question too often and too vividly, and she had kept him too much away from his patient.

"I am glad to say," he said before she had a chance to speak, "that your father is better. Yesterday was the crisis. He will get well."

He saw that she looked stunned. He raised his hand.

"He does not even need so much of your close attention," he went on.

Her face was set and cold as she made her way through the wind toward her home. Only when she was once more in the familiar kitchen, she let herself sink to the floor and caught the dog around his neck.

"Tige," she said, "he *must* die. It is the only way for him to be innocent in the eyes of those who know him."

But there was one other thing for her to do. She must see the man who alone suspected her father's guilt, who had first urged her to hear, in the ravings of delirium, the confession of the theft of the money—she must see her stepmother's son.

"Guilty! guilty!" came the voice from her father's room.

She put on her hat; storm or no storm, she must go to Williams as he had commanded her to do. First, though, she locked Tige in the house, for the dog did not love the man she was about to meet. Then she went out.

How the gulls were going out to sea!

She walked half a mile into the wood, to a seat in the clearing where the choppers held their annual picnic. The trees were throwing their arms about in the frenzy of the wind, but she heeded not, nor the moaning and cracking up in the branches.

She seated herself without looking round. With a dull sense she knew that Williams was there waiting for her; that it was a part of his tyranny to bring her there.

"Well?" he asked her.

"The doctor says father will get well," she said. "I do not know what to do."

"What do I care for that?" The man frowned. "It's the money I mean. Will you take it? I tell you I have that amount; that it is in your power to clear his name. Will you take it and save your father's name?"

She rose to her feet. A branch from the tree under which she stood broke with a snap and crashed down at her feet.

"I cannot," she said. "That is what I came to say. I cannot take the money."

"Suppose your father gets well, as the doctor says," he went on. "Will you let him be called a thief? George Ramage a thief!"

"He will not be called that."

"Not if you do as I want you to do, Lydia—not if you marry me. A thousand dollars, earned fearfully, is a good deal to give for a wife, but you are worth it, Lydia, you are worth it."

She took a step further from him.

"Father will not be called a thief," she said. "I have written to Mr. Calvert and told him that *I* took the money."

Williams bounded toward her, his face livid.

"That cur!" he screeched. "You wrote to him!"

"And he has answered my letter in person," she said. "He is here."

"Here!" He rushed at her and grasped her wrist. "Here! Then you *do* care for him, as I have always said. You love him."

"I do," she answered sadly. "And I give him up. In his eyes I am the thief. I must save father if I can."

Williams pressed her wrist till the pain was excruciating, but she would not have winced if her arm had broken in his grasp.

"Damn him!" he said. "I will be even with him yet. And you will be glad to marry me to save yourself, if you won't do it to save your father. I will tell him that your father is the thief—I will tell him that you love him though he cares nothing for you."

The next moment she was standing there alone.

She had done what all along it had been her care to prevent—she had ruined her father as well as herself.

But would Calvert believe Williams? A sudden tensity seized her to know whose word would have credence with Calvert; if he believed Williams it meant that——

"No, no," she said, her hands up over her face, "he must not despise me though he does not love me. What have I done!"

But Calvert had seen and heard.

After he had left the cottage he went to the lodging he occupied when he paid his periodical visits to the factory, and throwing on some dry clothing he plunged into the wood, as a place where he might be alone to think of all this miserableness that had happened.

In the shadow of a tree he had witnessed the meeting of Lydia and Williams and heard every word that was said. His soul went out to Lydia when she owned that she loved him, and he could have thrown himself at her feet in utter gladness.

But he feared what Williams would do to make her yield to his wishes. Williams wished to see him; he must put himself in the young man's way.

He left Lydia with her hands over her eyes and went in the direction Williams had taken. But the man had disappeared, as had Lydia when he regained the wood.

Then he feared for her safety; what would Williams do to her?

The storm had come on in earnest, the blackest storm of years.

Was Lydia safe in the cottage with her sick father, and that man hating her for her refusal of him?

There was a light in the kitchen, for the day had grown dark as night. He hung round the cottage. The spume from the sea reached him even there and bit at him; the wind raged, the rain lashed.

The gate latch clicked sharply. It was Williams.

He had been drinking, and he had put on a strange garb. He went boldly into the kitchen, and Calvert crept after him.

"Lydia," Williams called up the stairs, "come down and see how your precious father will look in prison togs."

There was a cry up stairs, Ramage calling his daughter by name, and Lydia crying out that he knew her, he knew her. And a dog growled.

Williams turned and saw Calvert. With a smothered cry he went toward him, and Calvert backed out of the house.

"So it is you," Williams said, "and I am nothing to her nor all my years of mad devotion, and she would make herself a thief to shield her father, would she? And you would see nobility in that.

"See here!" He took a bundle of notes from his pocket, "at least I can rob you. Your money was to buy her for me. I am the thief, I took the money, as I would take anything from you. Her father missed the money and he dared not say a word, and it nearly killed him. Look!"

He tore the notes into shreds and scattered them in the wind.

"This is the money I would have given her if she would have married me, and she loves you, and you may yet get her! I am going to kill you."

Calvert braced himself for the sudden rush. But he was too late. There was a straining, a tugging; Williams was dragging him to the edge of a rocky declivity; to fall over this meant death.

Nearer and nearer the man drew him. Then Calvert got himself flat on

the ground, and threw his arms around Williams.

But Williams was on top of him, his hand at Calvert's throat, pressing and pressing there, while he managed to edge toward the rocky opening in the earth.

Calvert's world was red like blood, the surge of mighty waters was in his ears. He knew that he and his opponent were on the edge of that rocky hole, that Williams was doing his best to get him over.

He made a supreme effort. But the pressure on his throat was too much, the roar in his ears partook of the nature of a dog's barking—and then the world slipped past him.

When he opened his eyes he was in the cottage kitchen, the doctor bending over him.

"Hush!" said the doctor. "Do not try to speak yet a while. Lydia came for me. Do you know, Tige has done for Williams? Lydia saw it all, and when the worst came she sent the dog at Williams.

"The man is dead—he pitched into the place he was dragging you to fill. And Lydia—she has told me it all, about the money, about Williams' villainy, and all. She saw him tear up the notes, she heard what he said to you. She——"

"Lydia!" Calvert managed to say. "Lydia!"

There was a rustling near him and he turned his head.

"Lydia?" he said. "Love!"

"After all these years," he heard above the storm outside. "After all these years," and it was music sweet as the angels make.

His hand was caught in hers.

"Lydia! Love!"

And far out at sea the gulls saw the flanges of light that come with the ending of the storm.

"WOT'S ZAT?"

Young Shortem sits upon my knee
  And in my knowledge basks;
In my omniscient wisdom I
  Can answer all he asks.
He thinks the fount of learning springs
  From just beneath my hat;
He comes right to the fountain head
  And asks and asks, "Wot's zat?"

Sam Walter Foss.

TWO SIDES.

Why is it the things we have are never just what we'd choose?
  Why is it the offered gift is always the one we refuse?
Why is it the lives we live are so filled with gloom and hate?
  And nothing is just as it should be, no matter how long we wait?

Why is it the things we have grow dear because they are ours?
  Why is it the lives we live have more of sunshine than showers?
The things that we all can have are the things we could not spare,
  Tho' life is never complete till the seal of death is there.

Maude Meredith.

THE AMERICAN SYNDICATE.*

BY FREDERICK R. BURTON.

A sturdy fight against heavy odds. A narrative setting forth the devices resorted to by an enterprising New Yorker who goes into Puerto Rico with grit, thirty three odd dollars, and a sign board.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JOE BARBER, down on his luck in New York, borrows two hundred dollars from a friend, and armed with a sign board reading "The American Syndicate, J. A. Barber, Manager," sets out to Puerto Rico to make his fortune by his wits. By his assurance of manner he succeeds in hiring an imposing office, and chance brings him the acquaintance of a native, Don Octavio Valla del Rey, the chance in question being the precipitation into his arms of the don's beautiful daughter, owing to an accident to her carriage. After looking over the field, Joe elects to get up a corner in the ice cream freezer market, and begins by buying up the entire stock of a restaurant keeper, giving him the privilege of using them for a week longer. Joe is asked to dine with Don Octavio, and over the cigars talks trolley line investments to the don's friends, who, to his great satisfaction, are deeply interested; Joe also is much impressed by the beautiful daughter Sylvia.

He succeeds in arranging with the Ponce caterers to continue their business on commission, which supplies him with ready money, and puts affairs in such good shape that he is undisturbed by the arrival of two American business rivals. Victor—the fiancé of Sylvia—openly insults Joe in a café, and a duel with swords is fought in which Joe speedily disarms his opponent. The alcalde tells Joe that the syndicate must deposit at once $15,000 for the trolley franchise or the Americans Haskell and Van Dorn will get it. Joe goes to consult the don, and while waiting for him sees a wallet filled with money; he struggles with his desire to touch it, but finally opens it at the very moment when Sylvia—unobserved—passes the door. Joe replaces the purse intact, and goes hurriedly away disgusted with himself, and unconscious of the fact that his every move has been followed by a man. Joe is in such desperate straits that the only solution he finds is to give the impression that his safe has been robbed, so he blows it open at midnight and then goes to his hotel.

CHAPTER XX.

VISITORS AFTER MIDNIGHT.

JOE was puffing with customary nonchalance at a fresh cigar when he went into the hotel. There was nobody in the office then except a sleepy clerk and Messrs. Haskell and Van Dorn.

There was nothing exceptional in this, for both of these gentlemen during their residence in Ponce had shown their American habits in more ways than in sitting up late at night.

Joe nodded to them, and even paused for a moment to chat in an indifferent way before he went to his room. They had never mentioned trolley lines to him, and he addressed them on this occasion more for the sake of giving them an opportunity to broach the subject than for anything else.

They chose to disregard the matter, and Joe saw nothing to gain by introducing it. So he went on to his room, turned on the light and prepared for the last step in the burglary by which he proposed to have it appear to the alcalde that he was unexpectedly unable to deposit fifteen thousand dollars, or any other sum, in the public treasury.

There had been a little unconscious preparation for this desperate device fully two weeks earlier. An official of a local banking house had called on Joe to suggest that the bank would be very pleased to become the depository

**This story began in the November number of* THE ARGOSY. *The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 40 cents.*

of the Syndicate's funds. At that time the Syndicate was so wofully lacking in assets that Joe had found it something of an effort to keep a straight face while he excused himself from accepting the banker's offer.

"We contemplate," he had said, "the entire probability of establishing a banking business on our own account, presently, and for that reason it seems hardly necessary to take advantage of your courtesy. Our funds are doubtless perfectly safe in our own strong box, and until the question of establishing a private bank is settled, it will be as well to keep them there."

Joe had reviewed this conversation since his interview with the alcalde with considerable satisfaction. He had no doubt that everybody would take it for granted that all the Syndicate funds were actually in the iron box in his private office, and that, therefore, there would be no awkward questions to answer when he should report that his safe had been broken open and the contents rifled.

Naturally enough, a considerable portion of the money he had really kept there was in silver coin, as nearly all the receipts from the caterers were in that form. Joe conceived it necessary, therefore, to unload his pockets of the cumbersome material, and place it somewhere where it would be out of the way and be reasonably safe.

He could think of no better receptacle than his trunk, and accordingly he knelt before that article and inserted the key.

Something seemed to be wrong with the lock, and he twisted the key impatiently. Then it seemed to work, for when he put his hand on the cover he raised it readily.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "if I could have forgotten to lock this."

He gave himself no further thought on the matter at the moment, but began to take out the various articles of clothing in order to store his silver beneath them at the bottom.

He had thus dug his way rather more than half the distance from top to bottom when he paused, rested his hands on the edge of the trunk, and knelt there, looking steadily down.

For several seconds he was like a statue. Then, his eyes still fixed upon the interior of the trunk, he reached vacantly around with his right hand for the cigar that he had laid on the mantel when he began to work.

He could not reach it, and he had recourse to a fresh one from his case. This was slowly placed between his teeth and lighted.

Joe's face, meanwhile, if it could have been seen, was absolutely impassive.

He recognized only too well what he saw, and after he had stared at it for several seconds longer, he reached down and brought forth the don's red morocco purse. Mechanically he opened it. He found, as he expected, nothing.

Holding the empty purse in his hand, he went over to his bed and sat down, thinking.

There was a subdued murmur of voices in the direction of the office, but it made no impression upon Joe. As he looked at the purse and thought it over, deep furrows gathered on his brow, and now and again he removed his cigar, and pursed his lips as if he would say something.

There was nobody to whom he could address his remarks, and as he was not in the habit of talking aloud to himself, he remained silent while the murmur of voices increased.

Ordinarily the American Hotel after midnight was properly quiet. There was seldom a late arrival, and from one year's end to another little excuse for the presence of a night clerk. Perhaps the landlord imagined that with the change of name and the expected influx of American guests, there would be new duties for his clerk to perform.

That sleepy individual certainly could not be idle now, for from the sound it was apparent that at least half

a dozen men were in the office, and all talking excitedly.

Joe heard them not, or, if there were any impression upon his physical ear, it failed to make its way to his consciousness. He knew nothing save that he was confronted with a new emergency that filled him with positive horror by reason of its mysteriousness, until there was an imperative knock at his door.

" Hello," said Joe, " what's wanted? "

" Open the door, Senor Barber."

" Who is it? " Joe demanded as he crossed the room.

" Open the door at once," was the reply, just as he had placed his hand upon the knob.

The command from the man outside was emphasized by a repetition of the loud knocking.

" There is really no need of your making so much noise about it," Joe remarked, as he turned the knob and threw open the door.

Then, with the don's purse in his hand, he found himself confronted by several men, at the head of whom was one whose uniform proclaimed him to be a member of the *orden publico*, or city police.

The contingency was not fully unexpected, for, in the brief interval that had elapsed since the first knock, the probability of an immediate arrest had occurred to Joe. In fact, while he had sat on the bed thinking it over, he knew that it must come sooner or later, unless he could forestall it by going directly to the don's house to restore the empty purse.

He had quite convinced himself that this course would be useless, for nothing would more certainly be said than that he had restored the useless purse in order to divert suspicion from himself by an apparently ingenious act.

Therefore it did not disturb Joe to find himself confronted by the police, but it did give his nerve a furious wrench to see that among those who made up the arresting party was Don Octavio himself.

It was the sight of that good gentleman's grave and painfully worried face that caused the American to step back hastily.

" Seize him, officer! Don't let him escape through the window," exclaimed one in the party whose accent was guttural, and whose Spanish was as unpleasant to hear as was his English. " You see," continued this man, Van Dorn, excitedly, " we have come at a good time. He has the stolen article in his hand at this very moment."

Like a flash Joe turned upon the German, and cried:

" How do you know that is the don's purse? "

" The worthy Don Octavio shall speak," responded Van Dorn. " Tell us, your excellency. It is not the purse that was taken from you office? "

" See here, Van," said Haskell, whose fat face was clouded with doubt, " don't be too previous. You hain't got no call to mix yourself up in this thing, it seems to me. Let the dagoes settle it amongst themselves."

As the elegant expression of Haskell's view was couched in English, no one understood him save Van Dorn and Joe, and therefore no offense was taken.

Probably no attention would have been paid to it in any case, for interest must have centered upon Don Octavio.

Tears gushed from the old gentleman's eyes, and he held out his hands appealingly, as he sobbed:

" Oh, my friend; my friend! That I should have lived to see this! "

Then he put his hands to his face and sobbed like a child.

Joe was mightily shaken. At that moment all thought of his own relation to the episode vanished from his mind which was wholly absorbed in pity for Don Octavio, in whose broken tones rang unmistakable regret for what he conceived to be the exposure of a friend's dishonor.

Joe wanted to speak. He wanted to assure the don of his innocence and call upon him, in the name of friendship, to withhold his condemnation until all the circumstances had been made known, but there was too big an obstacle in Joe's own throat to permit the words to issue readily. And, moreover, the officer felt called upon to intervene.

"Senor Barber," he said, "you must go with me."

"I understand you," Joe responded, "but I demand to know on what charge I am arrested and who makes the charge."

"I am not called upon to inform you as to either point," replied the officer.

"Not under Spanish law, I know," said Joe, "but if you people really expect to make Ponce an American city you can't do better than to begin now to conform to American customs. I have committed no crime, and I ask you again to tell me point blank what I am charged with and who is responsible for the charge."

"In heaven's name, officer," moaned Don Octavio, "waive formalities and let him know."

"Very well," said the officer, "as you are the most interested party I will say this much—you are charged, Senor Barber, with the robbery of a large sum of money from the house of Don Octavio."

"That is unimportant," retorted Joe. "Who says I did it?"

"This gentleman," pointing to Van Dorn, "having learned that the don had missed a purse containing a large sum, laid information before the police to the effect that he saw you making your way secretly from Don Octavio's house during the absence, not only of the don, but of the porter, and he was so positive in the statement of his convictions that Don Octavio was persuaded to authorize an arrest with a view of searching your belongings for evidence. It seems that you have spared us the necessity of a search."

