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Volume 29
Number 1

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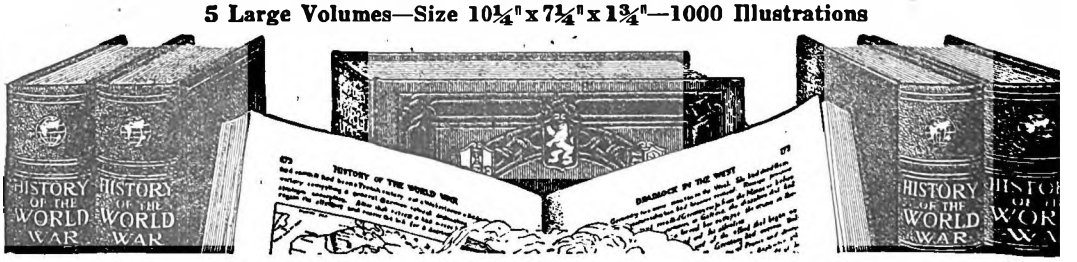

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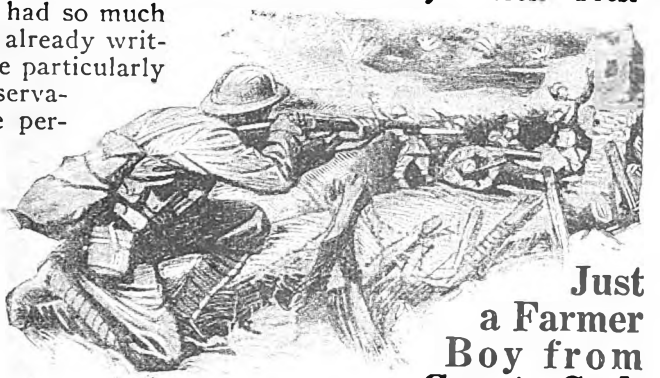

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Contents for First April, 1921, Issue

Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

A TALE of the Ohio country in 1789, when Cincinnati was known as Losantitown; when pioneers followed streams that were completely arched over by the primeval forests; and when homeseekers made clearings along the Wabash, where the light of the sun had never reached the ground since the forest crown was formed, thousands of years before. Single-handed, a U. S. Government agent worsts the Shawnee Indians and clears the Mississippi waterway of a gang of river-pirates that preyed upon the immigrant keel-boaters. "THE FLOATING FRONTIER," a novel by Hugh Pendexter, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure

VOL XXIX NO 1
APRIL 3 1921

The Man from Pondera

A Complete Novelette

By Robert J. Horton

Author of "The Law Comes to Singing River," "Coyote Jim's Code," etc.

I

ACROSS a wind-swept sea of sage and bunch-grass two men were riding. One, far in the lead, rode boldly and topped the gentle rises of undulating plain at a swinging lope. The other kept well to the rear and sought the screen of willows that bordered occasional gullies, and waited in shallow coulées to avoid being seen by the man riding ahead.

The broad, flat land was bathed in a rosy glow—harbinger of the prairie twilight. In the clear, high skies above the mountains in the west the sunset flung crimson banners. The wind carried the tang of earth swelling in the warmth of late Spring and prairie-cactus flowers splashed the open spaces with colorful blooms.

The first rider, who had been heading due north, suddenly shifted his course to the west and the man following dropped behind a rise of ground and dismounted. He loosened the cinch of the saddle and allowed his horse to graze at will upon the rich grass while he rolled a cigaret and lighted it.

"Just my luck to have a job hung on me with a long ride like this," he muttered to himself with an oath.

He climbed the rise and from the vantage-point on its crest watched the first rider cross a long flat, disappear in the shadows of some rolling ground beyond, and come into sight again as he reached a broad sweep of tableland at the edge of which a barbed-wire fence formed a barrier. As the rider leaned from his horse to open the gate the man who was watching turned back to his horse and lay down upon the grass behind the protecting swell of ground.

"Ridin', trailin', stallin'—" The man swore again.

Daniel Holmes urged his horse through the gate, closed it, and rode to the little two-room ranch-house flanked by a small field of growing grain.

He turned in his saddle and for long moments searched the distances to the eastward and southward from whence he had come. The man's face was seamed and lined and weather-beaten; the hair beneath the broad-brimmed hat was gray; in the man's eyes was a deep, brooding look of worry.

"Hello there, dad!"

The man whirled his mount and waved to the tall, stalwart youth in the doorway of the little house. He tossed a package of papers toward him and rode behind the house to the barn in front of the corrals, where he put up his horse.

When he entered the house the youth was standing by the stove in the kitchen.

"Beans again tonight, dad; is that all the mail there was—just papers?"

"That's all, Stuart," replied Daniel Holmes. The look of worry in the man's eyes changed to one of pride and satisfaction as he gazed at his son.

Stuart Holmes was a perfect product of outdoor life. Clean-limbed, clean-featured, and clean-thinking, his had been the early-life experience which makes real men. Like his father he was inclined to be blond, with clear and forceful countenance; eyes as gray as the sky at early dawn and with a gaze that never wavered. There was a healthy glow of tan on his skin and a stubble of beard on his square chin. Every movement was one of poise and grace and strength.

But it was the eyes which held his father's gaze. In their depths shone the fire of youthful vigor, a glint of humor, and a subtle, dreamy quality that reminded Daniel Holmes of the little woman who had mothered this man.

"Stuart, step out here a minute," said the father.

The younger man turned from the stove with a whimsical smile and the pair walked to the little space between the rear of the house and the barn.

"Rub your left eye with your right hand, son," instructed Daniel as he picked up a small piece of wood from the ground.

Stuart obeyed without hesitation.

The father threw the piece of wood into the air.

"Now!" he called sharply.

The young man's right hand darted down and almost instantly there was a loud report and the bit of wood was sent spinning toward the corrals.

"Well done, son," said Daniel as Stuart replaced the smoking forty-four in the black sheath that hung low on his right thigh. "You ain't missed from any sort of start in almost a month now."

They returned to the kitchen.

While his father was washing at the bench just outside the rear door the young man placed the supper on a table near the stove, under a window, and lighted a lamp.

They ate in silence, as is the custom on the ranges; but when they had finished and the old man had lighted his pipe and Stuart had cleared the table and rolled a cigaret, the younger man spoke:

"Dad, I've been wondering why it is you go over to Choute for the mail and our supplies instead of going down to Pondera. The narrow-gage is down at Pondera and it isn't anywhere's near as far as over to Choute."

"I have my reasons, son."

"That's the answer I get to all my questions, dad," the youth complained in his deep, resonant voice that was, nevertheless, pleasing and musical.

"Well, son, that's about the best answer I can give you—now."

"Dad, this thing has sure got to come to a showdown some time. There's something that's been worrying you—I can see that. And there's something sort of mysterious in the way we have lived here and worked since mother died two years ago."

"The Winter killed her and— By ——!" Daniel Holmes brought his fist down upon the table savagely. "She couldn't stand this cold. Forty below that Winter! I might have knowed it and ——"

"Dad, we didn't have to stay here in the first place, did we?" Stuart broke in.

"I've homesteaded this, son."

"But dad, we could homestead in Texas."

His father was silent.

"Dad, why did we leave Texas?"

The old man rose, knocked the ashes out of his pipe into the hearth, and began to pace back and forth across the little room.

"Son," he said, after a bit, "some day I'm going to tell you the whole story, an' maybe it'll be sooner than you think."

"I'm thinking now would be as good a time as any, dad. I can't help being puzzled why you brought mother and I up here to Montana when you came up with the cattle for the C Bar, why we run what little stock we've got so close, why you go on a long trail for our mail and supplies, why we stayed here in the first place and why we stay here now, why you take those spells when you go up on the butte and look around. Why! I've seen you up there gazing east and south for hours as if you were looking for some one or——"

The young man stopped his discourse suddenly.

"I forgot, dad," he resumed gently; "is it because of mother——?"

"Perhaps, perhaps," said Daniel Holmes.

FOR a time there was silence while the boy stared out the window at the deepening shadows and the old man noiselessly paced the floor.

"There's another thing, dad," said Stuart finally. "Down in Texas you was just tolerably interested in my gun-hand, but since we've been up here you've kept me practising and taught me to draw from so many angles that anybody'd think you was bent on making a regular gunman out of me."

"You was younger in Texas, son. You hadn't hardly growed up to gun-age yet. Why, you're only twenty-three now. You got to be a man afore I knew it, staying with your mother on the Brazos and going to school thataway while I was out on the range."

"Dad, I haven't been to town in over a year—and I've never been to Pondera and they say that's getting to be a live place. I've wanted to go, too; and I've stayed away just because you objected to it. I've got a good mind to go down there tomorrow!"

The old man shot a startled look at his son. He sat down heavily.

"There's nothing to stop you, boy; you're of age and it ain't mine any more to tell you what to do. Only it would sort of please me if you hung close until—until——"

"Until what, dad?"

Daniel Holmes leaned upon the table and looked squarely at his son in the lamplight.

"Until I know where we stand," he said quietly.

There was something in his father's tone which made the boy close his lips tightly to keep back the startled exclamation and natural question which leaped to his tongue.

"And now, son," said Daniel, "suppose we let it go for tonight. I'm goin' to take a slant at these papers before I turn in."

For some time, while his father read the papers, Stuart sat moodily engaged with his thoughts. Then his regular habits asserted themselves and, yawning, he went into the next room and went to bed.

The prairie wind blew stronger as night fell. The heavens blossomed into stars and coyotes began their nocturnal serenades. In a wide, wide area in that vast country east of the Rockies the only light was that which shone in the window of the little ranch-house at the end of the broad tableland north of the Teton's sluggish waters.

Daniel Holmes bent low over the papers which he had unwrapped and spread upon the table.

Suddenly the still air was split by the crack of a gun, there was a crash of glass as window and lamp chimney were shattered and the room was plunged into darkness.

Something white came hurtling through the night against the glass of the window where it was not broken. It dropped outside. There was a pound of hoofs close at hand and then the sound became fainter and fainter as the rider made away.

Daniel leaped to the kitchen door, drawing his gun. When he had gained the front of the house he saw a horseman outlined for a moment against the sky on a rise beyond the gate. He fired twice and then horse and rider had vanished in the shadows.

II

STUART HOLMES came running out the front door as the bark of his father's gun stopped.

"What was it, dad?" he cried. "Who shot the light out? Who was you shooting at?"

"Saddle the horses," said his father crisply, as he hurried around the house to the kitchen window. Here he lighted a match and picked up a small, white, cotton tobacco-bag and with a startled exclamation gripped it in his palm. He felt something of hard metal within.

He hurried back into the kitchen and lighted another lamp. Some minutes afterward, when Stuart entered, the old man was standing with one hand upon the table, holding the other clenched before him. His face was ashen and drawn into grim lines and his eyes blazed blue-steel.

Quickly he put what he had held in the clenched hand into the pocket of his shirt, and began filling his cartridge belt.

"Is this—does this tell us where we stand, dad?" asked Stuart in a soft voice as he touched his father on the arm.

"Perhaps," said Daniel. "Are the horses ready?"

"All ready," answered Stuart in a tone showing that he felt hurt because his father evidently did not even now consider the time opportune for confiding in him.

Daniel Holmes started for the door and as his son bent to blow out the light he turned.

"Stuart!"

The younger man looked up, surprized.

"There isn't time to tell you about everything now," said his father quickly, "and I'm sorry I didn't tell you before. I've taught you to draw and to shoot. There ain't a gunman in this country can beat you to it. If we meet anybody tonight what I've learned you is goin' to come in handy."

In another minute they were mounted and were racing through the gate. Across the broken ground, the flat, over the high swell beyond and straight east they pushed their horses. Both animals were splendid examples of horseflesh; fast and enduring.

Half an hour later Daniel, who was a little in the lead, suddenly reined in his mount and pointed toward the north.

Stuart looked and saw several horsemen silhouetted for an instant against the sky as they plunged over a high piece of ground.

Daniel put his horse about.

"We'll meet 'em at the ranch," he shouted as he drove in his spurs.

They covered the distance back to the ranch-house in less time than it had taken them to come; but the horsemen they had seen also had seen them and had cut across from the north.

As they reached the house a volley of shots came from the approaching riders. The bullets plunked into the ground beneath their horses' feet and spattered against the low stone foundations of the little house.

Stuart, turning in his saddle, and without knowing what it all was about nor taking time to consider any aspect of the problem, fired a round at the figures racing for the gate.

"We'll have to run for it," shouted Daniel as they rounded the house and struck west toward the foothills.

With the house between them and the horsemen who were nearing the gate, Daniel and Stuart spurred their mounts to their fastest pace. Stuart began to realize that it was something besides an innate love of horseflesh which had prompted his father to buy the two fastest horses on the Brazos before they left Texas.

Something of the mystery of the three years preceding was cleared up in the brief space of time when he heard the whistle of flying lead in the air close to him. His father was firing and Stuart followed his example.

One of the pursuing riders toppled from his horse and Stuart felt a thrill, for he believed he had scored a hit. One thing he knew: the men behind them were enemies of his father's. It was enough to spur him to make every effort to shoot to kill.

They had crossed the half of the tableland and were gaining upon their pursuers. Little by little the gap between the two men ahead and the group of riders behind widened.

"We're gaining on 'em, dad," cried Stuart exultingly as he emptied another round at the dim figures behind.

No answer came from his father but he didn't think this strange. Racing their horses as they were, and bending low over the saddle-horns while they fired, it was not an opportune time for exchanging remarks.

Stuart reloaded and fired another round at the pursuing horsemen who now could be made out only with the greatest of difficulty because of the dim light on the prairies. The moon had not risen. In the shadows Stuart and his father soon were lost to sight from the men who still were firing at random some distance back.

Mile after mile Stuart and Daniel rode and the dim outlines of the towering mountains in the west came nearer and nearer.

"We'll make for Notch Cañon and stay there till morning, eh dad?" called Stuart, who was riding a little in the lead and to one side of the older man.

When he received no answer Stuart swung in closer to his father and called out again—

"I say we'll make for Notch Cañon—are you all right, dad?"

Daniel Holmes was leaning far forward in the saddle and merely made a gesture ahead as if in consent.

In another half-hour they had crossed the tableland and reached the tumbled rises and ridges which marked the beginning of the foothills. Soon they came to a little stream which flowed northeast toward the Marias River. They eased their pace in the darkness beneath the casual cottonwoods and began slowly to climb to the top of the first high ridge to the right of the stream.

Half-way up the ridge Daniel Holmes reined in his horse. Stuart stopped also.

"Best—to give—'em a little—breathing-spell," said Daniel.

"What's the matter, dad—winded?" asked Stuart.

"Long time—since I've—ridden that hard," replied Daniel.

He was still leaning forward in the saddle.

"Dad!" cried Stuart sharply. "You're not hurt!"

•

DANIEL dug in his spurs and they continued up the ridge. As they emerged from the few scrub pines near the top and at last gained the crest, Daniel slipped from his saddle and fell heavily to the ground.

Stuart dismounted in a twinkling, but before he could reach his father's side the old man had staggered to his feet.

"Dad, you're hurt," said Stuart as he put his arm about his father to support him. "Why didn't you tell me? Here, sit down, dad, sit down."

Daniel was breathing heavily.

"It's—the ride, I— I guess," he faltered. "I'm gettin' old an' I've got a crick in my side."

Stuart dropped upon his knees and as he began to open the old man's shirt he cried out. He lighted a match hastily and examined the shirt; and when he put his hand inside it against his father's side the hand came away with blood upon it.

"Dad," he said brokenly; "you've been shot. They hit you. Why didn't you tell me? We could have stopped down the creek."

And then Stuart did something that was unusual for him despite the fact that he was range born and bred—he swore fearfully.

"Maybe it ain't very bad, son; I've been shot before," said Daniel, who had lain back upon the grass.

Stuart had ceased swearing. He went for his horse.

"One thing is sure, dad; whoever is responsible for all this is sure going to get a receipt for it. I'll be back in a half-minute."

He swung into the saddle and made his way down the slope to the stream. Here he soaked the blue silk scarf he had worn about his neck and his big handkerchief in the cool mountain waters.

Guiding his horse back up the ridge, he washed the ugly wound in his father's side, compelling the old man to hold burning matches so that he could see to do the work. When the cold water with which the handkerchief was soaked had apparently stanched the flow of blood he bound the wound with his scarf and also tied over it the scarf his father had worn.

"Now, dad," he said when he had finished, "there's a stray band of Blackfeet camped down the line a piece—maybe two miles south of here. Let's try and make it down there."

"Maybe we'd better—wait—until morning—son," said Daniel, again breathing heavily.

A sob rose to the boy's throat. He knew what this request of his father's meant. The old man was too badly hurt to travel. Stuart mentally condemned himself for having made the suggestion as he thought again of the sight of the blood welling from the wound in his father's side.

"All right, dad, we'll hang up down by the stream until morning." Stuart tried to speak cheerfully; but in his heart was a growing fear.

"This'll be all right up here, son," said Daniel; "if you'll just move me so's I can get my back up against that stub—pine—over there."

Stuart carried the old man as gently as he could to where he could lean against the trunk of a single gnarled and twisted pine that stood a silent sentinel on the crest of the ridge.

Then he went down to the stream afoot and returned with his hat filled with water.

"Drink some of this, dad; it'll freshen you up."

His father drank and then pointed a long arm toward the vast starlit distances eastward. The boy looked and pressed his lips into a fine white line.

At a point which must have marked the eastern boundary of the tableland appeared a ruddy glow which steadily became brighter until the night skies were shot with crimson.

"The ranch!" gasped Stuart. "They've fired the house!"

III

THROUGH the night Daniel Holmes talked and raved by turns in lucid moments and periods of delirium caused by the fever from his wound. Stuart bathed his father's brow with cold water brought from the stream below and eased him as much as possible

by getting him to lie his full length with Stuart's coat pillowed under his head and the saddle-blankets over him to protect him from the chill of the prairie wind.

"It was a man caused us to leave Texas," said Daniel; "a rat and a snake if ever there was one. . . . I came on your mother's account or I would have tried to kill him. She didn't want trouble. So I came away and brought you and her when we drove the cattle up for Uncle Jim of the C Bar—good man, Uncle Jim—And the Winter killed her— It was his fault—the snake!

"Your mother allers liked the land—wanted to farm an' so I took that place down there. And after she died I kept it because I thought that's what she would want me to do. Don't you think that's what she would 'ave wanted, son?"

"Yes, dad," answered Stuart softly; "you did just right."

"I bought the lumber for the house from Uncle Jim—He sold me the cattle—They was paid for, Stuart, every cent—And we was doin' well an' she liked it—But I allers had an idee that snake from the Brazos country would get up here. And then she died an' I hoped he'd come—hoped, an' hoped, an' hoped!

"That's why I taught you the gun-play, son. . . . So's if he got me you'd be able to take care of yourself—an' maybe put a bullet into him. He deserves it—an' he's a coward an' tricky an' mean as a scorpion an'——

"Listen! They're coming! Where's that sack, Joe; where's the cash——?"

The old man tried to rise to his feet in the delirium which suddenly had seized him.

Stuart held him down and tried to soothe him with soft words and applications of cold water to his temples.

"—— Miguel, yo're a dirty, stinking liar an' you get no share o' this plunder. Twenty thousand an' you don't get a red. Why don't ye go for yere gun, Miguel? Why don't ye draw?"

Daniel became silent and save for the puffing of the lips and muttering Stuart would have believed him asleep. Soon he opened his eyes and asked for water. Stuart gave it to him.

"Who is this man?" asked Stuart in persuasive tones.

The father waved a hand feebly.

"All in time, son; all in time—Two years ago when I was in Choute I heard of a man who was in Sun River who answered his description. I went over there, remember? But he had left—Then I heard of another down in Pondera who came there when they put in the sheep-sheds—I went down but didn't see him. That's why I didn't want you to go over there, son—Because he's never seen you an' I didn't want him to get a look at you an' mix you up in this thing till I'd had a chance at him.

"I was quite a hand with my gun in my day—None much faster or surer—I wanted a chance at him—Knew he didn't know just where I was up here—That gave me a advantage—An' his not knowing you left you in the clear—I didn't want to saddle none o' my troubles on you, lad. I was ready to tell you a dozen times but the words just wouldn't come out—Was 'fraid you wouldn't understand my part in the business down in Texas. I never stole a dollar nor harmed an innocent man in my life, son, 'member that——"

Again the delirium overcame him and he raved wildly while Stuart sought to calm him.

"Twenty thousand!" shouted Daniel. "You say I robbed the bank, Miguel? I robbed it? Just tech that money, Miguel—try teching the sack! You o'nery greaser, why don't you draw?"

When the delusion had passed the old man became quiet. For some time he slept. Stuart went for more water. When he returned his father was staring at the star-flecked heavens and mumbling.

"Martha — ? Martha — ? Yes, I'm here——"

Stuart held some water to the wounded man's lips, lifting his head on his arm so that he could sip the cooling draft.

"What did you say that man's name was, dad?" pleaded the youth. "What does he look like?"

"That you, Stuart? He's a snake—A rustler and a killer by whatever means he can—I wasn't sure he was up here till last night—That shot through the window and what the man left was the signal."

The old man fumbled at his shirt pocket and then resumed:

"I thought once or twice I saw some one follering me yesterday—He wouldn't even wait for me to answer after he left the sign—Came a-running—'Fraid of me an' with —— good reason. Listen, son—

You 'member where we started to dig behind the house for the cistern? An' then covered it up as a bad job?—You do?—Good—Look in there when you get back to the ranch—Look after what's there all fair and square."

"You mean when *we* go back to the ranch, dad," said Stuart gently.

"No, son—No use foolin' ourselves—I ain't never goin' back—This pain in my side is gettin' into my heart, lad—It's the end of the trail and—Martha!"

FOR a long time the old man raved while Stuart laved his brow and temples with the water from the mountain stream and wept as he heard his father's weakening voice speaking as if back in the time when they lived under sunny southern skies on the banks of the Brazos.

In the old man's wavering speech was the drawl of the native Texan and now and then he crooned a feeble bit of lullaby that brought to the boy's eyes a vista of rolling mesquite lands and longhorn cattle resting in the lea of yellow hills.

And within the boy's heart there swelled a great anger, an insatiable hatred of the man whom his father hinted was the cause of their troubles, of his mother's death, indirectly, and of his father's presence within the shadow of the unknown.

For hours, between fits of troubled slumber and wild delirium, Daniel Holmes had no lucid moments. He talked of money—twenty thousand dollars—of a bank, of robbery, of rustlers, of the cattle-trail north from the Texas ranges, and of the wife whom he had loved—Stuart's mother.

The gold of the rising morning sun stained the horizon in the east when the old man finally opened his eyes and recognized his son bending over him with water for his parched throat.

"His name, dad?" said the boy grimly as the sick man sipped at the water and then turned away.

Daniel Holmes tried to speak and his white features were distorted with the effort. Stuart lowered his head to catch the faint whispers but could make nothing of the words his father struggled to speak.

"You better rest a bit, dad; then you'll feel stronger," said Stuart.

Daniel made a great effort, rising partly on one arm.

"Watch him," he shrilled; "he's tricky. His name——"

The man fumbled at his breast, then slowly raised his hands to his head. Upon his lips a fine sheen of red became visible.

Stuart hastily wiped it away as the dying man fumbled with his hands at his head.

"Dark," whispered Daniel; "dark—dark——"

With a sob Stuart lifted the head higher.

"His name, dad; his——"

One of Daniel Holmes' hands came slowly down to the pocket of his shirt and closed over it. The light in the eyes faded; and as the first gleam of the morning sun crept across the open spaces and touched the face of the man lying beneath the old pine he smiled into his son's eyes; the lips fluttered and were still.

After a time Stuart laid the head back upon the coat pillow and crossed the hands over the lifeless breast.

The youth's face was grim and terrible although there were tears upon his cheeks. He reached into the pocket of the shirt his father wore and extracted the thing he had seen him pick up outside the kitchen window and examine by candle-light the night before.

It was a small, white muslin tobacco-sack. Stuart opened it and drew forth a bullet—a bullet creased across its nose.

IV

STUART enlisted the aid of the Blackfeet Indians to bury his father in a grave on the crest of the ridge beneath the twisted branches of the pine that grew there—a lone landmark at the edge of the foothills which made a fitting headstone.

Then, leading the horse his father had ridden, he started in the late afternoon for the ranch. Where the house had stood he found a pile of ashes which was being rapidly dissipated by the winds. The barn and corrals had also been burned. The ground above the place where the cistern had been started, and where his father had told him to look for a cache of value, was covered with embers, so he decided to wait until later to open the earth and search for what might be concealed therein.

He turned loose the horse his father had ridden and the animal was soon on its way to join the other horses on the north range

where Stuart assumed the cattle were. To make sure that the cattle were where he suspected, he rode to the butte north of where the house had stood and searched the distances to the north with his keen gaze.

He saw the herd about two miles in the northwest where a small stream flowed on its way from the foothills to Birch Creek and the mother-waters of the Marias.

The feed was rich in that vicinity and as there also was abundant water-supply there, Stuart knew his stock would not stray. While his father had owned but six hundred and forty acres—which now was the property of the son—Stuart had understood his father to say on several occasions that in accordance with an agreement with larger stockmen in that locality this section of the range was allotted to him.

His father had been a member of the North Montana Stockmen's Association; and Stuart had often heard him speak of "Uncle" Jim Turner, one of the most prominent cattle-raisers in the Teton country.

Stuart wondered if Uncle Jim would be able to shed any light on the problem with which he was concerned.

As the young man rode eastward from the ranch, after carefully closing and securing the gate in the fence which surrounded the grain-field and spot where the house had been, he kept turning over and over in his mind his father's last words.

He understood now why Daniel Holmes had taken up the land and why he had planted grain. It was his mother's wish. He knew, too, how his father had come to leave Texas and bring his wife and son to the new country in the north. It was to avoid trouble with a man—at his mother's request. The reason for the lessons in gun-play now was simple. His father wanted his son to be on equal footing with this enemy in event that something should happen to him.

Who was this enemy? What did he look like? Where was he now? These were questions which bothered Stuart. He felt a blind rage surge up within him when he thought of the cowardly manner in which they had attacked and shot and killed his father the night before.

And the shot through the window and the token which had been left—the creased bullet? His father had said it was a signal; that some one had been following him when he had returned to the ranch with the mail, that he wouldn't wait for an answer but had come a-running. Was this *he* the man he was searching for—his father's enemy?

Stuart felt confident that the man who had been responsible for the raid the night before was the man his father had been referring to in his death-speech—the man who had driven them from Texas and whom his father had expected he would have to kill.

His father had said he had reason to believe he was in Pondera. But even if Stuart should meet him face to face he would not know him. Or would he? Stuart felt that some occult instinct would tell him when he met this enemy. And then——

The youth's eyes glowed with a dangerous light as he urged his horse across the great flat land that stretched eastward to the Knees and far beyond.

Riding at a steady gait in the gathering twilight, the son recalled another feature of his father's last hours—his delirious reference to a mysterious Miguel, whom he had called a greaser in one wild outburst. Was this man connected with the other—was this perhaps *the man?*

Stuart thrilled at the thought. Miguel. The name was burned into his memory. He pondered over his father's ravings concerning a sack which evidently had contained twenty thousand dollars. He had referred to it time and again in his delirious moments and always the matter had been coupled with the name Miguel. It was a Spanish name—there were many people by that name in Texas, of course. But Stuart could recall no particular character to associate with the name.

But then Stuart had been out on the southern range in Summer and in Winter attending the school taught by an eastern college professor who came into the Brazos country for his health. There were plenty of characters thereabout of whom Stuart knew little or nothing.

Miguel. He put aside the thought of the name as he considered anew the problem of finding this enemy who had caused his father's death. It was fair to assume that he would prove Stuart's enemy also. And in any event, there was the accounting that Stuart had promised his father as he lay dying.

Stuart halted at dark in a dip in the

prairie, unsaddled his horse, and lay down upon the soft bunch-grass with the saddle and saddle-blanket for a pillow. Overhead the stars that he loved hung in clusters in the purple arch of night and the prairie wind breathed in the grasses.

The young man felt a thickening of the throat as he thought of his father, asleep on the ridge where the lone pine held sentinel. And as he lay there with his thoughts something in his being knitted into the texture which forms a resolve; and he shook from his shoulders the last vestige of irresponsible youth and carelessness and folly and became a man of purpose and calculating judgment.

He rose with the first flush of dawn and whistled for his horse. The animal responded from a short distance and was soon saddled.

For one brief moment Stuart hesitated in the saddle. Then he started due east toward Pondera.

V

THERE were two buildings in Pondera besides the sheep-shearing sheds. One was the station of the Great Falls and Canada Railroad (narrow-gage) and the other was a combination saloon and store. Not much of a town this, to mark the near location of the thriving little city of Conrad which was to come some years later when the Great Northern standardized the railway; but sufficient to draw from miles and miles doubtful and thirsty gentry who yearned for refreshment of the mule-kick variety.

Stuart Holmes made straight for the little saloon when he arrived in the afternoon.

He left his horse at the hitching-rail and entered. The place was thronged with sheep-shearers spending the last of their wages earned during the season just closed with gamblers, cow-punchers, and some sheepmen. Indeed, Pondera was more of a headquarters for sheepmen and those interested in the activities associated with sheep than for cattlemen.

Stuart made a striking figure among the men as he advanced to the bar. Tall and erect, with every move attesting to unlimited physical power for one of his size, he attracted attention. He wore the regulation chaps, high-heeled riding-boots, spurs, flannel shirt, broad-brimmed hat, and carried a pair of gauntlet-gloves—beloved of men who have to handle a rope. And low on his right thigh hung the black sheath, securely tied, that held his gun.

His dress was not unlike that of the others there, except the gamblers; but something in his carriage, in the way he held his head, his general bearing and poise, seemed to serve to set him apart as worthy of more than one glance.

As he walked to the bar he made a survey of the room and those in it. The occupations and the simple natures of most of the men he saw were reflected in their tanned visages. There were some, however, who met his quick gaze with suspicious glances and shifty interest.

The bartender, scenting with his usual keen intuition an unusual newcomer, waited upon him with alacrity.

"One drink," ordered Stuart.

"That's whisky," grinned the bartender as he put out the bottle.

In the small mirror behind the bar Stuart saw the man at his right looking him over with what was meant for sarcastic deliberation.

When he had finished with his drink he turned and regarded this man. He was small and wiry, with low-hanging black mustaches, a scar on the chin where the dropping ends of his mustaches nearly met; little, beady black eyes, and—what attracted Stuart's attention most—an almost continual twitching of the thin lips that curved downward so that his mouth was given the appearance of being twisted into a perpetual sneer.

"Think you'll remember me, stranger?" asked the man with an accentuation of the sneer.

"It would be hard to forget you," answered Stuart in instant dislike.

The beady eyes darted red for a moment.

"Don't ever remember having seen you before," he observed coolly.

"Very likely you haven't," said Stuart dryly.

"Talk pretty nice for a cow-hand," the small man continued as if in contemptuous appraisal.

Two men next to the small man laughed at this. Others at the bar had moved away and Stuart surmised that the trio before him were in some way different from the others in the place. He felt a desire to

draw the other out—to make him show his hand, whatever it was—to bait him.

"Where you from?" the man demanded suddenly.

Stuart's brows lifted a trifle.

"What's the name of *this* place?" he questioned in turn.

There was another laugh from the man's two companions at this.

"That's one on you, Curran," jeered one of them, addressing the man who confronted Stuart.

"Tell him where he is, Curran," snickered another.

Curran's lips were more than ordinarily agitated. They twitched with a celerity that was indicative of mental stress—of anger.

"This here's Pondera," he said in a clear ominous voice; "Pon-de-ray—get it? I'm answering your question, now you answer mine."

"Sure," smiled Stuart. "I'm from Pondera!"

"That's a—" Curran paused as he caught the glint of blue steel in Stuart's eyes. "One man has already laid title to this town," he resumed.

"I see," said Stuart calmly, "an' it isn't big enough for two. That what you're getting at?"

"Maybe."

Stuart noted as he shot a quick glance to the mirror behind the bar that the men who had been standing behind him had backed away toward the card-tables on the side of the room from the bar. Only one remained—a tall, blond, pleasant-looking fellow who appeared to be a cow-puncher.

"I don't suppose you happen to be the man that's thinking he's got his brand on the place, do you?" continued Stuart in crisp, even tones.

"Me? Oh, no. I ain't so presuming." Curran joined in the general laugh as he said this.

Under it all Stuart recognized the genuine, though subtle and veiled, reference to another person; a man who evidently thought he held the place under his thumb. That this individual was not there was shown in the fact that the levity of Curran and his companions was due to this man's absence and Stuart's confessed ignorance.

"I take it you're new to these parts, stranger," said Curran sneeringly. "Aim to hook up with some outfit here?"

"That's likely, too," replied Stuart. "Any suggestions?"

"None—'cept you might oil up that gun-hand of yourn if you're goin' to carry the town on your shoulder."

"I haven't needed any grease on it yet." It was a challenge and Curran knew it.

"Oh, a gunman, eh?" Curran's sneer became more perceptible, and there was no laughing as he made this remark.

Stuart thought he caught a warning flicker of the eyelashes from the bartender.

"Well, if you don't need no grease suppose you give a little exhibition. We're mostly acquainted with each other's ability round here. I'll time your draw!"

The insult intended was plain. Stuart's eyes narrowed as he met Curran's sneering gaze squarely. The latter saw the shot had gone home and to drive the slur deeper reached for his watch with his left hand.

Almost with the movement came the crack of a gun and the fragments of the watch spattered upon the bar.

Stuart stepped back, a wisp of smoke curling upward from the pistol he held at his hip.

"You was a bit slow with the timer, wasn't you?" he asked genially but with no smile upon his lips nor in his eyes.

Curran's face was white with rage and his lips twitched horribly. He made no reply.

"Any more experiments you want to try?" suggested Stuart.

No sound disturbed the stillness in the room for a moment and then when Curran remained silent it seemed as if the place itself breathed deeply.

Suddenly men started again for the bar and Curran, with a grimace meant for a laugh, said, with an attempt at lightheartedness—

"Oh, come have a drink an' fergit it."

"One at a time," said Stuart, replacing his gun. "I've had my afternoon's afternoon; I'll give you a chance some other time."

He met Curran's blazing glare in the mirror with a smile as he edged to the door and passed out.

When he looked in on his way to his horse, after having purchased some supplies at the store, Stuart saw Curran and his two companions at a table near the door conversing earnestly.

VI

AS STUART loped out of sight of Pondera, laying a course to the south, he heard the sound of flying hoofs behind him. He halted and waited and when the horseman came into view he recognized the tall, blond, pleasant-looking fellow who had remained standing at the bar when the altercation with Curran had started.

"Hello," called the man as he came riding up alongside.

Stuart returned the greeting with a questioning gaze.

"Going my way?" asked the cow-puncher.

"I'm going to Uncle Jim Turner's ranch," replied Stuart.

"That's where I'm bound for," said the puncher cheerfully. "Might as well hit it along together. Devon's my name; I work for Uncle Jim."

Stuart introduced himself in turn as they started on.

"Holmes, eh?" said Devon, reflecting. "I've heard the name but I can't place you. Work around here?"

"I've got a small ranch and herd a piece northwest of here that was my father's," explained Stuart, who had taken a liking to the blond cow-puncher. "Only been here three years an' haven't been around much; don't know many people hereabouts."

"I thought so," observed Devon dryly.

"Why do you say that?" asked Stuart sharply.

"Plenty of time to talk when we hit Basin Spring," was Devon's answer. "We'll have to put up there for tonight, unless you want to push on. Your horse don't look none too fresh."

"Oh, he could stand it all right," said Stuart, "but I'm in no great hurry. Basin Spring she is then, for the night."

They had entered a long, sloping depression in the prairie which widened out as they progressed. The grass here was rich and green, furnishing admirable feed.

"This is part of the cattle-range," said Devon. "Ever been in here before?"

"No," confessed Stuart. "And it's sure some range."

"Best north of the Teton," boasted Devon. "Uncle Jim runs a good many cattle in here. Several outfits brand at the spring. The sheepmen have had their eyes on this for a long, long time but it don't do them no good."

"How long you worked for Uncle Jim?" asked Stuart.

"Five years comin' this Fall," replied Devon.

"Ever since you come up from Texas?" laughed Stuart.

"The same. I see we've got each other spotted. How long you been North?"

"Three years," answered Stuart.

From this on there was an intangible feeling of companionship between the two men who had recognized by each other's accent that they came from the same State.

They arrived at the spring just at twilight; dismounted, turned loose their horses, and built a fire to warm coffee in a pot which Devon recovered from among some cooking-utensils cached in a dugout.

Both men had a quantity of emergency provisions tied in the slickers behind their saddles and they ate a hearty supper, talking sparingly of the southern range and comparing it with Montana's broad domain.

Suddenly, as they sat looking into the coals remaining from the fire, Devon gave vent to an expression of admiration.

"Boy," he drawled, "you sure do pull a slick gun!"

Then Stuart told him the story of his father's tutorship in the use of the weapon, of the attack on the ranch and the death of Daniel Holmes.

"I dunno," reflected Devon; "you've made a life-size enemy in that feller Curran. He's a bad one; an' he stands in with the bunch that's making its headquarters somewhere up on the Marias."

"What bunch is that?" asked Stuart, interested at once.