"Yes," replied Joe, now perfectly master of himself. "There is nothing left for you to look for, but you may continue the search if you want to."

He handed the purse to the officer, who looked doubtfully at the don and then at the small array of personal property that was visible in the chamber.

"The purse is empty," he muttered, "and I suppose I should make certain that the money has not been hidden here."

Don Octavio was too far gone in nervous collapse to suggest one thing or the other, and the officer accordingly rummaged through Joe's trunk and elsewhere until he had satisfied himself that no portion of the don's money was in the American's quarters.

"Well, Senor Barber," he said at length, "the *cabildo* will be your lodging house tonight."

Joe bowed, put on his hat and set forth to pass his first night in prison.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW EVIDENCE DEVELOPED.

It was altogether a night of excitement and unhappiness for the household Valla del Rey, and especially so for Don Octavio himself.

Shortly after dinner he had withdrawn to his office for the consideration of a business matter that is in no way related to the fortunes of the American Syndicate or its manager.

It is only necessary to explain that before the beginning of hostilities between Spain and the United States, the cautious don converted a considerable portion of his personal property into Bank of England notes. The reasons for this course are presumably obvious, and the same may be said of his policy of keeping the notes in his own strong box instead of trusting them to a bank while Puerto Rico was under tottering Spanish rule.

He had just taken a parcel of these notes from his strong box and had

placed them in a red morocco wallet, or purse, when a servant announced that Senor Montoro had called upon a very urgent matter.

The don was all eagerness to see Montoro, for that punctilious young man's visit could have relation to but one subject: nephew Victor.

Leaving the purse upon his desk, Don Octavio stepped into the reception room, where he was immediately thrown into considerable excitement by the news that Montoro brought him and by the young man's agitated manner of telling it.

Victor, who had remained hidden from friends and relatives since the duel, had returned to Ponce secretly and was at that very hour arranging to depart from the island by a ship that was to sail next morning at daybreak. The sensitive volunteer regarded himself not only hopelessly disgraced in having been defeated by a civilian, but there is every reason to believe that he also had discovered that his love suit was vain.

Certain it is that Senorita Sylvia had not added her active influence to that of her father in his efforts to keep Victor at home.

Even to the don her attitude was plainly one of indifference, and as it is well known that even Spanish maidens, in spite of the restraints with which they are surrounded, do manage, like maidens everywhere, to make independent communications with young men outside the house, there is every reason to believe that Victor had received an unmistakable intimation from his fiancée that with the dawn of American rule and American customs in Puerto Rico she proposed to assert her own independence and bestow her heart and hand as she pleased.

Be that as it may, Victor's determination to ostracize himself was pronounced, and the don was still anxious to prevent the young man from carrying his purpose into effect.

Montoro's information was just sufficiently doubtful to make the don feel that he must verify and act upon it instantly. Accordingly, taking Montoro by the arm, he hurried him down stairs where he sent him in one direction and the porter in another, while the don himself went in a third.

It was all for the purpose of getting track of Victor's exact whereabouts, and a sorry chase they had of it, for in the end the defeated volunteer eluded them and sailed away.

Meantime, Joe had come in and announced his own arrival. The servant who had conducted him to the reception room, having observant eyes of his own, and having come to the sage conclusion that Senorita Sylvia had more than a passing interest in the well built American who was such a frequent visitor, took it upon himself to give the senorita a hint of Joe's presence.

He took pains to do this without conveying the same hint to the somnolent Anna. So it chanced that the senorita went along the *patio* balcony and entered the reception room fully expecting to find Joe seated there.

As the room was empty, the open door of her father's office suggested where he had gone, and with merely a girlish idea of giving him a surprise, she tiptoed across the room only to receive the horrifying shock of perceiving the American in the apparent act of committing theft.

In the solitude of her own chamber the senorita wrestled with the frightful thing she had discovered. It was a good many minutes before she could compose herself, to which end she was infinitely aided by a sense of shame that she had not instantly placed a favorable interpretation upon Joe's act.

Why, indeed, should she jump at the conclusion that this American gentleman, who had manifested not only high courage, but a fine sense of honor, was capable of a dishonest act? It was finally with a conviction that whatever Joe did must be right that she returned to the reception room again.

Again the reception room was empty, and again the open office door invited her inspection. With no attempt to conceal her approach this time, she went to the doorway and looked in. Not only was Joe gone, but her father's red purse also.

Then, with a sinking of the heart that needs no description, she returned to her chamber and stayed there until summoned forth by her father.

The don returned within an hour. He was disappointed and fatigued with his exertions and wholly unfitted to resume the consideration of the business that had taken him to his office so soon after dinner.

Nevertheless he went straight here, for, as he climbed the *patio* stairway, he recalled for the first time that he had left his desk open and the purse plainly in view upon the shelf.

He noted its absence at once, therefore, but could not immediately believe that a theft had been committed. He tried to persuade himself that he had put the purse away before his hasty departure, or that Donna Anna, or his daughter, observing it there, had been at the pains to put it in a safe place.

A hurried inspection of the room showed him that this was not the case, and his apprehension speedily grew to excitement. He went to call the porter for the purpose of inquiring whether anybody had come in, forgetting for the instant that he had sent the porter away from his post.

As he was crossing the reception room, a servant approached and said:

"Your excellency, Senor Barber called."

"Eh, where is he, then?"

"I do not know, your excellency. I showed him to this room."

The don looked nervously about the room, as if expecting Joe to pop up from behind a chair, and then hurried on to the *patio* balcony.

"Pedro! José! Miguelo!" he called, summoning his various servants.

"That rascal Pedro" was the first to respond, and him the don dispatched to the *prefectura* to ask that an officer of the *Orden Publico* be sent to the house at once.

Pedro departed, and the porter, who had returned shortly after the don, was questioned, but, of course, unavailingly.

Distracted then, for the unpleasant suspicion was forming in his mind that the robbery must have been committed by some member of his own household, the don sent for Donna Anna and his daughter. Both responded to his summons with lagging steps, the donna because she was dreadfully sleepy, and the senorita for other reasons.

"I have been robbed," said the don when they were before him.

Thereupon the Donna Anna awakened sufficiently to utter a frightened squeal and sink into a chair with every appearance of nervous collapse. Don Octavio turned from her with a grunt of impatience to face his daughter, who had received the news without apparent emotion.

"It is some prowler, I hope," said the don, "for it will break my heart to suspect any of the servants. I was unwise enough to leave the entrance unguarded for an hour or more. Were either of you in this room during my absence?"

"Oh! a robbery! a robbery! Santa Maria preserve us! Whatever shall we do? A robbery!" moaned the portly duenna.

"I was here for a moment, father," said Sylvia.

"Did you see anybody?"

"Not in this room, father."

"Not in this room?" the don repeated in wonderment. Then, as another matter of a very different nature occurred to him, he added, "I understand that Senor Barber called this evening. Did you not see him?"

"Not in this room, father," answered Senorita Sylvia, speaking with

difficulty. "His card was not brought to me——"

"Sylvia," exclaimed Don Octavio, with sternness and anxiety together, "have you been so indiscreet as to receive a gentleman and visitor without the presence of your duenna?"

"No! no!" she answered, and one could not have told whether she were suffering from indignation or fear. "I did not receive Senor Barber at all."

"You must tell me what this means, child," said her father, with unusual quiet. "You make me believe that you did see him. He is not here now. Then you must have sent him away. What has occurred between you? What has he said to you? Has he offered you his——"

"Oh, father, father," interrupted Sylvia in extreme agitation, "Senor Barber has said nothing to me. He did not see me this evening."

"Then what has happened, for I still believe that you saw him!"

"I did."

"Where?"

For reply, Senorita Sylvia pointed within the office, then burst into tears and fled from the room.

At this the Donna Anna's tragic manifestations were renewed, whereupon the don said, "Attend to my daughter, madam. Do compose yourself and help me to meet this shocking emergency."

With many a sob and shiver the portly duenna waddled from the room, and when she had gone the don paced up and down a few times before he put on his hat and followed his servant to the *prefectura*.

He arrived there before "that rascal Pedro" had finished the "information" that he had been sent to give. Standing near Pedro was a tall, spectacled man, with whom the don was unacquainted.

It was Heinrich Van Dorn. He explained his presence as soon as Don Octavio came in. Addressing the captain of the *orden publico*, he said:

"I came here to report the loss of a diamond stud that I think I must have dropped somewhere in the Plaza Dominica. In American cities, the police are often helpful in tracing lost articles, and perhaps you can help me now, but my matter can wait, for this gentleman's is evidently more important, and moreover I think I can throw some light upon it."

Thereupon he proceeded to say that he had been in the vicinity of Don Octavio's house early in the evening, and that he saw issuing from it with hurried and apparently stealthy footsteps, a man who appeared to be placing a bulky article in the breast pocket of his coat.

"What hour was this?" asked the captain.

Van Dorn named the time at which both Don Octavio and the porter were absent from the house.

"This is certainly suggestive," said the captain. "Do you think you could identify the man?"

"I know him," replied Van Dorn.

"Indeed! so much the better. Who was he?"

"Joseph A. Barber, manager of the American Syndicate."

Now, just what the don's impressions and emotions and speculations had been while on his way to the *prefectura*, it will serve no good purpose to state in detail. The worthy gentleman was miserably unhappy.

Suffice it to say, then, that he had fought against the inevitable suspicion that had arisen with regard to Joe, and that even now he was extremely averse to entertaining it. The captain of the *orden publico* was shocked, too, for he knew who Joe was, and, in common with other Puerto Ricans, had come to entertain a very high estimate of him.

Nevertheless, when Van Dorn coolly asserted that he could see nothing unreasonable in suspecting an unknown foreigner like Barber, and when he further hinted that there might be the most serious reasons to

impel the Syndicate manager to possess himself of money at once, it was agreed that the matter demanded an official investigation.

Don Octavio had taken a harmless pride in declaring himself to Joe as a man of affairs, but first and foremost and all the time, with all his eccentricities, he was a refined gentleman. He had regarded Senor Barber not only as his business associate, but as his warm friend, and it was intensely repugnant to him to consider anything in the way of police action.

He was impelled to go straight to Barber himself, tell him how damaging the circumstance appeared to be, and ask him frankly to clear himself. Van Dorn sneered at this, and the captain opposed it as being the surest way to enable the thief to escape.

"If he is innocent," said the captain, "he can satisfy us of that fact readily, and under the circumstances he can find no fault with Don Octavio for causing an investigation to be made."

"And if it is done quickly," suggested Van Dorn, "there is every reason to hope that convicting evidence will be found upon him."

So a police officer went to the American Hotel only to learn that Joe was not in. When he had reported this fact, it was arranged that no open pursuit of the American should be made, but that Van Dorn should watch for his return to the hotel and notify the *prefectura* promptly. Don Octavio remained with the captain until Van Dorn's notification came, after which events took place as already described.

Joe slept, yes, actually slept, in a cell in the *cabildo*, or city prison, and Don Octavio passed the rest of the night broad awake at home.

CHAPTER XXII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

EARLY on the morning following Joe's arrest, Secretary Mike went to the office of the Syndicate and opened it for business.

There was a cloud upon the young man's brow that seemed to speak of a world of worriment on his own account. It was not the hour when his employer might be expected to be on hand, and yet the secretary immediately opened the door of the private office and looked in.

He was about to close it again, for a glance showed him that nobody was there, when something on the floor in front of the strong box attracted his attention. It was the iron filings that had resulted from Joe's patient drilling.

To look from these to the safe door was but natural, and then Mike quickly crossed the room and applied his hand to the knob that worked the lock. The iron door came open readily.

For one instant Mike stared at the safe, perceiving that it had been blown open and that the money drawer had been emptied. Then he hurried to the American Hotel.

His inquiry for his employer was met by information that well nigh prostrated him. With pale face and stammering tongue he asked for details, and when he had obtained them, he went back to the office where he sat down, all of a tremor, unable for the moment to drag his steps further.

He had been there but a few moments, and had not collected himself as yet, when the outer door opened. A broad shouldered man with white hair and mustache, stood on the threshold, looking in inquiringly. He had a gripsack in his hand, and although his strong face was brown, it was plainly the result of recent exposure.

His dress and appearance indicated his nationality clearly enough, and there was no room for doubt left when, with that accent that our foreign cousins are pleased to call the Yankee twang, he addressed the secretary.

"Is Barber in?"

These were his words, spoken in plain English, and Miguelo Marto, jumping up excitedly, answered in the same tongue.

"Oh, senor! you have come in good time, for I am sure that you must be an American and a friend of my noble employer!"

"Eh, what's the matter?" asked the newcomer, stepping into the office, closing the door, depositing his grip on one chair and taking another. "Anything wrong?" he continued. "Where is your noble hearted employer?"

"Alas, sir," answered Mike, choking down a sob, "he is in jail."

"Great Jerusalem!" exclaimed the other.

He stared for a moment at the frenzied secretary, then took out his watch and asked, "Do you know how soon the next boat goes back to New York?"

"Oh, sir," cried Mike, frantically, "do not think of deserting him in his hour of need! You must know that he would do no wrong, and I not only know it, but I can prove that in this case he has been foully wronged. Do not leave your friend, senor, to suffer the outrage of imprisonment on a false charge."

"Now, wait a minute," responded the other, cautiously. "Don't go quite so fast, young man. I don't know what right you have got to call me your employer's friend. So far as I know, I've never set eyes on him, but I've come down here from New York to see him, and I'm telling you that it isn't exactly encouraging to find that he has got himself locked up. However, here I am, and here I have got to stay, I suppose, until the next boat goes back. I'll satisfy my curiosity about the thing any way. Begin at the beginning now and tell me who you are."

The secretary's pale face flushed as he responded: "My name is Miguel Marto, senor, and I am Senor Barber's secretary."

"Then you probably know all about me. I am Horatio J. Weston."

"I am sorry," said Mike, "but I never heard your name before. You see, sir, Senor Barber has conducted his own correspondence. He didn't know that I understood English."

"That's funny."

"I deceived him, sir. I was placed here by a Puerto Rican gentleman, a relative of mine, who wished me quietly to watch out for his interests, for he did not then know Senor Barber——"

"Huh!" exclaimed Weston. "Made a spy of you, did he?"

"Yes, senor," admitted Mike, guiltily, "but I have not been unfaithful to my employer. There has been nothing evil of him to report. He is generous, loyal, brave to a fault, and honorable in every way, senor."

"Well, then, what the dickens have they locked him up for?"

"They say he stole a purse with money in it from the house of Don Octavio—one of his business associates here."

"Stuff!" exclaimed Weston, contemptuously. "I believe in Barber sufficiently to know that he wouldn't be such a fool. Tell me about it."

Thereupon Mike told him what he knew. There was nothing to the point so far as Joe's pressing need for money was concerned, but there was something which seemed very much to the point with regard to the criminal charge that was brought against Joe.

As Mike was not a born raconteur, and as he was laboring under great excitement and subject to many an interruption from Weston, his experience can be better set forth in words other than his own.

It seemed, then, that Mike on the previous evening had chanced to see Joe on his way to Don Octavio's house, and as Joe turned the corner, Mike also chanced to observe a man, a few paces in the rear of Joe, dodge suddenly into a doorway.

The secretary had hardly observed

this much, when the man issued cautiously from the doorway and followed along after Joe.

This aroused Mike's suspicions and apprehensions. He feared that his employer might be in danger of assault from a footpad, and accordingly he, too, joined in the pursuit.

A moment later he saw his employer enter Don Octavio's house, and after a short pause the man who had been following slipped in behind him and disappeared in the *patio*.

All this was very mysterious and troublesome to Mike, whose intellect was not equal to grasping a situation which would have puzzled a detective. So, in doubt as to what he had better do, he remained outside of Don Octavio's house for several minutes.

When at length he saw presumably the same man who had disappeared in the *patio* coming out again, Mike took it upon himself to shadow him.

The man went to the American Hotel, where for the first time he passed under a light strong enough to enable Mike to see his features, and he then recognized him as a certain Van Dorn, a newcomer in the town, with whom he knew that his employer was acquainted.

Wondering yet, and hardly knowing why he did so, Mike followed Van Dorn to the door of Joe's room. There he saw Van Dorn apply a key to the lock and withdraw it the instant he realized that anybody was near.

This convinced Mike that all was not right, and he was at his wit's ends to know what to do about it. It struck him that it would be the part of shrewdness to fathom the man's operations and catch him in the act of doing something wrong, if that could possibly be accomplished.

There wasn't much time to think about it, and Mike's thinking powers were not of the greatest. He knew a way by which he believed he could get access to Joe's sitting room, and as Van Dorn seemed bound to enter the chamber, it appeared to Mike that the one way to catch him in some overt act was to secrete himself in one of his employer's apartments.

So Mike went outside the hotel and climbed upon a low shed, from which he found it easy to crawl through an open window into Joe's sitting room. This done, he cautiously opened the door into the bedroom.

There, upon his knees before Joe's open trunk, was Van Dorn.

(To be continued.)

THE STRANGE CASE OF COLONEL KILGORE.

BY ANNA DEMING GRAY.

A young physician's story of his engagement to a charming girl, and the marvelous faculty of mind reading possessed by her father, which proved potent on more than one occasion in turning the current of his life.

I HAVE been at a loss to know how to relate the facts which I am about to give to the public for the first time.

My original plan was to send the statement to the Philadelphia *Medical Reporter*, as an authentical chain of circumstances, coming under my personal observation, and of such scientific value as to merit a place in the *Reporter*.

Afterward, however, I found that it was an utter impossibility to separate the romantic side of the story from the scientific; and, as romance has little in common with science, I have concluded to print it simply as a story, with the assurance that the statements herein chronicled are not the imaginings of an abnormal intellect, but simple truth.

And so, hoping that some specialist of my honored profession may chance upon the story, and give it the consideration which I feel it deserves, I submit the following:

The spring of 1888 found me a young man of twenty seven, in possession of a good medical education, thoroughly in love with my chosen profession, and an unswerving determination to make a success of life, in the best sense of the word.

I had a trim little office in a good part of the city, and an enameled door plate bearing the inscription:

JOHN DANFORTH, M. D.,
Office Hours: 4 to 6 P. M.;

all I lacked was patients and patience.

I solaced myself, during the interval of waiting, by reading frequently such maxims as, "All things come to those who wait," "Heaven helps those who help themselves," and others of like significance.

It was at an evening reception that I first met Colonel Kilgore.

One of those senseless, crushing affairs which make one rail at society as it exists, before one goes, and come home to make rude speeches at one's self for being such a fool as to go.

I noticed him as a portly, rather fine looking man of fifty, with the complacent expression of feeling his own importance, and then I noticed him no more.

Upon his arm was his daughter, a young girl of twenty, perhaps, with one of the sweetest and most attractive faces I have ever seen.

Not a beautiful face, strictly speaking, but more than beautiful.

Earnest brown eyes, and a broad brow; a quantity of blonde hair, a straight nose, and a firm but sensitive mouth.

This was my first impression of Leonice Kilgore.

The day following the reception, I found my thoughts more taken up with visions of Miss Kilgore than was at all good for my peace of mind.

In the evening I received an imperative telephone message asking me to call at once at number 405 Cedar Avenue.

The telephone snapped to, before I heard the name, but recognizing the neighborhood as one of the best in the city, I started out.

I was elated to receive a call from so fashionable a part of town, and such is the hopeful egotism of inexperience, that I saw myself at once at the head of a large and flourishing practice.

405 Cedar Avenue proved to be a rather pretentious, modern house with a silver door plate; and I was more pleased than a well regulated physician should be, to see that the plate bore the name of Kilgore.

While I was removing my light overcoat and hat in the hall, Miss Kilgore came down the wide stairway.

She was dressed in a floating robe of some soft, blue material, which was exceedingly becoming, but intensified the pallor of her cheeks.

She seemed anxious, and I noted with a thrill of pleasure that she looked relieved and glad to see me.

She gave me her hand and said at once:

"Dr. Danforth, my father has been ill since noon today. He hoped the attack would pass off, and so delayed sending for you.

"It is an old nervous trouble to which he is subject, and which often comes after he has been in a crowd.

"I fear yesterday's reception is responsible for this.

"He has been quite well, and free from the attacks since last fall, and so rather insisted upon going yesterday, against my judgment."

"What is the nature of the trouble?" I asked.

"It is apparently only a severe sick headache, but differing from it, too, for while it lasts, he complains of the most intense and strange flashes of light,

which seem to cross his brain at intervals. Scenes of his past life and childhood come up before him, or before his mental vision, in the most minute detail.

"Conversations, scenes, and faces which have been entirely forgotten for years, come to him, and stand out as plainly as if a vivid electric light had been turned upon that particular part of his memory.

"Our old family physician in Baltimore advised a change of scene, and as father had business interests in Kansas City, we came West.

"He has been much better, in fact almost entirely well, since we came here, and has not required any medical advice until today. He sent for you, because you were the only physician in the city he had met, and he does not like strange doctors."

And then she blushed, lest the frank admission was not quite polite, and catching my look, we both laughed, and were straightway upon an easier footing.

I found the colonel in an excitable and nervous state, but free from the headache, and so leaving a quieting potion which I knew would give him a good night's rest, I departed.

Upon calling next morning, I found him up and apparently all right, in fact he met me himself at the door.

He gave me a full and interesting account of the peculiar attacks, which had first appeared three years previous, and which had come at intervals ever since.

He was much pleased at his good night of sleep, for which he gave me full credit, assuring me that whenever he had need of a doctor he should certainly send for me. All of which was very flattering.

I succeeded before leaving in gaining an invitation to call when I could find an evening at liberty.

It is needless to say that I availed myself of the invitation as soon as I thought it in good taste to do so.

The call was followed by many others, until it became the greatest pleasure of my busy life to spend the evening with Colonel Kilgore and his charming daughter.

A steady increase of practice had begun or seemed to begin from the time of my first call upon the colonel.

My luck had turned. Meanwhile I had found out all there seemed possible to learn about the family.

The colonel was a widower, a Southern gentleman of good family, and of independent fortune, who had invested something in Kansas City real estate, at the time of the boom, and was now waiting to gain the fortune which the boomers had so sanguinely assured him must be the result of his investments.

Leonice was his only child.

Not many months elapsed before I realized that I was hopelessly in love with Leonice Kilgore, and also that I had no right in the world to allow her to suspect the fact.

I loved her too well to offer her my limited income in exchange for unlimited affluence.

I made up my mind fully and decidedly that in silence only was my safety.

But love is a wonderful fellow, and he laughs at prudence as well as at locksmiths.

That very evening, while we were in the conservatory, Leonice picked and gave me a bunch of carnations, which were filling the room with their fragrance.

As she did so, she happened to glance up; I was glancing down, and—well, I never knew just how or why it happened, but five minutes after I noticed that the bunch of carnations lay on the floor, and that the heel of my boot was upon them.

They were crushed and spoiled, but I took my arm from about Leonice's waist, to pick them up, and place them carefully in my note book, and there they have been ever since.

The next day I had a long talk with the colonel.

He was much more favorable to me than I had any right to expect he would be.

He gave his consent to our engagement, only stipulating that we should wait for a year.

When I reported the result of this talk to Leonice, she did not look as overwhelmed with joy as I expected she would.

She seemed preoccupied and I found her eyes fixed upon me more than once during the evening, with an expression I could not understand.

"My dear Leonice," I said finally, "if you look so sad you will make me think you have repented of your bargain."

She gave me a quick, troubled glance.

"Jack," she said, "I must be frank with you, and yet it seems like being untrue to my father.

"In fact, by speaking freely to you, I shall disobey him for the first time in my life. He told me that I must not mention this to you, and it did not occur to him that I would do so against his direct command."

I was thoroughly alarmed. A hundred thoughts came into my mind.

Had the old man embezzled, or worse yet—had he killed somebody?

These Southern gentlemen had, sometimes, very uncertain tempers. What could it be?

"My dear child," I said, taking her hand, "it is your duty to tell me what troubles you.

"I should help you bear your annoyances now, and not be shut out from them. Our love must not be clouded by any concealments."

And so with much hesitancy she told me the following fact:

Colonel Kilgore was not only afflicted with nervous trouble for which I had been treating him, this was only a part of the malady.

He was also possessed of a peculiar trait of sensibility, whatever it could be called, which made him able to see the thoughts of those in the same room with him; and he could exercise this strange power at will.

"It may seem like a slight thing, Jack," she finished, "but you have no idea how very disagreeable it is.

"I have scarcely any privacy; even my thoughts are not my own, when I am with father.

"I cannot help wondering if you love me enough to undergo for my sake, the constant string of petty annoyances that this trait occasions."

I convinced her upon this point, and also that for her sake I could undergo anything.

Then I said: "We will talk no more about it, dearest.

"The only difference will be, that I shall be at your side, to help you bear this, and other trials, which you used to bear alone. And now let us have some music."

She thanked me with a glance, and seating herself at the piano, began playing "Douglas, Douglas, Tender and True," one of my favorites.

I stood at her side to turn the leaves, and with my back to the door, I did not see or hear the colonel enter.

When he spoke, I started, and was surprised to see him upon the other side of Leonice.

"Fiddlesticks," I thought, "why couldn't the old crank stay away a while longer?"

The colonel glared at me over his gold eyeglasses.

As soon as the song was finished, he said, "Dr. Danforth, I am surprised, sir! That is scarcely the way for a young man to think of one so much older, and in his own house. I am certainly surprised, sir!"

I tried to stumble through an apology, but he bowed stiffly and left the room.

Leonice looked as if she wanted to cry, but laughed instead.

"You see how it is, Jack," she said.

"You will have to be always on your guard. I have learned to school myself, but even I forget sometimes.

"One fortunate thing is, that the next time he meets you he may have forgotten all about this, and be as friendly as usual."

This comforted me greatly, but I went home in no very cheerful frame of mind.

The next morning I sat busily writing at my desk.

I had promised the New York *Magazine of Medicine* an article on Hygiene, which I hoped would bring my name into some notice, as well as prove lucrative.

I had moved farther down town, as my practice now warranted my doing, and here the colonel often dropped in to see me during office hours.

I was writing away at a furious rate when I saw his portly form approaching.

"Good mawnin', good mawnin'," he said genially, as he entered, without a trace of last night's coldness.

I pushed him a chair, saying, "Come right in, sir; glad to see you," but ejaculating mentally, "you dear old bore! Heaven preserve a man from his friends! I wish I had put down the blind and locked the door. There goes that article for another day!"

The colonel rose hastily.

"I bid you good mawnin', sur; you are not the gentleman I took you for, sur! I bid you good mawnin'!"

And with the offended dignity of a man of the old school, he walked out.

I was angry with myself, angry with the colonel, and thoroughly uncomfortable.

I took no pleasure in wounding others, and here I seemed to be offending this kind old soul every time I met him.

The reflection forced itself upon me that there must be a great many unguarded thoughts in the world.

I felt that I was no worse and no better than other young men of my acquaintance, but I had certainly fallen into the habit of criticising others to myself.

The article on Hygiene did not prosper that day, and I spent a restless night.

So matters went on. Hardly a week passed that I did not offend my prospective father in law, until the state of affairs became almost unbearable.

Meanwhile I had given the colonel's case much study and thought, but had arrived at no conclusion.

It was a most strange and unique malady, unlike any I had been able to find upon record.

The headaches, the flashes of memory, and the peculiar mind reading, were all caused, I was sure, by an overwrought state of the nervous system, but the remedy for the disease was as great a mystery to me now as at first.

Matters finally reached the climax at a dinner party which the colonel gave for two of his friends from the South, who were spending a few days in the city.

The colonel had gone into company very little of late; he told Leonice it made him tired to see the silly nothings a roomful of society people were thinking, even if they kept still.

To me he never mentioned his mind reading. Leonice told me that he was very sensitive in regard to it, not wishing even the servants to suspect that he possessed this strange power.

The dinner party was to be a grand affair.

"I'll not have a single butterfly there," he declared.

"They shall all be men of sense and of years. Staid gentlemen, who don't know how to talk trivial nothings."

As his medical adviser I had said all I could against the plan, but he remained stubbornly firm.

There were invited one ex-governor, two celebrated lawyers, two doctors with enviable reputations, two bank presidents, and two old friends from Baltimore.

Leonice and I were the only young

people, and I must say that I felt rather elated at this mark of his favor, for it proved, without doubt, that he still had a liking for me, in spite of my many offenses.

The day at last arrived, and at the appointed hour I presented myself, rigged out in all my best finery.

Leonice, I knew, rather dreaded the dinner, for there was a new butler on hand, a Frenchman with a scowling face whom I did not fancy in the least, and she was not at all certain as to the serving.

But he understood waiting at table to perfection, and so her fears in that direction were groundless, for everything passed off smoothly.

The two physicians patronized me in the most approved style. The ex-governor looked at me through his gold eyeglasses when I was presented, and said: "Oh, yes, sir, yes, sir, I have often heard of you, sir; quite so!" in so hearty a fashion that I knew at once he had never heard my name.

I think it was certainly the most prosy meal I ever attended.

I realized that society light talk has its uses.

Leonice tried, with my feeble aid, to better it a little at first, by a witty remark to the ex-governor, but it fell quite flat.

He looked at her blandly, and said: "Ah, quite so!" and we subsided into silence.

The two doctors got into some learned discussion, and prosed on and on.

The ex-governor and the lawyers almost came to words over some extinct point of law; while the two Southern gentlemen and the colonel compared Baltimore and New York city, much to the detriment of New York.

The dinner was six courses. I had been up all of the night before, and had been busier than usual all day, so by this time I was so tired that I was almost desperate.

"Old duffers," I thought, "with their stale old jokes. I wonder if they will ever stop and go home. How dull people can be and not suspect it! The colonel looks half asleep."

Just here I caught his eye, and saw that he looked like anything but sleep.

He was glaring at me angrily, and I became aware that my reflections were not as respectful as they should be.

Even then, I did not feel the approaching result. As we passed into the reception room the colonel whispered:

"I wish to speak with you."

I followed him into the hall.

He took my hat from the rack and handed it to me.

"There, sur, is the door," he said; "this is more than I can excuse. You can insult me, but not my friends in my house," and giving me no chance to reply, he returned to the reception room.

I waited for a moment, hoping Leonice would come out, but she did not, and as I was very angry myself by this time I departed.

Next day I indited a carefully worded note of apology to the colonel, but it was returned unopened.

Two letters to Leonice received the same fate; the third day came a letter from her.

She said that I must see that matters could not go on in this way. I should only make her more miserable by attempting to see her again; begged that I would feel as she did, that it was best for us to consider the parting final.

And so this chapter of my history was over, but not forever, as subsequent events proved.

I buried myself in business and worked early and late. I began to be known as a physician of some importance, and as the author of a certain treatise upon "Nervous Diseases," which had received some flattering attention.

I grew to look old for my years, and a little line of gray hair showed above my temples.

I was totally unlike the genial young fellow I used to be, and I deplored the change.

I was irritable and easily excited, all of which I know now was the result of overwork, late hours, and the severe tension upon all my faculties.

Every busy physician has come to just this point in his experience. If it were possible, I should prefer to leave out the next page, in giving this truthful record, for it is greatly to my discredit.

I drank deeply, and often heard whispers to the effect that I was going to spoil a fine career by the habit; and caught glances of pity, and not a few of contempt.

I had no intimate friends, and wanted none.

One evening at the club I quarreled over a game of whist with a certain Rankin Mathers, a great favorite and a man twice my age.

We were undoubtedly both to blame, but in my angry ill temper I made some ugly speech about settling with him later, and left the club.

I never saw him again.

On his way home that night he was assaulted and murdered, and the following day I was arrested.

All the evidence was against me. The room had been full when I made my absurd threat. The case seemed so clear that I almost doubted myself if I were innocent.

Time went by, until it was within three weeks of the date set for the trial.

I seemed to be in a strange stupor. Those who had interested themselves for me were doing all they could to find proofs of my innocence,

The days passed; it lacked now only two before the trial.

And then I was suddenly and unexpectedly released.

It came about in this way, and I can tell it best in Leonice's words:

"I was feeling very miserable, Jack, but trying to keep up for father's sake.

"I could not help feeling that you would be acquitted, for I knew that you were innocent, Jack."

Oh, this faith of woman!

"We had talked repeatedly at table about the affair. Indeed, we could talk of little else. But that day Jockquin, who had been with us two years, and was an excellent butler, happened to stand just back of my chair, and facing father.

"Suddenly I saw father grow white, and I thought he was going to faint, and sprang to his side.

"'Only my old trouble,' he managed to say. 'Get me to my room.' This Jockquin and I did. He kept his eyes closed, and did not speak again until I had sent Jockquin for the doctor.

"As soon as we were alone, he called me to him. 'Leonice,' he whispered, 'send at once for Governor Trenton, *at once*, do you hear, *at once*.' I did so, and the governor reached the room a half hour before the doctor.

"Father told us that he had only pretended the illness; and that he had kept his eyes closed, because he dared not meet Jockquin's eyes for fear of betraying the awful secret, which he had just learned.

"As Jockquin stood behind my chair father had happened to glance at him, attracted by the ugly expression upon his face.

"He saw, to his horror, what was passing in the butler's mind, and knew him to be the murderer of Rankin Mathers.

The governor arranged all the details, and by the time Jockquin had returned with the doctor, there were men waiting to arrest him.

He was not told how his guilt was known, but allowed to believe that all had been discovered.

As the governor thought he would be, he was frightened into a full confession of the horrible affair.

It seems that he had been years before in Mr. Mathers' employ in France.

He had at that time been convicted of a theft, of which he affirmed he was innocent, and had served five years in the penitentiary.

He had vowed to have revenge upon Mr. Mathers, who had been instrumental in having him punished.

After coming to America, he drifted West, and finally one day met his old enemy upon a street in Kansas City. He had ever since only waited his opportunity.

The man never knew that he had convicted himself.