"Don't know much about 'em," replied Devon. "They've been in there for about a year now and the only town down this way they hit is Pondera—if you could call that saloon-shearing hang-out a town."

"Who did Curran mean when he said some one had put his brand on Pondera?" demanded Stuart.

"Suppose he meant the feller who's runnin' the gang," said Devon.

"Ever see him?" questioned Stuart.

"No—and none of our outfit has ever seen him. But he comes down once in a while. They was a shooting up there last Fall when a puncher for the Y outfit got

bored. The boys from the Y went up there but couldn't get any line on how it had happened an' the gang from the Marias had lit out an' they couldn't find a trace of 'em.

" 'Course they couldn't stay away from the round-up long enough to comb the river. An' the cattlemen has been goin' into Pondera less an' less so it's got to be a sort of sheep hang-out. The Marias River crowd seem to stand in with herders an' the rest of the sheep layout."

STUART pondered over these remarks. The horsemen who had attacked the ranch had come from the northeast from the direction of the Marias. Could it be that the gang Curran belonged to, and its mysterious leader, were identified with his father's troubles?

"Who were the two men with Curran?" he asked.

"Thick-set one's called Sandy an' the other's Mack Lander," answered Devon.

"They belong to the Marias outfit?"

" 'Speck so—they was runnin' with Curran. You want to watch out for that evil-faced *hombre*, Holmes; he's supposed to be a killer an' he tips his gun."

"Shoots through a hole at the end of the holster, eh?" mused Stuart.

"Yes—yes, an' I've heard it said he ain't inclined to give much warning when he draws."

"What game is this Marias gang in?" queried Stuart.

"They cleaned out a bunch of the boys at cards after the round-up last Fall and took the sheep-shearers for most o' their greasy earnin's. Then old Frick, what runs the saloon, gets his whisky by way of Canada an' it seems like some o' that outfit is allers on hand just about the time he gets a fresh supply."

"Gamblin' and whisky-running, eh?"

"Yes—an' there's another peculiar thing we just begun to notice this Spring. We didn't get near as many calves this year as usual—not near what we oughta had. Some of the other outfits noticed that peculiarity, too."

"Rustling!" exclaimed Stuart.

"Well, we ain't making no claims. Only thinking a bit. Uncle Jim and the rest of the stockmen don't want any trouble with the sheepmen—they've never had any up here—an' so they're layin' low."

"Holy smoke!" cried Stuart. "Is the bunch *that* thick with the sheepmen?"

"They're pretty thick," confessed Devon. "An' as I say, we're sort of layin' low, now that we've just made this new range agreement. But maybe Uncle Jim can tell you more'n I can. I'm goin' to turn in."

As they were fixing saddles, slickers and saddle-blankets for a bed, a hail came from below the spring. Shortly afterward a man rode up, recognized Devon and waved a hand in greeting.

"Got a herd just east of the Basin," said the man, "an' I've run outa tobacco. Thought maybe you could spare a thimbleful."

"Hello, Mangle," Devon called out. "Sure; here's an extra sack. Got papers?"

The man nodded and as he took the tobacco and fashioned a cigaret, Stuart saw him looking at him with a keen, searching gaze.

"Friend of mine," said Devon casually, noting Mangle's look of inquiry. "Name's Holmes."

Mangle nodded. After some casual talk while they smoked the newcomer took his departure and disappeared into the night, going eastward.

"Who is that fellow?" asked Stuart, as he pillowed his head on his saddle.

"Mangle's a sort of chief herder for Short—big sheepman east of here."

"Wish you hadn't told him my name—yet," said Stuart.

"Why, why didn't you tip me off, partner?"

"Oh, it's all right," said Stuart sleepily. "By the way, Devon, what's the name of that leader of the Marias River outfit?"

"I think they call him Gill," answered Devon as he pulled his saddle-blanket over him.

Again Stuart went to sleep watching the stars overhead and with the soft prairie wind crooning in his ears.

Three miles eastward the man Mangle galloped into a sheep-camp and dismounted before the wagon. Sitting on the step was a man with long black mustaches and a twitching lip. They crawled inside and soon a light shed a soft glow through the wagon's canvas top.

Half an hour passed and then Curran came out.

He mounted a horse already saddled and standing near by and soon was riding at a steady, swinging gait into the north.

VII

AT DAWN Stuart and Devon were in the saddle and riding out of the Basin toward the southwest. For some hours they continued, passing numerous bands of cattle, and finally when the sun was almost directly overhead Devon pointed ahead.

Stuart looked and saw the Teton winding between banks of green which were thickly studded with cottonwoods and willows.

"The ranch is just above that bend," Devon indicated.

Soon they turned from the benchland and wound down a trail into a deep coulée which led out on the bottomland along the river. The ranch-buildings were close up under the bluff where they were protected in Winter from the blizzards which swept across the plains.

Devon took charge of Stuart's horse as the latter made his way at once to the low, rambling log structure which was the main ranch-house.

"Daniel Holmes' boy!" exclaimed Uncle Jim Turner when Stuart had introduced himself. "Wal now, by thunder, you're big enough, an' tall enough to be Dan's boy all right, but you got them features from your mother. How's old Dan?"

Stuart explained what had happened and the face of the grizzled old rancher immediately showed concern. He shook his head slowly and frowned.

"These are gettin' to be strange times, Stuart; I'm afraid there's all kinds of trouble in the wind. Now I'm right powerful sorry to hear that old Dan's gone. The —— cowardly skunks!"

"I thought maybe you'd be able to tell me some things that dad would have told me if he had lived long enough," said Stuart. "Perhaps you know who these men are."

Uncle Jim again shook his head thoughtfully.

"Queer times," he ruminated. "An' we ain't had any trouble in here before. But come in to dinner, boy; let's eat an' then we can talk things over."

The cattleman led the way into the dining-room where the rest of his family already were seated.

"Roy, this is Stuart Holmes," said Uncle Jim, introducing Stuart around the table; "and Stuart, this is my daughter Dorothy; mother, you remember old Dan Holmes—this is his boy. And this is my other son, Burt; an' Stuart, this is Max Randall, my manager. Bill Turner, set a place for this young man."

Stuart started in surprize for the last remark of Uncle Jim's was directed to an aged Chinaman who was waiting on the table.

Uncle Jim noticed Stuart's astonishment and laughed.

"That's Bill Turner, Stuart; I had one —— of a time givin' him my name but I managed it all legal and tight. He's done enough for me to be entitled to be named one of the family."

The Chinaman set a place and pulled up a chair next to the stockman on his right and they began to eat.

Uncle Jim broke the news of Stuart's father's death and gave some of the particulars. Those around the table extended their sympathies to Stuart and then fell silent. Twice during the meal Stuart noticed Dorothy Turner looking at him curiously. And he in turn directed many a glance in her direction.

She was dressed more becomingly than was usual in the range-country and Stuart surmised that her clothes had been made in the East. She knew how to wear them too, apparently. She was more polished and dainty than any girl he had ever seen. A great wealth of dark hair enhanced the delicate beauty of her clear, white skin; and dark eyes and lips the color of a red rose coming into bloom added to her attractiveness.

Her speech was cultivated and many times her father turned to her for a word in his endeavors to express himself properly and she always supplied it without hesitation. At such times her father would beam with pride and glance at Stuart. It was indeed plain to see that Uncle Jim loved his daughter and was very proud of her.

AFTER dinner Uncle Jim took Stuart out on the porch where they sat with the broad sweep of the river before them. The distant hills looked very blue under the reefs of white clouds which were banked above them. Feathery flecks of cotton from the cottonwoods along the river drifted lazily in the air.

"Tell me all about it again and don't overlook anything," Uncle Jim requested.

So Stuart began at the beginning and told

all his father had said before he died, including the delirious ravings which had marked the fatal progress of the fever. Then he took from a pocket the small tobacco-sack his father had picked up after the shot through the window and the flight of the mysterious horseman.

Uncle Jim turned the bullet over and over in his hand, but his face mirrored perplexity only.

"I can't make it out," he confessed at length. "A forty-four bullet with a crease in it made with a knife. It conveyed some kind of a message to your father, lad; and I never suspected the old man had an enemy in the country.

"All I know is that he came up here with some cattle I bought in Texas and brought your mother and you along. He took up that land out there because it was pretty well watered and he said your mother wanted him to do a little farming. He apologized for puttin' a plow in the ground and bought some stock from me and paid for every head.

"I talked with him many times—I liked your father—but he never mentioned any enemy. But, lad, this sure looks like he had one and that bunch coming down the way they did from the northeast makes me think that maybe the Marias River gang has something to do with it.

"Mind," he continued, raising a deprecating hand as Stuart started to speak, "I don't know that they did an' I wouldn't say they did, only—it looks suspicious. You can't accuse anybody of anything in this country, lad, unless you've got the proof to back it up. That is, unless you're lookin' for gun-play, an' it wouldn't help you to solve your problem by bustin' loose and shootin' permiscus."

"I know that," agreed Stuart, settling back into his chair. "But this man—this enemy of my father's who is sure to be my enemy, too—how am I to find him?"

Uncle Jim was thoughtful. At last he spoke deliberately:

"Boy, I've lived quite a spell an' I've done a lot of watchin'—watchin' people an' the way things come out. And I've noticed that when a man ain't square he shows himself up sooner or later. Maybe it's what my daughter calls the law of averages; but, whatever it is, he sooner or later steps out and gives people a chance to look at his real colors. Now I'm a-figurin' that this enemy of your dad's an' yours ain't square."

"I see," said Stuart grimly; "and you believe if he's around here he'll give himself away sooner or later?"

"I rather reckon that's what I'm gettin' at," said Uncle Jim.

For some time there was silence between the two. Then Stuart told of what had happened in the saloon in Pondera.

"Bad-man, that Curran, they say; I've never seen him," said Uncle Jim. "As for the leader of the bunch, I've never seen him, either, and none of my outfit has seen him. Name's Gill, I hear."

"Uncle Jim, what's the Marias River gang up to?"

Again the troubled look settled on the stockman's face.

"It's a little early to say," he evaded. "They've been card-sharping an' whisky-running along the Whoop-Up Trail. But we've been missing calves lately an' this is a bad time to be missing calves. We need 'em. We've quit bringing longhorns up from Texas and we've quit spaying. We're startin' to raise our own cattle up here in Montana and it's a bad time for—for rustling.

"An' the sheepmen has been uneasy lately. We've just made a new agreement coverin' the range. The sheep can't come north or west of the east and south lines of the Basin. We won't give 'em another inch of this range up here. We've never had any trouble an' we hope we never will have, but if they cross the new line—" The stockman ceased speaking with a cold glitter in his eyes.

"If they cross the line it's—trouble, eh?" ventured Stuart.

"I reckon that's about it," said Uncle Jim.

There was another period of silence.

"Do you believe the Marias River gang has something to do with the unrest among the sheepmen?" asked Stuart.

"I ain't sayin' at present, lad," replied the cattleman.

"Uncle Jim, did you ever hear of a man named Miguel?"

Turner thought for some time and finally shook his head in the negative.

"Uncle Jim, do you know what I'm goin' to do?" said Stuart in sudden decision. "I'm goin' back to the ranch, an' I'm goin' to let everybody know I *am* going back—

an' we'll see if that dastardly outfit comes after me!"

"Better be careful, Stuart; I've got a good place for you in my outfit an' you'll have plenty of chance to look around and try to learn something."

"No, I would go back to my property anyway. I've got three hundred head of cattle up there. But I want everybody to know I *am* going back."

"Wal, we'll fix you up with a tent an' outfit to live in—but follow my words an' be careful. You'll stay overnight, of course."

Stuart nodded and the pair left the porch.

On the way to the bunk-house Stuart met Roy Turner and Dorothy. Roy's eyes were shining and he grasped Stuart's hand. Although somewhat puzzled, Stuart assumed that it was an earnest of friendship on the part of the fair-haired youth who looked so much like his father.

"You can count on me," said Roy mysteriously as he passed on.

Dorothy Turner lingered. She looked Stuart over carefully to his confusion.

"So you're the gunman from Pondera!" she said finally.

VIII

STUART started in surprize. Then the meaning of Roy's admiring gaze and queer speech was suddenly plain, as was the reason for the girl's remark, when he saw Devon disappearing into the bunk-house. Devon had been telling Roy and his sister about the incident in the saloon at Pondera.

"I lay no claim to being a gunman," said Stuart soberly, looking at the beautiful girl before him somewhat defiantly.

"But you are one, are you not?"

"No, I'm not—not in the way that we think of on the range," said Stuart stoutly.

"Was that affair in Pondera a grand stand exhibition, then—just to show off?" persisted the girl, keeping her level gaze on Stuart's face.

Stuart colored.

"I'm sorry you heard about that," he replied. "It was—I had a reason." He knew by the girl's attitude that she knew nothing except what her father had told at dinner of his affairs.

"Spectacular gun-plays have always impressed me as being ridiculous," said Dorothy. "They are part of the West that has passed. In this new era it is time such foolishness was abandoned."

Stuart merely bowed his head upon hearing this for he could think of nothing appropriate to say in reply. The girl confused and disconcerted him. Education or beauty alone he might have accepted as a matter of course, but the two combined were beyond his powers of ready reasoning. Only one thing he understood; the girl thought he was a four-flusher.

"They are still wearing guns in this country, Miss Dorothy," he observed lamely.

"That is perfectly true," she agreed. "But they have certain definite uses and exhibitions like that of yours over in Pondera are silly and set a bad example for younger men. You see the effect it had on my brother Roy—he thinks you're a hero!"

The red flamed into Stuart's face. "I'm sorry he heard about it," he said quickly. "I'm sure I didn't want the story to get around; I'm not looking for notoriety."

"But I suppose when you happen to be over there again if that man, whoever he was, starts joking with you again you will try——"

"If he starts joking like that again he'll probably compel me to kill him," said Stuart, who was just a little nettled.

"As I thought. So you *are* a gunman, Mr. Holmes. Don't you think it would be better to be known just as a *man* than as a gunman?"

"Have it as you wish, Miss Dorothy," said Stuart slowly, meeting her eyes steadily.

"In the East, Mr. Holmes, men are just as brave as they are out here, but they do not strive for visible heroics——"

"You've been East?" inquired Stuart casually.

Dorothy flushed; but the blush left instantly and Stuart caught his breath at the contrast between her fair beauty when normal and when under stress.

"I went to college there," said the girl in something of a superior tone; "but don't forget that I was born in the West."

"I was afraid that perhaps you were forgetting it," he answered quietly.

"You mustn't speak to me like that. How could I forget it?"

"I beg your pardon," said Stuart, abashed. "I guess perhaps you couldn't." The words slipped out.

"What I have said was said for your own good, Mr. Holmes," the girl reproved.

Stuart nodded stiffly.

"You are too promising-looking a young man to be angling for a reputation as a bad-man," continued Dorothy.

And then, as Stuart smiled, she evidently regretted her last words, and added—

"But perhaps you are well fitted for the rôle."

The smile vanished and she walked on toward the house in triumph.

"That's funny," Stuart mused to himself as he continued on to the bunk-house. "College professor came out to Texas and wanted to learn to shoot first thing an' here's a girl goes back where he came from and fetches back preachin' against gun-play."

But he speedily forgot the girl's words in the memory of her beauty and poise as she had stood before him.

In the bunk-house he was greeted with acclaim by Burt Turner and another man who had been listening to Devon's account of the clash with Curran in the saloon at Pondera.

"Look here, Devon, I don't want you to be telling that story around," complained Stuart, thinking of Dorothy's view of the matter. "It ain't exactly a recommendation."

"Say, Holmes, listen," cried Burt cheerfully. "Any man who can put one over like that on that locoed-mouthed Curran is sure in to be talked about. We all hope you hook up with this outfit."

The man standing beside Burt agreed heartily. But a man sitting on the edge of a bench repairing a quirt appeared but mildly interested.

"This is Haines," said Burt, introducing the man beside him. Then turning to the man on the bunk, he said—

"Come up here an' meet Stuart Holmes, Craig—he's the man Devon was telling us about."

"Sure, glad to meet anybody," said Craig, offering a limp hand. "Gunman, eh?"

"Don't claim to be," answered Stuart, who thought he scented something sarcastic in the man's manner and speech.

"Well, I guess you can give a good imitation, then," said Craig with a loud laugh as he went out the door.

"Cow-boss," explained Burt Turner; "gruff sort of a cuss sometimes. Got his thumb chewed by a rope an' had to come in for a day to have it looked after. Dad's orders. Makes 'em report in when they're hurt. Going to hook up with us?"

"No, I'm going back to my place northwest of here in the morning. Your dad said he'd fix me up with a tent and some bedding and lend me a pack-horse and I can get what grub I need over in Pondera."

"Going to Pondera on your way back?" asked Devon quickly.

"Sure am," sang Stuart. "Suppose I'll meet any interesting people?"

Both Devon and Burt were thoughtful.

"Why don't you grub up here and strike straight for your place?" demanded Burt. "We can spare you what you need."

"Nope. I kinda want to be seen starting back."

"It might be you'd be walking into trouble to drift back into Pondera so soon," suggested Devon.

"Well, I can't start running away from trouble," said Stuart.

"I'll fix up your outfit," said Burt. "Come along."

As they made their way toward the supply-building they passed Craig, who directed a searching scrutiny at Stuart.

"He's worried," said Burt. "Worrying about the cattle. We were short on calves this Spring an' a few days ago we missed some two-year-olds. Craig says he thinks they crossed the river and edged off our range—the two-year-olds."

"And the calves——"

"Lost north of here. Plenty of calves in the herds along the river and west, but we were mighty short in the north."

"Rustlers?"

"We don't know—that is, dad won't say what he thinks. But it's strange, if anybody was to ask me. We'll get your stuff together in here."

They entered what appeared to be an addition to a barn and soon had a tent and other needs packed ready to put on a horse in the morning.

Stuart had his horses ready at daylight and quickly slung the pack on the animal which Uncle Jim Turner had lent him. He saw the girl at supper but no word passed between them; in fact, she seemed to wish to avoid him. Stuart could not read her thoughts but he surmised that if he could he would learn nothing complimentary to himself.

In the early dawn he set out for Pondera. He felt an exhilarating sense of uncertainty,

of impending events as he rode into the green Basin leading the pack-horse, and mounted the rim to the flat lands that led into town.

It was late in the morning when he finally entered.

IX

AS IN the case of his former visit, Stuart proceeded directly to the saloon. He stepped lightly across the low, sloping platform and passed inside. To his surprize he found the place deserted. There was no one in the room—no one behind the bar.

Stuart suspected that the last of the sheep-shearers had left, and, as there were no outfits near, business was at a standstill, at least until night, when any who might be working in the close vicinity would be likely to make for the only place of entertainment within many miles.

He was about to pound upon the bar in hopes of attracting attention from the man in charge, who should be somewhere around, when he heard voices in a room behind the rear partition.

"There you are," some one was saying; "there's thirteen cans—all Frank brought down this trip. They're watching the Whoop-Up Trail a little stiff near the line lately, and Frank brought these across the line behind his saddle."

"Oh, that'll keep the Helena Chinks goin' a few days an' by then you'll have more down, eh Gill?" said another voice.

Gill! Stuart was instantly keenly alert. Hadn't Devon said he understood they called the leader of the Marias River gang Gill? The man he wanted very much to see was in the room behind the partition.

He crept silently to the rear wall and sought for a crack in the flimsy partition. Soon he found it and peered within.

Standing beside a small deal-table were two men. One was tall and sallow with dark eyes which glowed brilliantly. He was dressed in black. Chaps, shirt, scarf and hat all were of black. Around the crown of his hat he wore a broad black leather band, buckled in front. Stuart noted with more or less curious surprize that the man wore no gun.

The other man, small and blond, dressed more after the manner of the towns, had a certain business air about him. A pencil was stuck with some papers in the pocket of his shirt. He was piling a number of small tins upon the table and while Stuart watched he took a small satchel from a chair and placed the tins therein.

"You want me to give you credit for the opium, Gill, or——"

"Credit's good enough," Gill broke in nervously; "we'll have a settlement after the next cargo comes down. I want to plant some money across the line."

With the mentioning of the word "opium" another source of the gang's income was revealed to Stuart. Gill and his crowd were smuggling opium across the line from some point in Canada where it was brought from British Columbia where the steamers touched.

"We're doing a pretty business," said the business-like man, whom Stuart assumed to be Frick, proprietor of the saloon.

"Yes," drawled Gill; "but the boys is gettin' restless. They want a big clean-up an' a trip to some center of dissipation. I know the signs. There ain't enough excitement to whisky and dope runnin'. They want a big job an' they're capable of handling one."

"Well, this is as far as I go," said Frick meaningly. "Dope an' whisky is all I can 'tend to."

"That's mostly my line, too," drawled Gill, with what Stuart thought was a hint of uneasiness in his tone.

Try as he could, Stuart could not recognize the man Gill as one of those who had participated in the raid on the ranch. The affair had taken place with such suddenness and it had been so dark that he had not been able to distinguish any of the attacking party to a degree which would have assured later recognition.

And by the same twist of circumstances it was unlikely that any of the raiders had got a good enough look at him to become familiar with his features or even his build.

Therefore if Gill was responsible for the tragedy they were on an equal footing so far as knowing each other was concerned.

No one thereabout knew Stuart's name, he reflected, except the C Bar bunch and Mangle, top herder for Short the sheepman. Stuart resolved to conceal his identity with the idea that in the event that he was followed to his ranch, or visited there, it would be by some one who was familiar with preceding events and thus open to suspicion.

As the two men in the little room moved

away from the table Stuart stole back to the door and slipped outside. He waited a short time and then stamped across the platform noisily and entered with a swagger as if he had but just that moment arrived.

Frick was behind the bar and the supposed leader of the outlaws was pouring a drink from a bottle.

Stuart nodded genially to both.

"Mighty dead dump this," he asserted as he called for a drink.

"Have one with me," said Gill, eying him narrowly.

"Sure," accepted Stuart, noting again that the man carried no gun and wondering at the unusual aspect of the case.

Could this man be the leader of the Marias River gang which was fast making a reputation for outlawry and which already had earned the suspicions of the cattlemen although they were not yet ready to confess to it? This man—unarmed?

Stuart felt the man's eyes boring into him as he poured his drink. He purposely looked once or twice toward the door and Gill noted these stealthy looks with evident satisfaction.

"Travelin' far, stranger?" he asked suddenly.

Stuart looked at him sharply.

"I'm traveling west a piece," he answered shortly.

"West?" The man Gill put the question in a rising inflexion of voice.

"The same," said Stuart. "Why? You going that way?"

"No," said Gill pleasantly. "No, I'm not going that way. Ain't very much out that-away, is there? No towns I know of—is there?"

"I ain't looking for towns," was Stuart's crisp reply.

Gill remained silent; but Stuart caught a look of mutual understanding flashed between Frick and Gill.

"Ain't looking for work?" suggested Gill with a faint smile.

Stuart laughed.

"Nope. It ain't work, exactly, I'm looking for."

Then he turned to Frick.

"You run that little maverick store next door?" he asked.

"Sure," replied Frick.

"I'm aiming to buy a little stuff," explained Stuart. "Got time to fix me up?"

"Sure," nodded Frick. "Come along."

THEY went into the small room next to the saloon where Stuart purchased some supplies and a quantity of cartridges.

"That fellow in there—" said Stuart, bending low and whispering into Frick's ear as he pointed with his thumb toward the saloon next door—"is he all right?"

"Sure thing," said Frick eagerly. "That's —" he lowered his voice—"that's Gill."

"Who's Gill?" demanded Stuart in evident suspicion.

But Frick now also showed suspicion.

"Say, ain't you the feller had the run-in with Curran here day or two ago?" he asked.

"Curran got too fast," frowned Stuart.

A glimmer of admiration showed in Frick's eyes. He looked Stuart over carefully.

"Gunman, eh?" he said, half to himself.

"I ain't lettin' 'em smoke me up if I can help it," said Stuart with a shrug.

The glimmer of admiration became a gleam.

"You lit out for the sheep-camps, didn't you?" asked Frick.

"I went south," replied Stuart. "People hereabouts seem —— interested in which way a man's traveling."

"Natural," said Frick. "Ain't many men in this country playin' a lone hand. I heerd you was lightnin' with your gun and—" He paused as if weighing his words.

"Yes?" prompted Stuart, gathering up his purchases.

"Oh, nothin'," said Frick lightly; "only there's a pretty good crowd hangs out here. Where you going?"

Stuart turned in the door.

"I'm goin' west a piece," he answered.

As he started for his horses he saw Frick hurrying back into the saloon. A few minutes later he swung into the saddle and, leading his pack-horse, turned his mount toward the rolling prairie-lands that reached toward the foothills.

X

FOR some minutes after he returned to the saloon Frick remained engaged in conversation with Gill. They talked in an undertone and Gill kept tapping the bar with long yellow fingers. The man plainly was nervous; his method of talking and his actions showed a continual

uneasiness. His glance roved constantly though it frequently centered bright, cold and keen on Frick's face.

"—an' he's faster then ——'s lightnin' with his gun," said Frick in a louder voice as he reached for a bottle to offer Gill refreshment.

"But travelin' alone that way——"

Gill shook his head.

"Big-Nose George always traveled alone," said Frick, referring to Northern Montana's most notorious outlaw.

"I know," said Gill; "but I gotta think it over."

"Curran said he'd like to see him with the bunch," said Frick. "Said so last night on his way north."

"Curran know him?" asked Gill, interested.

"Saw him in action," grinned Frick.

"Must know him or he'd never make a break about taking him on," reflected Gill.

"Real gunmen is —— scarce," said Frick, pouring himself a drink.

Gill became silent, moodily peering into his glass. The bright afternoon sun slanted through a window and traced a streak of gold on the double-planked floor that bore the imprint of many horses' hoofs—telltale marks of cow-puncher conviviality.

Suddenly the clink of spurs and stamp of riding-boots came from in front and a tall man in chaps and sombrero stood in the ray of sunlight.

"Howdy, men," the newcomer saluted, pulling papers and tobacco from the pocket of his flannel shirt.

"Hello, Devon," greeted Frick as he moved the bottle along the bar.

"Have one with me," invited Gill casually.

"Sure," responded Devon. "Whom am I drinking with?"

"Gill's my name." Gill spoke quietly, almost hesitatingly.

Devon's brows lifted as he set down his glass.

"You with that Marias River outfit?" he asked sharply, looking Gill over.

"I'm from the north," answered Gill.

"Sure. You're supposed to be the leader of that bunch of whisky-smuggling, calf-rustlin' outlaws that killed Sam Smith of the Y outfit. Your gang'll pay for that yet, Gill!"

Gill's eyes glowed dangerously, unusually bright.

"Ain't you makin' some rash statements, partner?" he said softly.

"No, I ain't making no rash statements an' you know it. I've got nerve enough to say what I think, an' what every puncher on the range thinks. There's been some mighty queer goings-on in these parts since you and that man Curran drifted in last year. You've kept pretty well hid but you'll get smoked out one of these fine days."

Gill shrugged his shoulders and motioned to Frick for the bottle.

Devon, who had come to Pondera for the explicit purpose of being on hand if Stuart should get into any trouble, looked around the empty room. Then he stepped close to Gill.

"Don't think I'm telling you these things because you're not packin' a gun, Gill; Frick there'll lend you a shootin'-iron if you think it would help your argument any!"

Gill laughed a mirthless, sinister laugh.

"You seem tolerably well supplied with information, Devon," he said with a sneer.

"An' it's the straight dope—just as high proof as that stuff you're runnin' in from Canady, an' you know it."

Devon, heated by the force of his own argument, reached again for the whisky-bottle and thus failed to see Gill's face pale and the man's hands twitch nervously at his sides.

"Ever think you might maybe think you knew too much?" asked Gill, stepping back a pace and leaning his right hand on the bar.

"I ain't never been hurt yet by knowing too much about an outfit like the one you're headin'," roared Devon, thoroughly angered.

The drinks he had taken were beginning to flame in his brain and he helped himself to still more of the raw, contraband liquor.

"I notice you ain't backward about drinking this stuff no matter how it gets in here," said Gill in an evil voice.

"I wasn't talking about whisky, an' you know it," thundered Devon. "An' now I'm a-goin' to quit talking an' let you do a little whispering on your own hook, Gill."

Gill shot a quick glance at Frick, who shoved the bottle toward Devon again.

"Join me?" Devon shot at the outlaw leader.

"Sure—why not?" said Gill.

"Look here, Gill," said Devon, after they had drank; "I'm from Texas. You nor your hull —— outfit can't put anything over on me onless you come in a crowd from all sides. Get me?"

Gill merely looked at him in silence.

"An' there's a lot of the boys hereabouts that stacks up just the same way," continued Devon. "We know Sam Smith was done dirty in here an' Frick knows it, too. But it ain't hardly his place to spill since you-all have been making this your hang-out an' are relievin' him of the need for sendin' down to Benton for his whisky. An' there's just one thing we'd like to know about Sam's trouble that'd stop a lot of permiscus shootin'——"

Devon paused for a moment; then, jerking his gun from its sheath on his right thigh, he shoved the barrel into the pit of Gill's stomach.

"Gill! Who killed him?"

Gill stepped backward and elevated his hands.

"Come on—speak up," cried Devon, lowering his gun as he made an impatient gesture with it.

"Who——"

Flame blazed in Devon's face and the room rocked to the sharp report of a gun.

"Gill! My ——!"

Frick reeled back against the shelf behind him.

Devon dropped to the floor, blood spurting from a hole in his forehead.

Gill leaned with both hands empty against the bar, tapping the scarred surface with agitated fingers.

"Forget it!" he said sharply to Frick.

"But Gill—My ——!" faltered Frick.

"Forget it!" repeated Gill, his gaze holding Frick fascinated.

From without came the rapid pound of hoofs and a rider threw himself from the saddle at the door. Gill swung with his hands held high out before him. Curran strode into the room and stopped, looking down at the body of the dead cow-puncher.

"You fool!" he cried, scowling darkly at Gill. Gill rested his hands upon his hips from which no cartridge-belt or holster hung.

"He knew too much an' he was talkin'," he said loudly.

"An' now we're in for it," growled Curran. "They'd let one killin' ride until they got a good chance to play back—but two is double-shootin' the turn, an' they're bound to copper."

"Let's—let's drag him out of here," said Frick, wetting his dry lips.

"Go to it," said Curran, striding up to the bar.

Gill joined him and the two talked in an undertone while Frick dragged the body of the dead cow-puncher out the rear, mumbling to himself as he did so.

When Frick returned Curran casually pushed the bottle toward him and dropped his right hand to the butt of the big black gun that protruded from the sheath on his thigh.

"You 'member how it happened?" he asked.

"No," said Frick. "But it's making it —— hard for me."

"We won't be botherin' you long, now," said Gill nervously.

"But I'm left here to face the music," complained Frick. "My ——, Gill! I never knew—I've seen lots of killin's—but I never heerd of a man with a gun in——"

"Shut up!" snarled Gill.

All three turned as the pound of hoofs came from outside. There was a clatter of boots and spurs upon the low platform—a curse as a man stumbled and recovered himself. Then Craig, cow-boss of the C Bar, stood in the doorway.

XI

RIDING leisurely, and handicapped by the pack-horse which he was compelled to lead, Stuart found at nightfall that he had covered only about half of the distance between Pondera and his ranch.

He camped, therefore, on the flanks of a deep ravine through which ran a thin stream—a remnant of the flood-waters of Spring. He hobbled the horses because he was afraid the horse he had borrowed at the C Bar might stray or turn about and attempt to regain the ranch and that his saddle-horse might follow him.

A strong wind was blowing and clouds were gathering in the northeast. Stuart took the tent and fashioned a shelter by taking advantage of some posts sticking in the ground which had once been a corral.

Then he built a fire and cooked some supper. When he had finished eating night had descended. Scuttling clouds obscured the stars and made the darkness complete. He kept his fire going because it lent an aspect of cheerfulness to offset the depressing gloom of the night and the gathering storm.

Inside the canvas shelter he arranged his blankets and the light from the fire lighted

up the small space. He drew out a flap of the tent so that it protected the small blaze from the wind and pinned it down. Then he lay down upon the blankets and rolled a cigaret.

His thoughts reverted to the leader of the outlaws. He wondered if Gill would prove to be the man he was looking for. He debated whether it would not have been the better plan to have taken him to task and accused him of being responsible for the death of his father. He might have been able to determine by the man's manner if he was the person he was looking for. More than ever he regretted that his father had not lived long enough to describe the enemy who had caused him so much trouble and finally had taken his life. Time after time his father had said this mysterious personage was tricky. Stuart remembered with a start that Gill had worn no weapon. Was it a trick?

Stuart replenished the fire many times while he was engaged in his reverie. The prairie wind gained in volume until it seemed to be blowing a veritable gale. Stuart dozed and half-asleep imagined he heard the thudding of hoofs against the sod above the ravine. In a dim, vague way he wondered half-consciously if his horses were trying to climb out; then quickly he became aware of a shadow before the fire. He opened his eyes wide with a start.

Gill was standing before the opening to the shelter.

Stuart leaped to his feet, his right hand darting to the gun that hung at his side.

"Hello," said Gill quietly as the wind was momentarily stilled. "Was cutting around to the north and saw your blaze. Thought I'd drop in for a chat."

Instinctively Stuart knew this to be a lie; knew that the man had followed him. Why? If he had wanted to do him harm he had had the opportunity. Again he noted that the tall leader of the outlaws wore no gun. An unarmed bandit? Stuart smiled in silent irony and kept his hand on the butt of his gun.

"Looks like it might turn into a wild night," said Gill.

Stuart bit his lip in perplexity. How was he to deal with this man? Could he be forced to tell anything he might know? Or was this a trick——

"Might invite a fellow in," suggested Gill. "This wind——"

"Come ahead," invited Stuart.

Gill stooped low as he slipped inside the shelter and sat down upon the ground opposite the blankets.

"Gill, why did you follow me?" Stuart demanded quickly.

"To make you a proposition," replied the man instantly.

Stuart, taken aback by the ready answer, withheld an exclamation of surprize with difficulty.

"What is it?" he asked, seating himself.

"Put in with us," said Gill, his burning eyes holding Stuart's gaze.

"You mean join the Marias River gang?" asked Stuart.

"Why not? This is a big country to play a lone hand in. You handle a fast gun. We can use you an' we'll play square. The bunch would like to have you along. Frick says you're a wonder."

"And Curran?"

Gill laughed mirthlessly.

"You've got Curran respectin' you, which is more than any other man in these parts or elsewhere can say!"

Stuart pondered the strange proposition. If Gill had been responsible for the raid on the ranch and his father's death would he be asking him to join his band of outlaws? But—did Gill know who he was? He believed not. On the other hand it might be a trick of Gill's to get him into his power. Yet if the outlaw leader had wanted to make away with him he had had a chance to do so that very night when he stood before the fire and Stuart had lain dozing on the blankets.

"What's the game?" asked Stuart finally, showing interest.

"We've been runnin' whisky," said Gill frankly, "but we're figurin' on a clean-up——"

He paused, waving a hand in a gesture that seemed to mean big things.

"Cattle?" asked Stuart sharply.

"I ain't sayin'," evaded Gill. "Not unless you put in with us."

The canvas tugged at its lashings as the wind careened across the vast open spaces in advance of the storm. Gill kept tapping his fingers upon his knee. Stuart contracted the nervousness which radiated from the man.

"Gill, stop that!" he cried irritably.

The fingers became still and the gaze from the bright eyes shifted to the blaze.

"Think it over," said Gill quietly. "You can go out of here with a packed money-belt in the Fall if you want to put in with us. Frick at Pondera will tell you where to go if you figure to come in with us."

As the wind caught the blaze and then smothered it for an instant Gill leaned toward the blankets. Stuart's hand again dropped to his gun. But Gill merely placed a hand upon the bed to aid himself in rising. Stuart watched him as he stooped low and left the shelter.

"Think it over," said Gill again from the outside as he moved away.

Stuart leaped to the entrance, saw Gill mounting his horse in the shadows. He ran out but Gill already was urging his horse up the ravine. Stuart followed on foot without reckoning why. When he reached the rim of the ravine he could see nothing in the black pall of the night. But he heard the dull echo of flying hoofs in the east, growing fainter and fainter.

Gill was doubtless going back to Pondera.

Stuart walked slowly down into the ravine, saw that his horses were near by, and replenished the fire. He sat down on the blankets within the shelter to consider the strange advent of his visitor and his unusual proposition.

He had been asked to join the outlaws. Because they thought he was a lone rider and a gunman? Because Gill believed he was an outlaw also and attempting to play a lone hand at some underhanded work in the neighborhood? Or was it an attempt to lay a trap? And what kind of trap?

Stuart leaned back upon the blankets and listened to the first drops of rain shed by the approaching storm as they pelted against the canvas roof.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright and stared at a spot on the outer edge of the blankets. Quickly he felt in a pocket and brought out the little tobacco-sack which his father had picked up beneath the kitchen window on the night of the raid. He could feel its content intact and so replaced the sack in the pocket.

But he continued to stare at the blanket.

"Another!" he exclaimed aloud as he picked up an object from the place where Gill had rested his hand as he was in the act of getting up.

It was a bullet neatly creased as if with a knife across its nose!

XII

STUART'S first instinct was to dash out into the storm and follow Gill, for he had now definitely established a connection between the outlaw leader and the signal which had preceded his father's death.