After it was over, the colonel had a long and dangerous spell of sickness, brought on by the nervous strain of that hour of waiting, the fear that the man would not confess his guilt—for he knew that his mind reading would have no weight before a jury.

It was at this time that Leonice sent for me.

He was sick for three weeks, and I had little hope of his recovery.

But doctors are liable to make mistakes as well as other people.

When he began to get better, we planned that the other physician should take charge of the case, as I feared seeing me would excite him.

But one day he surprised me. I was mixing his medicine by the bedside, when he suddenly opened his eyes. I had no chance to escape.

He looked at me with mild curiosity, and then spoke, feebly:

"You are the doctor, I suppose?"

"Yes," I said.

"Have I been very sick?" he asked, again, after an interval of silence.

"Yes," I answered.

"I fear my daughter will be ill, with all the care of the moving, and my sickness. Have the goods come from Baltimore yet?"

"Yes," I said, "the house is all arranged. Miss Kilgore has excellent help and is quite well. If you will promise not to talk, but let her, I will send her to you for five minutes."

I went out and posted Leonice, who was listening in the hall.

From this time the colonel steadily improved.

I thought that with returning strength he would recognize me, but he never did. The three years of his life in Kansas City were a blank.

What seems even more strange to me, is the fact that he has never since had any return of the nervous attacks to which he had been subject before his illness, and his power of mind reading is gone.

Though it served me a good turn, I cannot help being glad that my father in law cannot know every one's thoughts at will.

We are the best of friends, for Colonel Kilgore gave a hearty and kindly consent to my suit, when, several months after, I asked him, for the second time, for the hand of his daughter Leonice.

NATURE'S ART.

Though I am poor, and cannot buy
  The rare, time mellowed things of Art,
God keeps an open gallery
  Of glories for the poor in heart
Whose walls are hung with grander show
  Of color than old Titian knew,
With outlines Michelangelo
  Wronged in the best cartoons he drew!

Maurice Thompson.

THE CAPTIVES OF THE TEMPLE.*

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

A tale of strange adventure in South American wilds. The sequel to a quest for the Great Royal Orchid, involving an escape from one foe only to fall into the hands of another still more relentless.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RESORT TO TORTURE.

AT Pence's command we were taken from the place through the nave of the temple, and the four Englishmen, roused from their stupid contemplation of the Great Royal Orchid, followed us with many an exclamation of surprise and pity.

"Surely, Captain Pence," said Professor Wisdom, "you will not resort to violence now, after being so kind to us."

"The devil!" growled Pence. "You and your fool companions are very different cattle from these two. You couldn't do us any harm. These fellows are our enemies. We'll kill them sure, this time."

Pence and Huskway talked together a moment and then Pence spoke again.

"Take them to that place where we saw the old hag disappear," he said. "They must have come from there. We'll make them disclose the mystery."

We were dragged into the room of the statues and empty pedestals, and there found the sailor who had been on guard still watching as if nothing had happened.

He opened his eyes in astonishment when he saw the crowd enter with us as prisoners.

"Have you been away from here, Sammon?" asked Pence.

"No, sir," was the reply.

"Has anything happened?"

"No, sir."

"You have not seen the old woman again?"

"No, sir."

"Have you seen these men?"

"I know them. They are Mr. Keyburn and Dr. Desklit."

"Bah! I know who they are only too well. What I want to know is whether you have seen them today."

"Not till you brought them in here," said Sammon without hesitation.

I breathed more easily. It was evident that Sammon had meant all he said and was really disgusted with Pence and his search for diamonds.

"Has one of these infernal stumps moved yet?"

"Not one, sir."

"Well," said Pence, turning to me, "where the devil did you come from?"

"That is a little secret I do not wish to share with you," I replied.

"But by heaven, I'll make you share it!" he roared in a rage. "I am the commander here, and I'll give you one chance for your life."

"No chance," growled Huskway.

Pence went about examining the tops of the empty pedestals, but his superficial examination disclosed nothing. Had he mounted one and stood with both feet on the inner disk, he would have sunk to the secret room of the priests.

**This story began in the December issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

"Take them outside!" he roared, after failing to discover the secret.

We were again taken through the nave, and set down on the public square before the temple.

Pence and Huskway stepped to one side and held a lengthy consultation. When they returned, their countenances wore a ludicrous expression of mingled malignancy and craft. They were trying to appear in a friendly mood.

"Now, look here, Keyburn," said Pence. "You know my mettle, and I know yours. You don't want to die, and I don't want to kill you. You are young, full of ambition and love of life. There is no reason why, after all, we should kill you or your associate. All we want now is to find the two girls and the diamonds.

"We believe that you know where the girls are hiding. We believe that you were in the same place, and that there are two ways of communicating with it. We know the old woman went down through one of those pedestals, but how she did it we can't find out. You must have come out another way, and that way we want you to tell us. In return for this information we will grant you and Desklit your lives.

"I hope," said Professor Wisdom, stepping forward, "that my friend Keyburn is too brave to save his own life at the sacrifice of the safety and liberty of two young girls."

"Shut up, you fool!" growled Pence. "If you begin to meddle I'll give you a dose."

"No meddling is necessary," I answered. "Even if I believed you, Pence, I would not betray the secret to save my life. But I do not believe you. I know that after I had given you the information you ask and you had the young ladies in your power, you would kill both of us. You may do your worst. No words shall come from my lips to help you find them."

"I'll torture them out of you."

"Go ahead."

With a horrible calmness he went about it. Cords were tied tightly around my thumbs and to two stout sticks. He and Huskway each took one. By giving the sticks a few twists the pressure was brought on my thumbs and they too were twisted. The pain was not great at first and I maintained my composure.

"Will you tell?"

"No."

"Twist!"

They twisted again, and the bones in my thumb joints were separated.

The pain became excruciating. I quivered from head to foot. I felt like crying out, but bit my lips to remain silent.

"Will you tell?"

I shook my head.

"Twist!"

"I protest against this treatment of an American citizen!" cried Mr. Hebard, rushing up to Pence. "This outrage shall not go unpunished. We have seen enough of your maliciousness, Captain Pence. We have seemed to be stupidly acquiescent, but we can remain so no longer. Release this man at once."

Pence gazed at the speaker with an impudent stare, and then promptly knocked him down.

"I'll give every one of you a thumb twist if you interfere."

At this threat there was considerable murmuring among Pence's own men.

"It is going too far," I heard one say. "It was all right to kill the fools we found here, but this is like murder."

A blow from Huskway felled that speaker.

My thumbs were now stretched to almost twice their natural length, and the pain was almost insupportable.

The interest of the entire party was centered in us. A hundred blacks gathered round, but they were not noticed by the men of the Wing.

Most of the crowd stood with their backs toward the temple. I could look over their heads to the temple doors.

I fancied I saw a familiar figure glide through a crowd of blacks and disappear in the temple, but was not sure.

It looked like Pedro Gapo.

The blacks seemed to be divided in their sentiments. One half the crowd were evidently our sympathizers, and the other half still adherents of Pence.

"Twist again!" commanded Pence.

I think that time my thumbs would have been literally torn from my hands had not a diversion occurred.

A scream was heard coming from the temple doors. All turned to see what was happening.

The sailor Sammon came staggering out with blood running from a stab in his throat. His eyes were already glazed. He reeled like a dying man, and attempted to speak, but failed.

He tried to point toward the room from which he had come, but his arm swung half way round a circle and he fell dead at Pence's feet.

Both thumbs were released as Pence and Huskway leaped toward him.

"Sammon! Sammon! What was it? Who did this?" they cried.

But the silent lips gave no answer.

"Follow me!" ordered Pence, and we were left alone as the entire throng crowded in through the temple doors.

Even the four Englishmen went with them, so great was the overmastering excitement of the moment.

Something had happened in the temple—that was certain.

Some one had murdered Sammon.

Desklit and I were near enough to each other to converse.

"Who do you suppose killed that fellow?" asked the doctor.

"Pedro Gapo. I thought a short time ago I saw him enter the temple. He has probably looked upon Sammon as an enemy and killed him to prevent an outcry. He has gone to the underground chamber."

"He has ruined everything," groaned Desklit. "They will lie in wait for him and seize him. Then they will go after the girls."

But Pence was too excited even to follow up his advantage at the right time. In a short time—perhaps a quarter of an hour—we saw the crowd returning, and this time poor Pedro Gapo was with it.

They hustled him, with much jeering and cursing, to the space near Desklit and me. His eyes showed the whites as he glowered on his captors.

"Who was down there?" demanded Pence.

"Go fin' out," was the negro's answer.

Pence took out his knife and slit the right ear of the negro. A gleam of hate showed in the wide eyes.

"Look out what you do, Pence," he said. "Dere's more after me."

"I'll make you tell! How did you come to life after we killed you?"

"I've got nine lives like a cat."

"Then I'll take the remaining eight, and end you. Will you tell me what is below the temple?"

"Yes, the earth."

A terrible curse came from Pence's lips, and his knife played cruelly on the negro's face. Huskway joined in, and in a frenzy of hate and drunkenness, he slashed the fingers from the black hands, and cut the lips frightfully.

"End it!" said Pence, making a drive for the poor fellow's heart.

Gapo opened his eyes, which had for a moment closed. He saw the black faces of the former slaves around him.

A shout came from him—a sentence containing about four words which no one but the blacks could understand.

They answered him in the same tongue.

A look—a dying look of awful significance rested on Pence, and Pedro Gapo fell dead.

Hurling the black body to the ground, Pence led the way back to the temple.

Desklit and I were again left alone.

"They will surely get the girls now," said Desklit.

"It is certain," I replied. "I regret

the action of Gapo, but cannot find it in my heart to condemn the poor fellow. He died in our service."

"I wonder what he called to the blacks."

"I have no idea."

"By the way, did the Englishmen come back when the men returned?"

I looked at him in astonishment, my mind trying to cover every moment of the episode.

"Now I think of it, I did not see them," I answered.

"Have they been killed, do you suppose?"

"No. In the excitement of the capture of Gapo they would not be noticed."

"Then where are they?"

In a short time the gang came back. Pence and Huskway were in a frantic rage.

"By all the furies in hell!" roared Pence, "it is the mystery of sorcery. A nigger can go up or down through those pedestals, and we cannot make one of them budge."

"'St! That accounts!" came a hissing voice from Desklit. "The Englishmen are with the girls."

Driven to the extremes of frenzy by his disappointments, Pence scarcely knew what he was doing. All his venom was heaped upon Desklit and myself. He chuckled in hideous glee as he made preparations for our punishment.

"You curs must know the secret," he said. "I am going to get it out of you. I'll see what a slow death will do. Here, bring stones this way."

None of the men seemed to understand him.

"Bring stones to build a tomb!"

A shout of joy from Huskway was echoed by several of the men, and they began carrying the square building stones they had torn from houses in their mad search for diamonds.

Under the commands of Pence a circle was drawn. Stones were placed on this, and a strong circular wall began to grow.

When it was four feet high Desklit and I were placed inside. Our hands were freed, then our feet, so we could move about. The wall increased in height, and a dozen pistols covered us to prevent interference or an attempt at escape.

"What is this devilish scheme?" asked Desklit.

"We are to be entombed alive," I answered.

The walls were continued above our heads, and a beehive roof put on. We were in a solid prison, save for a small aperture left for communication.

"Now then," said Pence, when it was finished, and speaking through the little window, "we will amuse ourselves watching your dying agony. It is possible when the pains begin to gnaw and the thirst to drive you mad you will think better of it and tell us the secret of those pedestals."

"To what purpose?" asked Desklit. "We know you would take our lives any way."

"But the girls would be safe, and now they will die alone of starvation."

"They may die of starvation," said Desklit, "but not alone. Do you know what has become of your simple Englishmen?"

Through the little window we saw Pence's face turn white.

"The devils! They have gone! They were shamming all that simplicity to wait for a chance! Well, I'll find them. Their escape will not help you."

Even near death as we were we could not help chuckling at the shrewdness of the Englishmen. All the time they had been in Pence's hands they had assumed the simple and half wild manners of monomaniacs. They seemed to care for nothing except to stare at the gorgeous Moon Flower.

Simple minded they seemed to be to Pence, and harmless. Shoot they could not, for they had no firearms. They were scientific men, and not hunters. But now, when at last an opportunity had come, they had seized it with the

alacrity of the tried adventurer, and were undoubtedly in the underground chamber with Lottie and Elna.

"Admitting that they are shrewd beyond our expectations, and trusting that they are with the girls," said Desklit, "what hope does it give us? We shall undoubtedly starve here, and they there. Would it not be better, after all, to disclose the secret and give the girls a chance for life in the hands of Pence and Huskway?"

"It is not in our power," I said. "We have no secret to disclose. If the Englishmen are with them, the girls think we are killed, for the Englishmen saw us ready for the slaughter. Elna will lock the mechanism of the works so that no matter what we told Pence, he could not get at them."

"That's so," said Desklit. "There's nothing left but to die and trust to meeting them in another world."

CHAPTER XIV.

DEATH AT THE FEAST.

We slept that night on the hard pavement of the public square, the strong walls around us shutting out all sounds, and even hiding from our sight the stars of heaven.

We had not seen much of those same stars of late, and to one who has lived more than a week below ground the sight of the stars at night is a boon that cannot be appreciated by those who have the pleasure of gazing into the diamond studded vault every evening.

It was fortunate for us both that we were young and had good nerves. It was also fortunate that Pence, in his eagerness to be cruel, had forgotten to separate us. The touch of the hand, the whispered word, the knowledge that each was near the other, did much to hold us firm.

Solitary confinement under those circumstances would have driven us mad.

In the morning we were hungry. We peered through the little window, half hoping that Pence would relent and bring us food. But that worthy was pacing up and down before the temple, scarcely glancing our way.

We saw Huskway and others of the crew at intervals, crossing the public square, and many of them gave our silent dwelling a curious glance.

We saw many blacks hurrying to and fro, nothing in their demeanor giving evidence that the death of Pedro Gapo had in any way affected them. They were still acting in the capacity of servants or slaves of the whites, and were now engaged, as we learned, in preparing breakfast.

The climate was warm, and Pence a man of good taste in matters pertaining to his own comfort. He had caused a table to be brought and placed in the cool recesses of the temple porch. Here the breakfast was laid for the crew of men who had been glad to eat sailor's grub in sailor's fashion but a few weeks ago.

This arrangement not only served for coolness, but it gave Pence the opportunity of keeping a continual guard at the entrance of the temple, he himself trusting no one now that the Englishmen had eluded him.

The aroma of Brazilian coffee came to our nostrils, and the odors of the food the blacks had cooked. It required strength of will to keep us from calling out and begging for a morsel. But we knew we would not get what we asked for, so held our peace.

The crew of the Wing, or what was left of it, seemed to enjoy that particular breakfast immensely. They laughed loudly, told ribald yarns, and drank deeply of the native liquor.

We watched them enviously from our little prison window.

"A feast of Lucullus!" said Desklit.

I did not answer. Just then I was wishing that Elna and Lottie and the four Englishmen had a portion.

We grew cramped, so long did we remain at the window watching that

bountiful meal. We turned away, and as the prison afforded us room to move about, we exercised a bit to get our blood into circulation.

Desklit was the first to return to the window.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "They are going to sleep. They have drunk so much of that liquor, whatever it is, that they are drowsy. See, Huskway's head is drooping, and so are a dozen others. Pence seems maudlin, and wants to sing, but is too drunk."

I looked out. It was certainly a strange breakfast scene upon which I looked. Had it been a bacchanalian supper I would not have been surprised. But men do not usually drink themselves stupid at breakfast.

Yet these men were apparently very drunk—helplessly so.

Not one of them had abstained sufficiently to control himself.

One after another dropped calmly off to sleep. Their heads drooped, and we could see a peculiar half closing of the eyes.

When they had been asleep for perhaps a half hour, a number of blacks joined the few who had been serving. One of these struck Pence a blow on the head. The captain rolled to the ground, and seemed stiff and unconscious of the blow and fall.

A wild scream of exultation came from the blacks.

"My God!" cried Desklit. "Those men are not drunk! They are dead! The blacks have poisoned them. That was the dying message of Pedro Gapo!"

A wild tumult was in my breast. At one sweep these black men had rid us of murderous enemies to the number almost of sixty.

No longer did starvation stare us in the face. No longer would we be tortured by thoughts of the dying agonies of the two girls we had learned to love.

We shouted to the blacks. They heard us, and with loud cries came to us. Their powerful arms tore away the top of our prison, and, without waiting for them to make a convenient way, we leaped out.

A score of them fell upon their knees before us, and by their cries and gestures we knew they were assuring us of their loyalty.

We expressed our gratitude to them in a jargon as near to the Spanish of Ameza as we could get, but though we felt more grateful to them than we could say, we had no time to waste.

We rushed past the dead banqueters, all sitting in their chairs as if asleep, save Pence, and ran through the nave to the room of statues and hollow pedestals. With loud shouts of joy and triumph we leaped upon the two we had used before, and—stood looking horror stricken into each other's face.

The works were locked. We were free, all our enemies were removed, but the girls and the Englishmen were down in their luxurious retreat, now, apparently, destined to be a luxurious tomb.

"What shall we do?" I cried. "Here we are, with nothing to hinder us from walking off to join the Flora, and the owners of the Flora with our two sweet companions down in that grave."

"Let's think a minute," said Desklit coolly, jumping down from the pedestal. "We can't make them hear, that's certain. We can't open the works from above while they are locked below. The priests understood that business. It could be opened or locked from here, provided it was open there. But when they descended, and locked the thing, no one could open it from this end. We must get at them in some other way. I suppose we could make a hole through the floor."

"It seems the only way," I answered. "But see how long it will take."

"I know, it will be a stiff job. But it is better than waiting for them. It is possible, of course, that one of the Englishmen will come up to see how things are going. But there is nothing certain about it."

"No, and we have no time to lose. We must get out of this while the blacks are friendly."

"Well, we need strength, so must eat. Let's get the blacks to give us breakfast."

We made our wishes known to them, and soon had a good meal set before us. Then, with my knowledge of Amazonian Spanish stretched to the utmost, I told them to prepare a meal for those who would come.

They understood, and set about it.

More than that, many of them followed us to see what we were planning in the temple, and when they understood, they ran for iron bars.

These were rude but very strong bars made from iron brought in small quantities from their own hills by the workers of Ameza, and fashioned into implements long ago for mining purposes when the diamond and gold diggings were still productive.

They showed as much eagerness in attacking the solid flooring around the pedestals as we did, and the heavy blows of their bars must have been heard below.

After an immense amount of hard work we managed to make a hole through the floor. It was not a large hole, but sufficed to call through. I at once threw myself flat and applied my mouth to the opening.

"Ho, down there!" I called. "Are you there Elna, Lottie, Professor Wisdom?"

"Whose voice is that?" I heard the answer.

"Mine, Keyburn's! We are all that's left now! The blacks have poisoned the entire crew."

"Thank God!" I heard the voice of Professor Wisdom say. "But how shall we get up?"

"Is not Elna there? She knows the works."

"Elna is here, but after she locked the machinery, she became unconscious after being told you were being killed. She has not yet come to herself."

"Heavens!" I said to Desklit. "Here's a new trouble. Elna is unconscious because they told her I was being killed."

A grin overspread his face.

"You're a lucky man," he said. "It isn't every chap who gets such love as that, and from a priestess, too."

With fresh vigor I attacked the floor and we soon had an opening large enough for us to let ourselves down through. We found plenty of grass ropes, and made a sort of fire escape with knots at regular intervals. This was let down and fastened, and I descended first.

The four Englishmen were there, and my poor Elna lay on a couch, her lovely face as white as snow.

"Elna!" I cried. "Elna! I am here! I am not killed!"

"You can't do it that way," said Desklit. "Let me try."

I called up for the blacks to let down some water, and they quickly obeyed. Desklit worked over her for some time, and suddenly stepped back.

"Her eyes are opening—go to her——" he said.

I knelt down by her side and took her hand in mine. Her beautiful eyes opened—rested on my face a moment—then closed again.

"Where am I?" she murmured.

"Here, under the temple, Elna," I said. "Don't you know me, Keyburn? I am alive, after all. Look at me."

She did look at me. And that look conveyed—what did it not convey to my palpitating, overjoyed heart? It told me that her love and she, herself, were mine.

Elna was not able to leave the place for several hours, and Desklit, acting under her directions, released the works. He then ascended to the temple and returned with the food the blacks had prepared.

The Englishmen, as they ate their breakfast under these strange circumstances so utterly unexpected by them when they set out to find the Great

Royal Orchid, showed themselves clever and ready to accept all circumstances with coolness.

They laughed as they recounted how they had assumed their simplicity for the benefit of Pence, knowing that if he suspected them of being other than pure cranks on the one subject of the Moon Flower, he would subject them to the same rigorous treatment he had given us. They had hoped by their craft to obtain an opportunity to help us.

"The world will be richer by this adventure," said Professor Wisdom. "We have had some sad experiences, it is true. We have been nigh unto death, and put up with some great inconveniences. But we will take back with us plenty of the Great Royal Orchids, and not only that, see what I have found."

He held up a yellow volume made of written paper sewed together and bound in dark cloth.

"I discovered this among the old books here," he said. "It is a complete history of the first two hundred years of the existence of Ameza. It is written in Spanish, with which, fortunately, I am familiar.

"During this early period, Ameza was a prosperous and growing place. The Spaniards who arrived here first were a shipload who came over with the old conquerors, but their ship having been blown away from the fleet they made the best of it and sailed up the Amazon. They heard tales of yellow metal to be found in the mountains to the south, and landing near the Tapajos, they made their way through a country settled by Indians to this place, where they found a simple race of mankind of black color. These they made slaves, and, having brought with them traces of Moorish influence, built the city of Ameza as you have seen it.

"The volume contains much that is interesting and valuable. Of course the degeneration of the race from a thousand hardy settlers to two hundred half mad fools is due to their continual intermarrying as much as to the influence of the root of the Moon Flower, although that has undoubtedly strangely affected them. But a constant diet of almost anything will have some curious effect.

"I shall take this with me, if the presiding genius of this place does not object."

"Elna? Oh, I fancy she cares nothing about it. She was a captive here, the same as ourselves. She was not of the race," I answered.

"I am glad of that," said the professor, "though it is a pity the race should have become so suddenly extinct."

We made preparations to leave at once. Elna recovered her strength, and applied herself to the problem of disposing of the diamonds.

"While I suppose there is no doubt of my moral right to the ownership of the jewels," she said, "I shall not take them all. I am going to divide them with the blacks who were the real owners originally of Ameza, and whose labors made the wealth a fact."

And this strange girl carried out her intention. Having taken the diamonds to the temple, she called about her a council of the black Amezans.

She explained to them that she was going to leave, and that it would be necessary for them to select a ruler, as all their masters were killed.

A great black fellow, ugly enough to look upon, but quite intelligent, was chosen king, and to him and his council their share of diamonds was handed over.

And the unselfishness of Elna went still further. She insisted upon dividing the jewels with Desklit and Lottie, and even asked the Englishmen to take some.

But most of these either had wealth enough or cared nothing for it, and as Desklit was to marry Lottie, all that was necessary was to divide what Elna had in two parts. This gave each of the two girls a considerable fortune, which

Desklit and I, as their prospective husbands, swear we will never touch.

The new black king kindly furnished us with an escort, and twenty five of these started for the Tapajos, loaded with splendid specimens of the Great Royal Orchids.

We reached the launch without further adventure, found the little crew quite ignorant that any misfortune had happened to us, and made our way to the Flora.

Elna remained with Lottie, and the two girls are now in London preparing for the double wedding which is to take place in Professor Wisdom's house.

Our story is done. But if any reader wishes to study deeper into the strange and mysterious history of the Amezans, he will find much to amuse and entertain him in Professor Wisdom's forthcoming book entitled: "The History of Ameza, an Unknown Colony of Brazil."

THE END.

A SENTENCE OF DEATH.

BY CLARENCE MILES BOUTELLE.

A strange experience, showing how conditions alter cases. What one man did under the belief that he had but a year of life left.

I HAD lived in perfect health for thirty years. Every portion of my physical organism had found its powers exactly adapted to its duties. No function of any vital organ had given sensible hint of its activity, and seemingly threatened rebellion.

Aside from the results of the trivial accidents inevitably incident to boyhood and young manhood, I can truthfully say that I had never known an ache or a pain. I had always found a good appetite balanced against perfect digestion.

Sound sleep had given me the prompt blessing of its presence whenever I sought it. Every power was so thorough, every faculty so fully in accord with its appropriate work, that exercise of them, even to a degree that would have been excessive in another man, was practically effortless.

To say I was young is to admit I must have been careless. The young and careless discount the future heavily in their drafts on the banks of health and strength. I had done all that.

I had kept late hours, turning night into day and day into night when it suited my convenience. I had exposed myself to all sorts of weather, sleeping in the open air, when the pleasures of hunting enticed me to the field or the forest, without caring for the heat or cold, drought or deluge.

I had enjoyed the pleasures of the table without restraint, or the thought of it. I had rowed, run, jumped, wrestled, fenced, lifted, and taken part in every other sort of athletic exercise to which the animal sense of power, plus the spiritual sense of ambition, attractively allures.

In a word, I had used myself as though muscle were as immortal as mind—the physical as deathless as the soul.

I shall never forget my thirtieth birthday. I had a headache when I arose in the morning, which was an entirely new experience for me.

Food did not taste good, and I left the table without having swallowed a half dozen mouthfuls. I started to walk to the parlor, from the diningroom, and grew so dizzy that I fell against the casing of the door, and had to ask the support of the arm of a friend.

My limbs became numb; there was an uneasy feeling of discomfort in my back and hips. The light hurt my eyes. There was a horrible buzzing in my ears. I felt sick, a thoroughly new sensation to me.

The next day I was better. The day following that I was worse again, with a severe chill in the morning, and a dull and depressing fever in the afternoon.

So the thing went, like the vibrations of a pendulum, until I had endured seven days—*endured*, for the first time, in place of really *living!* Then I gave up, and went to see a doctor.

Dr. Ralph Clinton was a man I had known well for years. He had enjoyed an enviable reputation, both as physician and surgeon, and had made much money.

He had worked hard and steadily, and was about to have the first real and extended vacation he had taken in ten years. I presume the knowledge of the fact that he would sail for Europe the next morning sent me to him a day or two sooner than I would have given up otherwise.

My friend had practically turned his entire practice over to another physician, for the time being, and I was the last patient he saw in America.

He objected, at first, to looking into my case at all, and the reasons which led him, finally, to do as I wished were social rather than professional.

He took me into his private office, opened the blinds, unlocked several drawers and cabinets, and proceeded to make a critical examination of the man who was ailing for the first time in his life.

Patients were so numerous with him, under ordinary circumstances, that a fellow was fortunate who got—supposing, of course, that he needed it—ten minutes of Clinton's time. He had, of course, no one but me to look at that afternoon.

But he had packing, leave taking, the completion of a thousand and one little bits of business to attend to. I remember thinking it very complimentary to me, very generous and gentlemanly in him, that he gave me the time and attention he did.

I was with him not less than two hours.

He wrote at the end of our interview, just before I bade him farewell, some five or six prescriptions for me. Two or three of them, I noticed, were very long.

It seemed to me rather unlike what I had supposed was usual; but I had only a general and vague impression on which to base an opinion, being, as I have said, absolutely without experience. And, if anything in his manner had been calculated to annoy and alarm me, the brevity of the directions he gave served to thoroughly reassure.

He spoke in the most general way, saying nothing regarding either exercise or diet. I went home, half doubting the wisdom of admitting my case a serious one—to the extent of taking the medicine he had prescribed.

I had the best night's rest that had been mine since my first sick morning. I awoke refreshed, and rose strong and happy. I said to myself that I guessed I was well again.

Before sitting down to breakfast, I looked over my mail. It was not voluminous that morning. The second letter was from Dr. Clinton. It read as follows:

MY DEAR FRIEND:

By the time you get this I shall be on the Atlantic. I do not intend to return home for two years. Consequently, I write you this evening.

Had you been my patient two years ago—or possibly even one—it may be I should have been spared the necessity of either telling or writing you the message which I feel it my duty to send. Were I to remain in America, where I could see you every day or two, watch every ebb and flow in the tide of the fight of the physical against the insidious advance of the foe whose success is inevitable, I should not tell you the truth for months; indeed, I might never tell you; your own good sense might so far help you as to make that needless.

But, as it is, I have a duty to perform; you have a right. You are a person of culture, education, experience; I beg you to bring to your aid every power that is yours, be it natural or acquired.

You have wealth; you can give yourself all the ease that fate can allow any individual. You have no family; you have no wrong doing of any sort with which to reproach yourself—no moral wrong doing, I mean. You have six months, at least, outside the contingencies of accident that are possibilities to any and all, in which to prepare for a change of worlds; you may have nearly a year.

The time seems short? I know it, my good friend; and God knows how gladly I would write otherwise than as I must. The truth is, *you haven't a year of life left!*

And one may do much—much to reconcile friends—much to help oneself to needed resignation—even in six months. It may not help you greatly to be told that physicians are compelled, sometimes, to pass professional sentences of death with the end of all things set much nearer at hand than is true in your case.

It is true, however, I had, once, to tell a man, who had no suspicion that he was seriously sick, that he would die within twenty four hours. Think how much more merciful circumstances and conditions allow me to be to you than to him.

You may find a comfort in the thought. It may help you to bear your trouble if you will remember that it might be worse—that for others it has been worse.

You will pardon me, I feel sure, for writing very fully. You will forgive me for being, at this time of departure, more a friend than a physician. That being so, may I ask you to remember that all must die?

There may be advantages in going early. The knowledge that enables one to set a limit in time beyond which life cannot extend is not all a disadvantage—not all a matter for horror and regret. You may die tomorrow, in any one of a thousand ways, as may any one now living. To say to any one, at your age, " You will not live more than seventy years more," would be to make a statement so natural and quite to be expected as to leave the hope of its proving false so infinitely small as to be too ridiculous for consideration.

But the horror at the end is the same as the other horror—the horror at the end of the statement I have had to make in your case.

You will naturally wish to know how I am sure of my ground. Well, I am not sure. No physician ever is. No one ever can be. As long as God creates no two human beings exactly alike, so long will there be chances, while life lingers.

I have known one man to recover from a serious wound, when another, hurt in precisely the same way, died in a quarter of an hour. I have known illness to spare when science and sense alike agreed it was impossible.

But you need hug no delusion to your breast; there are cases that are " one in ten thousand," but yours will not be—is not. I am indulging in nothing paradoxical when I say that there is not one chance in ten thousand that it will be.

I examined you thoroughly. I spent two hours in doing it. Why? Simply because my friendship was pleading against my professional skill. My judgment had sentenced you to the grave before you had been with me ten minutes.

Everything is against you—everything. There isn't a single hopeful thing to be said. I know, because I have balanced what *is* with you against what has been in the recorded cases of hundreds of others, all of whom have gone the fearful way that you must.

You wonder how you must act? It makes no difference—none at all. If you enjoy exercise, take it. If you prefer inactivity, enjoy it. Eat and drink when you like, what you like, as much or as little as you like.

Go into society, or remain at home. You cannot hinder the coming of the day of your death. Nor can you hurry it much.

Pain? Some—not much. A feeling of lassitude—lameness. A general giving way of the powers. Then, some day, a sudden faintness, blindness, and cessation of the processes of life; you will go out like a candle in a tempest.

Medicine? I have written more prescriptions than you really need. If the medicines ease you—please you—use them. If the trouble is too great, let them alone. It will make little difference.

And now, having done my duty, as hard for me as it has been for you, there is only one thing left for me to say, farewell! farewell! When we next meet it will be in a world where no death is!

Your sincere friend,

RALPH CLINTON.

I ate no breakfast that morning.

The letter read, I sank back in my chair, and fainted dead away. It was noon before they brought me to myself again.

During the afternoon I lay on my bed.

I thought little. The stunning force

of the blow I had received had numbed my mental powers.

But by the time evening came, I was nervously alert and active. I not only could not sleep, but I could not bear to lie down, and to put out the lights. I must think—think!

It was late, almost midnight, when there came a furious ring at my door-bell. Knowing that the servants must have retired, I answered the summons myself.

I found Arthur Arnold standing there, a young business man with whom I had had some acquaintance, but with whom I had never been intimate. He looked ghostly in the dim light of the hall, and he shivered as though some internal chill was well nigh freezing him.

"Good evening, Mr. French," he said; "may I come in and talk to you for a little time?"

I suddenly felt that conversation with some one was what I needed, especially conversation with some one as wretched as myself—and he looked worse, on the whole, than I felt.

I knew that an interview with him would help lift me out of myself. I gladly begged him to come in. I eagerly hoped he wanted some sort of favor, and that I might have, at least, the mournful pleasure of seeing him go away happy.

"Perhaps you know what I want?" he suggested, hesitatingly.

"I haven't the least idea."

"You haven't heard, then?"

"I have heard nothing."

"I'll tell you the story. I am in financial difficulty. I have obligations which I am unable to meet. Failure now will mean that I lose everything. Could I have the ready money with which to continue in business for a few months, I should not only save the earnings of years, but should reap a profit as well. You see the situation?"

"I see it. You have applied at the banks?"

"I have. But nothing has resulted from it. I have no security to offer—beyond my word, my honor, my good name."

"That should be sufficient."

"Do you mean, Mr. French, can you mean, that you would take such security?"

Before my interview with Ralph Clinton I wouldn't have done so. But now I hesitated. I seemed already withdrawn from the world. Death was so closely crowding me that I seemed suffocated and robbed of room in which to breathe.

I had two millions of property. I hadn't a relative in the world. I had from six to twelve months to live. To see this man go out happy would perhaps pay me for all it would cost. I answered his question by asking another.

"How much do you want?"

"Why, I think five thousand dollars—perhaps four——"

"Suppose we say ten?" I suggested, taking out my check book.

And the man broke down and cried, and mingled the wildest and most incoherent thanks with a flood of happy tears.