But reasoning soon induced him to give up this plan. Suppose he were to confront Gill with the creased bullet, he reflected; what progress would be made in the solving of his problem? He could accuse Gill and perhaps have to shoot him down; but the mystery still would have to be unraveled. He could not be sure that Gill was the enemy his father had spoken of and warned him against. He could not prove that he had led or planned or ordered the raid that had resulted in his father's death.

And then it was suddenly borne in upon him that Gill was under the impression that he (Stuart) knew the meaning of the creased-bullet signal! Otherwise why would he have left it? And, if this were the case, did Gill, then, know his name? Was it a threat of death as his father had hinted? And why should Gill wish to warn him when he had had a chance to kill him if he so desired?

Baffled and with his head aching with the problem, Stuart now was put to the necessity of looking after his shelter, for the storm had broken and rain and wind were beating down upon the tent with a force that threatened to wreck it. He went out and made the fastenings more secure and carried in his packs and saddle.

The horses were standing under the lee of a bluff above the shelter. Stuart reentered and again lay down upon the blankets. After a time he slept. When he awoke it was still dark but the full force of the storm was spent and the wind was dying down. He peered out and saw the first faint glimmer of the dawn in the east.

When it was light and the rain had ceased he made a fire with a few dry sticks he found under the canvas and cooked his breakfast. The sky had cleared in the east and the sun soon was up. He broke camp, placed the load upon the pack-horse, saddled the other animal, and started on his way to the ranch.

It lacked an hour of noon when he arrived before the fast-dwindling mound of ashes which marked the site where the

ranch-house had stood. He unsaddled and removed the pack from the horses and hobbled them. After he had prepared and eaten a meal he set about the task of erecting his tent. This accomplished, he placed his other belongings within and sat down to rest.

Whatever the meaning of the creased-bullet signal, Stuart suspected that in the event he did not answer it as expected he could soon expect a visit from the outlaws. He did not intend to be caught napping.

In the midst of these reflections he remembered what his father had said about a cache in the place where they had started to dig a cistern.

He found a crowbar which had been used in making post-holes for the fence and with this and the ax he had brought among his supplies he started to excavate at a place behind where the house had been.

It was slow work because he had to lift out the dirt with the broad side of the ax as he was unable to find a shovel. The sun was low in the western sky and fast dropping behind the mountains when he finally felt wood beneath his crowbar.

He worked carefully and uncovered a small box. He took this into the tent and pried off the top. Within was another and smaller box made of tin. Stuart pulled out the nail in the clasp and opened it. Within was a package and when this was unwrapped Stuart found a number of neatly bound bunches of bills of large denomination.

He counted one of the packages and found it totaled two thousand dollars. There were ten of the bundles. Twenty thousand dollars!

Instantly he remembered his father's speaking of twenty thousand dollars several times in his delirium. Undoubtedly it was this money he had had reference to and at the last he had gone too quickly to tell Stuart all about it.

Examining the packages, Stuart was thrilled to find a piece of white paper twisted under the band of one of them. He unfolded it and at once recognized his father's handwriting. It was only by careful study that he was able to make out the characters of his father's sprawling hand.

This twenty thousand dollars belongs to the heirs of John Loud. He has a sister in the East somewhere and I have advertised in the Eastern papers for her. I took the money from Miguel after he killed Loud and robbed him at High Crossing on the Brazos, June 8, 1887. Loud was my friend and I am making great effort to find his sister. The law was so bad in that county I knew if this money was turned in none of Loud's folks would ever see a cent of it so I brought it North, for which I am leaving this same month. The bank at Salters was robbed this same night and Miguel threatened me he would say I robbed the bank if I told any one. I should have killed him and now he will try to get me and I would have killed him if it hadn't been for my wife. If anything should happen to me this money belongs to Loud's sister or other heirs if they can be found. DANIEL HOLMES

Stuart drew a long breath after he had perused the note twice. It was this trouble which had caused his father to leave Texas. It was a case of leaving Texas or killing the man Miguel and Daniel Holmes had yielded to the entreaties of his wife.

Stuart leaped to his feet. He now knew the name of the man he was looking for. Miguel! Instantly he thought of the Spanish pronunciation of the word, particularly the last syllable. Might it not be that Gill had taken this last syllable and given it an English twist in assuming a new name?

But the matter of the creased bullets? Thinking of this, Stuart speedily decided to be on the lookout. He replaced the money in the tin box and buried it well in the earth beneath the débris where the house had stood. The note he kept.

He saddled his horse and rode to the low-lying butte a short distance north. There was but one narrow trail to the top of this butte and Stuart planned to spend the night there, watching for the raiders whom he half-expected would come soon. Perhaps, after all, there were other outlaws in the country besides the Marias River gang, and he might be mistaken in——

Stuart paused abruptly in his deductions. He swept the country north and west with a practised gaze. For long moments he looked—north, east, south, and west—and then his lips compressed into a thin white line.

He vaulted into the saddle and rode down from the butte. In the long prairie twilight he rode northwest two miles to where his herd had been grazing. He found tracks nearly washed away by the rain. Farther north he found the tracks bunched into a wide path which led northeast toward the Marias. He continued in this path to a high rise of ground from which one could see for miles north. There was not a head of stock to be seen.

His cattle had disappeared!

He turned his horse and started back for the tent. His face was grim and set. However he soon began to whistle an old range tune. He was still whistling when he arrived at the tent and began packing emergency rations in his slicker. He tied the slicker back upon the saddle, struck the tent and packed it and the blankets and balance of his supplies upon the pack-horse.

In the early night he struck back across the flatlands, laying a course southwest toward the Teton and the C Bar ranch.

The stars and the moon gleamed in the heavens and when the moon had drifted down behind the western mountains he saw the first of the C Bar herds far up the Teton. He increased his pace as he turned down the river toward the ranch.

XIII

HE REACHED the C Bar ranch-buildings shortly after daybreak. He met Craig near the corrals on his way to the bunk-house.

"Where's Devon?" asked Stuart shortly.

"Dead," said Craig.

"Dead!" exclaimed Stuart.

"Killed over in Pondera yesterday," explained Craig, cutting a chew of tobacco from a thick black plug.

Stuart could only stare in astonishment and dismay. He had liked Devon from the start; had, indeed, gone back to the C Bar to enlist his company in the hazardous expedition he had planned to the north.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"Shot in the forehead in front of the bar," said Craig; "an' we don't know who got him. I rode over there for plug-tobacco in the afternoon. As I was coming in from the Basin I saw Curran cutting across from the northeast. Before he got to the saloon I heard a shot inside. When I got there, Curran and Gill—know Gill?"—Stuart nodded—"Well, Gill was there an' Frick. Devon's body had been carried out the back way."

"Yes—go on," urged Stuart, his eyes flashing fire.

"Well, that's about all. Frick says he was outside an' don't know who did it. Gill wasn't packin' a gun an' I know Curran wasn't there for I seen him riding in as I heard the shot. Least I thought it was a shot, although I couldn't be sure, for I was some distance away."

"Nobody else there—just those three?" demanded Stuart, scowling.

"That's all I see. But Devon had enemies. He's always been a hard talker when he got a few drinks of liquor in him."

Stuart scorned this statement.

"It's up to Gill or Frick—or maybe Curran. Maybe you didn't hear any shot before Curran got there. I saw Gill myself yesterday when I was in Pondera for supplies an' he wasn't carrying a gun. Maybe Frick——"

"Scared cold," put in Craig; "an' Frick ain't pullin' off any killin's, you know that. It wouldn't get him anything an' he ain't noways handy with a shootin'-iron."

Stuart looked about somewhat dazed in his effort to get a mental grasp on this new angle of the extraordinary series of events which had been enacted in the space of a few days.

"What'd the boys say about it?" he asked finally.

"Most of 'em is out on the range," answered Craig. "We can't spare 'em for any general raid at this time."

He looked at Stuart shrewdly.

"Those as was here an' heard about it was for making for Pondera straight off an' shootin' Frick an' his place an' all who happened to be in it off the map, but the old man put his foot down on that. It's better to wait until we know more about what's goin' on——"

"Know more!" cried Stuart. "Devon killed outright—my father dead—that Marias River nest of outlaws runnin' amuck! See here, Craig; my cattle are gone."

"Maybe they've just strayed——"

"Strayed?" Stuart interrupted. "They've ranged in about Lost Creek for all Spring an' there's plenty of feed there yet. There's a track as wide as a quarter-section leading toward the Marias. If those cattle strayed they strayed with a no-good rustlin' outfit behind 'em!"

Craig shifted his glance about before replying.

"If they *was* rustled," he said at last, "the bunch that got 'em would hardly be drivin' 'em north to ship yet. You've got plenty of time to hunt 'em up."

Stuart laughed in derision.

"Where's Uncle Jim?" he asked soberly in another moment.

"Gone to Benton to a stockmen's meeting," replied Craig.

"When's he coming back?"

"In about ten days, maybe a little less. He left just a little while before you came."

"I think I'll go up to the house and leave a note for him," said Stuart. "The pack-horse I had is out there near the upper corral with the pack on him. I'll——"

"Never mind; I'll take care of him," said Craig. "You won't want your outfit today?"

"No," said Stuart. "But I'd like to put up my saddle-horse for the afternoon."

"Sure," said Craig amiably. "I'll have him looked after."

At the house Stuart found Dorothy Turner on the porch.

"I'd like to leave a note for your father, Miss Dorothy," said Stuart, removing his hat.

"Very well; come in," said Dorothy in a precise tone.

She showed Stuart into the house to her father's office where there was a desk and paper and ink.

"I suppose you heard about—" Stuart hesitated as he observed the serious look on her face.

"About Devon?" she asked, lifting her pretty brows.

Stuart nodded silently.

"Yes, I've heard about it," she said. "It goes to show what these saloon exhibitions lead to. It ought to be a good lesson for you all. It needn't to have happened."

"I see," said Stuart gravely. "You think Devon was engaging in heroics?"

"Quite likely. I understand he was that kind." She looked worried for a space. "Mr. Holmes," she said, with a rising note of entreaty in her voice; "you are not going to try and get my brothers and the men here to go and—ah—avenge Devon, are you?"

Stuart was surprized.

"Why, no," he said finally.

"I'm glad of that," she said in evident relief. "It would be just like throwing oil on a fire to put it out and I do not want to see my brothers risk their lives in such a foolish cause."

Stuart reflected for some moments over this remark.

"They hint that Devon was shot down in cold blood, Miss Dorothy."

Her eyes flashed.

"Well, let those who are accustomed to such work avenge him, then," she exclaimed. "You're a gunman—if you were a friend of Devon's why don't *you* take up his battle?"

Stuart was very grave. The girl had hurt him and yet he could not help liking her. And she had made a suggestion.

"As you say, Miss Dorothy," he said quietly.

For a moment she appeared startled and ill at ease.

Stuart turned to the desk, arranged a sheet of paper and dipped a pen in the ink.

"Ah—I didn't exactly mean what you thought," said Dorothy, who now was plainly disconcerted.

"But it sounded like pretty fair logic," observed Stuart, without looking at her. "I *was* his friend, and I don't approve of the circumstances surrounding his death because I don't believe he had fair play. Something tells me he didn't have fair play. I'd bet my life on it."

"But I—I—" She faltered. "I don't want to be responsible for you going out to—to——"

"To kill some one?" asked Stuart in matter-of-fact tones.

"You mustn't intimate that I would be guilty of such a thing," said the girl as her color came and went. "You must not misunderstand me, Mr. Holmes!"

"I don't believe I do," said Stuart, smiling at her.

She regarded him for some time as he sat and wrote. Her gaze roved from his hair—a golden-bronze in the light that filtered through the window near the desk—to his riding-boots and spurs. There was a condescending gleam of admiration in her eyes as she noted his build, his clear-cut features, and a certain natural gracefulness that asserted itself even when he wore chaps and spurs. She gazed for some moments, fearsomely, at the black gun-sheath and the pistol-butt which protruded.

"You are from Texas?" she asked curiously at last.

"Yes," answered Stuart, without looking up.

"Have you ever killed a man?" she queried in a low voice.

"No," he said shortly, still writing.

The girl seemed relieved.

"I--I wouldn't want you to take too seriously what I said in—in—on the moment," she said in confusion.

"I take it you mean well," said Stuart soberly, as he finished writing and looked

at her. "That's all I take seriously about you, Miss Dorothy, except——"

He paused and shifted his gaze awkwardly.

"Yes—except what?" she asked spiritedly, recovering from her confusion when she saw he was nonplused.

"Except that you are very beautiful, Miss Dorothy," he said, steadying his gaze.

She rose quickly and with a manner suggesting haughtiness.

"You include idle compliments to ladies among your talents, Mr. Holmes?"

"I never lie," said Stuart simply.

"You can leave the note for my father on the desk," she said carelessly.

She hesitated as she started to leave.

"I wonder—since you profess to be so chivalrous—if you would promise me something in the interests of—of humanity."

"What is it you wish me to promise?" asked Stuart, surprized.

She looked at him again with interest before replying.

"That you will not have any trouble with those men up at Pondera, because——"

Stuart toyed idly with the pen.

"I can't promise that, Miss Dorothy."

"I could hardly have expected it," she said quickly and walked swiftly from the room.

Stuart folded the note, sealed it in an envelope and left it on the desk. Then he went to the bunk-house to catch a few hours of sleep.

XIV

NIGHT had fallen over the vast, dim reaches of prairie country. The velvet-black canopy that arched above was splashed with stars. In the west the mountains traced their jagged outlines in shadows against the skies. The moon hung directly overhead like a silver disk and gazed down at its image mirrored in the still waters of Basin Spring.

Stuart Holmes rode slowly on the eastern rim of the Basin. He leaned forward over his horse's neck as if listening to the whisper of the vagrant wind in the grasses. At a point near the north end of the Basin he checked his horse as his eyes caught a gleam of light in the east.

In quick decision, then, he turned his horse toward the light. As he neared it he distinguished the white outlines of sheep, thousands of them, close-grouped on a tableland north of a herder's wagon. The light shone dimly through the canvas top of the domicile of the tender of the flock.

A dog ran out to him, barking once or twice as he dismounted. A head appeared in the wagon-entrance above the steps.

"Who's there?" called a thick voice.

"Friend," answered Stuart. "Got any tobacco?"

"Sure—come in, come in," stuttered the voice.

Stuart crept inside. On the edge of the bunk that filled the front end of the wagon sat the top-herder, Mangle. Stuart nodded to him gravely and with secret satisfaction. He had expected to find Mangle—had wanted to find him.

On the table near the head of the bunk was a bottle of whisky. Only a few drinks remained in the bottle. Mangle's head wabbled as he motioned toward the bottle.

"Li'l drink, eh?" he invited.

"Sure," accepted Stuart as he poured a small drink into a cup. "Here's how—and again."

Mangle tipped the bottle to his lips and took a long pull.

"Visitors today," he said thickly. "Always drunk after visitors. What're visitors for, anyhow?"

He looked at Stuart belligerently.

"That's what I say," said Stuart amiably.

He had not anticipated that he would be so lucky as to find Mangle in such a condition. He had come to use other means to compel him to talk. Now it seemed but a question of listening quietly.

"Say," mumbled Mangle, "ain't you man I saw with Devon at spring—night, two ago?"

"Same man," answered Stuart readily, making a pretense of taking another drink. "Who is this Devon, anyway?"

"Mouth—too much mouth," said Mangle. "He'll get it."

"Think so?" asked Stuart casually.

"Know it," nodded Mangle; "Curran or Gill—hard pair, them. Killers. Blood next—watch out. Say, where you ridin' round to?"

"Pondera," replied Stuart, offering Mangle the bottle.

The man took a long drink.

"Wha' for?" he demanded.

"To see Gill," said Stuart.

"Wha' for?"

"Business," grinned Stuart with a wink. "Oh-o-h. I see."

Mangle winked back and bared his yellow teeth in a hideous grimace.

"Bus-i-ness, eh?"

He winked again and shoved the bottle on the table with an unsteady hand.

"Bus-i-ness with who? Gill?"

Stuart nodded meaningly.

"Goin' in on the play?" asked Mangle, leering.

"I reckon so," affirmed Stuart, affecting nonconcern.

"D'ja get the sign, eh?"

Stuart thought rapidly and then took the bull by the horns.

"The creased bullet?" he said softly.

Mangle nodded his head energetically with another grimace.

"You got it, eh? An' you're goin' in? You're wise. Devon better foller suit."

He wabbled his head from side to side.

"—— fool!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"The sign didn't bother me," said Stuart in a false bluster. "I'd made up *my* mind beforehand. I ain't worried about signs."

"Eh?" Mangle regarded him in drunken amazement.

Stuart took a chance on hitting the mark.

"I know," he said. "The sign means join the outfit or ——"

"The man with the tall hat," grinned Mangle.

"Gill," thought Stuart to himself. The creased bullet then was a silent message to join Gill's gang or take the consequences. Had Devon then ignored the sign? Had his father— Inwardly, Stuart's blood boiled at the startling thought. Gill had flung the challenge in his father's face and made good the threat.

But Mangle was reaching for the bottle and mumbling again.

"I'm the first to cross," he said.

"Say," said Stuart suddenly. "Is Short in with us?"

"I'm the first——"

Mangle drained the fiery content of the bottle.

"Tha's how *I* stand—first—to cross."

He drooped wearily against the head of the bunk.

"There they lay," he roared in a frenzy as he waved an unsteady hand toward the north and then subsided into broken and unintelligible mutterings.

Stuart stepped to the door and looked out.

"Of course," he murmured to himself. "The sheep."

"First—to—cross," repeated Mangle as he sprawled out upon the bunk.

Stuart, puzzled, remembered what Uncle Jim Turner had said about the range agreement with the sheepmen. No sheep were allowed in the Basin; none could cross the lines drawn on the eastern and southern rim of the rich range about the great spring.

"When are we going over?" asked Stuart, edging closer to the bunk and speaking in a loud voice.

"First — to — cross," breathed Mangle sleepily.

Stuart sat down upon a crude chair near the table. So that was the big play Gill planned to make. A sheep war! And why? Stuart regretted he hadn't known this when he left the note for Turner in which he had stated that his cattle were missing and that he was setting out to find them and to learn if possible who was the man who had been responsible for his father's death and preceding troubles.

A sheep war! Stuart realized that he had no time to lose. And if Mangle was implicated to such an extent that his was to be the first move it was almost a certainty that Short, the sheepman, was implicated also. And, if so, it was reasonable to assume that other sheepmen in the district were involved. And Turner was at the stockmen's meeting in Fort Benton.

Mangle evidently was unaware of Devon's death. From the drunken man's talk Stuart surmised that Devon had defied Gill. Mangle had linked Gill and Curran as a bad pair. Stuart felt a rising curiosity as to who had visited Mangle that day. Doubtless the plans for invasion of the cattle-range had been discussed.

He stepped to the bunk and shook the figure reclined thereon.

"Mangle!" he called shrilly. "Mangle!"

But there was no answering flutter of the eyelids of the man on the bunk. Mangle was out—would be out for hours.

Stuart blew out the lantern on the table and slipped from the wagon. He mounted and rode past the great flock of sheep resting on the flat land north.

"Five thousand," he estimated. "They'd make quick work of the Basin range if left alone in there a few days, and they need that range for the beef round-up."

He put the spurs to his horse and swung

into the north. He racked his brains for the origin of the creased-bullet sign. Gill had doubtless brought it from Texas. Was Gill to turn out to be Miguel?

If Mangle had only held out a while longer! But Stuart knew he had been lucky. Had Mangle realized all he had been saying? The man's statements, however, seemed to fit in with the turn events had taken.

Stuart urged his horse to its fastest gait, across the dim reaches of prairie north of the Basin. When he came in sight of Pondera at last he gave a sigh of relief. Lights were shining from the windows of Frick's saloon.

XV

STUART tied his horse to a post at the side of the store. There were several horses in front of the saloon. He stole around to the window in the east side of the building and peered cautiously into the barroom. Men were grouped before the bar and Stuart recognized Sandy and Mack Lander, who had been with Curran the day Stuart and Curran had met.

The men seemed on familiar terms and Stuart surmised that they were all of the same party. He saw Frick go through the door in the rear partition to the room behind carrying a bottle and glasses and decided that Gill was probably there in conference with some one. Frick returned in a few moments and put some money in a drawer. Four of the men sat down at a table and began a game of stud poker. All of the men appeared to have been drinking freely.

Stuart walked to the platform in front of the saloon, stepped lightly across it, and entered.

The men at the bar swung about and those at the table looked up quickly as he walked to the forward end of the bar and leaned carelessly against it upon his left elbow and he faced them. He caught swift looks of comprehension flashed between the men. Curran was not there and Stuart suddenly jumped to the conclusion that he was with Gill in the back room, if Gill was there. Curran, he suspected, was Gill's right-hand man.

"Evening, stranger," said the man nearest Stuart.

Stuart returned the greeting casually and laid some money on the bar, indicating with a sweep of his right hand to Frick that he wished to buy a drink for all present.

Apparently the men accepted this as a favorable sign for they resumed their talk and joking, including Stuart in some of their impersonal jibes, and winking at him occasionally.

But underneath it all he detected a guarded attitude on the part of the others and noted with secret disdain the obsequious demeanor of Frick. He felt sure that Frick knew much more than even the C Bar men suspected; and he was certain Frick could explain the circumstances surrounding the killing of Devon.

The men raised their glasses to him and in the lull while they were drinking he caught the subdued murmur of voices in the rear room. One of the men at the table seemed to sense that he was listening and noisily began reciting a ribald toast. Roars of laughter immediately drowned the murmur of the voices from the room behind the partition.

Another card-game was started and soon all the men had taken a hand and were engaged in gambling. Stuart declined an invitation to join them with a shake of the head and a smile. He wanted to edge along to the lower end of the bar near the partition but he also wished to remain facing the men. To face them from the lower end of the bar he would have to stand with his back to the door in the partition. He decided to remain where he was.

It now was early in the morning, nearly dawn. Stuart had a mind to engage Frick in conversation but the man was busy attending to the orders of the card-players. So he merely toyed with another drink and waited, straining his ears when the talk died down in an endeavor to hear the voices in the rear room and determine who were there.

This uncertain means of securing information proved unnecessary. The rear door opened and a man came out. Stuart looked at him curiously for he had never seen him before. He was a man of medium build, dressed much in the same manner as a stockman, with a round, ruddy face and eyes that seemed to twinkle beneath the brim of his hat pulled down over his forehead.

He spoke to no one, merely glanced at Frick, who nodded respectfully, ignored

Stuart, and walked out of the place. A moment afterward Stuart heard the pound of hoofs east of town. He turned from looking out the front entrance into the darkness to find Gill standing in the rear door.

He was regarding Stuart with a keen gaze and now nodded gravely.

Stuart beckoned to him and the outlaw leader came at once to where Stuart was standing. Frick set out a bottle and glasses. The room suddenly became quiet as the men hushed their talk.

Stuart could see significant glances directed at the outlaw leader in the mirror behind the bar.

As they put down their glasses Stuart reached into his shirt pocket with his left hand and laid the creased bullet on the bar before Gill.

Gill looked at it a moment and then put it in a pocket. Stuart again made mental note of the fact that the chief of the Marias River outfit carried no gun. He watched for some sign to be flashed by Gill in the mirror to the men behind them.

Gill turned to Stuart and bared his yellow teeth in a smile.

"Well, what about it?" he asked.

"I think I'll take up that proposition you made last night, or night before last, as it's nearly morning," said Stuart.

"That's sense," said Gill with a searching glance.

"More sense than Devon had, I figure," said Stuart watching the other closely.

Gill made no reply to this. He turned and casually regarded the men behind them.

"Boys," he said finally, "the gunman's goin' in with us."

Immediately there was a stir and outspoken statements of approval. The men thronged up to the bar and Frick got busy serving them at a word from Gill. When they had had several drinks the first light of day was shining in the place and Frick put out the hanging oil-lamps.

"You boys better light out for the river," said Gill. "We'll be coming up that way later in the morning."

As the men left Gill went to the window and looked out. Stuart had noticed that he seemed anxious.

"Waiting for some one," he told himself.

Gill stepped to the door and spoke a few words in a low tone to one of the men.

Stuart turned to Frick, who was wiping glasses behind his bar.

"Who was the fellow who was in there with the chief?" he asked, motioning with a thumb toward the back room. "Seems to me I've seen him somewheres but can't recall his name."

Frick hesitated; then remembering Gill's announcement of Stuart's joining the gang he answered—

"That was Short, the sheepman."

"Oh, I see," smiled Stuart with a wink. "Business."

Gill rejoined them before Frick had an oportunity to reply.

"You better rustle up something for us to eat, Frick," he said; "we may not get away before breakfast."

Frick went out the back way and they could hear him shouting instructions to his cook. Gill sat down at a table where he could look out the window.

"We'll go on up to the river after we get something to eat," he said to Stuart.

Stuart sat down also. The conviction was growing upon him that he was deliberately stepping into a trap, but he was resolved to carry his plan through to a finish.

Short in a conference with Gill! They had been laying plans for the invasion of the cattle-range, probably. Stuart could not figure out how a sheep war would profit Gill and his followers although he realized that some sinister move for gain was behind it.

Gill kept tapping the top of the table with his long fingers while his eyes burned under his high, black sombrero with the broad leather band.

Suddenly he rose and passed through the door in the rear. Stuart heard the clatter of a galloping horse brought to a halt behind the saloon. He stepped to the partition just as the cook came in with some dishes. When the man left, Gill reentered. As Stuart walked around the table to seat himself again he caught a flash of a man on a horse disappearing in a cloud of dust.

But the flash was enough to acquaint him with the identity of the rider. It was Curran.

Gill seemed more cheerful. He even joked with Stuart about the breakfast as the man brought in the food.

"Sure glad you've hooked up with us," he said as they began eating. "Always glad to get a good man in my bunch."

Stuart pondered over the fact that the man had not asked his name.

XVI

THEY had hardly finished eating when Gill pointed with a startled exclamation out the door. Stuart looked and saw two horsemen approaching at breakneck speed. Gill rose in haste and started for the rear door.

"They mustn't see me here," he called back. "I'll get our horses around the back way an' you can join me there in a minute. Hold 'em in here until Frick comes in."

He darted through the door and closed it.

Stuart stepped to the bar just as Burt and Roy Turner came in. Both brothers bore a look of menace but their faces cleared when they saw Stuart.

Burt started to speak but ceased when Stuart covertly held up a warning finger.

"How d'ye do," said Stuart loudly; "you boys are from the C Bar, ain't you?"

The brothers looked at each other wonderingly but at once divined that Stuart must have a reason for acting so strangely.

"You hit it right first time," said Burt, winking. "Where's the rat that runs this place?"

"Just stepped out a minute," replied Stuart.

Then in an undertone—

"What's up?"

"We come over here to make that skunk tell us how Devon got killed," whispered Burt.

Again Stuart raised his voice.

"If he don't get back in here pretty quick I'm a-goin' across the bar an' help myself."

Stepping closer to Burt, he said softly—

"Let the Devon business go for a day or two and then maybe I'll have some news for you."

Burt eyed him steadily and Stuart saw him look curiously at the table where he and Gill had eaten breakfast. Burt's gaze when he looked at Stuart again was plainly questioning.

"Couple sheepherders in for a time had breakfast before they went back."

It sounded ridiculous and Stuart knew it, but he could not tell the truth for Gill must be within hearing and he did not want him to suspect that he was on friendly terms with the brothers. Neither did he want Burt and Roy to know that Gill was there because they might start trouble and spoil his plan to accompany Gill to the rendezvous of the outlaws as a member of the gang.

Burt and Roy evidently were suspicious of his explanation and Stuart saw with apprehension that both brothers suddenly seemed to look at him with a different expression in their eyes.

"Funny time of the year for sheepherders to be having a blowout," observed Roy.

Stuart heard a movement in the room behind the partition and knew that Gill was there listening and possibly watching them.

"You never can tell what a sheepherder will do," he said, trying to convey another meaning with his look.

"That's right," agreed Burt; "but their bosses sometimes tell 'em what to do."

At this juncture Frick appeared from the rear and went behind the bar.

"Say, you dirty louse," began Burt; "what——"

He paused when he caught a warning look from Stuart in the mirror and his face became fixed with a puzzled expression.

"Just outside getting something to eat," said Frick hurriedly. "Sorry to keep you waiting."

Burt glared menacingly but held back the balance of the accusation and pertinent question he had been about to hurl at the saloon man. Roy continued to stare at Stuart in a way that made the latter squirm inwardly.

"I take it you boys just run in for some supplies," said Stuart, once more attempting to tell them with his eyes what he could not under the circumstances speak outright in so many words.

"An' you're out for the morning air," said Burt sarcastically.

Stuart laughed after a strained fashion.

"That's worth another. I'll buy."

He nodded to Frick.

As Frick pushed out the bottle the muffled sound of horses was heard behind the saloon and there were stealthy footfalls behind the partition.

Burt put down his glass with a bang.

"Think I'll see who the early-mornin' callers are," he jeered as he started for the rear door.

Stuart leaped ahead of him and planted his back to the door.

"Never mind the callers," he said sharply.

Burt fell back in astonishment; then his face flushed darkly.

"What kind of a game *is* this?" he cried angrily.

"If it's a game the hands are all taken," said Stuart meaningly.

Burt flushed again as Roy stepped in behind him, frowning.

"I'm a-goin' out there for a look—hands or no hands," said Burt harshly after a moment's consideration.

Stuart's right hand darted to his gun. "Keep back!" he ordered as his left hand sought and found the door-knob. "I'm goin' through here an' if you follow, by ——, I'll shoot!"

He backed through the door and closed it. In two bounds he had reached the rear entrance to the room behind the partition and found Gill at the door astride his horse and holding Stuart's. Stuart vaulted into the saddle and the two spurred their horses toward the north and the Whoop-Up Trail.

Turning in the saddle, Stuart saw—not without a thrill of admiration—that Burt and Roy had plunged through and were standing looking after them with amazement and bitter accusation in their eyes.

Did they recognize Gill, he asked himself. Would they shoot? Stuart knew in his heart that he would not shoot at the brothers though they dropped him from the saddle. And they were suspicious of him; perhaps convinced that he had put in with Gill and his crowd in good faith.

Then he sighed with relief when he remembered the note he had left for Uncle Jim Turner—their father. It would explain why he had left with Gill.

The brothers did not shoot and soon Stuart and Gill were hidden in the dust their horses kicked up on the main trail.

Stuart looked at Gill to find the outlaw leader regarding him with silent satisfaction.

"That was good work," said Gill; "you'll do."

Stuart did not reply to this. He looked into the north whither they were hastening. Somewhere up there was the Marias River and the hidden rendezvous of the outlaws; somewhere up there were his cattle; and perhaps the man riding beside him was the one man on the range with whom he wanted an accounting.

And if this were so it might be that death lay in waiting where the cottonwoods marked with green the course of the river.

XVII

HOLDING a steady gait, they rode in silence along the trail. Gill looked neither to right nor left or behind, but kept his eyes almost continually upon the ground just ahead of his horse. He appeared worried and Stuart wondered whether his conference with the sheepman had been satisfactory.

As they covered the miles Stuart felt the growing realization of the dangerous mission he was on and more than ever he was inclined to believe that Gill knew him. If he didn't know him why had he not asked his name? If he did know him it was practically a certainty that he was leading Stuart into some kind of trap for some reason.

Time and again Stuart's hand rested on the butt of his gun and he thanked his stars that his father had insisted upon his practise with the weapon. Now, if ever, it was more than likely to prove an invaluable education.

And then as Stuart remembered the killing of his father and the flight from Texas which had cost his mother her life, his eyes blazed and the muscles of his gun-arm tensed as he forgot the danger and risk. More than once he was tempted to draw on Gill and compel him to tell the truth at the point of the gun, but he reflected that if Gill lied to him he would have no way of proving his contention and he wanted to learn the man's plans and the whereabouts of his cattle. In addition he wanted to be absolutely sure that Gill was Miguel before he called him to the reckoning.

So he rode on apparently satisfied to accompany the man and become a full-fledged member of his band of outlaws.

As they neared the green fringe of trees marking the course of the river Gill shifted their course to the northwest and soon they entered the bad-lands where deep coulées cut back from the banks and where there were trees and tangles of underbrush.

In the early afternoon they rode out upon a broad flat lying on the south side of the river. They crossed this and followed a trail that wound through a tumbled country and finally sloped down into a deep ravine. This led to a small open space behind a high bank and shut in on all sides except that toward the ravine by high-flung ridges.

Among the trees in the amphitheater

Stuart descried some log buildings. Horses were grazing on the rich grass which grew in abundance. Smoke was curling upward from one of the buildings. He could see a few men lounging around under the trees. With a thrill Stuart realized that they had reached the rendezvous of the outlaws.

Gill led the way to a long building—the largest of those in the place—and with a nod to Stuart dismounted.

A man came to the door, greeted Gill and looked at Stuart curiously.

"Take the horses round to the corrals," said Gill to Stuart. "Put 'em inside. Frenchy, you go with them."

The man in the doorway came out and led the way around the long building to the corrals in the rear. There were several horses in one large corral but the man whom Gill had called Frenchy led Gill's horse into a smaller corral and motioned to Stuart to follow.

They unsaddled the horses and hung the saddles on posts just outside of the enclosure.

During this process Frenchy spoke no word. He seemed to take Stuart for granted as a member of the gang; accepted his presence as a manifesto of his lawless integrity. He led the way back to the house and they entered a long room with benches around the sides and a long table in the center.

It was now well along in the afternoon and Stuart could smell the odor of cooking. Gill was sitting on a bench before a crude table examining some papers.

"What's the lay?" asked Frenchy, sitting down near the chief.

"Tonight," answered Gill abruptly.

"Well, it's about time," said Frenchy and Stuart caught a note of insolence in the man's tone which made him wonder.

"I sent Williams and Martin up to ride herd on them cattle we brought over from the west," continued Frenchy as he rolled a brown-paper cigaret. "I'm sick of riding herd."

Stuart was instantly alert. Cattle brought in from the west? This possibly was his herd of cattle.

"Monotonous job," he drawled, winking at Frenchy.

Frenchy stared at him a moment, then lighted his cigaret.

"I've had enough of it," he snapped out, regarding Gill resentfully.

SEVERAL other men trooped into the room and Stuart saw Gill move nervously on his seat. Once again he remarked what appeared to be worry in the man's manner. Stuart saw, too, that the men did not show any marked degree of respect for their leader. Something besides dissatisfaction showed in the glances they directed at him and Stuart was inclined to think that the other quality in the eyes of Gill's men as they looked at him was sheer contempt. If they had contempt for him personally, what was the nature of the hold he had upon them? Why did they follow him?

"When we goin' to get out of here?" demanded one of the men surlily, lounging alongside of Gill.

"Tonight," said Gill sharply, but Stuart could see he was tapping with his fingers on the desk nervously.

"Well, that'll be soon enough—if we go," laughed another man.

A man with a dirty apron tied about his waist entered and began putting plates, cups and knives and forks on the table.

"Wearin' your gun under your skirt," jeered one of the men.

The man with the apron grinned as he slammed the dishes in their places.

"He'll get even with you for that, Ducky," laughed another.

They joked back and forth with the man who began putting the supper on the table, and Stuart felt a growing uneasiness which he could not explain because none of the gang paid any attention to him. Although he had come with Gill, and apparently, so far as they knew, was now one of them, they ignored him entirely. But he saw Sandy and Mack Lander shooting a covert glance at him now and then.

When the supper was placed on the table the cook went to the door and whistled. Three more men entered and all drew up the benches and sat down to eat. Stuart's place fell to the lower end of the table, opposite the door. Gill sat at the head and a place on the bench at his right was left vacant. Then Stuart recalled Curran and was astonished that he had not noticed the man's absence. He had conferred briefly with Gill that morning in Pondera and had ridden away immediately afterward. It was plain that he had not yet returned to the rendezvous.

Stuart turned his attention to the food for he was hungry.

While he was eating, however, he again noticed the room. In addition to the door leading out into the open there were two other doors, one in each end of the long room. The cook had entered from one of these doors—the one below the lower end of the table. The door beyond the head where Gill was sitting and near the desk was closed and locked with staple and padlock.

Stuart was mentally asking himself why the door was so locked when there was a clatter of hoofs and a man dismounted at the entrance from outside. Another moment and he came in with spurs jingling, drawing off his gloves.

It was Curran.

Instantly Stuart became aware of a new and tense feeling in the demeanor of the men. It was as if an electric current had been shot through the air. Gill looked relieved. Such casual talk as the men had been engaging in was hushed.

Curran looked around the table and for a second or so his gaze centered on Stuart. But that second's gaze was enough to put Stuart keenly on his guard. He saw Curran's eyelids flicker with unmistakable satisfaction; caught a gleam of malice and something akin to triumph in the other's look. Nor was that all. As Curran sat down in the vacant place next to Gill he saw a look of comprehension flashed between the two men. Curran glanced at him again as he started to eat. During the balance of the meal, which was eaten almost in silence, Curran kept his eyes on his plate.

But in that brief interval Stuart realized that his position had become one of acute danger. Curran knew him. Thus, if Gill did not already know who he was he soon would. And then Stuart suddenly remembered the night Devon and he had camped in the Basin and Devon had told Mangle his name. He smiled grimly. He had fairly run into the trap!

XVIII

AS THE men rose from the table Stuart's mind leaped to a decision. With the approach of night he would make a daring effort to accomplish two things: to kidnap Gill at the point of a gun and escape with him. If this could not be accomplished Stuart planned to make his own escape and wait for Gill when next he should appear in the vicinity of Pondera or on the trail unaccompanied by Curran or any other members of his band.