"The—the notes—the rate of interest?" he asked.

I laughed, and tried to imagine I did it easily and naturally.

"You—you *may* die," I said, steadily enough, though my voice broke a little, in spite of my efforts, as I continued, "or even I may. Let this matter stand as it is. Pay me when you please."

And I rose and showed the happy man out, finding it hard to get away from the clinging clasp of his grateful hand.

As he went down the steps, and walked rapidly away, while I stood in the doorway watching him, a stooping figure, with a shuffling gait, came lounging along.

He met Mr. Arnold a half dozen paces from the foot of the steps. He gave him a short glance, and seemed about to speak to him.

He hesitated, thought better of his impulsive intention, and came on to the foot of the steps.

He looked up at me, found something in my face that he liked, and came shambling slowly up.

" I am in trouble, sir," he said, " and——"

" Come in, and let me hear about it," I replied.

" I'll not sit down," he said, slowly, " indeed I'll not go into your parlor. It's no place for such as I. But, if you'll be so kind as to listen, I'll——"

" I'm rather tired," I said, " and, if you'll pardon the frankness, your appearance speaks as loud as words could. It's money, I suppose——"

" Of course it's money," he growled. " Did you ever know a case in which the need of money wasn't involved? I tell you, sir——"

" Never mind, never mind," I said, soothingly. " Will you tell me how much money tonight would make you perfectly happy? "

His face worked strangely, and I really feared this fellow was going to weep as Arnold had. And that would have been dreary and disagreeable—much worse than in the case of a gentleman.

" You—you are laughing at me? "

" Not at all."

" And do you mean to say you'd give——"

" I didn't say that. I was asking, not promising. But I wanted to know. I gave the man you met my check for ten thousand——"

" Yes, and took his mortgage," interrupted the tramp.

" No. I took nothing but his word of honor."

" His word of honor! " said the vagabond, meditatively; " his word of honor! I haven't such security to offer —not—not now. But if I had a hundred dollars——"

" You wouldn't be satisfied."

" I would be. I would be. God knows I would be."

I took out my purse. I took out five twenty dollar gold pieces. I put the money into his hands.

I took him by the shoulders, and gently but firmly, put the unresisting fellow out. He was so dazed that he actually forgot to thank me.

I went in happier than I had supposed I ever could be again, and sat down to think. Seriously, the situation demanded an immediate attention to my financial future. I must make a will——

And who should have the money? Who should own in my place when I was dead?

I drew up a little list of bequests easily enough. To Ralph Clinton, " for services that went beyond medical assistance, and became loyal friendship, ten thousand dollars."

To Arthur Arnold, " in memory of the confidence reposed in me by him, ten thousand dollars in cash, together with such sum or sums as he may owe me at the time of my decease."

Small sums to my servants; small sums to several of my friends and acquaintances; and then, to what or to whom should the bulk of my fortune go?

Who should spend the two millions I had hoped would serve me and my pleasures for so long?

I went over a long list, mentally, of the men I knew and liked. I weighed each in my spiritual balance.

I found every one wanting. Among the women—let me see. I went over the names of those who had married into my circle of intimate male friends, or out of the circle of intimate female friends.

Bah! To give the money to any one of them would be little less than to give it to the man whose name she bore. And I wasn't so dead, not yet, as to be quite ready to do that.

Schools, churches, hospitals, museums? I thought not. If I had been worth ten millions, instead of two, I might have thought otherwise; two

millions for the charity—ten to make sure that the lawyers and trustees would see the two honestly expended! That would have been something like.

But, as it was, I thought the charity scheme an unwise one. There were children in the families of some of my friends who would find benefit in such legacies as I might leave. But it might spoil—ruin. I wanted to go to my grave, since go I must, with as little mischief charged to my account as might be.

The children must wait, taking their chances with their parents, or earning their own fortunes in due time. I fearfully and doubtingly counted myself out.

If I selected a single woman——

Well, there was Bertha Barclay. Really, there didn't seem to be any one else.

Bertha Barclay didn't need the money. She had all she could use. Probably not a tenth as much as I had, to be sure; but her simple tastes, her quiet life; her sensible and unostentatious charities, her—her——

And I went to sleep in my chair, and really had a wonderfully good night's rest. I awoke in the morning, a little doubtful as to where reality left off and dream life began; but full of the decision that Miss Bertha Barclay was to be my heiress.

I ate a good breakfast, because I needed the strength it would give. The interview I had in mind would very likely be a trying one.

I relished the breakfast, too; though it didn't seem right and natural that I should. I looked over the mail and the morning paper. Then I went up and made a very early call on Miss Bertha Barclay.

I had never called upon her at so early an hour before—never. Indeed, I don't think I had ever called a dozen times in all.

"Miss Barclay!" I said, somewhat desperately and excitedly, when we were once seated in her parlor, "I have been producing a great deal of hard and serious thought lately. And a large share of it has had you in it. I—I have decided, unless you have objections so serious that I cannot overcome them, that I wish you to succeed to my property when I am dead. And so—and so——"

"Mr. French, Charles," she said, "this is very sudden—very unexpected. But I'm not going to be so dishonest and prudish as to say I've never hoped it; the fact is—I have. So the answer is, yes! Call me Bertha, please—and kiss me!"

Yes, I called her Bertha. I kissed her. I think any man, in my place, would have done the same. Then, as soon as I could, without feeling awkward—and without appearing in an unseemly hurry—I got away, and thought the whole matter over.

I might have only six months left of life; they bade fair to be eventful months, if last night and this morning might be taken as samples of what a fellow was to expect.

I grew better and better, every day. I wondered if love was proving itself a tonic? Or were appearances deceptive? Was I really going rapidly to my death?

I got Miss Barclay—Bertha, I mean—to set the wedding day for the end of a half year's waiting. I am going to be ungallant enough to say that I think it would have pleased her better to have had the waiting shorter.

The vessel in which Dr. Ralph Clinton sailed was lost at sea. For a long time nothing at all was heard of it, and people hoped, because there was no certainty that they shouldn't.

Then wreckage was found, including a lifeboat bottom up; that settled the question beyond doubt or hope. I continued taking the doctor's medicine, though I used to feel unwilling to be "doctored by a dead man."

I became, so it seemed to me, startlingly robust—ridiculously healthy, and finally, the day before my marriage, I

consulted the best doctor I could find—the best one, I really believe, after Ralph Clinton, of course, and next to him, that I have ever known.

He gave me a thorough and searching examination—from head to foot—because I strenuously insisted upon it, and wouldn't let him off with less, though he laughed at me and my anxiety from the very beginning. *Nothing ailed me, nothing whatever.*

I married Bertha Barclay. She was the best woman I ever knew, and made the sweetest and noblest wife that ever blessed a man.

I married her. That was forty years ago. A month since—when supper was announced, I went out to the piazza, where she sat, to call her, and God's holy angel of death had been before me.

She sat smiling, facing the east, with her work done—her rest begun. In a little time, possibly within the space of a year or its half, I shall go, too, and meet her, and be with her forever. Sentence of death, to that extent now, would be a source of joy, rather than a horror.

But the time is likely to be longer delayed than that; I am so vigorous that it will take a long time to wear me out.

It is a great many years since I received Arthur Arnold's check for the ten thousand dollars I lent him, and for the interest on it. It is a great many years since I had an express package from an unknown individual, with a sum that was a liberal advance on a hundred dollars.

But it is only today that I have received two letters, one signed with Arthur Arnold's name, and the other unsigned, extracts from which I wish to use.

Both letters begin by speaking thanks to me. Both express sympathy for me in my bereavement. Both express a wish that the rest of my life may be pleasant and peaceful.

"You did more for me than you knew," says Arnold in his letter; "more than I have ever admitted to any human being. I had been everywhere else; I had tried in every reasonable way; there was no more likelihood of your granting my request, so I said to myself, than there was of your coming to your door and calling me in to receive your charity unasked.

"It was little more than an accident that I called at your house at all. I was simply passing, on my way to the river. It was my last chance—my last hope. You saved me from suicide."

Exactly. And only the fact that I supposed my days were numbered caused me to give his astounding proposition a minute's consideration.

"I was out of work, out of luck, out of money," writes the other man, "and my wife was dying, half way across the continent from me; I was as fully determined to have one hundred dollars, or more, before morning, as any man was ever determined on anything in this world; I was well armed; indeed, a good revolver was about the only article of value I had left.

"I had decided to attack the next well dressed man I met; and, as I couldn't afford to run the chances of escape, alarm, arrest, and identification, I had resolved to give my victim no chance for telling tales. I am a wealthy man, respected, honored, and happy. Tramp though I was, I never committed a crime. No deed done by me ever gives me an uneasy thought—ever costs me an hour's sleep.

"But my intentions, my purposes, oh, my God! how sincerely I have repented them; how truly I have given thanks for the providential guidance that led my steps to your door. An hour later, but for you, I should have been a murderer!"

Precisely. And he wouldn't have had a second glance from me if I had supposed I had the same fair chances of life that were possessed by other men.

I married Bertha Barclay—or shall I say she married me? I never told her

the truth regarding my intentions that morning—never. I loved her altogether too well long before I got well enough acquainted to venture the discussion of so difficult and dangerous a topic.

But only the fact that a dying millionaire had to do something with his money ever led me to her side. Fortunate, fortunate man! And I have half a dozen sons to inherit what I shall leave soon.

I went to a physician today—to the man I consulted the day before my wedding. I had a very serious question to ask him.

"Suppose a person stricken with such a disease as you usually call fatal," said I, "and thoroughly deceived as to its nature. Might hope and imagination cure?"

"It is not impossible, perhaps," he said, slowly, "though unless the mode of life changed greatly—with the interests and affections turned into new channels—nothing could be more unlikely. A turning aside of the whole life. But, no, I will not say that. If ever true, the chances would be only one in millions.

"It is true, sometimes, that the swiftest diseases move tardily through some systems; I suspect that is true in those cases especially in which the patients have little or no suspicion of the truth. A disease that ordinarily kills in one year, for instance, has been said to have taken a half century in doing its dread work.

"But, Mr. French, we are getting far from the solid and stable ground of well established facts; it is unwise to wander through the dangerous lowlands of theory and obscure diagnosis. And why do you inquire? You know that nothing serious ever ailed you!"

"Yes, I know that. And I know several other things. And there are several things I don't know that I'd like to."

I know, for instance, that I found this letter, yellow with age, among my dead wife's papers, only today. I know it was dated the day that Ralph Clinton started for the vacation that will never know an end:

MY DEAR FRIEND:

I've prescribed some medicines, because there are some little irregularities in your system that need medicine. Nature would attend to the affair in time; medicine will help hurry the matter.

I've thought, however, that the careful and exhaustive examination I've given you may have caused you some needless alarm. If so, allow me to disabuse you of all your fears at once. You are not sick; you are not going to be. The symptoms manifested in your case, the aches and pains you have felt, would have been disregarded by any one who had been used to less than the superb health that has always been yours.

Practically, nothing ails you—nothing whatever.

Sincerely yours,

RALPH CLINTON.

I think I know that letter was written to me. I think I know that the one I got was written to Bertha Barclay. And that is why I went and questioned the doctor today.

And the reason why I don't tell him all I might—preparatory to pressing the question home again—is the feeling that he would speak even more guardedly than he does now.

I'd like to know what would have become of Bertha Barclay, of me, of a gentleman named Arthur Arnold, and of a tramp, to whom you may assign any name you think fitting, if the doctor hadn't put those letters in wrong envelopes?

I'd like to know what would have happened to me, and to Bertha Barclay, if Ralph Clinton had lived, and written to either of us?

I'd like to know what I'd do with all my money, one of these days that's coming soon, if men, married women, the children of my friends, schools, churches, museums, and hospitals, were all counted out—the sweetest young woman that ever lived, married, grown old, gone to her grave—yes, I'd like to know what I could do—*if I hadn't six sons?*

THE SUCCESS OF "FIORNELLA."

BY JOSEPH PERCIVAL POLLARD.

The reward for years of toil; how it was brought about, the joy it imparted to a dying man, and the price paid for it by the living.

I.

"OH, is it you, Arnold? Come in. This is such a happy day for me! Think: the play is finished!"

"But you, Roland, how is it with you? Is it one of your good days? But why do I ask? You are looking as if you had never known what illness was. Your cheek is red, your eyes sparkle. What has wrought this transformation? Finishing this play of yours? Oh, to feel an ecstasy like that!"

It was a small room in a quiet part of the town. There were flower pots in the windows, and the odor of the blossoms mingled faintly with the vague heaviness of a sick room atmosphere.

The furniture was neat; there were adornments of the sort that told of a feminine hand.

The sun sent a struggling ray through the white curtains, lighting up the face that looked out from the depths of the pillows. It was a boyish face, with a strangely beautiful mouth and curling lashes veiling the eyes that were now so lit with ecstasy.

Roland Stamford had lain upon that sick bed for nine months full of pain and hopelessness, yet now much of that anguish was forgotten, swallowed up in this beautiful joy, this complete, sense dazing, satisfying thrill.

He had just completed his lifework! Think of it! It was what he had dreamed of in the far, sweet days of his perfect health; it was for that he had kept alive so long; the one thing he had worked at, waking and dreaming, in pain and in weakness.

And now, the work was done, the last touches—often so dangerous, but here only of a perfect truth, because of the exquisite tension of all the young author's faculties—had been added; the play was written.

Was it any wonder that there was a scarlet spot on either of the thin, white cheeks, and a strangely radiant luster in his eyes? For there is nothing in all the world so exquisite as the joy of the author when he first lets the pen drop, and sighs the satisfied words: "It is finished."

It is like the thrill that courses through the tortured body of the mother as she feels her first born placed softly in the hollow of her arm. Success or failure attend the work as they may, there will never again be that divine exaltation, that echo of "He saw that it was good."

It is not given to all to know this ecstasy. And sometimes it is a very pathetic thing.

As for the visitor, Arnold Dilston, he was as unlike Roland as possible. He was in evident good health; prosperity shone from him everywhere; his good looks were marred by nothing of care or disease.

His step was light, his voice cheery. He brought an aroma of youth and vigor into the dull atmosphere of this drooping life. When one is twenty five, and has perfect health, a patrimony of twenty thousand dollars, with only oneself to care for in the world—

Arnold had taken a chair by the bed. He was watching the queer tricks of the sunlight across the white counterpane.

A light breeze was coming in at the window, swaying the curtains gently.

"And now," he said, "now that your play is finished, you will—will you not, tell us something of it?"

"Oh, yes. I would not speak before, you see, because I might never have completed it, and then what use would the hope have been! But now that it is done!"

He said this last as if the words were very sweet to him.

"What is it, then, this child of yours? A comedy, a new 'School for Scandal?' a——"

"No, no, Arnold, this is a tragedy! And such a cue! Oh, it is really beautiful. You cannot fancy; you must read it; surely you will read it?"

"Of course, Roland. But—a tragedy! Today—at the very end, in the declining years of the nineteenth century! It is quite hopeless. If it had only been comedy. They are all gone, you know, the people who look to the theater for poetry, for inspiring words and mental profit. We go only to be amused. Why have you forgotten this?"

"I do not seem to have thought of anything like that at all. I knew only one thing: this glorious thing was in me, and I had to deliver it to the world. And now what is the next thing? It must go to a manager and be read, I suppose——"

"Or not read."

Arnold only whispered this in his thoughts. His lips said:

"Yes; the managerial eye must scan these lines, and then—well, I hope for the best. What is the best? Why, acceptance, and the announcement of the play's being put in rehearsal for early performance. And then; the test of publicity. Success. Wealth. But—it is a tragedy."

"Why do you say that so sadly? If you knew the stuff this tragedy is made of——! Besides—there is Jermayne."

"Yes, there is Jermayne. Have you written a part for her?"

"Not a part merely; it is the whole play. She is to be the Prince of Denmark in this 'Hamlet!' Oh, my beautiful sister; how gloriously, how sweetly you will play this rôle! It will bring you fame! Oh, Jermayne has read the play. She loves her part already; she realizes it."

"But her contract with Manager Weekman? She is so successful there, and now; it would be a pity to spoil that."

"Spoil! Arnold, you are but a poor comforter. No, no; there will be nothing spoilt. Her present contract expires soon; then—ah, yes, then—she shall play *Fiornella.*

"It is true that she has a delightful position in Weekman's company; and yet—there is but little fortune for her. Whereas—as *Fiornella!* Oh think! There will be nothing sweeter in all the world than Jermayne as *Fiornella!* If I can only live until that day!"

He closed his eyes in a transport of imagery. Then he went on:

"And you, Arnold, will you take this precious child of mine, this 'Fiornella,' and put it before the managerial eye? You know some of those people, do you not? You will do this for me?"

"Yes," said Arnold, as he took the neatly wrapped sheets of manuscript, and got up, pushing his chair back gently, "I will do my best, my very best. I hope for the pleasantest of things.

"Besides—there is Jermayne——" His eyes grew very tender.

II.

"And so they have all refused it?"

It was Jermayne speaking; Jermayne, the beloved sister of "Fiornella's" author.