He believed now that Gill knew who he was and that he had some powerful design in thus enticing him to the rendezvous. He was amazed to realize that he had not thought more seriously about this phase of the adventure before. He was angry with himself for his lack of foresight.

Uncle Jim Turner would not have an inkling of his whereabouts until he received the note Stuart had left for him and he would not get that until he returned from Fort Benton which would be a week or more.

No, all things considered, the best plan was to reverse the situation so far as he and Gill were concerned and get the outlaw leader where he could talk to him and if necessary threaten the truth out of him or betray him into exposing himself and his plans. And if Gill turned out to be Miguel, as Stuart suspected, he would be given a chance to use a gun although apparently he never wore one.

So Stuart was prepared to wait for night.

But the plan he had outlined to himself was not destined to materialize. As the men were leaving the room Gill touched him on the arm and motioned to him to follow him. The outlaw leader led the way to the door at the end of the room near the desk.

As he was unlocking the padlock a shadow fell within the room and Stuart, looking out the window, saw that the sky was becoming overcast with clouds. The wind, too, had freshened and was singing in the trees.

Gill removed the padlock and opened the door.

"Let's go in here an' have a little talk," he said as he led the way into the room.

He stooped low as he crossed the threshold and Stuart noted that he again wore his hat, although he had not had it on during the meal.

The glistening black sheen of the great sombrero fascinated him as he followed the man. Somehow the hat this man wore appeared more a part of him than the headgear of the ordinary man and seemed to accentuate the mean, cunning look always visible on the sallow features.

When they were in the room Gill closed the door.

The shadow within and without had deepened. It was the sunset hour and with the approach of the storm which the clouds betokened it was rapidly getting dark. From somewhere in the high skies far distant came a low rumble of thunder. Stuart saw the branches of the trees being lashed by the wind and knew the storm was coming at racing speed. The day had been hot and the atmospheric disturbance now rapidly gathering was characteristic of the prairie country. The storm would come like a whirlwind and might pass as quickly.

As Stuart gazed through the single window in the small room he saw something else which made him start and compress his lips. The window was barred! Large round iron rods were fastened on the outside.

He swung to confront Gill, who was placing a bench near the small table in the center of the room.

He watched the outlaw chief, remarking again to himself the peculiar fact that this man wore no gun and that he glanced anxiously out the window and back toward the door through which they had come.

"I suppose you know what we're planning to do?" said Gill with a grimace as he seated himself upon the bench.

"How should I know?" countered Stuart, marveling at the other's question.

"Oh, I thought maybe you might have heard," said Gill after a moment's hesitation.

"You're the only one I've talked with," said Stuart irritably; "no others know your plans, do they?"

Gill deliberated, tapping the table with his nervous fingers.

"No, I expect not," he said finally. "It isn't a good idea to talk too much."

"What do you figure on doing?" Stuart asked to the point.

Gill continued to drum upon the table with his fingers as he stared out the window. A minute passed without his making any reply to Stuart's question. The shadows were gathering deeper and deeper and Stuart saw that by the twilight hour it would be dark. The thunder was muttering almost above them.

"We have got several things to do," Gill volunteered after a spell.

Stuart waited for the other to continue and when Gill again lapsed into silence he decided that Gill was playing for time. It was then that Stuart concluded to put his own plan into quick operation. It was nearly dark, a storm was approaching and within a few minutes it might be possible for him to get Gill out of the place and around to the horses unseen. If guards should be encountered in the ravine—well, he would cross his bridges as he came to them.

Stuart, too, began to spar for time. He began a discourse on range conditions and told of exploits which, if not wholly within the truth, were at least thrilling. He knew Gill was convinced he was lying but he did not think Gill suspected him of knowing this.

Darkness was descending rapidly.

"There ought to be a good chance for some wholesale rustling hereabouts," said Stuart finally.

Gill looked at him sharply but refrained from answering. Stuart listened for voices or other sounds but could hear nothing. However he knew the others could not have left the place or he would have heard their horses. The thunder reverberated with an increasing roar and a flash of lightning lighted the room momentarily.

Stuart had noticed some time before that another door opened from the end of the room opposite where they had entered. He surmised that this second door led outside.

As Gill started again to speak in a casual manner Stuart stepped toward him. Gill paused and Stuart's hand moved like the lightning that was streaking in the darkened skies.

"There's no use in our beatin' around the bush, Gill," he said softly, covering the outlaw leader with the gun that had leaped into his hand. "You brought me here for a purpose and I came for the same reason."

He held the gun close to Gill's breast.

"Now, listen to me," he said earnestly. "You an' I are goin' out of here, an' if we're not goin' together I'm goin' to try an' go alone. But if I try to go alone you're goin' to stop a bullet from this gun before I start!"

He looked at Gill significantly and was inwardly pleased to see that the other's sallow face had turned a shade lighter.

"Is that door locked?" he demanded, pointing to the door which he thought led to the outside.

"On the other side," said Gill.

"All right, we'll have to go out the other way," said Stuart, "but if you make a move to stampede or open your trap to yell I'll drill you an' try to make it alone."

Keeping Gill covered he went to the end door and tried it. He found Gill had told the truth for it was secured on the outside. He came back and tried the bars across the open window. They did not yield. As he turned back toward Gill he looked toward the door by which they had entered, then lowering his gun he motioned to the other.

"Step out here," he commanded softly. "I'm goin' to drop this gun into my holster in case we should be seen from a ways off; but I guess you know about how long it takes me to get it out again an' if you make any false moves I'll bore you quicker than lightnin'. It's truth I'm talking, Gill."

As Gill stepped forward Stuart lowered his gun into the sheath at his right side. Gill stooped low after he had opened the door softly. His hat struck the top of the door-jamb and he raised a hand. Instantly he whirled and Stuart found himself looking into the black bore of a six-shooter.

It had happened so suddenly that Stuart was dazed. Gill reached down and pulled the gun from Stuart's holster.

"Back up!" he said sharply. Then he slammed the door in Stuart's face and snapped the padlock into place.

Stuart stood alone in the room looking out the barred window into the night.

XIX

FOR some moments he stood thus, but he was smiling. He recalled his father's dying statement that his enemy was tricky. Stuart stepped to the table and leaned upon it, still smiling. Gradually the smile faded and he began to consider his predicament.

He stepped quickly to the barred window and exerted all his strength against first one bar and then another until he had tested them all. He saw that it would be futile to attempt to effect his escape this way for the bars were securely bolted into the logs.

Next he tried the door at the upper end, the end toward the river-bank. This door, like the other which Gill had locked, was fastened on the outside. Stuart laughed when he thought of its being thus secured in the first place. And the bars—the room had been prepared to keep prisoner whoever might be locked in it.

But Stuart was not dismayed. His father's continual preaching of caution and preparedness for unseen emergencies had not been wasted. Stuart reached inside his shirt and from a holster slung under his left arm he drew forth another gun—the counterpart in caliber, make, and balance of the gun which Gill had taken. This had been his father's weapon. He had carried it away with him from the ridge where his father had died under the lone pine. He dropped it into the sheath on his right thigh, then straightened suddenly.

Between the crashes of thunder he heard the murmur of voices in the room where they had eaten supper. He crossed to the door leading into this room and put his ear against it.

"But Short won't go, I tell you," he heard Gill saying.

A crash of thunder drowned whatever reply was made to this, and in another interval of comparative silence Stuart heard:

"—Mangle's bunch will start the ball a-rolling— Five men'll be enough on that side— We can gather all the cattle up here in with that bunch of three hundred of Holmes' and three men can start 'em north as soon——"

Thunder again intervened but Stuart had recognized Curran's voice.

"—and we better get started for this rain may last all night." It was Curran speaking again. "Mangle—morning——"

Stuart could hear no more for some time owing to frequent crashes of thunder which rolled almost continually.

He had gathered, however, that the gang was preparing to start that night on some kind of expedition and surmised that the sheep war was about to start. Gill had said Short wouldn't go. Stuart wondered if he meant that Short had rejected whatever plan they had in mind or if he had merely refused to become an actual participant.

And Curran had mentioned Stuart's cattle. Stuart now had no doubt but that Gill was responsible for the raid on the ranch and the attack upon his father and himself which had brought about his father's death.

His eyes glowed with a burning rage. The cattle were somewhere near and the outlaws were figuring on driving them north. But the thing that he could not

understand was how Gill and his companions were to profit by precipitating trouble between sheep and cattle interests, unless....

He started with a new thought.

"I've got to get out of here," he exclaimed to himself in an undertone.

Just then came a lull in the storm and he heard the voices again.

"We should have put him out for good in the first place," Gill was saying.

"Leave him where he is," thundered Curran; "I've got a score to settle with him. Cook, you and Bremmer stay here at the house—watch that he don't get loose —when we get back——"

The voices were drowned in a peal of thunder; but Stuart gathered that two men would be left at the house and they were instructed to see that he remained a captive until Gill and Curran returned.

"Five'll be enough down there," was the next thing Stuart heard, and Gill was speaking. "I'll send three to relieve the men with the cattle— Twenty-thousand'll just top the pot off nice— I'll leave that to you for——"

The voice died away as the men left the room.

Twenty thousand! The sum Stuart's father had buried and which he had taken from Miguel to save for Loud's heirs! So that was part of the game, thought Stuart; Gill intended to make him give up the money? Stuart laughed as the place was lighted suddenly by a blinding flash of lightning and the thunder burst like high explosive in rapid detonations.

He hurried to the window. It was now very dark and he could see outside only when the vivid streaks of lightning illumined the place. The rain was falling in torrents and Stuart reflected that it was indeed an important mission that would send the men out in such a storm.

It portended but one thing: the carrying out of a plan which had previously been arranged. Did it mean that the sheep were to be driven across the dead-line drawn by mutual agreement between the two branches of stockmen in the morning? It would be a most opportune time for the cattlemen were then attending the meeting in Fort Benton. Stuart wondered if Gill's bold move would mean a repetition in Montana of the disastrous sheep wars which had torn Wyoming.

The next flash of lightning revealed two men mounted and halting their horses beneath a tall cottonwood just outside the window. The men wore slickers and the water streamed from their wide-brimmed hats.

"If that rat starts givin' me any orders I'll tell him to go to ——" exclaimed one of the men in a voice so loud that it carried to Stuart's ears despite the noise made by the rain whipping through the trees.

"That's me," shouted the other man. "I'm sick of all——"

A clap of thunder cut off his words.

Stuart decided the men were talking about Gill, and, if so, it was plain that Gill's leadership hold upon his followers was slackening. Or it might be they had reference to Curran. Curran had seemed to have a lot to say, Stuart meditated; and he had exhibited an aggressive attitude toward Gill.

But Curran was, nevertheless, seemingly entitled to much consideration from his chief. He bore the reputation of being a bad-man—a killer. The other men in the outfit surely respected him. And Stuart knew Curran held a strong grudge against him because of the incident in the saloon at Pondera when Stuart had shot the watch out of his hand. Curran would try to settle that score as he had intimated to Gill in the other room a short time before.

Stuart heard the sounds of several horses and the next flash of lightning revealed a dozen or more men outside. In the darkness which followed the lightning-flash Stuart heard a whistle before the thunder broke again.

When the lightning next lighted up the scene he saw no one before the window but caught sight of the men riding swiftly toward the mouth of the ravine almost directly opposite. Another flash of lightning a few moments later showed the space outside to be deserted. Gill and his band had left the rendezvous on their mission which Stuart feared might involve the peace of all the range north of the Teton.

He thought for a minute of the awful results which might accrue from such a condition—wholesale slaughtering of sheep and cattle, death-bringing clashes between armed forces on either side, isolated killings, destruction of property, birth of feuds, land-squabbles and disputes, and—perhaps most important of all—the involving of the State's politics.

By the death of his father Stuart had automatically become a member of the North Montana Stockmen's Association and it now was his first duty to protect the peace of the range, already endangered by the first sparse crop of homesteaders, and prevent, if possible, a violation of the terms of the agreement between the cattle and sheep-raisers.

He leaped to the end door and put his weight against it. It gave a little, just enough to show Stuart that it was secured by means of a bar on the outside, or, perhaps, a hasp and padlock as the other door was fastened.

He backed off two paces and threw his weight against it time after time but the door resisted all his efforts.

After a time he desisted from this method of effecting his escape and crept back to the other door which led into the big room. He put his ear against it and listened as there came a lull in the crashes of thunder. He could hear the murmur of voices, showing that the two men who had been left in the house were on guard.

He turned back to the other door with an inspiration.

XX

BEGINNING high up on the door, Stuart cautiously exerted every ounce of his tremendous strength against it. The door gave outward a little. Next he put his weight against it at a spot a little farther down. He repeated this process at intervals down the door of about six inches apart.

As he neared the center of the door it gave less and less until finally he put his weight against a place where it hardly gave outward at all. He measured this place from the floor and found it came directly even with his belt when he stood straight.

Next he began putting his weight below this spot and found that the door gave a little below it and more and more as he tested it down toward the floor. In this way he arrived at the conclusion that it was secured on the outside by a bar, possibly a wooden beam, at a point about halfway between top and bottom.

From his pockets he took a sack of tobacco and his knife. He ripped the sack so that it would lie flat. Then he held it against the door, near the side where it opened and pinned it there with the knife by sticking the blade through the sack at the top on one side and bending or breaking it inward so that the end of the handle held the other side of the top of the sack.

Thus he had a white mark against the dark wood of the door on the inside at the point where the bar was across it on the other side—the outside.

The storm continued to rage with increased velocity. The lightning flashed almost continually and the thunder crashed and rolled with the vehemence of an artillery engagement. It seemed one of the worst storms Stuart had experienced in the three years he had lived in Montana.

He went again to the door which opened into the big room and listened. When the thunder again subsided temporarily he once more heard the murmur of the voices of the two men who were on guard. They spoke louder than before and seemed to be on the point of a wrangle. But after Stuart had listened a few minutes he made out that the two were playing cards.

He went back to the other door. He snapped a number of cartridges from his belt and examined the leads.

"I can do it," he said aloud in an exultant voice while the storm shrieked its fury.

He stepped back two paces, drew his forty-four from its holster and leveled it from his hip, aiming at the top of the white sack. With the next flash of lightning he made sure of his aim. When the thunder crashed following the lightning he fired.

Instantly he turned and leaped back to the other door. He listened and when the roar of the thunder was stilled he again heard the murmur of the men's voices. He laughed softly to himself. They had not heard the shot. The report of his gun had been muffled by the thunder and even if it could have been heard it was more than likely that the men would not have noticed it, what with the storm's crashes of sound.

He went back to the other door and again leveled his gun on the mark. The lightning showed a hole through the cloth at a point near the top. Stuart aimed the second time just below this hole. The lightning flashed and with the thunderbolt he fired the second time.

His previous performance was repeated. He listened and heard the voices of the men in the big room wrangling over their cards He went back to the opposite door.

Two holes now showed, one above the other in the cloth. Stuart leveled his gun as the lightning flashed and with the accompanying thunder sent another bullet through the cloth and crashing into the wood behind it.

He did not listen this time but shot again with the next thunder-clap. He timed his shots to a nicety that spoke well for his knowledge of storms. Long years in the open had taught him which flashes of lightning were most likely to be followed by heavy thunder and how long the time-interval would be between the flash and the sound.

In this case the storm was electrical and each vivid flash of lightning was certain to be followed almost immediately by a heavy crash of thunder.

Stuart sent six bullets in a line straight down the cloth, emptied and refilled his gun. He listened again and satisfied that the men were still at their game unsuspecting of what was going on in the room next to them, he resumed his risky task. He fired six more shots into the cloth and as he filled the chambers of his gun again the lightning revealed twelve holes in a straight line down from the top of the cloth.

"Pretty fair shooting," laughed Stuart to himself.

Again he had cause to be thankful that his father had taken so much pains to make him an expert in the use of the common firearm of the range.

Even Stuart was impressed with the marvelous work he was doing. Aiming by the flashes of lightning, shooting with the crash of the thunder and hitting his mark. The cloth of the sack was nearly cut in two pieces from top to bottom!

Stuart listened again at the other door and then resumed his position before the white mark.

He fired twelve more shots into the gaping black mark down through the center of the cloth. He tried this time to send the bullets in between those he had fired first but was unable to see whether he had done so or not.

From time to time he listened at the other door to make sure that the two guards had not heard him. Once, when he did not hear their voices, he waited for some time, wondering whether they had gone out or were suspicious.

If they divined his plan for escape it would be easy for them to put more bars against the other door. He had long since resolved that if the men made an attempt to enter the room and stop him or disarm him he would start shooting as soon as they ventured into the room or near the window.

But it wasn't long before he again heard their voices. He went back to his work. He felt the holes in the wood through the gap in the cloth with satisfaction. He put his weight against the door and heard the crack of wood. It seemed to weave a little as he exerted his strength.

With the next crash of thunder he hurled himself against the obstruction with all his force. He felt the door give a little more. He stepped back and in as many minutes fired six more bullets into the crack he had made with lead. Then he filled his gun and replaced it in its sheath.

He made sure the men in the other room were still playing cards and then, with the thunder to muffle the sound, he once more hurled his weight against the door. It still resisted his efforts. He picked up the narrow bench and drove it with smashing force against the mark. The sound it made seemed louder than the reports of the gun.

Again and again he dashed the end of the bench against the door as the thunder favored him. He could feel the obstruction without, splintering. The bullets passing through the door had weakened the wood or the metal which held it from the outside.

After he had driven the bench against the mark until it began to break up Stuart again resorted to his shoulder. He hurled his weight against the point where the white cloth had been five times and at the sixth attempt the door swung outward a bit.

For the last time he made sure that his guards were not aware of his actions and then gradually pushed the door open as the splintered beam on the outside gave way.

He stepped out into the storm. He cautiously peered through a window into the big room and saw the cook and another member of the band playing cards at the lower end of the long table.

He drew back from the window, crawled along below it and ran around the house to the corrals. He found his saddle on the post where he had hung it together with his quirt, gloves, and saddle-blanket. His horse was in the small corral where he had left him and Stuart saddled quickly.

Before he mounted he hastily untied the slicker from behind his saddle and put it on. Thus protected, he could laugh at the rain which still continued to fall in sheets. He rode far to the lower side of the house to avoid being seen or making any noise which might be heard in a lull in the storm. Following the edge of the cleared space, he eventually made the mouth of the ravine and rode swiftly up and out of the rendezvous.

The lightning-flashes made it easy to follow the trail. He was soon out of the bad-lands and on the prairie which stretched to the south. He put spurs to his horse and rode like mad through the storm-ridden night.

IN THE gray of early dawn after the storm had spent itself Craig, cow-boss of the C Bar, was talking to Max Randall, the ranch manager.

"I'm runnin' the beef-herd a little farther west up the river than usual this time of the year," Craig was explaining to Randall in answer to a question from the manager.

"But what's the sense in that?" demanded Randall. "The feed's good this season all along west of here."

"Well, I figured we'd work 'em back slow before shipping-time, an' use the grass out by Lost Corral first——"

"Funny idea," interrupted Randall testily, although he had considerable respect for Craig's knowledge of the range. "I suppose you know we're goin' to drive the beeves north this year an' ship east in Canada?"

"What I've always argued," replied Craig. "Trailin' 'em south to the N. P. is too hard on 'em."

"In that case it wouldn't make much difference what part of the range we used first," remarked Randall.

"If you want me to have 'em brought closer in I'll give the order today," said Craig. "It's easy done, if——"

"Oh, let 'em be—now they're there. Just seemed queer to me that we should be runnin' 'em so far west so early. Why, Lost Corral is nearly out to Holmes' place. You know the old man has always kept off Holmes' range."

"I know, I know," asserted Craig. "We ain't sloppin' over on Holmes' ground." The cow-boss observed Randall with a shrewd glance.

The ranch manager, however, made no comment that would indicate he was aware that Stuart's cattle had been stolen.

Burt Turner joined the two men near the bunk-house.

"Craig, just how much do you know about this man Gill an' his outfit?" asked Roy of the cow-boss.

Craig cut off a chew of plug-tobacco before replying and seemed to weigh his words carefully.

"From what I've seen of 'em they're plain whisky-runners and gamblers," he finally answered. "Expect they're runnin' a little hop through to Helena, but don't know that. Why do you ask, Burt?"

"I saw Stuart Holmes with Gill yesterday morning," said Burt simply although he looked troubled.

"Where were they?" asked Randall, interested.

"In Frick's place at Pondera, first, that is, Holmes was. I found him in there when Roy and I rode in to make Frick come clean about Devon gettin' shot up there."

"What'd Frick say?" asked Craig quickly.

"Didn't say," said Burt. "Holmes made some sort of a play that stopped me from makin' the white-livered skunk talk. I couldn't make him out—Holmes, I mean. Then I saw where two people had been eatin' breakfast in the place an' asked about that an' Holmes said a couple of sheep-herders had been in all night an' had fed up before goin' back to their wagons."

"Sheep-herders in town carousin' this time o' year!" said Randall in astonishment. "What outfit was they from?"

"Holmes didn't say," replied Burt. "I heard somebody in the back room about that time an' started to look 'em over an' this Holmes fellow planted his back to the door an' stopped me with his gun."

"They say he's mighty handy with his shootin'-iron," observed Craig dryly.

"What'd he do, draw on you?" asked Randall sharply.

"Sure did," nodded Burt; "meant it, too—way he talked. Then he backed through the door an' said if we followed he'd start the lead flyin' through the door. I heard horses an' busted through, Roy with me, an' we got out in back in time to see Holmes and Gill ridin' like blazes towards the north."

"Gill!" exclaimed Randall. "Holmes ridin' away with Gill?"

"Sure was; an' it was Gill and Holmes what ate breakfast there, to my way of thinkin', an' I've been thinkin' about it all night in the storm."

"Wouldn't be surprized," said Craig evenly. "I ain't astonished none."

"Why do you say that, Craig?" Randall demanded.

"Well, now here—" Craig was deliberate. "That play the young feller made up against Curran never seemed right to me."

"How do you mean?" asked Burt.

"Does it look just right that Holmes should drop into that place an' show Curran up by shootin' a watch out of his hand an' Curran do nothin' about it?" countered Craig. "Curran is lightnin' himself with his gun. Does it look natural like that Curran should let him go without at least a-*tryin'* to even things up? An' him with his gang all there a-lookin' on?"

"Devon was there," said Burt.

"Sure—that's just it," agreed Craig in a hearty tone. "Devon was there an' on the strength of that play he took a likin' to this feller Holmes an' rode away with him. Told him where he was workin' an' Holmes says, 'That's where I'm a-goin' too.' He come on here an' got the lay o' things an' went back by way of Pondera in the morning."

"Craig, what're you gettin' at?" Roy asked in a loud voice.

"I ain't gettin' at anything. I'm just a-talkin' things as I see 'em," replied Craig in a resentful tone.

"You mean that maybe this fellow ain't Dan Holmes' son at all?" persisted Burt. "He went out on his ranch right after he left here."

"Sure," agreed Craig. "By way of Pondera. An' he was back the next day, wasn't he?"

Burt remained silent.

"Both Miss Dorothy an' me saw him—you was out on the range an' so was Randall, here. An' when I got into Frick's place in Pondera that mornin' after he left here, an' Devon follered him, I found out that Holmes had just left there."

"Yes—but you said you heard the shot as you was ridin' in an' that Curran was just comin' in an' Holmes had gone, leaving Frick an' Gill in the place when Devon was killed."

Burt kept watching Craig closely as he replied to him.

Craig shifted his glance to the sky and the buildings under the bluff before he spoke again.

"But I didn't *see* Holmes ridin' away!"

"Craig, what're you talking about?" Randall ejaculated.

"Just what I said an' I don't mean anything more'n that."

"You mean you're tryin' to tell us you think Holmes killed Devon himself!" cried Burt.

"It looks sort of funny to me," Craig confessed.

"Nonsense!"exclaimed Randall. "Holmes had nothing against Devon."

"Don't know that he had," said Craig. "He was sort of put out, it looked like, because Devon made a few cracks about his speed with his gun—took him up about it in the bunk-house. He had some few words private with Devon before he left for Pondera; Devon follered him there; an' Holmes—well, Holmes was there, an' I didn't see him leavin' an' with the air so hostile I didn't do much lookin' aroun' to see if he wasn't aroun' back or in the sheep-sheds or somewheres."

"But when you came into the place only Frick an' Gill was there; wasn't that what you said when you came back here?" asked Randall.

"That's what I said," affirmed Craig. "An' they'd carried Devon's body out back an' let me have a glimpse of it through the door. An' as I say, things looked so hostile I figured I'd leave good enough alone till we could go down there in a bunch an' shoot the truth outa them."

Burt and Randall looked at each other as if trying to read each other's thoughts. Craig's statements had impressed them.

"Gill an' his gang never had much use for Devon," continued Craig. "He talked a lot an' he talked hard. Queer thing—he was from Texas. Wasn't Holmes from Texas, too? Funny. An' you say you saw Holmes ridin' away with Gill, Burt? An' Holmes drawed on you when you tried to poke out into the back room where Gill was?"

Burt smothered a curse and turned away. Randall stood and looked at the ground in deep reflection. Craig waited a minute or so and then started toward the bunk-house.

Both Randall and Craig looked about quickly when they heard a startled exclamation from Burt, who had stopped on his way to the house and was pointing toward the trail down the coulée to the ranch-buildings.

A single rider was coming down to them at top speed, waving his hat at them in a manner signifying great excitement.

The three men ran to meet him.

XXI

WITH the dawn Stuart rode cautiously to a ridge west of Pondera. For some time he surveyed the scene below him; the small frame structure which housed Frick's saloon and store, the sheep-shearing sheds, and the narrow-gage railway station. His searching gaze concentrated upon the Frick building.

No one was in sight. There were no horses about the place. The unpainted buildings and sheds shone almost white in the bright morning sun and the broad prairie-lands were glowing green after the rain of the night before.

Stuart noted as he looked about him with a stockman's appreciation of the scene that the range had never been in better condition. He remembered, too, that the cattle were already fat and sleek—in better shape than had been the beef-stock at shipping-time the year before when the drought had blighted the grass and water had been scarce.

Both sheep-raisers and cattlemen stood to make good—more than make good—this year the losses of the dry season before. It would mean handsome times on the range, unless . . . .

He put the spurs to his horse and rode swiftly down to the town, approaching from the opposite direction from the wind so that the sound of his horse would not announce his arrival too soon in advance of his coming.

When he reached the front of the saloon he leaped from the saddle and strode quickly into the place. The room was vacant. He heard a stirring in the rear and went at once to the door in the partition and flung it open.

Frick was just coming in from his sleep-quarters, which were in a small room near the kitchen at the rear of the adjoining store.

"Hello," greeted Frick as he entered the barroom; "thought you was——"

"Don't bother goin' around the bar," interrupted Stuart as Frick started to go to his customary station. "I don't want anything to drink this morning; but I do want to talk to you—out here. Where did you think I was?"

Frick hesitated uneasily.

"Why, I thought you was up at the camp. You went up there with Gill, didn't you?"

Stuart noted the other's uneasiness and the shifty look in his eyes.

"How long since Gill was here?" he asked instantly.

Again Frick hesitated, plainly ill in mind as to how he should meet Stuart's questioning. Finally he spoke hurriedly:

"Why, don't you know where he is? I ain't——"

"Don't lie to me, Frick!" rang Stuart's voice, cool and menacing.

"He ain't been here only a minute or so before daylight," said Frick. "I suppose he went back to the camp."

"Don't waste your time supposing, Frick; talk straight. There's two things I want to know from you this morning an' I want to know 'em quick—*pronto!*"

Stuart stepped a pace closer to the man and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Who killed Devon?"

The question drew a gasp from Frick as Stuart shot it at him with the crispness of a whip-lash cracked in still air.

Frick's lips twitched and he wet them with his tongue.

"Who killed Devon?" repeated Stuart, dropping his hand to his gun.

"He—he—I ain't sure," stammered Frick, his face blanching.

"Frick, listen," said Stuart soberly; "I don't know if you can read the signs or not, but this isn't a good time for you to lie. Who killed him?"

Frick's eyes bulged as he wet his lips again.

"I didn't see," he said almost in a whisper. "He was standing in front of the bar an' I was out when I heard a shot. When I came running in he was on the floor—dead."

"Who was here with him?" demanded Stuart in a cold voice.

Frick gulped.

"They'd been two or three in here——"

"Who was here with him when he was killed?" repeated Stuart.

"For ——'s sake don't say I told you,"

whimpered Frick, rubbing his hands which were clammy with cold sweat. "Don't say I told——"

"Who was it?" shouted Stuart, jerking his gun from its sheath.

"Gill!" screamed Frick. "But I don't know how he did it—that's the ——'s truth I don't. He wasn't wearing a gun, and——"

"Never mind that," said Stuart. "Tell me what Devon was saying or doing an' how the play come off. Hurry up!"

Little by little Frick told the story of how Devon had baited Gill, accused him of being responsible for the cow-puncher Sam's death, and demanded at the point of a gun to know who had killed Sam.

"And who *did* kill this Sam?" demanded Stuart.

"I didn't see it, so help me ——," cried Frick. "They was at a table an' I was gettin' some drinks ready when the shots came and Sam went out with a bullet in his head."

"Was Gill in that game?" asked Stuart softly.

"Yes—y-e-s," said Frick, nodding his head. "An' Curran."

"Look here, Frick," said Stuart earnestly; "I want you to brush up your memory a little. You've got a chance with me if you think hard an' tell the truth. 'Member that first day I came in here—day I had the run-in with Curran?"

"I heard about it," said Frick. "I wasn't here myself; I had a man working for me that day."

"I know—the man who takes the dope up to Helena," said Stuart as Frick's eyes widened. "I saw him making away with that satchel of yours once. But what I want you to do is think hard an' remember the early morning before that. Are you thinking?"

FRICK looked puzzled but evidently was following instructions. Stuart turned over in his mind again the events of the night of the raid when his father had been killed as he allowed Frick time.

"Was there a bunch came in here early that morning?" asked Stuart. "Think hard, Frick; I'm liable to start shootin' in disappointment if you can't remember!"

"I got back from Benton that morning," answered Frick. "That's why I had the man working again next day—to get rested up an' 'tend to some things. There was a bunch here when I got back."

"How long had they been here?"

"I—I don't think they'd been here long. Their horses was pretty well played out an' they stayed overnight to freshen 'em up."

Stuart's eyes gleamed in satisfaction.

"Was Gill with the bunch?"

"No," said Frick instantly in a positive voice.

"You're sure—plumb sure?" cautioned Stuart.

"He wasn't here," said Frick, who seemed genuinely sure of his ground and somewhat relieved.

"Frick, think hard! Who was headin' that bunch that morning?"

"I didn't notice much," faltered Frick. "I was tired—rode hard from Benton an' ain't used to it. Curran was here, though."

Stuart frowned.

"Sure about Gill?" he insisted.

Again Frick vehemently asserted he was positive Gill was absent.

"Say, Frick; you got a good rope in that store of yours?" asked Stuart casually.

"Sure," said Frick. "What one?"

"Well, look 'em over," said Stuart. "Lead the way."

They entered the storeroom and Stuart picked out two ropes.

"Come along with me," he said, pushing Frick ahead of him and carrying the ropes in one hand while he again held his gun with the other.

He made Frick walk ahead of him to his horse and then made him walk beside him as he rode slowly down to the sheep-shearing sheds. Here Stuart dismounted. Frick, visibly nervous, regarded him with a frightened look in his eyes.

Stuart turned on him suddenly.

"Where did Gill and his gang go this morning?" he asked sharply.

Frick gulped and pointed south.

"The Basin," he whispered.

Stuart did not answer. He pushed Frick ahead of him into one of the sheds and put him, with back toward him (Stuart) against a post. He made a noose in the rope and shot it over the post and Frick's body while Frick cried out in protest. Stuart quickly tied the man securely to the post, disregarding his pleas to be freed.

"You'd have a slim chance if any of the C Bar outfit was to find you in your place today or tonight," said Stuart, standing off.

"Let me go an' I'll clear out," pleaded Frick.

"Not until I know you've told me the truth," said Stuart. "If what you've told me proves straight I'll give you a chance; if you've lied I'll be back."

He smothered Frick's protests with the scarf he tied about the lower part of his face as a gag.

Stuart left the shed on the run, vaulted into the saddle, and raced for the rim of the Basin. When he reached it he pulled up his horse and drew a quick breath of amazement.

Below him the great green depression in the prairie was flecked with white and on the east side white blotches and streaks could be discerned. As he watched the blotches broke into sections, gaps showed, the streaks wavered, parted, more flecks of white scattered farther west. And then on the eastern edge of the rim a long wave of white appeared and slowly washed down the side.

The sheep were in the Basin!

XXII

WITH a thrill Stuart realized that Gill had struck the blow which was bound by all traditions of the range to bring on a conflict between the cattlemen and sheep-raisers. The sheep had crossed the dead-line, which meant that the agreement between the two classes of stockmen had been violated. Could a clash be averted?

Even as he looked and thought of the dire consequences the act might precipitate he caught sight of several puffs of smoke from the Basin. He saw then what he had not noticed at first—several horsemen racing their steeds in the path of the sheep.

From the eastern rim he saw more puffs of smoke. The sound of barking guns was wafted to him on the gentle morning breeze. For a moment he hesitated in thought, considering his next move. Then he rode swiftly along the rim to the east.

He saw more puffs of smoke in the Basin and ahead of him heard the continuous popping of firearms; then the puffs of smoke ahead of him no longer showed. He could see the horsemen in the Basin riding through the sheep which were stampeding toward the north.

Stuart drew back a short distance from the rim. Several horsemen were racing eastward away from the Basin. Stuart started after them, cutting across the flat where the sheep had been and where Mangle's wagon still was. He gained upon the fleeing riders but could not distinguish who they were. He surmised they were members of Gill's band and wondered where the other followers of the outlaw were. The night before he had counted fifteen men as they filed into the mouth of the ravine to leave the rendezvous. The riders he was pursuing numbered but seven.

He looked across to the rim of the Basin and saw the men who had been firing among the sheep urging their horses in pursuit of the riders he also was following. Then, to his surprize, he saw the men ahead pause in their flight. They milled their horses about and appeared to be in some kind of wrangle, or undecided whether to continue to run or to stop and fight it out.

Suddenly as he watched the queer actions of the men there came a puff of smoke; the horses whirled and streaked out again to the eastward, but there were only six riders now—one of the horses was galloping madly in the rear, carrying an empty saddle.

Stuart spurred his horse and dashed toward the spot where the men had stopped momentarily and where there had seemed to be an altercation of some sort. As he rode madly little smoke-balls floated about the riders ahead and he heard the spatter of bullets about him. He returned the fire, but the distance was too great for accurate shooting and any bullets which might have hit either the riders ahead or himself would have been too far spent to do any material damage. So he reloaded his gun and ceased to fire.

Topping a little rise, he rode suddenly down into a slight depression, a gully almost, and saw a man lying on the ground. The whine of flying lead over his head told him that the men behind had fired at him as he made a good mark on the crest of the rise. He paid no attention to this, however, and dismounted beside the man on the ground and turned him over on his back.

Bleeding from contact with the earth and stones at the bottom of the gulley, the features of Mangle were revealed. The herder opened his eyes and after a moment of dazed staring he recognized Stuart.

"They got me," he said painfully.

"Who got you, Mangle?" asked Stuart as he hurriedly felt within the man's shirt, which was damp with blood.

"Gill's crowd. I—I told 'em——"

The man groaned and tried to lift himself to a sitting-posture.

Stuart raised the man's head on his arm.

"You're hard hit, Mangle; tell me what the trouble was. Who ran in the sheep?"

"I'm goin' out," whispered Mangle fearfully; "I'm done for—goin' out. He lied to me—he——"

The herder had difficulty in getting his breath and Stuart could feel the blood well from the ugly wound under the heart.

"Who lied, Mangle?" he asked quickly. "Tell me about it; I'm not with that crowd, and if they lied——"

"Gill!" cried the dying man. "He said Short an' the other sheepmen were in with him an' would be here this mornin' an' he lied. They drove over the sheep an' now they're runnin' away. I hollered an' got this."

He put his hand on his shirt where it was wet with blood.

"Did Gill shoot you?" demanded Stuart. "Tell me an' I'll see that he gets what's coming to him. Talk fast, Mangle—you haven't got much time, I'm afraid."

Even as he spoke, Stuart felt a tinge of pity for the man who had evidently been made a dupe by Gill and his crowd of lawless followers.

"Gill didn't shoot me—he ain't here!" said Mangle hoarsely.

"Not here?" cried Stuart in astonishment. "Where is he?"

"It's a trick I—I tell you—a trick," whined Mangle. "They're runnin' away—I knew it—an' when they found out I knew it they shot me. Short an' the other sheepmen ain't in this at all—Gill and Curran—it's a trick, I tell you, an' they double-crossed me."

"Why did they run the sheep over the dead-line?" asked Stuart.

Mangle tried to speak but a red froth bubbled on his lips as his breath came short and painfully. He stared at Stuart with eyes that were rapidly growing dull and which held a mute appeal in their fading light.

"Where are Gill and the others?" asked Stuart, who saw that the man was going. "Tell me that, Mangle; try to say it; can't you make it? Where are Gill and the others?"

Again the dying man struggled to speak and failed. He closed his eyes and then slowly he brought up his left hand and pointed with a shaking finger toward the west. He made two or three downward motions and pointed again, as if indicating distance; then the hand fell to his side and the red froth ceased to bubble.

Stuart laid the dead man's head upon the ground and rose with the steel-blue glint of purpose in his eyes. Before he could move there was a thunder of hoofs and mounted men appeared on the crest of the rise above.

"Put 'em up, Holmes, or whatever your name is, an' be quick!"

Stuart looked up to find himself covered by half a dozen guns and recognized Randall, manager of the C Bar, as the speaker.

He raised his hands above his head with a smile.

"What's the idea?" he asked pleasantly.

Then he saw Burt and Roy Turner. Both were looking at him with the kind of look men turn upon their kind who have turned traitor or done some loathesome thing.

Burt dismounted, came down to him and took his gun.

"Who did for Mangle?" he asked, pointing at the body of the sheep-herder.

"Gill's crowd," answered Stuart readily. "Killed him because they found he knew they were acting without the consent of the sheepmen."

"Your crowd, you mean," sneered Randall. "An' I suppose they're driving the sheep across the line without knowin' it, eh?" There was a mirthless laugh at this in which Burt and Roy joined.

"We've got you good, Holmes or whoever you are," snapped Randall. "You was in Pondera the morning Devon was killed; you drew on the Turner boys to protect Frick an' Gill an' rode away with Gill to his outlaw camp, an' now you're with the bunch on the wrong side of the dead-line."

"Wait a minute!" cried Stuart. "I went up there with Gill to find out what the gang was up to; they locked me in a room an' I escaped during last night's storm; I rode down to Pondera and made Frick talk an' tied him up in a sheep-shed an' started for the Basin an' saw these fellows lightin' out an' followed——"

"Never mind," interrupted Randall; "you can tell all that later. We've got business to 'tend to now. Tie his hands, Burt."

While Burt was tying his hands behind his back Stuart tried to explain the situation but

the C Bar men did not seem to be listening.

"It's a trick, I tell you," shouted Stuart, repeating the admonition which the dying Mangle had voiced. "Gill ain't with these fellows over here an' the sheepmen ain't in on the play. The outlaws drove the sheep across to get you people over here. Mangle told me before he died. Gill and the others are 'way west of here up to something this play was made to conceal. I tell you it's a trick. Do what you —— please with me but go *west!*"

"Sure," laughed Randall. "Ain't that good, men? Go west when the skunks that violated the range agreement has gone east. He's tryin' to cover 'em up."

"See here," cried Stuart in desperation. "I've got more against Gill than you have. Uncle Jim'll prove what I say——"

"And father's in Benton," said Burt, nodding his head suggestively in Randall's direction.

"—— you, Burt; I'm telling the truth an' you ought to know it," shouted Stuart, as beads of sweat appeared on his brow. "Gill killed my father and stole my cattle. I don't care what you do with me but for ——'s sake heed what I'm telling you an' go west with all the men you've got before it's too late!"

Randall ordered Burt to help Stuart into his saddle. Then he called to Roy.

"Take him back to the ranch and put him where he can't get away," he instructed. "Then come back with any others of the boys who may have come in. Tell 'em we came out here as soon as Harris here brought word the sheep were over the line. Follow us; we're goin' to trail this bunch or make for Short's ranch five miles below here and sift or shoot this thing to the bottom. And watch this fellow—there's something powerful wrong about him."

Roy strung a rope to Stuart's horse and the two started for the C Bar ranch without more delay. As they rode westward Stuart turned in the saddle and saw the others of the C Bar outfit riding madly into the east on what he knew to be a false trail.

XXIII

"ROY, you and the rest of 'em are making a mighty serious mistake," called Stuart as they passed the Basin and made for the ranch at a steady pace.

The young fellow riding ahead and leaving Stuart's horse to follow, as he knew he would, did not answer to this.

"Gill and Curran and the rest of his gang are not with that bunch your brother and Randall and the rest of 'em are chasing," continued Stuart. "They are somewhere west of here and they're probably after your cattle, just as they took mine and have 'em now up on the Marias ready to run into Canada."

Roy merely looked back curiously and when he finally spoke he warned Stuart not to attempt any funny business or it would be the worse for him.

Stuart bit his lips in futile anger as he realized that Roy was not to be argued nor cajoled into seeing things as they were. The boy was impressed with the responsibility of his mission and he had no intention of permitting his charge to get away, nor of being influenced by any argument, regardless of how logical it might sound.

It was with a feeling of goading helplessness that Stuart contemplated his predicament. He believed Mangle's dying assertion that Gill and Curran and the others of the gang were not in the vicinity of the Basin when the sheep were driven across the dead-line. Mangle had said it was a trick and Mangle had known he was about to die and had no object in lying, especially after he had been shot by one of the gang.

Reviewing events of the night and morning, Stuart saw that the sheep-drive had been a ruse to draw the attention of the C Bar men to the vicinity of the Basin. Gill himself had said the night before when Stuart had been listening to the talk between him and Curran during lulls in the storm that Short had refused to put in with the plan. Evidently Gill had explained his proposition to Short in the saloon at Pondera and the sheepman had said he would have none of it.

Mangle had been told that Short was in with Gill and had helped things along by driving the sheep to the edge of the Basin and keeping them there awaiting word to drive them on across the dead-line specified in the agreement between the stockmen.

And that morning the sheep had been sent across to attract just the sort of chase the C Bar men were now engaged in. Only a few of the gang had been sent to draw the fire and pursuit of the cowmen. By this move the leader of the outlaws, as Stuart surmised from Mangle's talk, had

covered up a more extensive operation somewhere in the country to the west.

Stuart remembered the restlessness of Gill's men, their demands for action worth while, and the talk which had hinted continually of some big deal about to be pulled off. He had long since acknowledged that the rustling of a large bunch of cattle, beef-cattle say, would entice such a band as Gill had gathered about him.

Uncle Jim Turner had cattle on the west range, Stuart knew, for he had seen them when he returned to the ranch the second time. He had passed several large herds up the Teton. He was now convinced that it was these cattle, or a portion of them, that Gill and his men were after. They had brought about the sheep-scare to call away the C Bar punchers and leave them free to handle the few men tending the herds. While the range squabble was on—and particularly if Short and the others should get mad and make trouble—they could drive a big bunch of fat C Bar cattle up across the Canadian line together with his own herd of some three hundred.

Stuart squirmed in his saddle as he thought of this, and of the possibility that Gill might get away unpunished for the death of his father. Miguel! Stuart smiled grimly when he remembered Frick's story of the killing of Devon and his own experience with the man in the rendezvous. He smiled grimly again as he recalled, too, his father's dying action.

But for the remainder of the ride to the ranch he made no further effort to engage Roy in conversation or persuade him that he or the others were in error. He would wait.

When they reached the ranch in the afternoon they found but one man there besides the Chinese cook. Roy called the man Darrel, who came out as they stopped near the barn.

"Put up the horses; I'm goin' to shackle this fellow in the bunk-house and then we'll get something to eat and you and I'll go back by the Basin."

"What's up?" asked Darrel, eying Stuart curiously.

"The sheep," replied Roy without waste of words.

Darrel whistled softly.

"Crossed the line?" he asked.

"And Burt an' Randall an' some of the rest of the bunch have gone to find out about it," explained Roy.

Then turning to Stuart, "Come on, an' remember I've got orders to keep you here an' a gun to do it with."

Stuart laughed as Roy led him to the bunk-house.

"Roy, it don't take much to make you boys lose confidence in a man."

Roy did not answer this. In the bunk-house he waited in the doorway and called to Darrel. When Darrel came he instructed him to tie Stuart securely to an iron ring bolted into a log above a bunk which Stuart suspected had been put there for such a purpose and possibly used in cases where some puncher became unruly during a bout with frontier whisky.

Then they tied Stuart's feet as an added precaution and left.

Stuart sat, sore and uncomfortable, looking out the windows of the bunk-house and considering his unfortunate situation. He wished he had made a break for it and taken his chances but with his hands tied behind him it would have been recklessness in the last degree.

The cottonwoods were trembling in a light breeze that blew down the river. Above the trees Stuart could see the light blue of the sky and fleecy little clouds that hung like billows or the foam of the surf. The air was rich with the tang of the open country. It was from all this—the land of mountains, long distances and far-flung skies — that his father had been taken through the cruel desire of the man Miguel for a false vengeance.

He turned his eyes to the door as he heard a light step.

Dorothy Turner entered and Stuart's heart gave a great bound.

"I've brought you something to eat," said the girl gravely.

"But how am I to eat it with my hands tied behind my back to that ring?" asked Stuart with a smile.

The girl appeared taken back. She put the wooden tray with the food on a bench and puckered her brow.

"You have to remain tied or you are liable to get away," she said after a few moments of deliberation.

Stuart laughed heartily.

"Have Roy and Darrel gone?" he asked.

She hesitated.

"Yes—they have," she answered at length.

"There are no more men here?" he inquired casually.

"Oh, yes, Bill the cook is here," he said. "And he can shoot, too," she added as an afterthought.

"I understood you didn't believe in shooting," said Stuart.

"This is hardly the time to discuss that," she replied severely.

Instantly Stuart sobered and regarded her somberly.

"Miss Dorothy, can you tell when a man is lying to you?" he asked.

"Sometimes. But why do you ask me that?"

"Did Roy tell you how I came to be in this fix?"

"He told me enough," she said quickly.

Stuart's eyes lighted suddenly.

"Miss Dorothy, I am not in with that gang. They have stolen my cattle and I believe one of them was responsible for my father's death. Didn't your dad tell you or your mother about it?"

"He didn't tell me and mother went with him to Fort Benton."

"Then I'm going to tell you; please listen."

Without wasting words, Stuart told her the story, beginning with the time when he and his parents had left Texas. He also told her of his visit to the rendezvous.

"Now Miss Dorothy, look at me. Am I telling the truth?" he concluded.

The girl looked at him and then turned her gaze to the scene without the window.

"Miss Dorothy, you're the finest girl I ever saw," said Stuart gravely. "If I didn't have any other reason than that I'd choke if I tried to lie to you. Miss Dorothy, men who have been brought up close to God's earth and under God's skies by a good woman—and my mother was one—*don't lie.*"

The girl continued to look out of the window.

"Miss Dorothy, in that note I left for your father I told him they had stolen my cattle and that I was goin' to get in with the gang, Gill's outfit, and find out what I could. If you believe I am telling the truth I want you to go in and get that note, open it and read it; but if you think I'm lyin' or that I'm the plain gunman from Pondera that you first called me, don't look at it."

She was regarding him thoughtfully now and he returned her gaze.

"You want me to trust you for yourself alone before I look for proof?" she asked.

"Yes."

Again she was silent—thoughtful. "And this Miguel—if you discover him to be Gill or any one else, you will kill him?"

"I don't know."

She lifted her brows in surprize.

"But he is a murderer, isn't he; and you hate him?"

Stuart nodded gravely.

"And you won't kill him?" She plainly was puzzled.

"I don't know," he repeated.

"But I—you—I don't see——"

She paused and looked at him again. Stuart tried in vain to fathom the mysterious light in her eyes. Was she mocking him? Didn't she believe him? Did she think he would resort to an unmanly subterfuge to gain his liberty?

She turned suddenly and left the bunk-house.

Long minutes lapsed. The sky above the cottonwoods changed to gold shot with crimson streamers as the sun dropped behind the western peaks. The wind freshened and whined in the foliage.

Stuart heard pattering feet. The Chinese cook entered, carrying a butcher-knife and a gun. He cut the ropes that bound Stuart and pointed to the food.

"Miss Dolthy say bettah eat an' send you this."

He dropped the gun on the bunk beside Stuart.

"Hoss in bahn—go quick," admonished the Chinaman as he left.

Stuart gazed at the crimson skies while he rubbed his sore wrists. And when he turned to the food his eyes were shining.

XXIV

WHEN he had finished eating Stuart picked up the gun which the Chinaman had dropped upon the bunk. He was elated to find it was the weapon which had been taken from him—his father's pistol. Roy had brought it with him and had left it, doubtless, in the house. He slipped the firearm into the sheath at his side.

As he walked from the bunk-house toward the barn Stuart hesitated, looking at the lights which shone from the windows of the ranch-house. Once he started toward

the house but changed his mind. He continued on to the barn; but something within him—some unusual feeling that was not exactly gratitude, nor satisfaction, nor triumph—made him wildly exultant.

He found his horse, saddled him and as he was leading him out saw a big black standing in a stall, saddled and ready for the trail. For a moment he wondered at this but the work he had to do quickly drove the thought from his mind.

When he was in the saddle he remembered that there were very few cartridges in his belt. He rode to the bunk-house and after a short search discovered several boxes of shells of the forty-four caliber in general use on the range. He filled his belt and stuffed more of the cartridges in his pockets. Then he rode quickly up the trail through the long coulée to the bench and turned west.

As Stuart loped steadily through the twilight, Dorothy, mounted on the big black, appeared upon the bench and watched him disappear in the shadows up the Teton. Then she swung her horse east and dashed away toward the Basin.

The shadows deepened and the stars came out as Stuart rode on in the soft beauty of the prairie night. He nodded in the saddle for, despite his iron constitution which enabled him to endure extraordinary hardships under stress, he felt the urgent need of sleep.

What was happening on the range east of the Basin? Were the C Bar men still on the trail of the few bandits who were leading them away? Had Short and other sheepmen become involved? Stuart knew how easy it was to start trouble between the two factions of stockmen and realized that Gill's ruse might indeed develop into a conflict.

He roused himself, flung his arms wildly and urged his horse to greater speed. But the animal did not respond as usual and Stuart reduced his pace in the knowledge that his mount also was tired. He hated to lose the time needed to assure himself and his horse the rest they needed but he knew this would have to be done.

His plans, however, were thoroughly outlined and when he sighted the first bunch of C Bar cattle in the bottom-lands along the river he swerved down and made for them.

One man was riding herd and Stuart hailed him when he came within shouting-distance.

"I've got a message for you," said Stuart as he rode up to the man; "but the first thing I want is some sleep. Anybody with you?"

"Grabel's over there in the tent asleep," said the man; "you just come from the ranch?"

"Yes," replied Stuart. "Seen anybody along here today?"

"Craig came through on his way up the river this morning," was the answer.

"Craig? Oh yes, the cow-boss. How far up is the big herd?"

"Over near Lost Corral. You say you've got a message?"

"I have, but it'll keep till morning. You boys dividin' the night-shift?"

"We sure are," grinned the puncher. "What'd you think?"

"Say—what's your name? Oh, Swanson. Well, Swanson, it seems funny to me that Craig would have two men watching this herd. What's the matter—is he afraid they'd leave feed like this to go to the hills or Canada or something?"

"Don't ask me," replied Swanson. "He's got two more men with another small herd about three miles above here an' with them he left down below it only leaves himself an' Small with the beef-cattle an' they're all in one bunch an' on the bench instead of the bottoms. I don't savvy the way Craig's runnin' the range this year; but he ought to know—he's been at it long enough."

"Swanson, I'm going over an' get some sleep; we've got some ridin' to do in the morning," said Stuart. "I'm pretty tired. Don't let me sleep till the sun shines in my eyes; an' if Craig comes along call me."

"Ain't you kind of overlookin' something?" asked Swanson.

"Holmes is my name," replied Stuart without hesitation. "I'll tell you the rest in the morning."

"Devon was telling about you in the bunk-house day or two before he got killed," said Swanson. "He was sayin' as how——"

But Stuart was riding down to the little tent which showed as a small white pyramid against the dark shadows of the trees by the river. He took the saddle from his horse, dropped it near the tent on the lee side, lay down upon the grass and pulled the slicker over him. In another instant he was asleep.

AT DAWN he awoke. Swanson and Grabel were cooking breakfast over a small grate. They greeted him in a friendly way when he appeared. He could tell that the men had been talking about him.

"What's the message?" asked Swanson when they had finished breakfast.

"That you're to come along with me," said Stuart; "an' we'd better start right now. I'll get my horse. I'm acting for Uncle Jim."

As he went for his horse Stuart smiled to himself.

"It's a bold play but I've got to do it," he reflected silently. "It's the only way left."

The men offered no objections to going with him, although it was plain that they were puzzled and would have welcomed a more detailed explanation than Stuart seemed of a mind to give them.

They rode out of the bottom-lands to the bench and struck west. Soon they saw a second small herd grazing near the river.

"Go down and get the two men down there," Stuart ordered. Grabel obeyed, muttering to himself.

Shortly he returned with two more cowpunchers.

"What's up?" demanded one of the men.

"I'll tell you when we get to Lost Corral," returned Stuart as he spurred his horse.

They rode northwest now instead of due west and it was still more than two hours before noon when they came in sight of the long, high ridge which marked the location of Lost Corral.

"Where do you say Craig has the beef-cattle?" Stuart asked Swanson.

"On the other side of the ridge near the old corrals," replied Swanson with a mystified look.

"All right," said Stuart as he drove in his spurs.

They raced across the intervening space to the ridge and climbed it at a more leisurely pace. Stuart's heart was throbbing in his throat as they neared the top and when they reached the crest he looked down eagerly and drew a long breath as they halted.

"Where's the cattle?" shouted Stuart as he pointed ahead.

The men gazed about in wonder. Below them the scattered posts and rotting saplings which once had formed the corrals showed in dreary desolation. Before them stretched the open range, reaching for miles toward the foothills in the west, south to the river, and north past the butte which marked the site of Stuart's ranch.

And in all that broad expanse of virgin prairie country not a single head of stock was to be seen!

"What in ——" began Grabel as he stared open-mouthed.

"Listen!" exclaimed Stuart. "Every head of beef-stock belonging to the C Bar is headed for Canada on the hoof this minute an' Gill an' his gang are drivin' 'em."

"But Craig—Craig came up here yesterday," said Swanson.

"They've made away with him or——" Stuart paused, struck with a new and startling thought.

"Listen," he resumed. "When I came up here I had no message in a way, but I knew what Gill was up to. Yesterday morning some of Gill's outfit drove the sheep in Mangle's bunch across the dead-line into the Basin to cover up their real play, which was to make off with this big herd. Randall and the others chased the few in the gang down there although I tried to tell 'em what Gill was up to. Here we are, the stock is gone—on the way north to the Marias and the line—it's up to us to head 'em off. An' we'd better get started."

"Look!" cried Swanson, as he pointed to the high ground on the other side of the corral.

They looked and saw where the earth had been pounded by hundreds of hoofs.

"Bunched an' goin'! Come on," shouted Swanson as he took the lead. In another minute they were racing along the broad trail left by the cattle in their forced pilgrimage to the north.

XXV

A MILE after mile they sped far in the wake of the big herd which the outlaws were driving to the Marias. Stuart and the four men with him knew they would have to overtake the rustlers before they got the cattle across the river; for once the cattle were driven across the Marias the band would split the herd up into bunches and take different trails across the Canadian line or perhaps hide them out in the bad-lands so that it would take weeks to find them if they could be found at all.

But when they reached the butte near

Stuart's ranch they paused while Swanson went to the top and built three smudge fires so that three columns of smoke curled upward in the still air of midday. The three smoke ribbons could be seen for miles in all directions. It was the emergency signal of the range for assistance.

They pressed on northward. In the late afternoon as they topped a high bit of ground Stuart pointed ahead. On the horizon a cloud wavered lazily.

"Dust!" shouted Swanson with an inarticulate yell of triumph.

They plunged onward, their horses running like mad, wild with the exultation of a free rein. It was nearly sunset when they came in sight of the great mass of cattle and a dozen men or more riding behind them, firing their guns. The cattle were virtually stampeding for the river.

Stuart and his companions spread out and took advantage of the occasional cover offered by coulées, shallow gullies and short ridges in the prairie. At last they dashed headlong at the herd and the men in its rear. Stuart counted thirteen of the outlaws.

"We'll let the cattle go," yelled Swanson. "They'll stop by the time they reach the river. But we want every rustler in that outfit!"

Puffs of smoke bubbled in the air about the bandits and lead began to sing in the air above the heads of the pursuers. Instantly Stuart and the others returned the fire.

Evidently Gill and his men had believed that the cow-punchers would refrain from firing at them for fear that they would hit and perhaps kill some of the cattle. But Stuart and the others had for the time being forgotten the cattle in their desire to trap or kill the outlaws. Nor did they stop to consider that the bandits' strength in point of numbers was against them. They fired again and again.

The rustlers divided and began racing up each side of the flying herd. Suddenly the leaders in the mass of stampeding steers swerved to the left and a flying wedge caught one of the rustlers. In a moment he was in the midst of the cattle; another moment and his head and shoulders, which had been bobbing clearly outlined above the backs of the frightened, maddened animals, disappeared.

"One gone," shouted Swanson. "We can lick any even dozen cow-thieves on earth!"

But when Swanson came upon the man's crushed and trampled body after the herd had passed on over it and left it lying a broken, hideous thing upon the torn face of the prairie, he pulled up his horse and motioned to the others to join him.

"Craig!" he cried in an awed voice as they came up.

They looked down and recognized the battered, mashed features of the former cow-boss.

"I knew it," said Stuart. "No wonder Gill was so cock-sure of his plan."

"That's why he had the beeves so far west on the range," said Grabel.

"An' that's why he had us fellows riding herd on a handful of young stuff," said Swanson, as the others nodded the same conviction. "To keep us out of the way. Who was with him with the beef-herd?"

"Lawton," answered one of the men.

"Then he's in with the bunch, too, or killed," decided Swanson.

Twilight now was at hand and the men redoubled their efforts to overtake the herd and the outlaws. But when the rear of the herd was reached the outlaws were in front and making for the river which Stuart believed was still some miles away as they had not yet sighted the fringe of green foliage which would mark its banks.

Swanson and Grabel went around the right side of the herd and Stuart and the two other men took the left side. The outlaws began to cut to the northeast and resumed firing although the distance was too great for them to expect to do any damage with their bullets.

It soon became apparent that the horses of the bandits were beginning to tire.

"Let's cut more to the north and drive 'em east," shouted Stuart. "We can beat 'em to the river."

"Sure," yelled Swanson in assent. "Maybe we can get between 'em and the river."

Slowly the pursuers began to edge between the outlaws and the Marias; and then, as the shadows of the twilight began to fall, the rustlers slackened their pace, halted for a moment, swung about and drove their horses directly toward Stuart and the others. They began to fire as they came.

"Spread out and keep out of range," yelled Stuart. "Let 'em have it Indian fashion; our horses are freshest."

As the others followed his suggestion and

divided the outlaws again changed their direction and made back toward the mass of cattle which was moving more slowly as if preparing to come to a stop.

The men in pursuit also began to cut back. The newest move on the part of Gill and those with him puzzled them. But the plan of the outlaws was soon apparent for when they reached the big herd they were swallowed in the shadows around its edge and Stuart and his companions could not distinguish them from the cattle.

"We'll surround the herd as best we can an' if they make a break signal by firing three shots in succession," Stuart volunteered when they came together to discuss the new phase of the situation.

"It's all we can do," agreed Swanson and the others approved.

They spread out and rode to different stations about the herd, keeping out of range. The stars came out and any attempt of the outlaws to leave the massed cattle would be easy to detect.

But the situation now was in the rustlers' advantage. They were practically concealed and thus could lie low and give their horses a chance to rest. Although the others would have a chance to rest their horses also they knew Gill's men had assembled some fine mounts and when they had recovered from the hard riding they had been subjected to the outlaws could give chase and perhaps do for them by sheer weight of numbers. And Gill's men were good shots in addition.

Stuart worried these facts in his brain as the night wore on. Mentally he upbraided Randall and Burt Turner for their suspicions of him. Why, Dorothy Turner was worth more than the whole lot of the men! And Stuart thought again of what he had told her; that she wasn't to open the note for confirmation of his story unless she trusted him and believed he had spoken truthfully.

She had sent the Chinaman to free him. That showed that she had trusted him and believed him and, of course, opened the note he had left for her father and thus ascertained that her trust in him was justified. He thrilled at the thought. Even though the outlaws might kill him she would know what he wanted her to know.

The cattle were scarcely moving forward and were beginning to mill and spread out a bit. Stuart strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of a hat or head and shoulders of a mounted man against the dark mass of beeves. The chances, however, were against this. Once or twice he thought he saw a horse's head bobbing but could not be sure.

In a few hours the horses of the outlaws would be sufficiently rested to enable them to make a dash for the river. On fresh mounts they would be certain to gain the Marias and its bad-lands. There, they would virtually be safe.

Stuart bit his lips as he considered this. Now that Gill had been frustrated in his attempt to steal the C Bar herd he would doubtless make for the Canadian line and leave his followers. Stuart remembered the dissatisfaction and insolence the members of the band had shown toward Gill and knew that the leader could not hold them after the failure of the big rustling-project.

Stuart wanted of all things to meet Gill again.

He was considering getting off his horse and trying to creep up on the outlaws when he heard a series of shots from beyond the rear of the herd. He spurred his horse toward the south and then gasped as he made out the dim shapes of the outlaws riding madly south. Riding south! Why didn't they make for the river and certain safety?

Stuart looked back as he rode and then cried out again in astonishment. Coming from the northeast and clearly outlined against the night sky was another party of men. They were riding furiously across the long bench where the outlaws had first turned back.

And the outlaws now were dashing back toward Lost Corral and the C Bar range on the Teton.

XXVI

WHILE Swanson and the others rode in pursuit of the bandits Stuart hung back until he could establish the identity of the new party. He kept close to the cattle until he could make out Randall and Burt Turner riding in the lead.

Randall hailed him when the men rode up and Stuart recognized Roy and others from the C Bar who had been east of the Basin.

Randall held out his hand.

"We'll get 'em before they hit the Teton," was all he said. "Dorothy told us you were

out here and we found Frick in the sheep-sheds and he talked. We saw the smoke signal too. Is Craig out here?"

"Craig's dead," replied Stuart. "Caught under the cattle helping Gill."

"Come on," cried Randall, taking the lead as they got under way.

It was early dawn when Stuart and the C Bar men surrounded Lost Corral where the outlaws had been overtaken. A volley of shots came from the remnants of sheds and corrals, where the bandits had taken advantage of such scanty cover as was offered.

Stuart and the others returned the fire and two of the members of Gill's band dropped. Surrounded, exposed to the fire of the C Bar men from all sides, the rustlers were in a desperate plight. Suddenly one of the band of trapped men stepped forth with his hands in the air. It was Gill—his face white and drawn. Burt Turner shouted warning and Stuart saw Curran raising his gun to a line with Gill's heart.

But two more of the outlaws had been shot down and the others, seeing the odds so heavily against them, followed Gill's example. Stuart's gun blazed but just as he fired a rope shot through the air and Curran was jerked off his feet. Swanson had given a splendid example of quick work with the lariat. In another minute the outlaws were lined up and their guns piled in a heap on the ground.

As Stuart looked at Gill he understood why the man's hold on the rest of the band had been weak. The leader was shaking and trying to mumble something from between pallid lips.

Stuart, having dismounted with the others, stepped toward the chief of the rustlers. At that moment a shout came from Roy and the boy pointed to the lower end of the ridge above the corrals. Uncle Jim Turner, Short, and—Stuart started back in astonishment—Dorothy were with the two stockmen. They waited until the trio rode up.

"Thought you were going to make us the goats for your —— scheme, eh?" cried Short to Gill.

Gill tried futilely to reply while Curran, standing a bit apart at the lower line of the captured men, sneered at the former leader.

"I'll show you how Devon was killed," said Stuart, keeping his eyes on Gill. "If he hasn't thrown away his gun it ought to be here." Stuart leaped forward and struck Gill's big hat from his head. A snub-nosed pistol fell with the hat.

"Afraid to wear a gun in the open because it might give the other man a chance," said Stuart with a look of contempt in his eyes. "Devon and Gill were together in Frick's place when Devon was killed. Gill shook down his gun from his hat—does it handy—did it to me up on the Marias when I had the drop on him in his camp."

The others had been regarding the outlaw with a mixture of astonishment, rage and contempt.

Uncle Jim Turner and Short got down from their horses.

"Gill," said Uncle Jim, "it's a dangerous game you've been playin' up here. We don't aim to have any of the kind of trouble on this range that you've been stirring up."

Gill started to speak.

"It wasn't my game," he shrilled; "I wish to —— I'd stuck——"

"You ran my cattle off," interrupted Stuart menacingly.

"I didn't——"

"You coward, don't lie," said Stuart sharply. "Your bunch raided our ranch and killed my father. We've got an account to settle, you and I, and you know what it's about."

Uncle Jim raised a hand as Short started to say something.

Speaking in a low voice which trembled with emotion, Stuart told the story of his father's persecution, of the conversation he had overheard between Gill and Curran in the rendezvous, of the betrayal and death of Mangle, of Craig's perfidy, of the discovery that the rustlers were attempting to start a sheep war to conceal their operations west of the Basin, of the theft of the C Bar cattle and his own. He did not mention how the Turner brothers and Randall had become suspicious of him but he told of the note he had left for Uncle Jim and why he had ridden away with Gill—to learn the big plan of the outlaws.

"And the reason why Gill didn't kill me long before is because he expected to make me give back twenty thousand dollars he stole in Texas—money my father took away from him and was holding for Loud's heirs," Stuart concluded.

"It wasn't me," cried Gill; "it was——"

With a single bound Curran reached him and drove his fist into Gill's mouth. Randall and two others were on top of Curran

instantly and pushed him back. The man's mouth was twitching in horrible rage and his face was livid.

Gill spat blood and cringed.

"For ——'s sake, tell 'em," he shrieked, turning toward Curran. "He's goin' to kill me!" He raised a shaking hand and pointed to Stuart. "Miguel, he's goin' to kill me!"

Stuart swung lightning-fast to confront Curran.

"Miguel!"

"That's him," continued Gill. "I knew him in Texas. He had me represent to be the head of this gang but he gave me the orders. This wasn't my kind of a play. I never wanted to take to rustlin'."

Gill's speech failed him as he gazed about the circle with frightened eyes in pitiful entreaty.

"Miguel!" Stuart murmured the word to himself as a great light broke in upon him. This man had been with the gang which had returned to Pondera the morning after the raid on his ranch. Stuart had heard him talking contemptuously to Gill; giving him orders, he had thought, that night in the rendezvous.

Miguel rested his hands on his hips and laughed. His sneering laugh at Gill told the others about that the man whom Miguel had forced to pose as a leader had told the truth. And Gill was a coward.

Stuart turned to Swanson. His face was very white and his voice when he spoke to the cow-puncher was hard and clear.

"You picked up this man's gun, didn't you, Swanson?"

Swanson nodded. For a fleeting moment Stuart caught sight of Dorothy Turner's face. She was still sitting on her horse. In that brief space of time Stuart noted that her eyes were fixed upon him with a look which he could not fathom. She whirled her horse away as he spoke again.

"Swanson, take that gun over to—Miguel."

The cow-puncher stepped toward the outlaw. Those on either side fell back in understanding. A glitter came into Miguel's eyes and he reached out eagerly for the weapon.

"Hold your hands out, Miguel," said Stuart sharply. "Now Swanson, drop that gun in his holster."

The clear morning sun shone upon the tense group of men and a light breeze stirred the dust as the horses stamped on the edge of the circle.

"Miguel!" called Stuart in a voice that rang. "Miguel—draw!"

Shots shattered the silence which had fallen upon the men. Stuart felt a blow in his right shoulder that turned him half-around. He saw the man Miguel drop his smoking weapon, lean forward and crumple upon the ground. Then the brightness of the morning shaded to gray and black and he fell into Roy's arms.

XXVII

WHEN Stuart opened his eyes again he was conscious of gentle motion. It was as if he were in a boat at sea except that this boat occasionally lurched. He saw the clear blue skies overhead and then, shifting his gaze downward, saw the prairie stretching out and away from him—retreating, it seemed.

"How you feelin', partner?" asked a voice near him which he recognized as Randall's.

"Fine," said Stuart as he felt a dull, throbbing pain in his shoulder.

Then the events of the last few hours came back to him in a twinkling.

"Miguel? Is he——"

"He's through," said Randall simply. "Now don't try to talk; just take it easy and Burt'll try to steer this wagon over the soft spots an' you'll be at the ranch an' in bed in half an hour. You'll be all right in a day or two."

But Randall's prediction proved too optimistic. When Stuart arrived at the ranch he was delirious in the throes of a fever caused by the wound in his shoulder. Uncle Jim Turner already had sent Roy to Choute for a doctor and that night he came. It was fortunate that the first-aid work given Stuart at Lost Corral was well done for no complications developed and in two days the fever had run its course and Stuart, very weak but cheerful, looked up from the bed into the eyes of Dorothy.

"Now don't try to talk," she cautioned; "an' you can't have anything much to eat yet, the doctor says."

So Stuart accepted her services in silence and later that day Uncle Jim and his wife visited him for a few minutes. Next afternoon Uncle Jim came in again.

"The boys has just got back from the Marias," he said in a hearty voice. "Now

don't be tryin' to sling any conversation a while yet, young fellow. I wanted to tell you that they found your cattle up there all fat an' sleek an' drove them back down on Lost Creek. I sent a man up there to keep an eye on 'em."

Stuart disregarded Uncle Jim's warning gesture.

"Did they find the two men Miguel and Gill left up there?"

"Found 'em an' brought 'em back," said Uncle Jim. "They're on their way to Choute, I guess."

"What did you do with the others, Uncle Jim?"

"Well, now, I reckon they won't do any more rustlin' or whisky-runnin'," said Uncle Jim, shifting his gaze to the window and the green of the cottonwoods outside. "You don't want to hear too much at one time but I'll tell you this an' no more. I sent the bunch with 'em to Choute, but I guess it's farther to Choute than it used to be an' the boys' horses got powerful tired and wore out when they got to them three big cottonwoods across the river from Lost Corral an'—there's some fine limbs on them trees, son, an' the boys had a rope apiece. They got back that same night an' seemed right cheerful."

"Gill? He was with the bunch?" asked Stuart.

"He was," affirmed Uncle Jim; "an' he's with 'em yet an' if they're where I think they be they're right where they belong."

With this Uncle Jim left.

EARLY next morning when Dorothy entered she found Stuart sitting up looking out the window.

"Well, how's the man from Pondera this morning?" she asked cheerily.

Stuart smiled at her.

"I thought it was the gunman from Pondera," he observed.

Dorothy blushed as she brought water to wash his face and hands.

"I didn't know as much then as I do now," she said. "I don't blame you for—for chasing that man Miguel."

"How did the boys happen to come west from the Basin after I left the ranch for Lost Corral?" asked Stuart.

"I—I rode down there and told them that I had released you," said Dorothy softly. "They went up to Pondera, found Frick in the sheep-shed and he told them all they wanted to know. They let him go to Canada when he promised he never would come back."

"Did Gill say anything more after—after——"

"After Miguel's death? Yes, he was frightened to death. He said Miguel had made Mangle follow you and Devon and learn your name, although he felt sure he knew you at that first meeting in Pondera. It was Miguel who led the raid on your ranch when your father was killed. Miguel sent Gill to get you to join the gang. He intended to keep you up there until they had brought up the cattle and then make you tell where the money was that your father took away from him in Texas. He compelled Gill to pose as the leader of the outlaws because he thought Gill could deal better with the sheepmen. Miguel's deformity of his features made it hard with him to talk and convince reputable men."

When Dorothy brought in Stuart's breakfast she also brought him his mail. He looked over the papers and several letters to his father carelessly. It was quite a bunch of mail for he hadn't received any since his father's death.

"Roy brought it back when he went for the doctor," she explained.

Stuart, who was opening the letters, suddenly gave vent to a startled exclamation as he held one out to the girl.

"That's from Sarah Loud, in answer to father's advertisements in the Eastern papers for her. She's in Illinois."

"And is she the one who is entitled to the money your father took from Gill?" asked Dorothy.

"She is—you can see she tells when her brother went to Texas and where she last heard from him and it was on the Brazos. I've got the money for her and I'll send it to her as soon as I can get out to the ranch and get it from where I buried it."

Dorothy went about her tasks of dusting and putting the room in order.

"The boys were going to call on you today," she said; "but mother told them they would have to wait until tomorrow because she didn't want too much excitement around you as yet."

"The boys?" said Stuart, puzzled. "What are they——"

"I guess they want to apologize for being suspicious of you for a while and tell you

how much they think of you," said Dorothy.

Stuart was silent for a time.

"What did your father say when you gave him the note I left for him?" he asked finally.

"He didn't—you see they sent word by the narrow-gage telegraph of what was happening and father came from Benton as quick as he could and when he got here the boys had gone west to join you and Short had started for the ranch to see father and explain things and the three of us started for Lost Corral. The boys drove the men who ran the sheep over the line to Canada."

"It's a good thing I left that note," said Stuart. "And I'm glad I told you not to open it unless you believed me—thought I was telling the truth."

Dorothy removed an envelope from her apron pocket. She handed it to Stuart and went quickly to the window.

Stuart stared at the envelope in amazement. It was the one he had left for Uncle Jim Turner.

"But, Miss Dorothy," he exclaimed, "didn't you give this to him?" There was no reply from the girl.

"And, why, it isn't opened!" cried Stuart. "Didn't you open it when— Dorothy, look at me!"

She turned with eyes which were bright and shining.

"You let me go because you trusted me?" he insisted.

Slowly she nodded.

"When I saw you give Miguel a chance I knew I had not been mistaken in you," she said softly.

"Dorothy, come here," said Stuart.