She looked at Arnold wistfully, hoping he might acknowledge that there was still some one untried, some channel open.

Arnold nodded, with pain in his eyes. "All, all. There is no one else, absolutely no one."

"Oh, it will kill him! It will kill him! My poor brother, poor Roland!" Her eyes grew dim and she looked into space. "Is there no way at all, no other way?"

"Yes, there is another way. And Roland shall live, if it depend on 'Fiornella.' You see, if the expenses are all guaranteed—almost any manager will take the piece. He risks nothing. The backer risks all that. Well—I will back it. I have twenty thousand dollars. That will put the piece on the boards. After that—who knows? It may be a great epoch making triumph.

"I may," he spoke as if he really believed it, "make a fortune. And you a splendid fame. And Roland—why, the mere joy of it will be enough for him."

"Oh, but you must not do this. Think, all your fortune cast upon one die. If the piece fails——"

"I am a beggar," Arnold smiled, as if that prospect were sweetly pleasant. "No, no, it is a very commonplace matter. It is just as if I were buying railroad stocks. I may win, or I may not. No one knows. Tomorrow I might have speculated it all away on Wall Street. Instead, I shall stage 'Fiornella.'"

He spoke, this splendid young liar, as if he had always had the Wall Street fever in his bones. Whereas, he had never—— But what will a young man not do for a girl like Jermayne.

"Yes," he went on eagerly, "Roland shall get well from very joy. You shall play *Fiornella*, and 'Fiornella' shall succeed. I stake my word upon its success.

"Now, go and tell Roland that Weekman has decided to put 'Fiornella' in rehearsal, and that he agrees to the stipulation about your playing the title rôle. It is a lie that the angels will most certainly forgive you. Good by, *Fiornella mia!*"

Jermayne's eyes grew very dim. "Oh," she said, chokingly, "how shall we ever——"

But Arnold kissed her fingers lightly and left her.

III.

The curtain went down upon the closing scene of "Fiornella," but the tumult of applause would not die out. It never lulled at all, until Jermayne, flushed still from her great finale, appeared and bowed, looking like a sweet and gracious queen.

And then the storm broke out anew, and there were cries, mingling finally into one compact call of "Author, author!"

Has there ever been a more touching scene, I wonder, than that of Roland Stamford, lying at full length in an invalid's chair, being wheeled to the center of the stage by that beautiful *Fiornella?* The crimson on his cheeks was very sharply defined against his whiteness, and he looked beautiful—beautiful as Death.

He spoke at last, and the silence out in front was almost an agony.

"You are very kind," he said; "I thank you. This—is what I have lived for."

Then his head sank down, and faintness came upon him.

"Fiornella" was a success! A magnificent triumph! Who, with that thunderous applause still ringing in his ears, could doubt it?

And yet, as each auditor went away, he looked at the other, guiltily, and as if he were ashamed.

As for Roland, when he was safe in his home again, he held quite a reception about his little bed. There were many great men there, men whose names we read of in the personal columns of the dailies.

And, of course, Weekman was there, and Arnold, and Jermayne. Roland looked, oh, so happy! He talked brightly, brilliantly; the young genius was at his best.

The others listened and laughed and made the boy forget his sickness and everything but success. Only, from

time to time, they exchanged furtive glances. And when they went away, each, as he shook hands with Roland, and then with Arnold, looked as if he had done something unworthy.

"Oh," said Roland, when he was alone with Jermayne and Arnold, "this is beautiful! Life, how glorious you are! Oh, you doubters! Did I not tell you of this, long ago? And see—it has come to pass!"

He turned, smiling, to his pillows, and passed into slumber.

The doubters looked at each other, and the laugh died away from their faces.

IV.

It was ten days after the night of "Fiornella's" success. In Roland's little room it was quite still.

Outside, the sun was going down in salmon hued splendor. In the outer room were Arnold and Jermayne, and sadness was upon both their faces.

The door of Roland's room opened gently, and the doctor issued.

"Well?" said Jermayne.

"Can he live?" asked Arnold.

"He cannot live two hours."

The doctor spoke softly, fearing to wound.

"I have done my best," he went on, "but he is ebbing away. There is nothing to be done."

He passed out, leaving Jermayne and Arnold to their sadness.

And so it had all availed nothing! Every day the reports from the theater had been brought to the invalid's couch, the criticisms had been read to him, the short paragraphs shown him. The doctor had told them that the only hope was in keeping him cheerful and happy.

Well, they had done that, at all cost, and now——

Arnold thought a little bitterly of the uselessness of it all. What a magnificent effort it had been! How well the mockery had been kept up! Only to keep Roland in happy content with success, that had been the end of all; that had succeeded, but——

"As literature," Arnold was reflecting, "'Fiornella' was beautiful, majestic. As a drama, it was impossible, because of its very beauty and strength. We can't stand genius on the stage; we are grown domestic, even in art, and we worship the commonplace. 'Fiornella' was anything but commonplace, and therefore predestined to fail.

"But there are ways and means known to the wily men of the 'profession' by which a failure may appear, for a little while, to be a success. The magic wand is composed of bank notes. Judicious 'paper,' a clever press agent, and a potent wand: these will keep any play afloat for a while. It is so easy to get a 'house' on a first night! And newspaper columns may be bought at no unattainable figures. Critics are amenable to good wine. But—it certainly takes money. It—has—taken money."

Still musing in bitterness, Arnold went into the next room. Jermayne was there before him, at Roland's side.

Roland was already growing unconscious. How beautiful he looked! Heaven could hardly have much greater joy for him than the ecstasy that set upon his face transfigured. His eyes wandered about the room. They rested finally upon Jermayne and Arnold.

"Ah," he murmured, "you must bid me good by, you two, I am going—away. But I am quite happy to go, now that 'Fiornella' is making a name for me. Oh, the sweetness of that success! Yes, I think, up above I shall have a theater and they shall always play 'Fiornella.' Though, of course, we must wait until you come, Jermayne. And I hope that will be a long way off. I can wait a very long time for you. Well, I must say good by. I hear the call boy.

"It will soon be my—cue, and I will have to—go on—up above. Give me your hands—both of you. So."

He laid Jermayne's right within Ar-

nold's right, and smiled up at them both. "It is so, is it not? I have always wanted that, also, and I have got it. How good God is! I have everything—everything to make me the most happy creature. And now—will you—both—kiss me?"

They stooped down and touched their lips lightly to his. Then, in another instant, a slight trembling came over Roland's form, a faint sigh came from between his lips, and—it was the end.

But there remained upon his face such a smile, such a look of perfect peace and happiness, as made you feel that death was very gentle with him and loved him, as all had always done.

All the bitterness had gone from Arnold.

"To have seen that perfect happiness," he said, half to himself, half to Jermayne, "was, indeed, worth twice as much."

Jermayne looked up through her tears.

"Is it all—gone?" she asked, very softly, as if the dead might yet hear.

"Every penny of it."

He spoke cheerfully, as if he were glad that he were rid of that paltry wealth.

"And you are a beggar?"

"H'm—yes. But——"

"Well?"

"I have you."

He drew her to him and kissed her tear wet eyes. "Besides," he went on, proudly, "we are both young. We have Youth and Love, and Happiness is with us." His eyes rested upon Roland's smile.

OUR PECULIAR PREDICAMENT.

BY MATTHEW WHITE, JR.

A story of loss which was sufficiently trying, but which was as nothing compared to a gain precipitating an awkward condition of affairs, the end of which is not yet in sight.

HERO was the noblest specimen of doghood I had ever seen. He had been presented to my wife as one of her wedding presents by a cousin of hers, and perhaps it was for this reason that we both thought more of this St. Bernard, singular gift though it was, than of many of the handsomest pieces of silver with which our friends had remembered us.

One thing only worried us—the dog persisted in growing at such an alarming rate.

Already he was higher than the railing on the piazza, and, as Gertrude always made a pet of him and enjoyed having him in the parlor, I began to look forward with some apprehension to the time when she would be obliged to choose between him and myself, for our cottage was a very tiny one.

But all my fears in this respect were utterly forgotten when Betty, our maid, rushed up to our room one morning before breakfast and announced that Hero couldn't be found.

I felt in that moment that I wouldn't care if he grew to the size of an elephant, if only we had him safe.

I cautioned Betty not to tell my wife the news yet, then hurriedly finished my toilet and went out to the kennel to investigate matters myself.

It was too true. The chain was broken, looking as if it had been cut by some sharp instrument, and the kennel was empty. Our noble dog had undoubtedly been stolen.

Well, there was a dreadful time when Gertrude found it out, as find it out she had to before breakfast, as Hero was always considered as much a part of that meal as the coffee.

She insisted on going out to the

kennel, and wept and wrung her hands when she beheld its emptiness and the severed chain.

"Oh, Dick," she wailed, "it's almost as bad as losing my wedding ring. Think, he was one of my presents! I'm sure something worse is going to happen."

Something else did happen. Gertrude insisted that I should stay away from business and scour the surrounding country in a search for Hero, which I did; and, although I did not find the dog, I did find the next day that I had missed the opportunity of selling a piece of property to old Richfellow, who dropped in, which would have netted me a commission out of which I could have purchased five hundred Heroes.

A week went by, and no tidings of the missing member of our family. I wrote a notice and had it pasted up in the post office, announcing that a handsome reward would be paid for the return of "below described dog."

I wanted to add "and no questions asked," but Gertrude declared that if the thieves got the reward they ought to be willing to bear the punishment, and no amount of argument on my part could convince her of the fallacy of her reasoning.

The same notice was inserted in the country paper on Saturday, and anxiously we awaited the result.

But it seemed as if there wasn't going to be any; then, just as I thought I would attempt to reopen the argument with Gertrude on the "no questions asked" matter, Betty dashed into the diningroom one night with the breathless announcement:

"Oh, missus, Hero's come back, and the boy says he wants the money."

We had a guest to dinner, but, without waiting to apologize, my wife and I made a rush for the rear regions.

There, at the back door, stood one of those sallow faced, grave looking country boys who are a constant refutation of the time worn assertion that town bred lads have no chance for health with their cousins in the rural districts.

"Hero!" cried Gertrude, and, regardless of the passementerie trimming on her skirt, she sank down upon her knees on the doorstep and threw her arms around the dog's neck.

He seemed no less delighted, and licked her face till I interfered, and suggested that she had better ask the questions she had reserved to herself the privilege of putting.

But as the boy's response to each and every one was "Dunno," she obtained but little satisfaction. The only other thing he would say was "Gimme de reward!" and, suddenly recollecting our deserted guest, I handed him a five dollar bill, and was glad to get rid of him at the price.

Of course Hero was conducted in state back into the diningroom, and the rest of the evening was devoted to dog talk. But it was so gratifying to see Gertrude her old gay self that I thought I could stand any reflections Gadsér might make on our qualities as hosts.

The next morning I went to town in a more cheerful frame of mind than I had enjoyed for the past ten days. Hero back, the home life would flow on in the quiet, blissful grooves of yore.

Imagine, then, my horrified amazement on walking up the path to the cottage that evening at beholding Gertrude leave the porch in undisguised excitement as soon as she beheld me.

"Dick, Dick," she cried, "a terrible thing has happened!"

"What, has Hero gone again?" I asked.

"No, come," she half sobbed, catching me by the coat sleeve and hurrying me on still faster to the cottage.

She piloted me around to the back door, and here, sleeping peacefully side by side, I beheld two Heroes!

"What does this mean?" I gasped, as much astounded at the spectacle as

my wife expected me to be. "Where did this other one come from, and—which is *our* Hero?"

"That is the awful part of it," sobbed Gertrude. "We don't know. They both answer to the name, and neither had a collar on. This one—the last one—came bounding into the yard this morning soon after you went away."

"Then, if he found his way back by himself, he must be our Hero," I replied. "Which one is it?" and I advanced and surveyed the sleeping animals critically.

"I—I—we don't know," responded Gertrude again. "The other one came out just then, and we got them mixed, and neither Betty nor I can tell the difference. Oh, Dick, can't you help us?"

I tried my best. I roused up the dogs and examined them closely, but could arrive at no definite conclusion. As fast as I decided that one was our Hero, some mark or act on the part of the other would cause me to alter my mind.

It was truly a terrible predicament. Here we were with two great dogs on our hands, either one of which was almost more than we could afford to keep, and yet we were afraid to give either of them away for fear it would be the wrong—no, the right one.

I wrote another notice, asking if any one had lost a St. Bernard dog, and describing the animal in the same way as I had done in the first instance. And my friends read it very studiously, and looked at me queerly, and nothing came of it.

The two Heroes are still on our hands, and each night Gertrude meets me with the announcement that she has solved the vexed question, but as often is utterly unable to tell which dog she has settled upon as being really ours. Meanwhile they are both growing, and the future looks ominous.

A CHANCE DISCOVERY.

BY LEONORA BECK.

The story of a blighted life and of endurance too far tried. A pleading for kindness that fell on unheeding ears, and a kiss that brought death in its train.

YES; I killed him. I killed him because I hated him. Could there be another reason so perfect?

I am sure that I hated him always, even from that first day—ten years ago—when Uncle Perry said: "Dearest, will you to take to heart what I have told you this afternoon? Can you not, for love of me, put aside any girlish, wayward fancy you have had, and fulfill this dream of my old age—mine and Mary's? Ah! the carriage must have already come."

For Jerome Ravenel was entering, and in a moment more, he had kissed Aunt Mary, and greeted Uncle, and turning, clasped both my hands.

"And this, I suppose, is my fair cousin, Damaris?" he said, in his rich, slow tones.

But I was not his cousin. Not one drop of his blood flowed through my veins, thank heaven.

He was Aunt Mary's nephew; only son of her only brother—the last to bear the family name. He had been a student in a foreign country during the seven years that I had been Uncle Perry's ward; and I had never heard, until that day, one word of the plan those tender old hearts had cherished all that long time—to unite us two, who were most dear to them, and thus to revive the dead grandeur of Stoneleigh Court with the Ravenel thousands.

I had been home from school many months now, and so much had been crowded into the short space. If they had only confided their longing dream to me last summer, instead of this April, all might have been well.

For my nature was pliant, my affections ready and quick, and my love for this second father and mother an exceedingly great love.

But, beside this love, there towered now another, of rapid growth, yet of immortal life and force. Lucien Ellison's poet eyes had asked for my heart, and I, unknowing any other claim, had gladly given it.

Even at Christmastide the whole world had blossomed for me like a great June rose. And now, beneath April skies, the blush hue had but deepened. The happiness of my life was concentrated into those months.

But have you thought what must have been my emotions when Jerome Ravenel came and I knew they had destined me for him?

I could not tell Uncle Perry that my heart belonged already to another—who had not asked me to marry him. I could say nothing, do nothing, except wait and pray that Lucien would speak and Jerome would not.

The anxieties of that time, the exhilarations and depressions, the eagerness, the longing, the happiness and the anguish, they quicken and thicken my blood today.

It is strange beyond all wonderment that I did not know then how greatly I hated Jerome. But I did not. It even seemed to myself sometimes that I liked his beauty, his caressing voice, his pursuing eyes, and haunting watchfulness.

Lucien was often there, looking his whole soul into mine, and still speaking not. Yet how could I be disturbed or unhappy long, when my every heart beat in his presence was full and vivid with the bliss of living and loving at the throbbing flood tide of youth and emotion?

There was never another soul so beautiful as Lucien's—never.

His face was not called handsome. He had not, indeed, the exquisite regularity of feature nor the glowing color of Jerome.

But to me, the childlike rings of blond hair around his pallid brow, the sensitive mouth, and eloquent hazel eyes, wore a beauty almost divine.

Ah, my poet, my prince, my perfect lover!

I can think calmly about you today, my singer of noble songs. It does not madden me as it has done for so many years.

It was radiant midsummer when Jerome and Aunt Mary went away to spend a fortnight with their relatives near Baltimore. Blessed for me and cursed for me were those two golden weeks; blessed, in that Eden held no fairer happiness; cursed, in that they bore me a destiny as black and relentless as the serpent wrought for Eve.

One of those days stands out from the rest of my life as clean cut as a Greek god's features.

There were fourteen glorious hours of sunshine in it, and each hour of them was a brimming goblet of bliss that I drained.

I rose early for a sunrise ride with my lover. The ineffable suggestions of untouched freshness in the cool skies, the dewy fields, and song stirred woods; the exhilarating sense of rapid movement on my magnificent Haloran; the conviction that came without words from him, that Lucien would be forever by my side as now, and all life like this ride; these made each breath I drew a deep joy.

When we returned for breakfast we found my uncle absent for the day. Lucien stayed to read me his beloved masters, Dante and Petrarch.

Good, deaf Aunt Hannah seemed to enjoy her tatting with us as well as if she understood every majestic line.

In the afternoon we went on the lake to enjoy a sunset as splendid as any I

have since looked on in Italy, and an afterglow as tenderly radiant as one of Titian's canvases. We were silent, almost breathless, for one enchanted hour. Then the day was dead.