And when Uncle Jim entered a few minutes later he saw Dorothy sitting on the edge of the bed. Stuart held her hands in his.

"Uncle Jim, you go on about your business," grinned Stuart.

"Well, I'll be—" began Uncle Jim.

Then he left the room hurriedly, calling for Mother Turner.

Dorothy and Stuart appeared undisturbed.

THE SHIP TURNS HOME

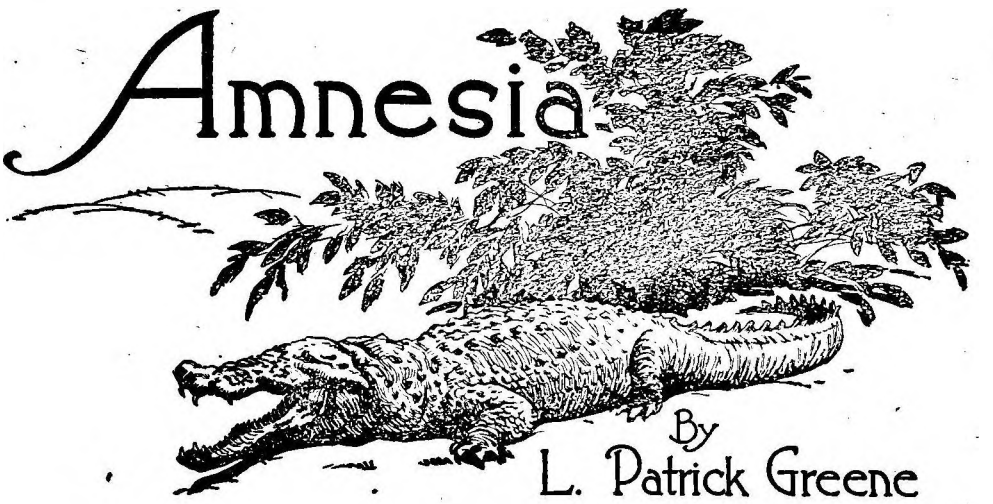
***by* Gordon Malherbe Hillman**

THEN out! Get her out, where the great waves shout
And the crashing seas loom high!
Spin her wheel to nor'-nor'-east
As the palm-green shores slip by!

Then north! Turn her north, where the gray seas froth
And her tall bows plumb the brine,
While the yellow wind-streak quivers
By the gray horizon line!

Then round! Get her round, where the long waves pound
And the lamps flash red and white!
Rattle her home up the starlit bay
Past the gleaming cliff-top light!

Amnesia



By L. Patrick Greene

Author of "Lines of Cleavage," "Fate's Instrument," etc.

THE Major whistled gaily as he strode down one of the less frequented streets of Lourenço Marques, that sleeping seaport of East Africa. Undoubtedly things were going well with him; he had just collected on a second delivery of elephants' tusks to Nathan Abraham a sum that made that avaricious individual whine for sympathy.

"Let me off, won't you?" Nathan had begged. "Giving you this high price for ivory will ruin me. Lower the price a shilling a pound and I'll come out even. That contract is not a fair one. You tricked me into giving it to you."

"Oh, be a sport," the Major had answered. "You would have tricked me if you had been able to. And don't forget that you planned with 'Dirty' Norton to kill me— Oh, don't try to deny it; there's a good fellow. It was not his fault that he failed. You must pay for your pleasures, old top, and attempted murder comes high. A check for the full amount, please."

And Nathan had no option but to comply.

Yes, the Major had good reason to be happy. He had already cleared about fifty thousand dollars on his lucky discovery of the "Place of the Elephants' Death." He chuckled gleefully as he thought of how he had outwitted Dirty Norton, a disgraced police official from the Transvaal, who had endeavored to discover his secret, planning to kill the Major afterward to square an imagined wrong.

The fifty thousand and the money he would receive from a deal he had just concluded with the Portuguese officials made it possible for him to——

He became conscious of a voice—a woman's voice—calling him to stop.

He turned round and waited for the owner of the voice to catch up with him.

She was young and attractively yet simply dressed. Her figure was slim, almost boyish.

The Major swept off his sun helmet and made her a profound bow.

"Oh, please forgive me," she gasped breathlessly, "for hailing you, but—you're the Major, aren't you?"

The Major screwed his eye-glass firmly into place, and his round, smooth-shaven face wore an almost vacuous expression.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken, madam. My name is Aubrey St. John, but upon my word if this Major chappie is a friend of yours I'd like to change places with the lucky beggar."

She made a little gesture of dissent.

"Please!" she said supplicatingly. "I know you are the Major—they pointed you out to me and said you'd help me. And I do so need help."

"Madam," said the Major, "when a charming lady like you is in need of assistance I'll be the Major or whosoever you please."

She clasped her hands tightly together.

"Then they were right? You will help me?"

"I'm yours to command, my dear lady.

But who told you that I could help you?"

"The Major's reputation for chivalry is admitted by every one," she said shyly, then went on hurriedly:

"It's about my brother. He's been gambling and drinking a great deal; he's breaking mother's heart."

There was the sound of tears in her voice.

"He's gotten in with a bad crowd, and a horrible beast of a man named Norton seems to have a hold over him."

"What is your brother's name?"

"Hawkins—Jim Hawkins. I am Nan Hawkins."

The Major gave a little grunt of astonishment.

"And he's your brother?" he said incredulously.

The Major was thinking of the time Hawkins had left him, wounded, to the mercy of a band of savage warriors. At least Hawkins had thought him wounded, and the warriors savage!

"Do you know him?" the girl cried.

"Well, I've met him and—er—yes, I think I may say I know him."

"Don't condemn him too quickly," she pleaded. "He's always been spoiled—and I know he's selfish. But he's good at the bottom and if we could only get him away from this man Norton's influence he would be all right, I'm sure."

The Major looked closely at the girl; noted her sweet face and the big gray eyes welling with tears.

"Where is your brother now?" he asked curtly.

"At Norton's place back of the hotel. I've just been down there trying to persuade him to come home. But he was drunk. They were all drunk, and Norton—he——"

She started to cry quietly.

"Don't cry."

The Major patted her hand awkwardly.

"I'll get him for you and take him to my room to sober up. Afterward we can talk the thing over quietly together."

"Oh, thank you, thank you. I knew you would find a way."

She raised his hand to her lips.

"That's all right," he said with a show of embarrassment.

"Now dry your pretty eyes and run along home. It's getting late, and little girls shouldn't be out alone down this quarter of the town."

He watched her until she disappeared round a corner and then hastened down the street that ran at the rear of the hotel.

Outside the door of a rough wooden shack he paused and listened. Snatches of drunken brawling and obscene songs sounded clearly on the night air. Peering through a chink in the door, he could see Norton, Hawkins and one other whom he did not know sprawled in drunken postures around a rickety table on which stood several whisky-bottles. Even as he watched Hawkins drank greedily from one of the bottles.

That decided it. Whatever doubts the Major may have had of the truth of the girl's story vanished. Shifting his revolver from the holster that swung at his hip to his coat pocket, he knocked at the door.

There was no response save a louder outburst of song and the voice of Hawkins vociferously clamoring for another drink.

He knocked again.

"Come in, blast you," a voice thick with liquor shouted. "Come in and shut the —— door behind you."

The Major opened the door and entered.

THE Major was floating on a cloud of pearly pink; visions of light flashed swiftly by him; ages passed. Then the cloud suddenly dissolved from under him and he fell down, down into a dark and troubled sea.

"He's coming to," a voice said; and it sounded strangely distant. "Give him another douse."

A wave broke over him. He spluttered and gasped as if fighting hard for breath, then slowly opened his eyes and gazed vacantly about him.

His head throbbed violently. Something warm trickled down his face. He put his hand up and when he took it down it was red and sticky with blood.

He looked wonderingly at the men who stood before him.

"I say, what happened? Was there an accident, or what? How did I come here? I don't seem to remember."

His face wore a troubled look.

One of the men laughed.

"Listen to the ducky. Dirty. 'E don't know where 'e are. Tell 'im."

"Here, take a drink of this."

Norton poured out a stiff peg of whisky and handed it to the Major.

He drank and with the drinking gained strength.

He essayed to rise to his feet, to discover that he was bound securely to a heavy chair, only his hands being free.

"Why am I tied like this?" he asked indignantly. "You can't do this sort of thing, you know. It isn't done."

The men were convulsed with merriment.

"Isn't 'e the love, though?"

Norton scowled.

"You think you're —— clever, don't you, Major? But I've got ahead of you this time. You never suspected the girl at all, did you? Why should you? She was all open and aboveboard.

"She told you the true story—she's a deep one, Nan is. Hawkins is her brother, and he's drunk—the fool always is—and I've got a hold over him. She told you that and you walked into the trap with your eyes open.

"Only you didn't see Joe here—" he indicated the scrubby little cockney—"get behind the door with a billy, ready to knock you out as you entered. He's pretty strong, Joe is, for all he's so small. We thought for a while he had knocked you out for good."

The Major did not answer, but gazed fixedly before him.

"Well, why don't you say something? You are fond enough of writing letters."

"I don't know what you are talking about."

The words came slowly, as if he were not sure of himself.

"Why do you keep me here? Let me go."

Norton sneered.

"Oh! So you don't know what I'm talking about. You'll be saying next that you don't know me, Major."

"I don't know you. Never saw you before in my life. And why do you call me Major? My name is——"

He stopped and looked around appealingly.

"What is my name?"

"Don't try to be funny. I know who you are, and you know me. What's more, before you leave here you're going to tell me where the ivory is. See?"

"I don't know what you are talking about."

Norton hit him viciously in the face with his clenched fist and laughed in derision as the Major flinched.

"Bring in the nigger," he said.

Two of the men went into an inner room and a moment later came out dragging a prostrate form.

It was Jim, the Major's Hottentot servant—his comrade on many a wild venture.

"Take that gag out of his mouth so the black can speak."

"I suppose you don't know who this is," scoffed Norton.

"I've never seen him before in my life," said the Major blankly, "and I'm quite sure he doesn't know me."

Norton looked nonplused for a moment. He had been watching the Major closely since Jim's entrance, but had failed to see anything in the Major's behavior that would indicate an acquaintance with the native.

He laughed shortly.

"Well, I guess we can soon find a way to open your mouth," he said. "You're supposed to be sort of fond of this nigger. Well, we'll see. Get the *sjambok*, Joe."

Joe took down from the wall a vicious-looking whip.

"Where does your *baas* get the ivory?"

"I don't know."

The rawhide whip came down on Jim's naked back with a sickening thud.

"Where does your *baas* get the ivory?"

Jim maintained a dogged silence.

Again the whip fell.

"What do you think of it, Major?" sneered Norton. "We are going to keep this up until you or him tells. We don't care which.

"Afterward— Well, there won't be any afterward for you. I've been waiting a long time to even up scores with you, and I've got you this time. No questions are asked in this town if a man happens to be found with his throat cut."

Again came the torture of the question and the whip, and Jim moaned with pain.

A light of anger shone in the Major's eyes.

"Stop it, you beasts."

"Ah! I thought this 'ud bring you to your senses. Well, will you tell us where the ivory is?"

"I tell you I don't know."

"Did you hear that, nigger? Your *baas* 'ud rather see you beaten than tell where the ivory is. You won't get anything from

him. Tell us and we'll let you go and give you plenty of whisky besides."

"I know nothing, *baas*," replied Jim.

"Give him a few lashes to go on with, Joe," ordered Norton.

BEFORE the order could be obeyed the door was suddenly opened and the girl Nan rushed breathlessly into the room.

All looked at her for some explanation.

"You'll have to get out of here, Norton," she cried.

They crowded around her.

"What for, Nan? What's the game?"

"The police officials are after you."

Norton made a gesture of contempt.

"That's not all," went on Nan. "You might get away from the Portuguese police, but there's a man here from the Transvaal. He's got an extradition warrant for your arrest."

Norton cursed.

"I wouldn't lose any time, if I were you."

"Yus. She's right, Dirty. Better light hout w'ile the goin's good. We'll take care of the Major fer yer."

"Yes. You can trust us," supplemented Hawkins.

Norton turned on them with a snarl.

"Like —— I can. If I go, you go with me. Inspan the mules, Cockney; and you, Hawkins, get some grub together."

"Where are you going, Dirty?"

"To Cenambo's kraal—over the border."

Hawkins looked horrified.

"Cenambo's!" he cried. "Why——"

"Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of. Cenambo's an old friend of mine. Now get busy; we ought to be on trek in half an hour."

The two men hastened to do his bidding.

"What are you going to do with the Major?" Nan asked.

Norton pulled out his revolver and looked at it suggestively.

"Don't be a fool, Dirty. If you kill him here they'd get you sure as fate. As it is they are not liable to chase after you. Besides, you would lose all chance of getting the ivory, for if you killed the Major you'd have to kill the Hottentot too. Take them both with you. You ought to find a way of opening their mouths when you get to Cenambo's."

"You're right, Nan. I'll do that. Are you coming with us?"

"Not me. The wild and woolly doesn't appeal to me. Ta-ta!"

With a flounce of her skirt Nan ran from the shack.

EIGHT days later a trek wagon drawn by eight mules pulled up near by the kraal of Cenambo.

It was at once surrounded by a horde of savage-looking warriors armed with large, business-like spears.

"What make ye here, white men?" asked one who seemed to be in authority.

"Thou art not Cenambo," said Norton.

"I am Cenambo's mouthpiece."

"Then run and bid Cenambo to come hither. Say that I come bearing gifts."

"Other men have brought gifts to the chief, yet went they humbly on foot to him—not he to them."

Norton turned to Hawkins and Cockney Joe, who were listening with ill-concealed fear to the conversation.

"I am going up to the chief's hut," he said. "You stay here and——"

There was a movement among the warriors as they made way for a newcomer.

"It is the chief. Hail to thee, Cenambo," they cried.

A fat, gross man approached the wagon. He waddled in his gait like a duck, yet his carriage had somewhat of a kingly dignity—or rather that of an autocrat who would brook no denial. His evil, vicious eyes peered constantly from side to side, and the man upon whom they momentarily rested shrank back as if he would efface himself from their basilisk glare.

"What make ye here?" His voice was harsh.

"It is I," called out Norton. "Thy friend, Uglubu."

"Oh, 'tis thou, O pig. Come ye to another feasting? Or desire ye to be a sacrifice?"

"The chief jests," said Norton somewhat hurriedly. "Yet listen. I have brought thee many presents—guns and powder. Also— But first say, O mighty one, is this how thou greetest thy friends? Is it by thine order that this one should threaten me with death?"

Norton pointed to the big warrior.

Cenambo looked fiercely at the now shrinking man.

"Art eager for death?" he said mildly. "If so there are many hungry bellies yonder."

He made a gesture toward the river which flowed at the foot of the hill.

The warrior fell to his knees and patted the feet of the chief.

"Nay, O great one! How was I to know that this one was thy friend?"

"Then get from my sight ere I forget that I am merciful."

Cenambo turned once again to Norton.

"Thou wilt stay with us for a while? Good. The guest hut is waiting for thee, and for these others so be they are thy friends."

Quickly the wagon was unloaded of its contents, which were carried by natives to the guest hut, save certain gifts of guns and powder which Norton gave to the chief.

Only once did Cenambo show any interest in the proceedings. That was when the Major and Jim, both tightly bound, were lowered from the wagon.

"These are not friends of thine?" he said hopefully.

"Nay, O chief. Let them be closely guarded, I pray thee."

"Death is a good guardian."

"Aye. But it is also a stopper-up of tongues. First I would hear them speak certain things; then——"

Norton shrugged his shoulders.

"That is well."

Cenambo rubbed his hands gleefully.

"I have discovered many ways whereby a man can be made to speak the truth. But not yet have I tried any on a white man. It will afford good sport."

"Tomorrow is another day, great chief, and we are hungry."

"Ah, sayest thou? Then go ye to the guest hut—thou knowest the way. Food will be brought you, and when ye have eaten I will talk again with thee. These black ones—" he indicated certain of the warriors with a contemptuous wave of his hand—"will do thy bidding in all things."

With that Cenambo, escorted by his body-guard, departed to his hut.

Norton turned gleefully to Hawkins and Cockney Joe, who were looking at him with a certain new-born admiration.

"What did I tell you?" he cried triumphantly.

"You've got 'im sittin' hup on 'is legs and beggin' like a bloomin' dorg," chortled Cockney Joe.

"Y-e-s!" assented Hawkins. "But I'm afraid of him."

"You would be," Norton sneered.

"Hi! You!" he continued, addressing the warriors. "Take this dog—" he kicked the prostrate Major—"to one of the huts and there guard him well. Ye may loosen his bonds and give him food and drink, but see ye that he comes not near to this other dog."

He spat on Jim.

"The black one, also, shall ye guard closely."

"It is an order, white man."

The warriors picked up the two men and carried them away.

Shortly afterward they threw the Major violently down in a filthy, vermin-infested hut. There they released him from the ropes which were cutting into his flesh.

"In a little while food will be brought to thee," said the warrior. "In the mean time see that thou dost not seek to leave this place. Death awaits thee outside."

LEFT to himself, the Major gazed around the hut with lack-luster eyes. He was weary, body and soul, and the slightest move was torture to his cramped limbs. He had been tightly bound during the whole trip from Lourenço Marques; only at the brief mid-halts had they given him a chance to exercise a little.

Blows had been frequent, for he persisted in his statements that he did not know Norton or what was meant by the talk of ivory. This attitude had puzzled Norton and the other two, leading to much altercation between them, Norton accusing Cockney Joe of having "knocked all the sense out of the blighter" and then having great difficulty in restraining the cockney from giving the Major another "bat hon the bleedin' 'ead to knock the sense back again."

He was still somewhat dazed from the heavy blow Cockney Joe had dealt him, yet under normal circumstances it was a blow he should have quickly recovered from.

But to be fed only the minimum of food required to keep in life; to be deprived of water; refused the chance to exercise; and to be trussed up like a fowl for days together—riding on the floor of a springless wagon driven at full speed over the rough veld land—are not conducive to a quick recovery.

The white duck suit which he wore at the time of his abduction was spattered with blood and filth. His face was drawn and

haggard-looking; his eyes were bloodshot and staring.

There was nothing in his appearance to suggest that he was Aubrey St. John, the dandy, and still less to indicate that he was the Major—a man whose wit, gallantry and clever evasions of the law were the talk of the Dark Continent. He looked instead like a man brutally debased; a man from whom all power of reason and intelligence had fled.

Norton had carefully seen to it that he had held no conversation with Jim the Hottentot, to whom they had allowed a certain amount of liberty—his services being valuable at such times they made camp. But this precaution was unnecessary, for at such times that Jim had artfully contrived to get near to the Major the latter had turned a deaf ear to his speech and showed no signs of recognition—a fact which worried the loyal native exceedingly.

Now the Major ate greedily of the food that a native shortly brought him and then slept soundly; nor did he awaken until long after sunup the following day.

FEELING a little stronger in body, the Major looked up indignantly when Hawkins entered the hut accompanied by four natives armed with assagais.

"You're to come with us, Major."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Really? How interesting. And to what purpose?"

Hawkins shifted uneasily.

"Look here, Major," he said. "Why don't you cut out this fooling? Norton's bound to find out where you got the ivory from. Why don't you tell him and let us get away from this rotten hole? I don't half like it."

He gazed round apprehensively at the four warriors.

"I tell you I don't know what you are talking about," said the Major dully.

"Don't be a fool, Major," pleaded Hawkins. "That black devil Cenambo has been telling us of some of his favorite modes of torture. It made me sick. You can't expect me to stand by and watch a white man tortured by a nigger. Besides——"

The Major made no response.

"Well, you can't blame me. I've warned Come on or they'll be sending after

Hawkins gave a brief order to the natives, who picked up the Major and carried him bodily to the hut of the chief.

"He is a proper man," said Cenambo to Norton, rubbing his hands gleefully. "It would well please me to deal with him according to my will, yet because ye are my guests things shall be as ye order."

"We thank thee, O powerful one," answered Norton. "We seek not to take from thee thy pleasure. Only do we seek to question him, and if he will not speak we look to thee to open his mouth."

"Ah! That is well said."

"Well, Major? Are you going to tell us where you found the ivory?" asked Norton.

"I tell you I don't know anything about it. How many times must I say that?" answered the Major wearily. "By Jove, you chappies really try me too far. I shall report this matter to the——"

"Stow ye gab," growled Cockney. "What's the good o' torkin' to 'im lady-like, Dirty? Let the chief 'ere 'ave a go at the blighter."

"All right. Remember, Major, you've only got yourself to thank for what happens.

"His mouth is closed, O chief. Use thy wisdom."

"That's good."

Cenambo almost purred his approval. He leaned forward on his stool and placed his hands on his fat thighs.

"Heed well, white man, enemy of my friend. It is a thing abhorrent to me that I should cause pain to such a man as thou art. Yet what wouldst thou? Certain things must be told and thou art silent."

He sighed heavily as one contemplating a hated task.

"There have been other men who refused to speak when I, the chief, commanded them to open their mouths. An evil spirit bade them keep silent even as one commands thee so to do. What then? The evil one must be banished.

"One man, I well remember, was possessed of a stubborn spirit, and it was only by tearing off the nails from his fingers—seven we removed—that we released the evil one. A red-hot spear slowly, very slowly lest we cause pain, run through the fat of the belly has oft opened a closed mouth. Yet with thee methinks that would not do, for thou art not fat—as I am. Or again the cutting off of a man's eyelids hath ofttimes let light into a darkened mind, so that the

inflicted one could see where before he was blind.

"Ah, there are many ways, and I would try them all, for it is well greatly to honor a white man. But first we will try yet another way—see how merciful I am! A fire shall be lighted on thy belly. Only a little fire and of damp wood so that the pain will be small. Water we will keep close by to quench the fire at such time the wicked spirit leaves thee.

"Fasten him down, my children," Cenambo ordered, and the natives quickly carried out his bidding, tying the Major to stakes driven into the ground.

Cenambo closely examined the ropes.

"Are they too tight for thee?" he asked solicitously. "My children are perhaps overzealous.

"Loose these a little, ye black ones. It is better that he should be able to move a little. It is my chief delight," he went on as if in explanation, "to see into what contortions the evil one will cause the body of a man to twist as the fire bites.

"Now the wood, my children. Place it carefully and see that the pieces are small; we would not make the fire too hot—at first."

"Dirty!" gasped Hawkins. "You won't let the —— do that? ——, man—you can't."

His face was white with terror.

"Don't be a fool," said Norton angrily. "Do you want to be treated the same way? Watch out; the chief's looking at you."

Hawkins gave a little jump of dismay as Cenambo came up behind him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"All is ready, O white man, friend of my friend—if that thou art. Thou shalt light the fire. See how I honor thee."

He put the burning brand in Hawkins' hand.

Hawkins looked appealingly at Norton.

"I can't do it, Dirty. Tell him I can't do it."

"He says he can't do it," Norton explained to Cenambo. "His stomach turns to water at the thought. Give the brand to me; he is a chicken-heart."

Norton spat contemptuously.

"Nay. I will do it myself."

CENAMBO walked to where the Major was fastened, and, stooping with difficulty because of his fatness, applied the lighted brand to the twigs.

A thin wreath of smoke floated upward and Cenambo, gazing at the white man's face, gloated as the Major flinched at the bite of the fire; the next moment Cenambo dashed the water from one of the guards on the fire, quenching it.

Norton looked at Cockney Joe in amazement, and Hawkins, heaving a sigh of relief, wiped the beads of perspiration from his face.

"This is a mighty man," said Cenambo in explanation. "Not thus shall we cause the evil spirits that bind his tongue to depart from him.

"Bring in the black dog. First we will deal with him, letting this one see somewhat of the pain of things."

In response to his order men brought Jim the Hottentot to the enclosure. He struggled in sullen silence with his guards as they staked him out on the ground. Despair was in his eyes, yet he made no plea for mercy.

"Untie the white man," said Cenambo, "that he may gaze upon his servant's happiness."

Again the order was quickly obeyed and the Major was held between two of the guards so that he could clearly see what was taking place.

Soon all was ready, the wood properly placed on Jim's heaving chest. Cenambo approached him with the lighted brand.

At that moment the Major caught Jim's glance. It held a mute appeal for mercy, a look of terror, and a lively knowledge of the torture before him.

The sweat rolled down the Major's face and a thick haze floated before his eyes. Something seemed to snap in his head.

"Wait!" he cried.

Cenambo looked at him disgustedly.

"Thou art made of poorer stuff than I first thought," he said.

"Well, Major," exulted Norton, "do you remember now?"

"Yes. I remember everything now, Dirty."

He passed his hand wonderingly across his brow.

"Then tell us where you got the ivory."

"If I tell you"—the words came slowly as if he were not sure of himself—"what do I gain? Will you let us go?"

Norton grinned.

"At least you won't be tortured."

"You can promise that?"

"I'll give you my word of honor."

"Thanks," drawled the Major, "but I don't care to take it. What sayest thou, O Cenambo? If I tell these white men are we spared the torture—I and this black one?"

"Aye. I have other things in store for thee. Yet am I grieved that thou didst speak so quickly."

"Jim!" the Major called out. "You have my leave to speak fully concerning the Place of the Elephants' Death."

"Yah, *baas*," responded Jim. "Yet would I not have spoken."

"Take him away from here," said Norton.

"You and Hawkins go with him, Cockney, and get his story. I'll question the Major here; afterward we can compare notes. If they have lied—well, we can try the fire again."

After they had left with Jim, Norton turned to the Major.

"Now, you, draw a map of the place."

By means of diagrams the Major quickly gave Norton the directions to reach the Place of the Elephants' Death—that mysterious valley where the bull elephants go to die.

"It is but a four-hour trek from the village of Ugubu, you say?"

"That is all."

Again and again Norton made the Major go over the directions, noting carefully that the accounts always tallied. Finally he was satisfied, and at that time Hawkins and Cockney Joe returned with Jim.

Norton compared the directions the Major had given him with those of Jim. They were the same save for one or two minor differences.

Norton slapped Cockney Joe on the back in triumph.

"We've got it," he shouted exultantly. "We can get out of here today."

"But how about the Major and the nigger?" asked Hawkins.

"Leave 'em here for the chief, of course."

"'Arf a mo', Dirty," said Cockney. "Suppose when we get to this place we find the —— have lied to hus, we'd be in a —— of a mess, with the Major and the nigger dead. Let's ask the chief to keep 'em for hus until we find hout whether they've given hus the straight goods."

"You're right, Cockney. Now, O chief, it may be that these men have lied. We start today for the place whereof they have told us that we may learn whether they have said a true thing or no. Wilt thou then keep them safe until our return?"

"Ye try my patience sorely," grumbled Cenambo. "The spirits of the river are hungry."

"It will be but for a little while," pleaded Norton. "It is but a four-day trek to the place whereof they told us. In nine days—but nine days—we will return."

"In nine days it will be the full of the moon, a proper time for the sacrifice," mused the chief. "Yet it grieves me to wait that long."

"More powder and guns will we bring thee," urged Norton.

"Aye; but perchance ye will not return. What then?"

Norton conversed hurriedly with Hawkins and Cockney; then, overriding Hawkins' expostulations, he said—

"This one"—indicating Hawkins—"will stay here with thee as a surety of our return."

"All then shall be as ye desire, white men. This man shall be my guest—my honored guest—until the full of the moon."

Two hours later Norton and Cockney Joe drove hastily away from the kraal of Cenambo.

"Hare yer comin' back fer that blighter, 'Awkins?" asked Cockney as they quickly left the village behind them.

"——, no," said Norton shortly. "We'll divide his share between us. Who cares what happens to him?"

THE following morning an old woman brought the Major his food. Old in sorrow, not in years. Her face was sadly scarred; in her eyes shone a fire of hate that years of suffering had failed to quench.

She watched the Major curiously as he ate.

"Thou art hungry, white man?"

"As thou seest, O maiden of incomparable beauty."

She laughed sardonically.

"Thou art blind, belike?"

"Perchance. Thy beauty hath dazzled me."

She rocked back and forth in her mirth.

"And this is the village of Cenambo?"

"Thou hast said."

"That same one who is Lord of the Crocodiles?"

"Even he. Thou hast heard of him?"

Again she laughed.

He pushed the empty platter away from him wearily.

"Who hath not heard of that dread lord of life and death? Thou art a slave of his?"

Her answer surprized him.

"Nay. No slave am I. Once was I his head wife, but now am I less than his dog. Yet still am I his wife."

Her voice was pregnant with hate; her eyes blazed fiercely. Then, the mood changing, she began to laugh again.

"But what is that to thee?" she chuckled. "Thou art fated to be a sacrifice to the spirits of the river. Sleep well—eat well; so shalt thou become proper food for the cold, crawling ones of the river."

With that she left the hut, nor did the Major see any one until she returned after sundown with his evening meal.

"Thou art indeed hungry," she said in amazement as the fowl she had brought him quickly disappeared.

"Aye. This past seven days food has been all but a forgotten thing with me. And at no time have I eaten a chicken like unto this one. Thou didst cook it?"

"Even so," she replied, apparently well pleased.

"With such an one as thou to prepare the food, it is small wonder that Cenambo the chief is fat."

"If I cooked for him the fat would roll away from him like the mist before the rising sun; his belly would tie itself into knots in protest."

"Sayest thou so? Then must the lord of life and death be a hard man to please."

" 'Tis not that he fears the food I prepared for him would be ill cooked; rather that he fears the sauce with which I might garnish it."

The Major drank deeply of the gourd of beer she had brought him before answering.

"Cenambo fears thee, and thou art alive!"

"Aye. I am alive, for it is fated that his death shall follow mine in but a little space."

"Strange are the ways of the spirits," the Major commented. "Yet this does not explain why thou, O woman of honey sweetness, who was once the head wife of the dread lord, should now be less than his dog. There is a tale to be told?"

"Aye, there is a tale to be told. But what art thou? Methought a man, but thy tongue wags like an old wife's."

She spoke with a show of impatience.

"A man I am in very truth, but the wonder of thy beauty hath gone to my head like old beer. Can I then control my tongue?"

She rose with dignity.

"Time was, white man, when thy words would not have been words of jesting. Many men in other days looked on me—Inyoni—and found me favorable in their eyes."

"I am well chidden, mother," the Major said gently. "Yet I spake not altogether in jest. Sweetness is not in the form alone. Consider the wild orange—a thing of no beauty, yet is its meat of a sweetness beyond compare."

Inyoni chuckled gleefully.

"Words are thy soldiers, white man, and thou dost lead them skilfully to the attack. But not thus canst thou charm the spirits of the river. Their ears will be deaf to thy pleas; their teeth will cut short thy arguments. Nay"—she placed her claw-like hand soothingly on the Major's arm—"be not overly distressed in spirit. The death is an easy one if thou strugglest not."

And with such scant words of cheer she left him.

DURING the succeeding days the Major was given a certain freedom. He was permitted to take exercise—always with a strong guard in attendance—and gradually his strength came back to his cramped muscles.

Jim he rarely saw, and then only at a distance that made speech impossible. Still he tried to convey to the faithful Hottentot that all would yet be well, though he himself was far from feeling that assurance.

His efforts to inveigle his guards into conversation were unavailing. Apparently they had been forbidden to hold speech with him.

Only once did one of them speak to him.

It was on the sixth day, and they had walked down to the river. It was near sundown and all the people of the kraal were lined up on the bank. Just as the sun's last rays struck the smoothly flowing waters Cenambo appeared, carrying a small goat in his hands. He stood for a moment motionless as if offering up a prayer, then heaved the struggling animal far out into the water. A giant crocodile which had been lying inert on a sand-bank made a

rush for its prey and then vanished into the depths of the pool.

"Seest thou?" said the Major's guard. "The big one of the pool is hungry. In but a little while he will be well fed—thou art somewhat larger than the goat."

That same night Cenambo visited the Major.

"Are my people taking good care of thee, O white man? It would grieve me sorely if ye lacked anything."

"I am well content save for one thing. The woman, Inyoni, where is she? I have not seen her for these four days. Of a truth none can prepare the meat of a chicken like unto her."

Cenambo scowled.

"She hath gone on a journey. With to-morrow's sun she will return."

"Then am I well pleased. Yet say, O chief, art thou altogether wise in thy dealings with me? Hast no fear of the vengeance of the white man?"

"Why should I fear, O white man? Who is there to say that thou didst come to this place? Who to tell of the manner of thy death? Nay, I have no fear; and as thou didst see this day the spirit of the river is hungry."

He rose to go, but at the door of the hut he halted a moment and said—

"Yet can I find it in my heart to wish that other—he who is called Hawkins—were in thy place and thou in his."

One other visitor the Major had that night. It was Hawkins. He entered stealthily soon after the chief's departure.

The Major looked at him curiously. He had not seen the man since the day of the torture, and was surprized to note his haggard appearance. Hawkins' eyes were bloodshot and his hair was unkempt, and he continually looked behind him with a half-furtive look.

"Come to gloat, Hawkins?" asked the Major.

"No; not that, Major." He laid his hand on the Major's arm.

"But I'm afraid."

"You've good cause to be," said the Major curtly.

"Why, what do you mean? Do you know anything?"

"I told the truth about the ivory. They'll find it all right; but do you think they'll come back for you? Hardly."

"That's just what I've been thinking," said Hawkins despairingly. "And if they don't come back, what's going to happen to me?"

"Well, you know what's going to happen to *me*."

Hawkins nodded.

"I know. Cenambo keeps telling me what a nice meal you'll be for the crocs. Then he looks to me and grins—you know how he does."

The Major nodded his comprehension.

"Yes. I'm afraid you're booked for the same fate as Jim and myself unless— Why don't you clear out?"

"Where would I go?"

"They don't watch you, do they?"

"No. But I'm afraid to go alone. I don't know this country."

The Major looked at him with contemptuous pity.

"Afraid to go and afraid to stay, eh?"

"Why don't you try to make a break for it, Major?"

"Don't be a fool, Hawkins. How many guards are there around this hut? An even dozen. Fat chance I've got, haven't I?"

Hawkins rose despondently to his feet.

"Ta-ta, old man, if you must go," said the Major. "Call around tomorrow."

Next morning, to the Major's joy, it was the woman Inyoni who brought his food.

"Greetings, O Inyoni," he said. "What said the witch-doctor to thee?"

She looked at him in amazement.

He laughed.

"Nay, think not that I am in league with the evil ones. Thou hast been away on a long journey; today thou didst return; and thou wearest a new charm."

"Truly thine eyes are sharp, thy wit keen. Dost know anything else?"

"Mayhap," he said carelessly. "Cenambo was here last night."

"So?"

"Of a truth. Methinks he was greatly angered with thee."

"I felt the weight of his anger this morning. Behold."

She slipped the goatskin off her shoulders. Big angry stripes showed where a *sjambok* had bitten deeply.

"*Au-a.*" The Major was all pity.

"It is nothing," she said, and replaced the goatskin. "The pain is nothing when I think of the vengeance to come. Mine uncle, the witch-doctor even now makes ready for it. It was to that end I went on

my journey, bringing him back to this kraal and to his hut."

"Thou meanest the hut that is next to Cenambo's?"

"Nay, foolish one, but to the left of the fence as thou enterest the kraal."

"When comes the time for thy vengeance?"

"After thou—together with the other white man and the black one, thy dog—have been sacrificed to the spirit of the pool is the time appointed. It irketh me that ye will not be alive to see the greatness of my vengeance."

"May the spirits bring thee comfort."

He yawned lazily.

"The time passeth slowly, O most worthy of women. Hast not a tale to tell?"

She hesitated a moment.

"Aye. I will tell thee a tale. Thou mayest have wondered—as many men have wondered—how Cenambo came to be chief of this kraal, for his father was but a common man, a tender of herds, and at no time was Cenambo a mighty warrior or a cunning hunter.

"Thus befell it:

"One day the young men were watering the cattle at the river—aye, and maidens were there too, for it was ever the meeting-place of lovers—when suddenly there was a swirl in the waters, and a crocodile rushed forth and toward the young men. Some fell before him in their eagerness to flee; these the crocodile heeded not, but made straight for Cenambo, who stood as if he were a carven stone. Him the crocodile seized and took back with him to the pool, and when we looked again he was no more seen, and we fled in terror from the place.

"The next morning as the men-folk went down to the pool, intending to kill the evil one, suddenly the form of Cenambo was seen as if rising out of the belly of the earth. The people trembled in fear, thinking him an evil spirit. Cenambo opened his mouth and spoke to us.

"'Look well upon me, O ye people,' he cried, 'and give praise to the spirit of the river. As ye see I am alive and unhurt, yet did ye see me taken but yesterday by the crocodile. But he was no crocodile but a form of the Spirit of the Great Great. Ah! Many things did he whisper to me.

"'I say unto thee,' Cenambo cried, 'that I am thy chief. So was it ordained by the Spirit.'

"And so after much cunning talk, white man, Cenambo became chief—for how should the people refuse one who had spoken with the Spirit of the Great Great? My father, my brothers—aye, all of the kin of the old chief, my father—he caused to be thrown to the crocodiles. Only Marko my uncle did he spare, for Marko was—aye, and still is—a mighty witch-doctor, and Cenambo feared him. Me, he married, first killing my betrothed before me.

"So the story is told, white man. It is a pity thou canst not see the end."

"Aye. I grieve for that, too. But thou hast not told all. Think'st thou that thou canst have a vengeance on one who is so regarded by the spirits that they deliver him from the jaws of a crocodile? 'Tis not a good deed to spoil the tale."

The woman laughed softly.

"Thou art like a child crying for more. Listen and I will tell thee."

She leaned forward and whispered in the Major's ear.

"It is a story well told," the Major said when she had finished. "Now wilt thou bid the other white man to come hither?"

"Thou wilt not tell him what I have told thee?"

"Nay. And will not speak of it until after the night of the full moon."

She cackled with laughter.

"Thou art a great jester, white man. Thou wilt say nothing after the night of the full moon."

"HAWKINS," said the Major, "I'm going to make a break for it tonight. I'm sick of this bally hole."

"How?"

The Major looked at him keenly.

"I'm not going to tell you that, old dear. That's my little secret. You'll pardon me if I say that I don't quite trust you?"

Hawkins flushed.

"I haven't given you much cause to, have I? But why tell me anything?"

"Oh, it isn't that I don't trust you; you're in the same boat as I am," said the Major airily. "Besides, no one can stop me if they don't know how I'm going to do it. But how about you? Are you going to stay, and be food for the crocs?"

Hawkins was panic-stricken.

"Of course you won't, continued the

Major. "Pack all the ammunition you can about you and announce you're going out shooting. Don't take any food—it might make 'em suspicious. You'll have your gun and revolver, of course. Think you can make your way to the last camp we made on the way up here? It was near a large baobab tree, I think."

Hawkins nodded.

"Well, stick close by that. If I don't get there before sunup you'd better go on, or come back here. That'll be up to you. The camp's only about six hours from here. You ought to make it easy before sundown."

"But won't they follow?"

"Maybe. But I think not; they'll have other things to think of. Tomorrow's the night of the full moon, you know. Give me that knife."

The Major pointed to a large hunting-knife which hung at Hawkins' belt. "Thanks. Have you got a spare revolver? Good. Then see if you can get it to Jim. Tell him he's to do nothing, no matter what he hears about me. Now good-by, and good luck."

It was not until late in the afternoon that the Major asked his guard for permission to take exercise.

"I would go down to the pool," he said, "for a cooling wind always blows there."

When they came to the bank of the river he sat on a rock watching the men-folk watering cattle and the maidens getting the water for the evening meal at a part of the river which had been fenced off and was thus secure from the attacks of crocodiles.

Beyond, on the sand-bar in the center of the river, were several crocodiles, but the big one was not among them.

"Where is the father of crocodiles?" the Major asked.

The guards laughed and one answered:

"He is a crafty one. See where he watches close by the fence that guards the watering-place?"

The Major, following the pointing finger, saw the monster floating idly on the surface of the water, watching with unblinking eyes the noisy scene before him.

"Why does he wait there?"

"One time a young heifer rushed headlong into the poles, knocking them down and so out into the open river. The big one was on the sand-bar, and though he was swift the heifer was turned safely shoreward and he was beaten off. That was many moons ago, but the big one always watches where he is now at the time of the watering."

The Major was silent for a while and surveyed the scene before him. Then as if continuing a conversation, he said—

"And so thou wast present when Cenambo, the dread lord of life and death, was taken by the Spirit of the Pool?"

"Aye. I saw it all, white man."

"And again when he returned?"

"Aye."

"The place where he first appeared to the people is near here, thou sayest?"

"But a spear's throw."

He pointed to a thick clump of bushes about twenty yards from where they were sitting and about ten feet back from the water.

"Is it permitted to go to that place?"

"Nay. None have gone near it since that time. It is a place sacred to the spirits, and death is the portion of any who venture near. The chief hath so ordered."

The Major rose and paced nervously up and down the bank of the river. One of the guard rose as if to accompany him but was pulled back by the others.

"Let be, let be," they said. "What harm can he do?"

And so they watched him, sleepily, for the sun was hot and they had drunk much beer.

Up and down the Major paced, each time lengthening the distance just a little before turning. Gradually he drew nearer to the clump of bushes, and when but a few yards from them he halted and began to sing loudly, thus drawing the attention of all the people to him. With angry curses the guards rushed at him with spears uplifted, for he had approached too closely to the forbidden place.

The Major ceased his song and stood gazing for an instant at the onrushing warriors. Then with a cry of fear he ran swiftly to the river-bank. On the very brink he stumbled and fell headlong into the river.

At the sound of the splash the crocodiles on the sandbank slipped noiselessly into the water and made toward him.

He called despairingly for help, then suddenly vanished under the water and was seen no more.

THAT night two silent forms came to the hut where Jim the Hottentot was held prisoner.

Their heads were completely hidden by the hideous masks worn by the witch-doctors at the time of "wonder-working," and their bodies painted with weird designs.

"Who are ye? What make ye here?"

The guard's voice held a note of fear.

"Hast a desire to look upon the face of Marko and see death?" said the smaller of the twain.

"Nay, O mighty one. Yet forgive me. I do but obey the chief's command."

"And I obey the command of the Great Spirit. I go to prepare the black one for tomorrow's sacrifice, lest he too be taken before the appointed time. Perchance thou wouldst like me to go hence. Have ye forgotten the punishment of those foolish ones who permitted the white man to escape from them?"

"Nay, O Marko. Enter and make thy magic. The cries of those others are still ringing in my ears. Of a truth the chief was greatly angered."

The guard lowered his spear.

"But this other. Him I know not."

"He is a stranger to thee, but a mighty man, one well thought of by the spirits. He will tread in my path when I have gone to the Land of the Great Great. Now must I dally further with thee?"

"Nay, O mighty one."

The two masked figures entered the hut.

But a short time elapsed ere they emerged again.

The guard came toward them wonderingly.

"Have ye so soon made your preparations, great ones?"

"Aye. Now listen well," answered the taller of the twain. "It is our order that none enter this hut until the appointed time for the sacrifice. If any desire to become jackals that howl in the night, let them disobey. See; I place this as a sign to all that this hut is a forbidden place."

He took from his neck a necklace of snakes' fangs and human teeth.

"When the last rays of tomorrow's sun strike this—and not till then—may ye enter."

With that the two figures vanished into the shadows of the night.

"It is a strange thing," mused the guard, "that Marko held no speech with me after the wonder-working, and it seemed to me that he was somewhat smaller. Without doubt something went from him as he was communing with the spirits. Who shall question the ways of the great ones?"

WHEN Hawkins, at the camp by the baobab tree, awoke the next morning it was to find Jim the Hottentot sitting by the fire cooking some food.

He rubbed his eyes wonderingly and was about to spring excitedly to his feet, but Jim motioned him to keep quiet and pointed to where the Major was sleeping peacefully.

"Let the *baas* sleep a while," Jim whispered. "He hath need of rest."

Hawkins rose silently and came over to the fire, for the air was chill.

"How came ye here?"

Jim laughed softly.

"The whole story I do not know, white man. The *baas* will tell you in his own time. This only do I know. But yesterday, before the setting of the sun, the *baas* leaped into the river and was taken by the crocodiles."

"Then how——"

Jim made a gesture of impatience.

"It happened as I am telling you. He leaped into the river and was seen no more. Of a surety he was taken. Yet listen to the wonder of it. Last night I was awakened by the voice of my *baas* calling softly to me as in a dream. Opening my eyes, I saw him standing beside me, and he wore the dress of a witch-doctor. Another was with him—even Marko, the witch-doctor of Cenambo's kraal.

"On my head they placed the mask of Marko. Then my *baas* said—

" 'Now suffer us to bind thee, O Marko, that none may accuse thee of aiding us.'

" 'It is well said,' answered Marko. 'Stop up my mouth also.'

"So we bound him and put a gag in his mouth. Then we twain, the *baas* and I, left the hut and came to this place. None questioned us; for was I not Marko the witch-doctor, and the *baas* my disciple?

"But see, the *baas* wakes."

"Mornin', Hawkins. Scoff ready, Jim?"

"In a little while, *baas*."

"How did you do it, Major?" asked Hawkins. "Jim's been telling me what little he knows. Did you really jump into the river?"

"Aye, tell us, *baas*," pleaded Jim.

The Major sat down on a log by the fire.

"Yes," he drawled. "I did exactly that. You've heard the story of how Cenambo became chief?"

Hawkins nodded.

"Well, Inyoni, the woman who brought me my food, used to be his head wife, and she got his secret from him a long time ago when he was drunk.

"It seems that after the croc seized him it carried him under the water and half-drowned him. When the blighter returned to consciousness he found himself in a cavern under the bank but just above the water-line. Leading from the cavern, back from the river, was a sort of tunnel.

"He wormed his way along this until he came to a place where the light filtered through, made an opening large enough for him to crawl through, and so appeared to the people as if he were rising out of the ground. The hole was hidden by a clump of bushes, and no one has been allowed to go near there from that day to this.

"Well, I decided to try the same stunt. It was a long chance, for the cavern might have closed up, or the crocs might have got me before I found it. Still I had a good idea where it was, and if I failed—well, I was only anticipatin' the end by one day.

"Luck was with me. I found the entrance to the cavern the first time I dived, entered it and wormed my way up the tunnel just as the big croc came. *Faugh!* How the beast did stink.

"The rest was easy. I waited there until long after sunset, and then made my way to the hut of Marko. Thanks to the suddenness of my approach—and your hunting-knife, Hawkins—I had no difficulty in persuading him to help me get Jim. Besides he's got a grudge against the chief that he's going to pay off tonight. I gave him a few suggestions for that. And that's all."

"Scoff's ready, *baas*."

The Major commenced eating leisurely.

"But what are we going to do now?" said Hawkins. "We've got no food and——"

"You're eating now, man, aren't you?"

"Yes. But we've got a three days' trek before us before we get out of Cenambo's country."

The Major turned to Jim.

"Where did you get this food, Jim?"

"I hid it when we camped here on the way up, *baas*—at every camp I hid some."

The Major looked at Jim in admiration.

"Jim," he cried, "you're simply priceless! Eh, Hawkins?"

"Yes. But how about you, Major? Supposin' Norton and Cockney Joe do come back. Aren't they liable to get you?"

The Major sobered for a moment, then burst out laughing.

" 'Pon my word, I'm the most forgetful chappie! I forgot to tell them that I had sold my claim to the ivory to the Portuguese authorities. I completed the deal the very day Cockney knocked me on the head. They won't come back."

He fumbled in his breast pocket.

"Confound it," he said in tones of annoyance, "I've broken my bally eyeglass."

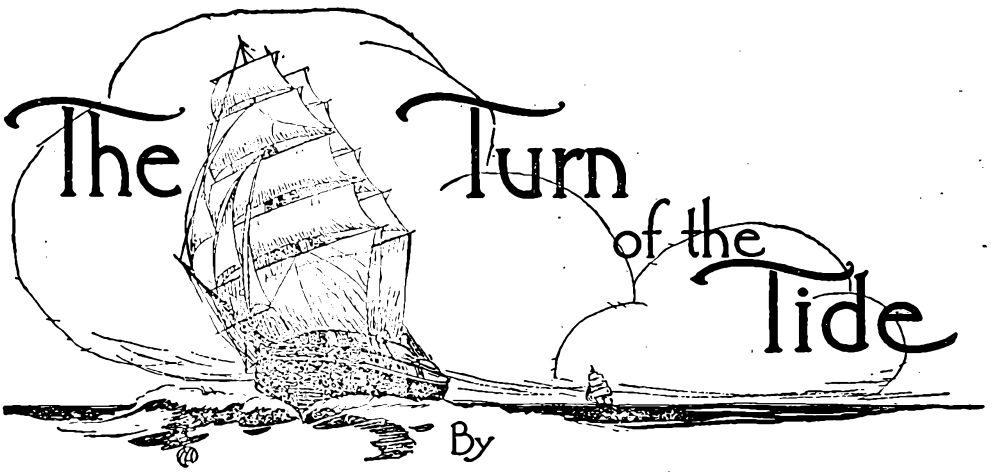
GENERAL SULLY'S CONCEPTION OF THE "BAD LANDS"

***by* E. A. Brininstool**

IN 1864 Gen. Alfred Sully was sent into the hostile country of the Sioux on an expedition in an endeavor to bring those Indians to final subjection. This was in Dakota, and the expedition moved up the Cannon Ball River to its sources, proceeding thence to the headwaters of Heart River. There it was learned that the hostiles were encamped near the Little Missouri. The troops engaged the Indians, completely defeating and routing them.

The column then marched through the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri. This section is one of the most desolate and forbidding to be found in the entire West, and when Gen. Sully stood on a prominent butte overlooking the area of tumbled volcanic matter with its blackened scoria and wastes of broken rock, mingled with its grim, jagged hills and valleys devoid of everything in the way of fertility or beauty, he turned to his staff, who were gazing on the naked expanse of desolation, and exclaimed with characteristic vigor—

"Gentlemen, there is —— with the lights put out!"



By

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A HIGH-CEILED room in low shades and tints; low-backed, low-topped furniture highly polished; soft carpets on a hard floor; an appearance of ease about a brittle, unyielding, metallically clinking atmosphere; a guise of hospitality and friendship mantling shrewd distrust; busy movement, industrious echo, pulsing animation ringing in the next moment's deadening hush whereby Arnie Sondheim's sentence of disgrace would be passed upon him—all these contradictory suggestions that went to make up the office of Merl & Tibbert, shipping agents, spoke audibly to Arnie of the character of the world in general and especially of that world of commerce he served on the high seas of trade.

The phrase "the world's opinion" that seemed to cover so much and mean a great composite mind at work was in reality a sham, a myth, for it did not exist. Even in the limited sense of this establishment's opinion it did not exist; it was one thing today and quite another tomorrow; it was one idea fighting directly against another with avarice and short-sight growing out of the moil of things. Tibbert typified this.

Tibbert had just accused him of a number of crimes on the high seas. In substance Tibbert had stated that Captain Loman, flat on his back with a fever produced by a villainous voyage northward, deposed and said that one Arnie Sondheim, regularly appointed mate on the bark *Samson*, refused orders of his superior officer, deserted his duty, aided and abetted the crew in mutinous behavior and in his, Captain Loman's, illness changed the course of the vessel to his own ends.

Tibbert recited these grievances briskly and waved them aside to make room for a charge of his own which was that this Sondheim, sometime known as a convicted addict to liquor, had broken a solemn obligation to return to him, Tibbert, a bottle of whisky deposited with this mate as an earnest of reform. And after this followed the stark silence which granted to the accused the formality of a few words.

Arnie regarded Tibbert absently. He had heard every word, and yet he was far afield in his mind, groping his way in another world, wrapped up in the thought of Japes—plucky little shred of Yankee bigness—who had given the greater share of his toiling years and, at the last, his life for the sake of two things: friendship and the principle of manly pride.

The bottle of whisky by which Arnie might have saved his face and his fortunes had gone to him, to Japes stricken with scurvy, just as the changed course of the *Samson* had gone, just as the so-called desertion of duty had gone. That they had all gone in vain had no bearing on the matter. Arnie felt in the midst of his desolate grief for the lost comrade a profound gladness that he had done all he could do to keep that deserving comrade alive.

It was simply his fate that this solitary comrade who had come to him strangely out of the harsh sea's anger, should in the harsh sea's malignance pass from him again. This was loneliness. The gritty little scampering figure with the provincial tongue and the heart of oak was dead. As Japes would have chirped cheerfully:

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!"

Arnie smiled to himself—at nothing.

Tibbert stared hard. "Well, what have you to say?"

"Never saw the like of him," said Arnie. "Wish to —— I could be that way."

"How's that?" Tibbert stared harder. "I don't understand you."

"Nothing. I have nothing to say. The *Samson's* a fine vessel, sir."

"*Hm!* I believed you were honest, Sondheim. I thought there was no question about that. But bribing the crew tells a tale of its own."

Arnie started out of his preoccupation. A sound fell irritatingly upon his ears. But for that sound he must have gone from this office as untouched, as speechless as he entered it. The world's opinion, moving tornado-wise in its contradiction to mow down this one and let that one stand when all were of the same color, scarcely seemed to matter. Here, though, were principle and pride, the pride he believed in with Japes, the pride of self-respect. He roused.

"You'd not be saying that. You'd not be calling me that name." The mild tone suggested satin steel. "The bottle back, you said, or no excuses. That was the agreement. I'm reporting that the bottle's gone, and that ends it."

"Does it?" Tibbert snapped. "Does it end the case of your bribing the crew with shore-leave in Crescent City and truck to fill their stomachs?"

"If you say I wasn't honest, it don't end it—no, not by a good deal." Arnie wore a dangerous expression now. "I'll say it's true, and I'll say it's a —— lie. It's true because I gave 'em shore-leave and filled their bellies with fresh grub. It's a lie because I didn't bribe 'em; I didn't have to. They'd have brought the bark in, rotten grub or not, rotting bellies or not, half of 'em dead or not. They told me so—the ones that could speak. They told me they'd take 'er out again, the whole ——-boiling of 'em; but not with Loman the master. And the bark, the bark 'most told me that, too—aye, she did tell me, if I'm any judge of a ship's voice. The finest bottom I was ever in, and she hollered it out plain enough."

Tibbert half closed his eyes and ejaculated—

"Impossible!"

"Is it?" Arnie answered him. His eyes were alight. "You'd best be finding out what a ship is. Maybe you'd best be finding out what a crew is, too. Captain Loman, he's found out by now. If it's honesty you want, why don't you be honest yourself and have honest masters? Why don't you have honest grub and honest fo'csles? Why don't you thank me for bringing in your bark, and thank the crew, too, when any man that's honest to himself would have left her in Victoria or Crescent City—or in a boat any old time?"

The flush of anger stood in Arnie's cheeks.

"I had a friend—I had a friend that was murdered on that cruise. I don't know why I tell you; you don't care anyway, and I don't care if you care or not. He was murdered to save money, like the others—only they didn't die. Loman cut the heart out of 'im, and you poisoned the bowels of 'im. He's dead. Japes is dead——"

Arnie's voice had risen. Tibbert, a petrified man, a gaping gargoyle, made no attempt to interrupt. In at the door a face peered and withdrew. On the wall at Tibbert's back a huge picture of the *Samson* under full canvas seemed imbued with life. Arnie could not keep his eyes from it.

"A fine ship!" he broke forth again. "But I'd have snapped every yard and brace and sheet in 'er and busted out 'er seams to save Japes! Her pride done it, the sort of pride she'd been fed up on. Ain't that running ships? Ain't that honest business?"

He relapsed into speech that observation—his only teacher—had long since shown him the better class of men did not use.

"None of *your* money went to bring those poor jacks on to their feet. It was my money and rotten money Loman divided with me for an extra job up in the Sound. It bought some lives, though."

Tibbert lurched forward, stammering, "W-what's that? Extra job?"

"Oh, you were willing. Loman said so when I asked him. And it put us days behind, and no better food, and driving the men to make up time. He wouldn't——"

"Tell me about that," said Tibbert.

That singular twist showed at the corners of his mouth. Arnie flung out the details carelessly. He had something to say and no desire to be side-tracked. Weevils and stinking meat were the subject he was on; a miserable hole of a forecastle—that too. Tibbert held him to the other.

"*Mm!*" he mused. "That was Loman's game! Very nice—very nice."

He became as preoccupied as Arnie had been and gave poor attention to the weevils and the stinking meat and the hole of a forecastle. He came to life when Arnie in disgust asked if it was to be jail or what.

"No," he said thoughtfully, "there will be no charges in court. I'm afraid, Sondheim, I haven't seen all there is to this affair. Of course, your failure to return to me that whisky is—a—I'm sorry, Sondheim."

"Likely Japes would be glad to know," and Arnie picked up his cap.

Tibbert bit his lip; immediately he thrust out his hand.

"I may need to get in touch with you. What will you do now?"

ARNIE shrugged his shoulders, turned silently and went out.

What would he do? Aye, it was a good question to ask. Not what did he wish to do, but what would he do? All in a noisy, multitudinous city he stood and asked himself this; all in a buzzing swarm of humanity he stood as in a mocking desert. Loneliness! The bitterest kind of loneliness! Loneliness that had not even the husk of regret upon which to fasten! Loneliness without anything to relieve the dim vista! Loneliness such as one feels on a wild sea!

There were two ways of ending this loneliness. Whisky was one; but whisky did not end it, did not end anything; it merely postponed it. The other way and the only way was—Lelona. One could not be lonely with Lelona. Away from her olive-satin smile and glittering eyes one might shake his head over life, but with her—aye, one would rather live and give up his hope of heaven! The faith she had in him, too. And all in the full flower of her Castilian womanhood she waited—waited——

A big ship and money he must have in order to conclude her waiting and this loneliness; she set him that double achievement; her practicality he admired; more than passion was necessary to keep people alive. And there the question came in; for he had the money—he reflected that with Japes' death he owned twenty-five thousand dollars—but no ship, now that the *Samson* had been taken from him. To buy in on a vessel was to have the ship and not the money.

Characteristically Arnie's sharp mind settled upon shipping somehow—possibly before the mast—to San Carlos and there presenting Lelona with the twenty-five thousand dollars and trusting her to understand the rest, to take him as he was or help him to meet her second requirement. She had a right in the matter; he was willing to make her the judge.

First he went to the bay-front and looked and looked at the proud *Samson* riding there, the ship that had cost him so much: herself and his friend. A ship of ships, a beautiful sight! Her majestic bearing kept him hypnotized; the rakish slant of her masts held the illusive attractiveness of a smartly dressed woman.

At length he turned away, stolid in his disappointment, and began a canvass of the shipping offices. A captain? Certainly not. A mate? What! In these tight times? Laying them off, more likely. Boatswain then! Plain able seaman. Common deckhand. Surely there were *some* boats bound southward—indeed, they told him, they had not seen much of any. A vessel of tonnage might make out now and again with her paint-streak out of sight, but the little fellows—pshaw! They might sell a tight bottom very reasonably——

He came to Jake's place where the music-box tinkled and whirred and jangled; and bottles, bottles, everywhere. Some of the tawdry, painted women to whom he had been kind and who each time forgave him that he could be no more, rushed to greet him. Jake escorted him to the bar and called for a bottle. Arnie had wandered in out of an old habit. He stared at the bottle, shook his head slowly and blinked.

"Don't get sore, Jake," he said. "I'm not drinking, Japes. I don't like it—honest, Japes. Wouldn't you please be taking it yourself—my treat, Japes."

"Iss it Japes I am?" Jake objected. "Vuss you forgotting me, Arnie?"

Then Arnie's shoulder was tapped, and there stood Lairton who had been mate of the *Snowbird*. Lairton regarded him.

"Thought you'd be here," he said.

"Tibbert sent me. Wants you to take the *Samson* out. South America. He says to tell you Loman don't feel fit."

Arnie's pulses leaped. He steadied himself.

"Didn't you want it?"

"It was the jacks," Lairton explained. "I asked 'em; they says 'Sondheim.' "

The blood raced in Arnie's veins. A great laugh issued from his lips. He slapped Jake on the back so that the little German coughed. He bought wine for the women. He put out his hand to Lairton and said slowly—

"You're white, Lairton!"

"Spanish *señorita*, hey? You —— fool!" responded Lairton.

ARNIE hurried out and, finding Merl & Tibbert closed for the day, went down to the wharf where he forgot his supper in contemplation of the *Samson*. The next morning he stood on her deck in active command, Tibbert's brisk order beating on his inner ear:

"Let Dasselt attend to the cargo; he's our business man. You do the sailing. Don't interfere with something you don't know. And mind, we're trying you!"

Arnie knew what that meant. It meant that his lack of education was recognized, and his disinterest in money. But he would not complain. The old careless grin had come back, the grin of confidence. He looked straight up into the *Samson's* nested rigging and winked; she bobbed and rattled her yard-arms in return.

He was pervaded with a great joy. Nothing could cool his enthusiasm. The dignified old Dasselt grew puzzled at his frequent laughs and was astonished to see the crew's devoted response.

The sheaves squealed; chain-sheets clanked and ground; sail fluttered out to the tune of creaking spars; the bark gasped as the first sea shivered her timbers; then they were outward bound and spanking along.

Arnie's pride in the bark knew no easy satisfaction. A queen of sailing vessels, he pronounced her; regal, haughty, superb, an eagle for flight against the wind. It was his pride in her that set the carpenter to tearing out the forecastle bulkheads and enlarging the quarters. When Dasselt voiced an objection, he said:

"Don't worry for Tibbert. I can pay for it myself, I guess."

He rustled the draft for twenty-five thousand dollars; it meant no more to him than the market-price of happiness he was on his way to buy, the price of the heart of Lelona. If a small—a very small—portion of that price could not be put into the ship whose bigness and fineness constituted one-half that bargain arrangement, he for one did not comprehend. And when the forecastle had been widened and ventilated, he had to see about further provisioning at San Diego.

"The right kind of pride—Lelona would want that," he mused.

Dasselt asked respectfully if he was crazy. Arnie laughed exuberantly and told him to mind his business, if he had any. The *Samson* roared its delight.

A carefree voyage, what though chock-full of responsibility. A jovial voyage in spite of Dasselt. A voyage of music, rare, choice music that the happy-tongued *Samson* composed in her topgallants and sang to the stars. The voyage of a bridegroom. The *Samson* a bridal ship. For the return he would wreathe her bows with bougainvillea and the dainty love-vine. This cabin farthest aft would be Lelona's, and he would buy a carpet for the deck of it and a bed where the bunk stood ungainly.

Ah, but the *Samson* understood! Of an evening when he should be sleeping he would come out on deck and listen to her voice telling him of life that was true happiness, soft arms that loved and would not let go. She spoke to him in a language they fashioned for each other.

Under Captain Loman's command she had seemed to have but one song: the song of serene pleasure in herself, the song of the master. Now she whispered in as many strains as there were changes of weather, as there were moods of the ocean. From taffrail and from chart-house, from 'midships and main-shrouds, from crow's-nest and foreroyal boom, from the prancing bowsprit, he watched her and hearkened to her.

Dasselt marked him laughing aloud in the night-time and muttered in concern. Only those of the old salts, who irrespective of blood-money of runners and herders, sought the sea for that which the land did not contain, knew and nodded their heads. They knew that to a natural sailing man there will be a ship among all those he sails that is in no wise like the others; a ship that knows

him and works for him and takes him to her heart.

To Arnie the *Samson* was a companion, not a ship; a reasoning thing full of tenderness, of jovial cheer, of whilom bits of complaint, of gratefulness, of utter steadfastness, of sound advice. He knew not at all how this came to be, or why it should be the *Samson*. Japes had come—and gone. His chatter had ceased and left a great void. This the *Samson* seemed to know, and that he was on his way to fill that void. He did not speak of these things to the vessel; it was thoroughly understood without that. The years of loneliness and longing—they were understood, too.

Arnie on his side understood the bark, her peculiar temperament, her fastidiousness, the correct angle of her sailing. It did not require the dragging of her channels for him to know that she was buried by her canvas. The wind piped at her jackstays, and he grinned as he ordered her eased. A furled topgallant whispered that it had not the proper harbor bunt, which at once he pointed out to the watch.

The crew, having been mates with him before, believed in him and marveled at what they considered his uncanny eye and ear. Dasselt, until now a stranger, tried for a time to make him out, but gave it up and told him to his face—in dry tones—he was a haunted loon. Arnie laughed at that.

"You know where I'm going, Dasselt?" he asked.

"To the ——."

Arnie stared at him, grinned and scratched his head—frowning.

"I'm going to get married. There'll be a woman waiting to come along with me, and we'll leave the sea and build us a house, and it won't be this lonely——"

"It won't be nothing," interrupted Dasselt. "Worse than that," he added in a growl. "You'll fight over who's cap'n and who's mate. How'll you like that?"

"No," said Arnie; "she's like the bark, Dasselt. I reckon to know her feelings and sail 'er easy—she can be captain," he stated rather wistfully. "I won't mutiny. Love's a funny thing, Dasselt. How do you like that?"

"I don't. My stomach's all in a Turk's-head. Sick is what I am."

"Go below; I'll stand your watch. We want no sick on this cruise."

Peaceful evening with the watch idle in the fair breeze and sprawled about the deck, some sucking villainous pipes in deep contentment, some sitting placidly estimating the sweep of waters, chin in hand; some chuckling over a rude tale and mending a torn pea-jacket by the light of the ship's lamps and the sunset's aftermath. From the wheelhouse came a fragment of humming. The colored cook rattled his last pan and stood whistling in the galley doorway, then disappeared.

Peace—peace! Almost involuntarily Arnie moved to the galley and stretched his arm across the door—thinking—thinking. Japes had howled his whaler's song here; had sweated and toiled and been stricken down by scurvy here. What loneliness! Lelona might not come into his sight and touch for many months; there were other ports first; perhaps San Carlos only at the very last.

It was then that the *Samson*, like an understanding presence, stole close and closer and wrapped herself about him and sang the chantey of comradeship. Arnie would listen and smile and nod and take a deep breath. His face turned upward to the rigging, to the very trucks of the towering masts. Human speech—what was it?

The proud vessel stooped and lifted him up; her pride humbled itself for his sake. His heart went out to this beauty of the builder's craft. He loved her, and she loved him. Long into the second mate's watch he kept the deck, lost in shadows.

But in addition there was work to be done—much work, what with Dasselt growing no better and groaning in his berth. Arnie emptied the medicine-chest in the mate's cabin and with a glad heart relieved him of his bills and orders and cargo-lists and stores-inventory and the like.

A regular watch he stood, turn about, with the second mate, and besides, mulled over supercargo's papers and checked and tallied and reveled in a feast of figures. Instead of sleeping, he multiplied and cross-footed.

And at Punta Arenas he outbargained the native skipper and stowed the bark just to her satisfaction and no more—though at good profit. And at Panama he met the trans-shipments of the eastern ocean and outbid lighter bottoms at their own game of a quick passage. When they tried to beat him to Callao, he cracked on topgallants and hearkened—then, with a secret

smile, bawled for the studdingsail gear to be bent. Laughing on a high key, the bark showed the other craft her heels.

BUT it was not all laughter and not all sunshine. The weather knew another mood, as did the *Samson* herself. Deep in the hollow night Arnie woke to hear the ship's voice wailing. He started up the companion all in a moment, for he had acquired the habit of turning in all standing; and first he thought she cried from the waist where her huge main course sucked the wind down; and then he thought she sobbed aloft and forward; and then—she whispered in her timbers directly beneath his feet. The blow was freshening.

He spoke to the helmsman and changed the course; he roused the crew and eased every whippet of canvas showing. The *Samson* would not cry to him in vain. Indeed, she began to talk—there in the hushed night.

"You're money out. You're money out. Money out, out, out," she said.

"Would I care for that?" he chuckled. "No driving you for money's sake." But scarcely had he spoken so than he realized with a shock how she would answer him.

"What will s-s-she say? What will sh-she-ee say?"

The imitation staggered him. He had not been eager to recall the last voyage; the remembrance of it hurt him. And yet she, Lelona, alone had made him guilty with Captain Loman of driving the bark and the crew. A big ship and money she had said. On that basis she waited for him. On that basis he must proceed.

The germ of doubt sent down roots that very night. Dasselt had a fever and a chill. Arnie went in to cheer him, and heard him mumbling through chattering teeth. What he mumbled was an old sailors' chantey of "cooks and dogs, and jacks and hogs, and what are they for but cussing and flogs?"

Arnie listened to the stuttered malicious doctrine and tried time after time to construct in his mind's eye the artist's picture of Lelona the girl, Lelona with the Madonna face. Somehow the grown woman with the controlled passion and the masked smile frightened him. Money!- Did she know no better? ——! He did.

He thought of her woman's eyes, of how they looked through him. Did she love him after all? What made a woman demand money and more money? The world's opinion, cold and calculating, this was; certainly love was not cold and calculating; Japes was not cold and calculating— Money!

Funny he should wonder about this now! This was the bridal cruise, the end of loneliness. Oh, how strong the yearning was! Surely it was for his sake, for his good, she said it. Ah, yes, now he had the glow of her in his eyes. How beautiful she was!

At Callao Dasselt had to be sent ashore to a hospital. Some of Arnie's own money went with him, since Tibbert had provided for no such emergency. It went heartily; it was Arnie's conscious challenge of the world's commercial view-point, his statement of belief that Lelona was wrong in putting money first. When he made the arrangements, a sort of awe possessed him, as if he found himself tramping with hobnailed boots through the holy of holies. He felt very self-conscious.

The other side to it added a glow of pleasure; he now had complete command of the bark and the joyous privilege of unrestricted figuring and computation. He promoted the second mate and let the crew choose a new second mate from their own number. It made no difference, for he would do his own navigating and save Tibbert expense. Besides, he wanted never to get so far away from forecastle life that he could not run the shrouds and slide down a backstay.

Work without end! An hour of rest stolen piecemeal out of the rush of responsibilities! Therein runs the tale of Captain Sondheim's days and nights in the South Pacific. Mates who could not write, who could not figure; a short-handed port watch; a vessel that demanded his eyes and his ears as it had stolen his admiration.

Arnie kept the log and charted the course, showed the way up the masts upon occasion, tailing on to a sheet, standing a trick at the wheel in a heavy sea, calculating the drift in a three days' gale, doctoring a man injured by a dropped marlinspike, working out reports of freight handling.

He was happy, happy in a deluge of work, happy in his men, happy in his ship, happy in the swiftness of the days, wanting for nothing. When he thought of this last, it was to find all his estimates of happiness shattered and the very object of his sailing in the balance.

He went to find an end of loneliness in

Lelona, a companionship and an endless exhilaration in a union with this Castilian woman of wonder he had hungered for. And yet with the building-up of the days and the nights and the work that never could be finished and the responsibility that grew and grew and the belief of the crew in him and his pride in them and in the *Samson*— Pride?

Was this only pride that lighted his eyes when she talked to him?—with so much, inevitably the loneliness diminished and dwindled and fell away until even the absence of Japes failed to hurt him, and instead the bit of a Yankee became a savory memory, and life stood quite complete. Somehow he had rent the veil.

But he was still the stolid Arnie. He expressed himself in action and let his thoughts as much alone as possible. Plenty to do! Callao to Valparaiso—to the Isthmus again with wine—and how the thought of the bottle of whisky came back in the odor of the spirits stowed everywhere! The *Samson* grew drunk with the aroma rising continuously to her spars and mast-heads. A Bacchanalian chant she sang of good-fellowship and fealty. Arnie smiled to hear her.

"You'll have to be getting through with that before we make San Carlos," he wagged. "No more of that with a lady aboard! You'll use good language then."

"A jolly good fellow—a jolly good fellow—" gabbled the wind in the rigging. "No mo-o-o-o-ore of that . . . no mo-o-o-o-o-ore—" hummed the shrouds.

At Panama the second time a curious thing happened. The crew returned to the bark from shore leave, and a few of them were tipsy, and all of them grinned and found their feet in one another's way as they pushed aft in a nervous body. Arnie stood staring. He could not make them out; but a sailor who has been drinking may do anything.

He was taking on a cargo of general merchandise, half of it bound to San Carlos, and he was trying to assure himself that the ship and the work and the sea were crude steps leading to a real happiness of which they knew nothing. He stared at the oncoming crew. A battle of brawn he would welcome now. Clumsy lots with streaks of tobacco-juice on their unshaven chins—Time he grew away from the back-yard of life and learned some of the decencies Lelona could teach him.

"Well, sing out, one of you!" he ordered, frowning and waiting ready.

Berkoll of the starboard watch drew a step ahead of the rest. His face became distorted. His right hand was closed into a fist. It came up slowly.

"We uns reckon ye'd care tuh do yer own pickin' 'n' choosin' is w'at."

"Watch your step, Berkoll!" Arnie warned as the man approached very near.

"'Tain't thet as bothers me," said Berkoll; "It's how ye'll like this."

His fist was thrust forward; Arnie caught it grimly. It opened—to disclose a silver watch. It lay back upward, and he read the engraving, "Respects of the crew to Captain Sondheim."

The men were grinning and shuffling. Berkoll rid himself of the gift and wriggled back.

"Along o' where ye're goin', hopes ye'll be happy, sir."

Looking from the ornate time-piece into that bank of eager, joyous faces, Arnie's self-confidence deserted him. He growled at them in a harsh voice:

"You —— fools—get along for'ard! What do you mean by this?"

An eddy of chuckling answered him. One man slapped his neighbor heavily on the back. They appeared as pleased as children. His emotions turned him red. Aware of an occasion that had got beyond them, the men made off, swaggering. Arnie clutched the watch and gazed after them.

SOUTHWARD—that was the tune now. Touches of weather, of wind and rain and devouring heat and repelling cold—and work, work, work in the midst of it all! A swift voyage to beat the mail-boat down the coast and sell at the old prices!

"Money in your pockets, boys, if we make it first! Share and share alike!"

"Well, sir, that's as yuh say. But we ain't set on that so much."

Arnie peered intently into the flying foam and made no reply to this. It seemed to him the bark had never sailed so fast; riding a-top the water like the very ghost of haste, he reflected. And for what? To get him to San Carlos and to the end of all this, to the end of the dream, to the end of the starved years! Lelona was waiting; she had his promise—the *Samson* was a bridal ship! That was the reason for this

tremendous speed; the ship was rushing him on to happiness.

She reveled in her undertaking; that was obvious; she was true to her trust. She sang; the crew sang; the sea sang. Not to be outdone, loudest of all sang Arnie. Their singing had no meaning apparently; he sang to keep up his spirits. His work was not enough to busy him; there were moments left for thinking, and so he piped for a gale of wind—and got it. It came down like a dreadful black snake out of the murky sky and seized the *Samson* in its jaws. The bark screamed in terror.