As we passed up the avenue in the last lingering light, we paused unconsciously by the old Irish yew. Looking up through the shadows into my poet's eyes, I found him looking down into mine.

"Damaris, my darling, my own," he murmured, stretching out his arms to me.

Minutes afterward I started away from Lucien's clinging lips, for a step sounded near by. It was Jerome Ravenel.

"Damaris," he said, taking my unwilling hand, and ignoring the presence of my lover, "will you come in with me? We returned an hour ago, and Aunt Mary has at last grown anxious, and sent me to find you."

As Lucien declined to come into the house, but asked permission—which I gave—to call next day, I ran swiftly in to Aunt Mary, leaving her nephew to follow alone.

He entered with a moody brow, which did not clear during the evening. At last, an hour or two after tea, my uncle said: "There, lady bird, your pretty tongue is so uncontrollable that I can scarcely say one word to my sweetheart Mary. Go in and sing your tenderest love song to our tired boy. You shall have Mary all day tomorrow."

I had struck the opening chords of a silvery "Gondollied" when Jerome interrupted:

"Let me talk to you tonight, please. I love your singing, but I cannot sleep until I have told you what you should know about the man in whose arms I found you this evening."

I started up stormily.

"Not one word, sir, against the man I shall marry."

"No, Damaris," he went on, with his rose leafy voice, every note of which I loathed before he had finished, "you will not marry Lucien Ellison. Don't go yet; you must hear me out. I need not say first that it pains me as much to reveal your lover's falseness as it can pain you to know. Listen."

I will not dwell upon the story. He merely told me, in as few words as possible, how his cousin, Annette Campion, had confided to him the week before the secret of her betrothal to a man her father opposed.

His name, she told him, was Lucien Ellison; he was poor and devoted to his art; she did not care for poverty; she intended to gain her father's consent, if possible; if not, she would marry her lover despite the world.

To all this I listened in scornful silence, secure in my faith and convinced that Annette's betrothed and mine were different men. But at last Jerome put in my hands a miniature, which he had secured from her on some pretext.

Calmly I opened the case, and then fell into fierce trembling. For it contained the portrait of a youth of perhaps twenty—beyond a doubt Lucien's own boyish face. There were the same babyish rings of hair clustering upon the broad brow, the same big, appealing eyes and thin lipped, delicate mouth, only less sensitive here, unshadowed by a mustache.

I looked no longer; it was death to me. But with a disdainful gesture I dropped into his hand the locket that had rested over the girl's heart, and, escaping from him, I walked unsteadily from the room.

Do not ask me—I cannot tell you—how I lived through the succeeding weeks. Nature will not let us slip out of trouble merely for lack of strength to bear it.

When Lucien had called many times without seeing me, and had sent me a dozen imploring notes, I finally wrote him this:

Mr. Ellison:

Come no more; write no more. Put the diameter of the globe between us as long

as we both shall occupy it. I could have lived without happiness; but how am I to live without faith in human kind?

DAMARIS STONELEIGH.

And he obeyed.

I married Jerome Ravenel before I could think or feel. My uncle and aunt joined him in pleading that the mockery should take place on my birthday, the murkiest, dreariest, most comfortless January day that the world has seen since Noah's dove brought back the brave little green sprig.

I scarcely opposed it. I minded not a breath what they did with my life.

The evening before Jerome and I were left alone in the library. He took my hand, and for the first time in months I felt stirred to some feeling—that of repugnance.

" My darling," he said, disappointedly, as I drew back, " I had hoped you would listen to me kindly tonight. Tomorrow, sweet, we will clasp hands for life, remember."

I must have shuddered.

" Don't, Damaris, I pray you; I will make you happy, not at once, perhaps, but soon. Love great as mine can never fail. I will win you, heart and soul; I am strong in that faith; I will win you to happiness and love, and myself to blessedness. But before you are my wife—my wife," he repeated, in those deep tones rich to sensuousness, " before you are my dear, dear wife, I want you to look with sorrowful pity upon the one black page of my past, and then, against all future opening, seal it with your precious forgiveness."

But I rose weariedly.

" I care nothing about your past, Jerome; I am tired; I can't listen tonight; I have heard that all young men have their follies. Consider yours forgiven! No," as with eyes misty with entreaty, he would have spoken; " I will not hear it. Good night."

We were married. That first week of my married life stays with me yet, a memory of ineffable, unforgetable loathing.

Seven days from the somber morning on which I walked down the church aisle beneath a bridal veil, I chanced upon a Baltimore paper, and casually read:

Married last evening, Annette, second daughter of Judge Lewis Campion, to Charles Lucien Ellison, the gifted young painter.

The rest of the column swam before my eyes, but I think I got through it before I swooned. When I revived —ah! heart's agony, do you not understand?

My lover was true as heaven. This was his cousin, Charles, much younger than himself, and strikingly like what he himself had been in earliest youth—the family had always declared—but for a deeper tinting. I had not known that he had Lucien's name.

Mad woman that I was when I heard those terrible words of Jerome, to think that there could be but one Lucien Ellison in Philadelphia, and that there was no art but poetry for a man to give his life to!

After that I knew nothing for many weeks.

When my long fever was over, and I could creep out into the May sunshine, I called Jerome to me, and asked him to go away forever.

" I will not be your wife," I cried. " I hate you. I cannot bear the sight of your face nor the sound of your voice. You have made such a ruin of my life as was never seen on earth before. Go, and never come near me again. Even in eternity your spirit must not approach mine."

" Damaris, my love," he moaned, " you break my heart. Don't do this. I cannot leave you; you must not ask it. I would not, for a heaven of bliss, have brought this trouble on you. But think how heavily it has fallen on my life also, and crushed and maimed it, with yours.

" Yet are the ruins past all redemption? Can we not save something?

Be still, dear, and see what my great love can do in the coming years. Besides, we owe much to others; we must not drag those who love us into the wreck with ourselves. Consider what a blow this separation of ours would be to Uncle and Aunt Mary."

He was right in that last. I would do much to save those two devoted old hearts.

"But you must never touch me," I cried. "You must never come into my presence but when convention demands it. I hate your sereneness of beauty and fullness of life and melody of voice; and above all, I hate your love."

"I shall never kiss your lips, Damaris, until you say that I may. I shall do nothing repugnant to you. I shall not burden you with my presence; but I will still hope to win a little affection from you some blest day. And, dearest, during my years of suffering and striving, you will sometimes let me—will you not?—touch my starving lips to your hand or your hair?"

He said this so sorrowfully and tenderly that it made me angrier yet. What right had he to be either sorrowful or tender, or even to love me?

What right had he to stoop suddenly over my open palm, and, before I could withdraw it, brush it with his blooming, bearded mouth. What right, indeed, when my own true lover was then wandering painfully across Australian steppes—the mad desert heats beating unrelentingly upon his brow, parching his lips, fevering his veins, and drinking up his life springs!

The heavy hearted years passed away with sad tardiness. I think I struggled that it should not be, and yet each dead year left me with a bitterer, more intolerant sense of repulsion to the man whose name I bore.

I am sure it would not have been so bad if he had loved me less, or hated me; if he had never let me catch the notes of pleading in his tones, nor the rare glimmer of hope in his eyes; if he had never pressed his lips to my hair, with light, entreating touch.

What a perilous, unreasoning, daring love his was! Once or twice I tried to make him feel this, but he would not. He was so infatuated with his very love that I could not make him fear my hate.

I had been called his wife five years when Aunt Mary and Uncle Perry died, within a month of each other. Faithful lovers to the end, they could not let the curtain that separates the two worlds divide them long.

Each spirit yearned to the other so intensely that the lonely old man quickly passed to the other side, following the heart of his life. Fondly as I loved him, I could but be glad.

We went abroad then—Jerome and I. He did not care to go, but, as always, yielded to my desires.

After a year of looking on Ireland's sorrowing beauty and England's proud prosperity, followed by six months of wearying travel on the continent, and another half year of yet more wearying Parisian splendors, I announced my intention of spending an indefinite time in Italy.

Not in Rome, Naples, nor Venice—I had never loved cities, and now I was tired of them, even to loathing—but I would pass perhaps a year in soft aired, soft voiced Tuscany, and beautiful, austere Umbria; lingering as I liked in the fair Signa country and once blessed Vallambrosa; making pilgrimages, as I chose, to del Sarto's Fiesole, to Vannucci's Perugia, to Montefalco's frescoes or Spello's antiquities, Assisi's holy church, historical Foligno, Spoleto, Cortona—it might be even farther, past Chiusi's Etruscan tombs and age worn Gubbio and on to Fano—happy Fanum Fortunae.

Some such vague outline of intended wandering I gave to Jerome, as we sat, one summer morning, in the scarlet and amber salon that I was so weary of, along with all the rest of Paris.

"You will scarcely like it, Damaris,

as you anticipate. I wish you would choose the Rhenish provinces instead. Years ago I spent some months in Tuscany and Umbria, and I have not thought of it with pleasure since."

He said this slowly and with an unaccustomed sadness in his voice.

Toinine, entering at this moment, presented a card, and with a rush of gladness I read:

MAURICE BRENNAN,
New York.

He was my mother's youngest brother—a kinsman whom I had loved always next to Uncle Perry. He was but few years older than myself, and had married a beautiful schoolmate of mine, the saint of my girlhood's adoration.

She was much broken in health now, and her physicians having recommended a year of Southern Europe, they were on their way to Florence.

Very quickly my plans were perfected; I would have some months of peace—freedom from the companionship that oppressed me, and which kept stirred to lambent flame all the evil of my nature.

"Jerome," I said next day, "I wish you would visit your university and your friends in Germany and Hungary for a few months, while I idle in Italy with Maud and Maurice."

"Will you exile me more than already, dear? Think, Damaris, if you do not make me suffer out of all proportion to my sin," he said, with a quick comprehension of the purpose of this arrangement.

"It will be better so," I replied. "You prefer the Rhine, I the Arno. Besides, one should not have the same traveling companion forever. I will write you when I tire of white teethed, fine eyed *contadini* and nightingale thronged groves of acacia and ilex, of Santa Chiara, San Giuseppe, and the endless host of others. I will write you, and we can then plan our next movements."

Up and down the salle à manger he walked with a clouded face, while I waited impatiently, yet knowing that his answer must be—what I willed it should be.

At last he paused before me:

"It shall be as you wish. But I hope you may relent and recall me very soon. And I pray you, Damaris, to try to think more gently of me while we are parted; gently, too, of our faraway home; let us go to it in the early spring. I believe I am just a little homesick," and he endeavored to smile at this boyish turn.

Then followed for me a period of almost serenity. There were hours when I could be merry and half light hearted with those two I loved, clever, tender souled Maurice, and my sweet Maud.

Why, I felt like a girl the first morning we awoke in Florence—Ascension Day—and hearing in the street below the shrill, insistent cries of "*Cantario Chi vuol cantarino? O che bel cantarino?*"

I ran down only to find grasshoppers and crickets in those funny, tiny cages. It was the festa of the *Grilli*.

I bought a pale green one and immediately released him that I might join in the joyous pursuit of the laughing children down the alleys of the gay Cascine.

After a few weeks of Dante's charmed Florence and smiling Valdarno, we agreed that there could be no place for summering like the shadow haunted slopes and dells of Vallombrosa.

The Foresteria had rooms to spare, and its cool, gray tradition thronged space we made our home. What a chapter of enchantment those beautiful months seem to me now.

They were over before I could drink into my soul half the beauty around and above me.

One walk that Maurice and I took will remain with me always, a luxurious memory of color and fragrance.

It was in October. Now I know October seems divine even with us, but you can only dream what it is in this glowing land. Ah, the glory and the magic of that day.

We walked miles down the valley of the Sieve, between the rolling hills that swelled and sank and swelled again into the violet distance.

The skies above us were golden misted; the chestnuts on every side, golden touched; the tangled gorse beneath our feet, rare gold itself.

We passed many *contadini;* the men in white trousers and baggy white jackets, tossing back their masses of night black curls, and swinging along with a free grace native to their Saturnian fields.

We walked back through the columnar firs that opened up charmed vistas, and among the smooth trunked beeches, where the squirrels swung from bough to bough, all the more merrily for the jubilant bird tones greeting them.

We were on a slope commanding the terrace on which stands the great, gray, mystic monastery of San Giovanni Gualberto. Beyond and above that we had a clear view of the steeply scarped rock, whose summit, ten hundred and twenty seven meters above the sea, is crowned with the stern oratorio of the Paradisino.

But a few days after that the Apennine spirit joined hands with the storm power, and we went further south to remain until spring. Maud could not endure the sharp Tuscan winter.

Next year, in Umbria, the shadow fell again, and the pitiful tragedy that we were playing gave signs of a hastening end.

No spot on earth is fairer than the Umbrian champaign in May time. Maud and Maurice walked down, at sunset, to see the shrine of Santa Giula that I had found especially lovely in its holiday bedeckment of laburnum boughs, iris blossoms, and rose garlands.

I sat alone in the door, reveling in the riot of color in the west, when I heard a piping voice beside me:

"*Rose, bella Signora! Rose benedetta!*"

I smiled on the small figure holding out to me his flowers the priest had blessed; but my smile died away in swift bewilderment.

What could be more curious? Here, in miniature, was the handsome face I detested. No big, brown, Italian eyes, these, but the full luminous violet ones; the same massy wealth of hair, tawny as the sunset clouds, thrown back in lines as waving as those western ones—from a faultlessly rounded brow; the same voluptuous curve of red lips.

More mysterious than even life or love seemed the marked resemblance this peasant child bore to a face of so peculiar a type.

I bought his roses, and inquired his name.

"Girolamo Tutti," he answered, and ran on to find another purchaser.

Girolamo—Jerome—is a very common name among them and need not have made me start anew.

I did not see the child again in many days, but his face and the mystery of it haunted me day and night.

The next time I saw him he was one of a family group on some festa occasion. I asked a servant of ours if she knew them.

"Donigio Tutti and his wife, Costanza," she told me.

"Is it their son?" I inquired.

She answered affirmatively.

I gazed at the tall *contadino*, with huge breadth of shoulders, and small head, covered with a heavy blackness of crisp curls, with low forehead, horizontally ruled eyebrows, quite meeting over fiercely bright eyes, and nose descending straight from the brow, as in a statue of the age of Antonius.

A magnificent fellow he was, but the type was not rare.

I looked at the woman; the same

face that I could see anywhere around me; handsome at seventeen, no doubt; but fading and wrinkling now, as most of them do at twenty seven or eight—the gentle calm of countenance that in early youth they share with these Umbrian landscapes sinking into dull apathy or changing into sharpness.

Where could the boy have got those features?

During one of my long walks, a week or two afterward, I was caught in a sudden shower, and ran into the first shelter that offered; it was the home of Costanza Tutti, a far better place than most of her class occupy.

With the spirit of all those kindly, simple hearted people, she extended to me the utmost hospitality of her abode. As I was drenched, she urged me to put on a holiday dress of hers while she dried mine; and this detained me much longer than the shower.

The house was full of children, and the little dark creatures scurried away from me in their shyness, peeping out continually from behind their ambuscades of furniture or doors.

But the bright haired Girolamo stood by with calm, yet not bold, self possession. I furtively studied his face all the while.

"He is very unlike your other children," I told her at last.

This broke the bounds of her peasant reserve, and set her telling her story.

"He was not Donigio's child," she said. "Oh, no; her beautiful boy, her Raffaelle cherub, had grander blood in his veins. She had married his father when she was but seventeen; he was a noble, rich *Americano*. The dear husband had been killed in ten days in a railway accident, and had left her a fine annuity. She could never forget him—never.

"But Donigio had wooed her very patiently for a year, and had promised to be kind to her child. On the whole, she had been happy with Donigio, though he would appropriate her income for family expenses, while she wished to save it all for her boy. They had moved here from Montefalco a year ago," and she rambled on.

When she paused, I asked her first husband's name.

"Girolamo Ravenelli," she replied.

My blood ran cold, then boiled. Yet I had expected it. I tore off the dress of hers I wore, hurried into my own half dried one, and scattering some small coins to the brown little girls, I hastened away.

But next day I went back and asked her to send the boy to me every day; I would teach him the American tongue, the language of his father. She liked that, and gratefully promised to let him come.

Could this be the leaf out of Jerome's past that he had begged me long ago to read, and then seal with my pardon? I must make sure.

I would endure for a time the frequent sight of the vivid loveliness I hated, because I desired to accustom the child to coming. If this were indeed so, I wished to see his face confronting his father's. I think it hurt me to say his "father" to myself; and I had not thought that anything connected with Jerome could hurt me.

I wrote to him at once, granting the permission he pleaded for, to join me immediately.

Meanwhile, I taught the little Girolamo each morning, and found him quick and affectionate. And though I hated his father, I could not, for all my trying, hate the sweet child soul.

Once, before I was aware, I kissed him, and he flushed over throat and brow with gladness.

"Oh, I love you so, Carissima!" he cried; but I left him quickly.

Maurice and Maud laughed at my new freak, but praised the boy's beauty, and wondered at a certain haunting resemblance that baffled them.

Jerome came as quickly as the trip could be made. I was out among the