Downhauls—clewlines—buntlines—and the seas whipping up so swiftly that with the heeling of the vessel several of them came aboard. From the throat of the storm drove a terrific growl. All the world of waters broke from their bed and rose to join the winds; together they forced the *Samson*, bellowing and fuming, a hundred miles out of her course. Arnie had time to get himself in hand.

In the end, when the gale had passed and they were once more masters of their immediate fate, he knew that more than a common occurrence had taken place; that the ship and the crew and he had formed a triumvirate more potent than nature in a fit of insane fury. He felt grateful and proud—inordinately proud—to come alive into a subsiding, sunlit sea. He knew now beyond peradventure that among the very greatest things in life is the spirit of men working together in perfect understanding and amity. After that there was not another moment of loneliness.

The fullest, fairest cruise in eighteen years; the world's opinion of the worth of a man refuted; the dream's end come in the dawn of actuality! Life, he imperfectly realized, held but two kinds of happiness: friendship, which was simple, unquestioning, exhilarating; and love, which was complex, shadowed in apparently unrelated matters, suspicious, exacting.

Arnie had dreamed of a happiness apart from all oceans; and he had found it on the decks of the bark *Samson*. He stared stoically at the calendar pinned on his cabin bulkhead. In eight days he would reach San Carlos and toil up the sun-baked hill to the hotel to keep a promise.

He did not consider the various strands that went into that rope that bound him to the promise; he did not ask himself whether or not it was wise to keep such a promise. Sufficient that he had said he would return with a bigger ship and with money. Eight days! Simply, he felt the slipping away of a great satisfaction that had only just come, and that must go when he grasped the other kind of happiness. And he knew, besides, that Lelona in his dream was the girl Lelona; and the girl had grown into a woman.

How he lived those eight days! Life had the sweetness of an umplumbed joy. He put his mouth to it and drank and drank and drank— Berkoll said:

"Beg pardon, sir. Some on us don't need rum. Ye're thet tickled——"

"Aye, Berkoll. A fine ship, and the boys—a fine crew, a fine crew!" He glanced about, looked up, grinned and nodded his head. "Tickled, you might say."

At once he swerved the conversation.

"Are you married, Berkoll?"

"Stitch me in canvas fust, sir. Ye're got my high respec's is w'at."

"Women are fine creatures, too," asserted Arnie, "and made for men."

"Then I reckon," Berkoll reflected, "it's the men ain't made fer women."

Arnie was disinclined to press the point. That matter was eight days off. Very near at hand and very near at heart were his ship and his crew; and when the mail-boat was sighted creeping up on them, the blood in Arnie's veins leaped with the exciting struggle that this foretold. In three hours the mail-boat was showing her forecastle-rail. Arnie ripped off his coat and undertook a lesson for his mates in the art of sailing a bark.

The mates were willing to learn; the crew was shaking with eagerness. Everywhere swarmed the men, crowding on sail at a jerked work, making the spars bend and the rigging sing its pride. The mates and the crew and the bark were willing; but they were not enough.

In six hours the mail-boat's ensign was picked up with the glass. A fast sailor! Nothing on the coast could run with her. Arnie watched her intently, then turned to measure the *Samson* alow and aloft. The bark ran fleetly, full of pride, chattering to him to know how this stranger could overtake her, outraged in her pride, pleading with him, admitting her need of some skill she did not possess, casting her glory of belief upon him.

Smiling, he dismissed the helmsman and took the wheel. The night came down; the watch changed; but Arnie would not relinquish his trick. From dusk to dawn he held the weary vigil, and with the advent of day the mail-boat was barely perceptible over the weather poop-rail—hull down.

This was living. Arnie reeled to his berth, exhausted and full of a new contentment, in his ears the ringing voice of the *Samson*, deep-toned with faith in herself redeemed. And she, ship of ships, thanked him!

Seven days more before he surrendered all this, this responsibility that was freedom! Time was precious, indeed. When they woke him to say that the mail-boat had gained on them, he discovered that he had slept through the change of watch, and felt the hours to be life thrown away. The bark welcomed him noisily on deck and began at once to recite her dependency upon him. He listened and laughed.

"It's up to me, is it? Can't do it yourself, old girl?"

"It's-s-s-s up to y-y-you-u-u-u-u-u," the courses sang.

"But what'll you do when I'm gone?" He stood at the wheel and steered by the wind in the sail overhead. "Seven days, and I've got to be ashore. A bed made for the aft-most cabin—wreaths for the figure-head—Lelona's waiting——"

A gentle whimper in the stays silenced him. He baited the bark no longer; somehow he could not bear it himself. He talked of other things; of a freshening wind and a too deeply buried head, and of the mail-boat hanging on—hanging on——"

One after another the royals were sent down. And here as before it was the crew's cue to show its infrequent wisps of anger, for a man swore when his watch mate reached higher on a rope than he, or took a bar at the capstan when he held slack. Pride of duty made for this, and pride of ship, and pride of captain.

The cook brought Arnie a tot of grog at noon. He told the cook he did not drink liquor when he could find something better. Then one came to relieve him at the wheel, and he would not have it—even to take a meridian sight. He knew they were less than seven days from San Carlos with all this fast sailing.

A haggard expression crossed his face as he contemplated the inevitable result of sustaining the *Samson's* pride and beating the mail-boat to port; assuredly this joy of comradeship would be that much sooner ended. Yet he would not have her beaten; she was the ship of ships, a thing of beauty and wonder. On they thundered—on——

NOT seven days but five, and the fifth shimmering blood-red in the west! All the lusty ribs of this stalwart creature showing bellied and firm, all her finery dyed a magnificent hue of carmen. The mail-boat was sunk to the eye. The next morning would leave but four days.

Arnie dragged himself, groping in his fatigue, to the companionway and dropped with a full sigh on to his berth. As he passed the crew cheered. It had got to that point; the race was the thing, and Arnie was winning it; the crew idolized him. Aye, he was living! This was joy incarnate!

An unceremonious hand shook him awake. He started up, fully conscious.

"As 'ow—as 'ow the mail-boat, sir—she'll be crossin' us——"

Past the man and up the ladder to the dim deck sprang Arnie. Lights dotted the water and the space above and to port. A huge shape loomed for an instant like a terrible monster or a devouring cave of blackness. Then came a grinding and a reverberating shock and a hoarse hail across the waters.

The air was clamorous: the mate articulated, "The mail-boat!" in a vicious tone and shook his fist. The voice from across the water cursed roundly; others cursed the voice. Confusion spread like wildfire. The *Samson* had been rammed.

"Steady!" Arnie called to the helmsman.

He heard water rushing into the hold. All of a shiver, her sheets a-thrum, her canvas beating, the bark coughed and sputtered and gasped and cried to him. He bawled for a light and swung with it out over the port-rail where the crash had sounded. The *Samson's* side showed a gaping wound.

At once and involuntarily he felt an unreasonable emotion of relief. Under his breath he said:

"All over—no reaching San Carlos now. I'll send her the money."

Something like satisfaction possessed him just for a moment. Then that vanished, and he shook himself into mental

responsibility. To be sure, this was a cruise of pride; not the bark pride alone but his. This was a race, with self-respect waiting as a prize at the end. There was the bark self-respect to be considered, and there was his. They must go on. They must beat the mail-boat to San Carlos.

What a night! No heaving to and shouting for help; with the men roused and crying for the blood of the mail-boat. They took to the pumps instead, while the mates assisted Arnie in rigging a whip and a boatswain's chair that let down the carpenter to examine the damage.

By the use of some scantling and sawed-off royalbooms and double thicknesses of well-tarred canvas, the worst rush of water into the ship's bowels was stopped. But the canvas did not last long; it tore and sagged and leaked. The well showed three feet of water in the hold.

"What does she make?" yelled Arnie to the mate at the taffrail.

"Seven!" disgustedly howled back the mate. The bark whined miserably.

"We'll trim cargo and seal 'er up inside," Arnie decided. And when the carpenter told him there was no timber for such an undertaking, he hauled him down the aft companionway and pointed to his own cabin bulkheads.

"Tear 'em down!" he ordered.

The carpenter went to work; the crew kept at the pumps the night through; Arnie took the wheel and stood by it for six hours. In the morning the bark was fairly dry and making ten knots. And the lookout in the crow's-nest raised the mail-boat to leeward with her foretopgallantmast snapped off. At the news the crew yelled and tossed their caps into the air. Arnie stared at the crippled ship and bit his lip—and put the helm about to make for her. In three hours he came up.

"I'll give you a jury mast," he sang out to the mail-boat's master, "but you'll sign for the hurt to my ship. You cut across my tack. This ship's got pride."

"Pride? Ho! Has she now? Then give me your royals; mine are split."

"We need 'em to beat you in," objected Arnie. "Anything within reason."

"You bet you need 'em. That's all that beats us, you —— well know."

Said Arnie to the mate, "Give him the royals—and get a receipt."

SAILORS loved to tell afterward about that run that the mail-boat and the *Samson* made to San Carlos. They dwell on the loss of the royals in reciting how the mail-boat gradually pulled ahead and yelled derisively back at them. And they'll swear that Captain Sondheim did not leave the decks but stood in the shadow of the mizzen all the night long and talked like one daft to the empty rigging above his head, and some will even say he had tears in his eyes.

Certain it is that pride had been his downfall—or would have been, for he had given everything, and in fighting for the ship's honor had sold her out—but the crew, hearing him talking to himself, did a queer thing. They brought all their blankets to the carpenter, and he sewed them together, along with what old rags were left in the loft; and up on to the royalbooms those grinning jacks took these poor makeshift sails and came down and shivered in their bunks and hammocks and laughed and joked when they could not sleep.

In the end there existed such an understanding between the cabin and the forecastle that ship's rules were silly formality and men's big-souled spirit everything. The *Samson* sang and scrambled over the seas and blew out some of the new canvas; but she caught the mail-boat seven hours out of San Carlos and rounded to her buoy forty minutes ahead.

Folks came to the harbor front to stare at the strangely rigged vessel. Aboard the ship, though, all was glee and merriment. And when Arnie made to leave the vessel, the crew lowered both boats and went ashore with him, knowing well his mission, hoarsely wishing him good luck and Godspeed, singing lustily and out of time and tune, as proud as peacocks in him, and in their hearts jealous as Lucifer that the Castilian woman was to get him; for well they knew also how certainly he was lost to them in time. They would have cursed and fought each other, what with so much anger at fate penned up within them, but that they had learned a wonderful thing on this cruise; and the wonderful thing was *pride*.

So they sang and joked and watched him out of sight. And Arnie kept a perpetual grin on his face and a mask of joy in his mild blue eyes, and he stuck his cap rakishly on the side of his head and told

them he was going to find his fortune.

Only when he had left them at the shore and turned his face toward the hill did the grin fade on his countenance. At a jog in the street he stopped to look once at the bark bobbing at anchor. Her wounded side he could see; the dejection of her improvised royals was staggering. Already she seemed to mourn him as lost.

Sternly he continued toward the hotel. He entered the door——

A fat and elderly matron, swarthy and irritable, sat at the desk and gazed sleepily at him. He roused his voice to ask—

"Where is Lelona?"

The stupid woman did not understand him at first. She scratched her head until all her hair tumbled down, then calmly swore in frightful English words and put it up again and discovered that he was still there and asked what he wanted.

"Where is Lelona?" he asked again.

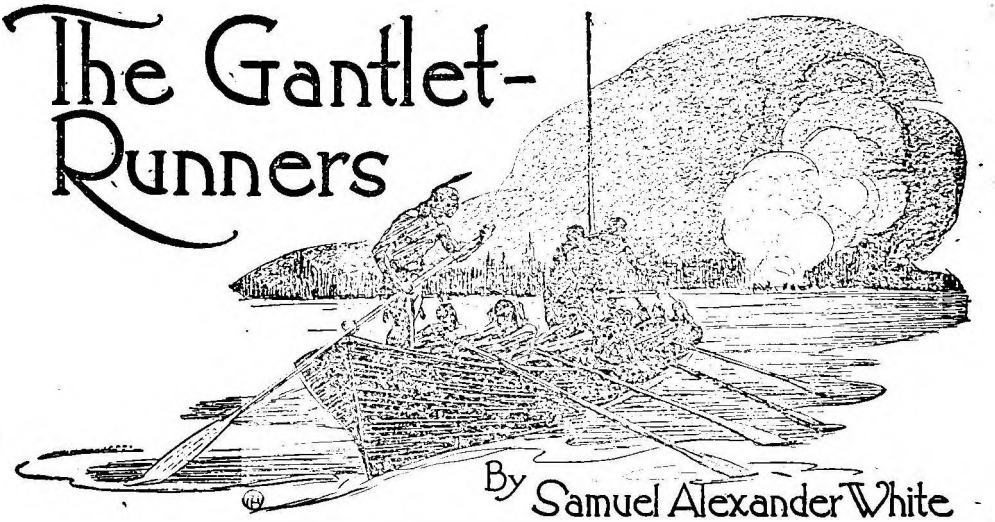
He wished it might not ever go any farther than that, his asking and her inability to understand. But she understood at once this time, just as he knew she would.

"Ah, *si, señor!* Lelona no be here. No work. Get him married. Fine son-of-gun he marry, too. Hard work here, *señor.* Marry—sure, you find him——"

She went on talking while he stood there incapable of hearing what she said further, incapable of replying. She did not mind; she was willing to have it so. And presently in the midst of her remarks he faced slowly about and went out into the sun-glare where the roadstead shimmered, and the *Samson* lay at anchor, mourning.

And as he went, a light—after the manner of the tide making, making to the flood—stole into his eyes. Out in the dusty street he broke into a run.

The Gantlet-Runners



By Samuel Alexander White

Author of "The Void Spaces," "Blended Brigades," etc.

FROM the steps of his Beren's River post the Hudson's Bay Company agent, James Culross, scrutinized the canoe slipping along Lake Winnipeg's eastern shore. It came from the direction of Norway House at the great lake's northern end. It pointed in for the landing below Culross' feet and yet the factor could not imagine at first the reason for its coming. He had received already his yearly supplies from headquarters along with the mail. There was no occasion left for a visit from an official canoe, but still he knew the craft to be an official one for amidships he recognized Spring Wind, chief courier of the Hudson's Bay Company and personal messenger of Governor Robert Semple himself.

Paddling Spring Wind with short, quick, tireless strokes that had cast half the length of Lake Winnipeg's waters behind them knelt six James Bay Crees. With the precision of a faultless machine they worked, swerving their long craft in to the landing

and drawing it out on the bank as the courier they carried stepped forth and stalked up to the post. A dozen possibilities flashed through Culross' mind as Spring Wind approached. He realized that this was no idle jaunt for the courier. Beyond a doubt Spring Wind carried important word from the governor and Culross thrilled with an intense eagerness to know that word. Still he betrayed nothing of his thoughts or his eagerness. Authority and discipline forbade any display. He stood with grim indifference on the steps as if the courier's coming was of little moment.

"Good day, Spring Wind," he greeted. "Good paddle from Norway House?"

"A good paddle though we met storms and rough water past the Poplar River," returned, Spring Wind. "But we are here without misfortune, and I bring you the governor's message."

Spring Wind put a long envelope into Culross' hand and the factor tore it open and read:

The Northwest Company has raided our Red River colony. Some have been coerced into leaving for the East. Others, numbering about seventy, as near as we can ascertain, have been driven north to Lake Winnipeg; but from the official report of the Hudson's Bay Company officers at Lower Fort Garry I find that two of these colonists became detached from this party, were driven back into the Stone Fort and have been unable to escape. They are Alexander Longburn and his daughter Mary and I understand also that it is Adolphe Norbert, the leader of the Northwest Company raiders, who effected the detachment and prevented their escape.

It seems it has become a personal matter with him on account of the girl and because she will not bend to his will he has set a watch on the Stone Fort and a patrol on the Red River so that the two are virtually prisoners there, unable to so much as move beyond the confines of the post for fear of Norbert's *métis*.

You see the responsibility for their safety lies with us. Lord Selkirk's crofters came in under Hudson's Bay Company auspices. We hold their welfare in trust and no trust of the company has gone unfulfilled. So Mary Longburn and her father must be reached at once and brought north to Lake Winnipeg to join the rest of their party.

You are hereby commissioned to sail immediately to Lower Fort Garry and escort them out by York boat. The Northwester Norbert dominates the trails. The river is the only way. Moreover you must be quick.- I myself am on my way in with another party of immigrants to reestablish the colony, and I don't want Norbert to fall upon the Stone Fort before I reach it. Undermanned as it is, he no doubt has force enough to take it in spite of its stone walls and he would surely do so if he knew of my approach. It will not be long till some of his scouts do know and carry the news to him.

Therefore you must have the two colonists away from Stone Fort before the Northwesters sight my party. We are keeping the advance as secret as possible but it is hard to hide the coming of a party of this size. After leaving Norway House, it will be almost impossible to do so on Lake Winnipeg and we shall travel the lake with all speed, trusting to meet you en route. If you should be short of men at your post and need additional hands to man your York boat you are at liberty to use Spring Wind and his crew. (Signed) GOVERNOR SEMPLE.

Culross drew a deep breath. He knew of the Northwesters' stroke but isolated at Beren's River he had not been able to learn all the facts. He had thought the Longburns members of the escaped seventy but he was wrong. They were still at the Stone Fort, virtually prisoners, taking shelter from the enmity of the Northwesters whose bitter antagonism, aroused by fear for their fur-trade ever since the inception of Lord Selkirk's dream of peopling the valley of the Red River with crofters from the Scottish Highlands, had culminated in a raid.

Their less drastic efforts failing to stop the immigration, they had not hesitated to use force and only force, so it seemed, could save Mary Longburn and her father from Adolphe Norbert's clutches. As the presence of the girl had become a personal matter with the Northwester, so had it become with Culross himself, for when Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk and Baron Daer and Shortcleugh, succeeded to his title, bought up a controlling interest in the Hudson's Bay Company to obtain a grant of forty-five million acres along the banks of the Red River and sent out three sailing ships full of colonists, Culross was one of the first to receive them at York Factory.

Straight out of the Scottish Highlands into Culross' heart Mary Longburn had stepped and the factor's grim eyes softened as he recalled the sweet companionship that had sprung up between them from the moment of disembarkation.

Ever since that day he had tried to make things smooth for Mary and her father, all through the bitter Winter spent in hut accommodation at York Factory, through the dangerous open-boat journey inland and through the period of hardship that inevitably comes to settlers in a new land. Before his transfer from Fort Garry to Beren's River he had helped them many times and now Mary Longburn needed his help as never before.

But he realized that he must be quick. He must reach Lower Fort Garry before the Northwesters should have news of Governor Semple's advance and Adolphe Norbert be moved to some desperate deviltry. He wheeled back to the courier who had brought him the governor's word.

"It is good, Spring Wind," he nodded, pocketing the message. "Under the word of the governor you will not return to Norway House but go on to Lower Fort Garry with me. Have your men rest and feed themselves. You launch off with them in my York boat at once."

Swiftly Culross ordered the big boat up from its anchorage, several of the post-men manning the long oars and working it up to the landing, ready for the stepping of the mast and the raising of the sail before a favorable breeze. It was a roomy craft, large enough to freight four tons of cargo, a good boat in a rough sea with a long, pointed prow to mount the rollers. Yet Culross had no cargo to freight this time. All the speed he could get out of the York boat was what he wanted. He piled a few supplies aboard in case of mishap or detention by adverse winds, hoisted the great square-sail and put off with Spring Wind, his six James Bay Crees and two Crees of the Beren's River post as crew.

The York boat would require a steersman and eight men on the sweeps if the wind went down but luckily for them as well as for Culross the breeze stiffened instead of falling. All day it held and grew, blowing a gale as they neared the mouth of the Red River. Culross, his own hand on the steering-sweep, kept the York boat on its foaming course. There was not an instant's delay since leaving Beren's River. They did not even stop to kindle a fire on the rocks when they grew hungry but ate cold food from their hands as they reeled along.

AT DARK they swept off the roaring lake and into the mouth of the Red and at sight of the white-crested waves snarling far back in the gloom as they sped on, Spring Wind nodded with grave exultation.

"We are river-sheltered now," he breathed. "The gods of Wenipak were kind."

"*Ae*," Culross answered him in his own tongue, "something guarded our keel from rock and shoal. Perhaps, Spring Wind, it was a maiden's need. But we are not safe yet. Yonder on Lake Winnipeg it was the wind. Here on the Red River it is the Northwesters. I must keep a sharp watch for Norbert's patrol."

He relinquished the steering-oar to Spring Wind and stood in the bow, listening for sounds of men on the river, staring for the glare of fires in the dark. To a depth of four hundred feet the ancient river cut through the bosom of the prairie, its banks all crumbled into broken buttes, and from butte to butte the York boat stole along like a fantom craft in the night.

Cautiously and more cautiously they advanced, Spring Wind silently steering, Culross keeping his watch, the crew handling the sail in the shifts of the wind between the broken river-buttes. On up to the fringe of the Indian settlement that lined the Red below Stone Fort the York boat glided, and as they reached its outskirts Culross signed to the crew to lower the square-sail.

"Get it down," he commanded in a low voice. "But no noise, remember."

Like some moth of the tropics, monstrous, grotesque, the wrinkled canvas fluttered silently down into the York boat's bottom. Having neither deck nor cabin, the craft was not easily to be distinguished under its bare pole, but as an added precaution Culross thought it best to get rid of the up-thrusting mast.

"Unstep it," he ordered. "And stow it handily where you can replace it at a moment's notice. We can't tell what minute we will need both sail and oars."

Their moccasined feet balancing themselves against the boat's gunwales, the crew put shoulders to the mast and with a heave laid it noiselessly in the bottom.

"Now take your sweeps," he directed them. "Row slowly. There is a fire on that low butte ahead. What it is I can not tell yet."

On toward the blaze burning like a crimson star on the bank they glided and as they neared it Culross knew it to be the camp of the river-patrol of which Governor Semple had spoken. For, drawn up on the grassy point at the base of the butte, he glimpsed a fleet of flat-bottomed Red River boats and on the butte itself that commanded a view of the river up and down he distinguished the owners of the craft, Northwesters, half-breeds, plains rangers, their motley and

picturesque costumes glowing vividly in the fire's glare.

"A band of our enemies, factor," spoke the steersman, Spring Wind, softly, surveying the Northwesters with his keen, haughty eyes.

"Yes, Adolphe Norbert's men," nodded Culross, pointing. "There's Adolphe himself."

"*Ae*, the tall one with the long rifle on his arm," identified Spring Wind. "I know him. We have met more than once at the posts on Wenipak."

"And keeping a strict watch on the river as the governor said," brooded Culross. "I'm afraid that there's no chance to pass by unseen, Spring Wind. See how the fire lights the water. He built it on the top of the butte for that purpose. They'll sight us in another minute and we'll have to go boldly as if it did not matter."

"It is good," agreed Spring Wind, twisting his steering-oar to swing the big York boat round the nose of the butte. "We go boldly, then. Look—we are in the flame-light now. It falls red as blood across our prow. An omen, factor. There is bitter work before we see the dawn."

The moment the York boat appeared in the belt of light which Norbert's camp-fire laid across the Red the Northwester jumped up from his bivouac and strode swiftly down the butte to the end of the grassy point the better to glimpse who was in the craft. Head and shoulders over the other Northwesters who straggled after him he loomed, the blue coat of the *mêtis* hugging his frame so tightly that the cloth gaped wide between the shining brass buttons. He pushed back the felt hat on his dark head and his somber eyes blazed out of a handsome swarthy face as he shook his long rifle suggestively at the York boat plowing indifferently along.

"Who comes now in a Hudson's Bay Company craft?" he challenged insolently.

He stared a moment into the face of the factor still standing up in the bow.

"Ha! You, Culross," he growled, recognizing the Beren's River post-agent. "I trust you are not bringing in another boat-load of invaders."

Culross' gray eyes gleamed like twin diamonds at Norbert's insolence. He raised a hand as a signal for his men to turn from midriver along the shore and the pointed prow of the York boat nosed through the shallows at the Northwester's feet.

"And what if I am, Norbert?" he demanded. "Do you undertake to stop me by waving a rifle-muzzle over my head? Just lower that gun."

Culross seized the long oar from one of the Crees and whirled it high to strike and Norbert sullenly lowered his weapon.

"*Ciel*, it's lucky for you you're not running in new immigrants, Culross," the Northwester sneered. "Nothing but an Indian crew, I see. But, *comment?* They are not your Beren's River Indians, either. They are Norway House men, and there is Spring Wind, the courier of Governor Semple, himself."

Even as he recognized Spring Wind, Norbert wheeled to his companions stalking down from the fire.

"Come on, *camarades*," he yelled. "*Comprenez-vous?* They carry the governor's courier and they are up to some deviltry. Seize them."

Norbert frantically urged forward his companions on the bank and they leaped down across the grassy point to his aid, rushing straight for the York boat to seize it before it could get under way again. But if they were swift, Culross was swifter. He whipped the borrowed oar back to its owner and jumped for the stern.

"Pull hard," he shouted.

The great York boat lurched to the heave of the rowers on the oars and began to gather momentum as it slid past the point. But Norbert, yelling to his men to follow him, dashed into the water up to his waist and laid hands on the long overhanging stern. His men were at his back. They laid hold with him, halting the boat, snapping the steersman's oar in two, commencing to breast themselves aboard.

Spring Wind fought them off with the handle of his broken sweep till Culross could leap to his help and Culross was with him in a flash, kicking Northwesters right and left from his gunwale and hurling Norbert back into the river as he pulled himself over the stern.

"Another blade, Spring Wind," he barked to the steersman. "Swing for midstream. Now, all together—pull."

Under the vicious onslaught of Culross the York boat's gunwales were cleared momentarily of Northwesters. Before they could recover themselves to seize it again

Spring Wind and his straining crew shot it beyond their grip and swerved out to the middle of the Red.

Water dripping from his blue coat, Norbert dragged himself out of the shallows where Culross had hurled him and shook a wrathful fist at the Hudson's Bay Company factor as he floundered out on the point.

"*Ciel*, I will pay you out for that, Culross," he roared. "You are not done with us yet."

He whirled to the bedraggled band splashing out on his heels and waved them toward their own flat-bottomed boats drawn up at the base of the butte.

"Launch them and give chase," he shouted peremptorily.

INTO the Red the Northwesters shoved their crafts and piled aboard, pulling desperately in Culross' wake, Adolphe Norbert alternately exhorting and cursing his men. Their boats were less unwieldy for riverwork than Culross' great York boat and immediately Culross saw that he must have sail if he was to gain. The breeze was still blowing in vagrant shifts through the hollows between the broken buttes, rippling the surface of the Red like the darting of a school of fish, and while his crew pulled steadily he and Spring Wind restored the mast and ran up the sail.

Once the big canvas bellied in the wind the York boat quickened its motion, gliding faster and faster so that the Northwest craft dropped steadily behind.

"We'll beat them to the Stone Fort," nodded Culross triumphantly as he measured their gain with a backward glance. "Keep pulling on the sweeps, men. Wind and oar together. That's the plan."

The gap between the plunging York boat and the pursuing Red River boats widened till Norbert's fleet was lost in the dark, out of sight and sound, but Culross never slackened his speed. On up the river he drove till he lay to under the walls of Stone Fort.

"Don't wait here," Culross warned Spring Wind. "Norbert will have men spying on the fort. Slip out into midstream again and drift into the little cove down yonder. You will find me there."

He was gone as he spoke, running toward the gate.

"Culross, Culross from Beren's River," he answered the guard's challenge.

The next moment he was through and hurrying on to the buildings. The clang of a late supper-bell fell on his ear as he broke into a run, darting into that part of the post where from experience he knew the dining-rooms were located.

Before him opened a long hall with separate dining-rooms on either hand and he saw the post people filing in to their evening meal. He scanned them as they passed gravely to their seats, taking their appointed places according to the number of years they had been in the Hudson's Bay Company's service, and among them he glimpsed the two he sought—Mary Longburn and her father.

As was the post custom Longburn had escorted his daughter up the hall to the door of the ladies' dining-room. She was turning in to her table and Longburn was wheeling across the hall to the men's dining-room when Culross strode up between.

"Wait, Mary; wait, Longburn," he breathed.

They turned at sound of their names to look into Culross' fine bronzed face, and though the Beren's River factor's eyes were smiling they sensed some strange gravity in his bearing.

"What is it, James?" cried Mary, scanning his features. "You've been in some danger. You look as if hard-pressed by some one. And what company order sends you in like a ghost from Beren's River?"

"Why, Semple's order from Norway House—the order to escort you north to Lake Winnipeg," he smiled, tapping the governor's dispatch in his pocket.

"He's on the lake, then?" cried her father. "Thank Heaven! And coming on with speed, I take it?"

"Yes, and Adolphe Norbert's coming, too," Culross informed him. "I'm afraid I'm going to hurry you. Can you forgive me for depriving you of your supper?"

A shade of alarm crossed the girl's delicate features, the high color that tinted her skin to a rose hue dying to two bright spots on the full curves of her cheeks. Her blue eyes, bright as heather-bloom, widened anxiously as she tried to read more of what was in Culross' face.

"Forgive? Forgive you anything if you get us out of this!" she declared. "You met with enemies coming here?"

"Yes, the Northwesters," he nodded.

"Norbert himself. I had a brush with him below the fort."

"What did the impudent scum do?" boomed Longburn.

"He tried to seize my York boat," laughed Culross grimly. "You see he recognized my steersman, Spring Wind, as the governor's courier and guessed there was some plan afoot. But we fought his Northwesters off and a good wind helped us outdistance them."

"Still they're coming on, didn't you say?" breathed Mary.

"Yes, they're coming," Culross admitted. "We must be out of here before he reaches the fort. I don't know his resources but I don't want to give him time to call on more of his *mêtis* and cut us off. Semple's warning against getting trapped here and drawing down Norbert's attack is plain enough."

"Yes, yes, we must start at once, Mary," nodded her father. "One minute, Culross, while I tell Faulkner, the senior officer in charge."

Longburn stepped inside the men's dining-room and in a few seconds appeared with Faulkner himself.

"Hello, Culross," greeted Faulkner, gripping his hand heartily. "So the Northwesters set upon you on the river, Alexander tells me. But, candidly, do you think you can get through Norbert's patrol and reach Lake Winnipeg?"

"We have to," declared Culross earnestly, holding Mary Longburn's eyes. "Not only in private interests but in the Hudson's Bay Company's interests. We have to go through, Faulkner."

"Indeed, yes, and let us not delay a moment," urged Mary fervently.

"Well, you must have something to eat anyway," insisted Faulkner. "Where is your craft, Culross? Down in the little cove, you say? All right, I'll see about things and meet you there with what I can lay hands on. Go on down quietly. There's no need to alarm the post with the news of Northwest activities."

Faulkner waved a significant hand and drifted away through the post-hall while the three who were to run the gantlet of the Red stepped out into the night.

"This way," Culross directed Mary and her father, "and keep close to the wall. We can't tell but the dark has Northwest eyes."

Invisible in the back shadow of the wall they stole around and cut across the trail that ran to the landing, angling off toward the river where Culross had commanded Spring Wind to put in for them.

THE York boat was not in sight at the moment but as they breathed themselves and listened intently they caught the low rippling of water against its hull and in another instant it loomed up vaguely in the darkness with Spring Wind and his eight rowers on the sweeps. Silently they drew in. No word was spoken. Longburn seized the gunwale and held the craft against the bank while Culross lifted Mary aboard. Then the two men stepped after her just as Faulkner's figure slipped out of the gloom and joined them.

"Here you are," he whispered.

He put aboard a big basket of food ready to be eaten out of the hand.

"Hunger is a poor companion," he told them. "That will keep your hearts up. Good-by and good luck. I hope the next Hudson's Bay Company officer you speak is Governor Semple himself."

In another moment they were off, hugging the bank, Culross' crew pulling swiftly but silently. The sail was down but the mast was in position and Culross ordered it to remain so in order that the canvas might be quickly raised in an emergency.

"You can't tell where Norbert is," he observed to his passengers. "When he found he couldn't catch my York boat he would likely lie up on the shore till his Northwesters scouted around the Stone Fort."

"They couldn't have seen us leave, could they?" asked Mary in a whisper.

"There's no telling," Culross evaded. "If he did he's trusting to a *coup* on the river and that's what we've got to watch against."

In his heart the Beren's River factor doubted whether they had left Stone Fort and embarked at the cove unseen by Norbert's scouts, but he did not care to express his conviction and unduly alarm the girl. That they had been seen and had been left unmolested so far told that whatever scouts kept watch on the Stone Fort were not in force or else had orders to report to the river-patrol before they struck. It was not surprize on shore so much as surprize on the water that would thwart their plan of driving north to Lake Winnipeg and

effecting a safe junction with the incoming Semple.

Also Culross knew that if Norbert had definite word of his move in slipping Mary and her father out of Stone Fort he would strike, in all probability, as close to his river-camp as possible. In his mind Culross had fixed the fringe of the Indian settlement as the point of greatest danger and somehow he felt certain that events would justify his certainty.

On down the river they glided, now hugging the nearer bank, now shooting across to the farther shore as they caught the sound of stir or shout in the settlement itself, rapidly approaching Norbert's bivouac on the out-thrusting butte. Suddenly Culross caught the gleam of the fire and he stood upright in the York boat trying to pierce the gloom with his keen eyes and see if there were any men about the blaze.

"There's Norbert's camp," he pointed out to Mary. "It was just off the point where I had my little brush with him. Look, there are figures running about the fire now. He must have fallen back on his bivouac with his boats."

"And no likelier place on the river to check us," growled Longburn. "The butte commands the waterway. The low grassy point gives him a chance to launch off quickly. And the turn of the Red round the butte slows us up. I guess Adolphe Norbert wants to make sure of us."

Persecution by the Northwesters had left Alexander Longburn bitter. So hard had they hounded him under Norbert's direction that he burned with a fierce desire to dare their might in one wild moment and either go down in the fight or win his freedom in the new land he had chosen as his own. That the moment was at hand he now felt sure, for, staring where Culross pointed, he, too, could see the figures shuttling about Norbert's camp-fire.

"You're right, Culross," he nodded. "He has fallen back. A shrewd leader he is and he doesn't get too far from his base."

"But isn't the fire growing brighter?" asked Mary, standing up beside Culross to see more clearly. "It was only like a star at first. Now it's growing into a big beacon. We're going fast but not fast enough to raise it so quickly."

"No, not that fast," decided Culross, watching carefully. "The fire's shooting up to the clouds, a perfect beacon as you say, Mary. That's what the darting men are doing—piling on the fuel."

"And that means?" she demanded.

"That they know we're coming. Norbert's scouts have kept a good watch and he's lighting the river like day."

The up-shooting flames on the butte were already painting the dark sky crimson overhead and bathing the river from shore to shore. The vivid light silhouetted the buttes and struck into the faces of those in the York boat tearing down the Red. In the stern it showed Spring Wind, haughty, stoic, lithe, swinging on his steering-oar; on the sweeps the eight bronze rowers pulling with all their might; amidships Culross and Mary standing upright and Longburn upon his knees beside, his hands resting on the gunwale.

"Take the middle of the stream, Spring Wind," ordered Culross.

Immediately the York boat swerved out from the bank which they had hugged for the shelter of its shadow. Now there was no shadow. The Red River was a chasm of blinding crimson through which they must plunge, a gateway of flame closed by a barrier of boats. They could mark them putting out from the point, all the fleet that had pursued Culross augmented by many more, together with Indian craft from the settlement itself. Among these, too, Adolphe Norbert had been a missionary of evil. From the first he had never ceased to incite them against the colonists, and now he bribed the more reckless of the young men to his aid.

"Gracious," breathed Mary Longburn, as she vainly tried to count the craft that launched out into the river before them; "look at the number of them. They'll block the whole waterway if we don't watch out."

"That's just what Norbert is going to do," Culross declared, interpreting the Northwester's plans. "He's going to bar the Red completely. See, he's lashing the boats bow to stern with ropes."

BY THE blazing firelight they could mark him, Adolphe in his blue, brass-buttoned coat, leaping from craft to craft, directing the men in their placing of the boat-barrier, seeing that all the lashings were tight.

"*Voilà*," they heard him shout with a great laugh, "Culross will not get down as

fast as he got up. Quick, *mes camarades*, there is his York boat now."

Plunging round the butte, keeping fairly in midstream, swung the Hudson's Bay Company craft. From the moment when he had seen how Norbert purposed to stop him, Culross' mind was working swiftly. In the few seconds that it took them to round the curve of the stream he evolved his own plan of action and gave his orders.

"Stick to your oars," he cautioned them. "Whatever happens, stick to your oars. If we get a chance to use the sail Longburn and I will handle it. As for you, Mary," gently pushing the girl down amidships under the shelter of the gunwale, "keep your head low. If I don't make a great mistake there are going to be oar-blades flying."

At the girl's feet lay his dunnage-sack which he had tossed aboard with a few supplies when he left the Beren's River post and he stooped and ferreted out of it a short-handled woodsman's ax with a razor-edge blade.

"We're going through, Mary," he vowed softly as he felt the blade. "You know I can't let you fall into Norbert's hands. I don't want bloodshed if we can help it but rather than see him take you I'll sink this ax in his head."

"Be careful if it comes to blows," Mary warned him. "He will have murder in his own heart if he doesn't stop our boat."

"I'll watch him," nodded Culross confidently. "You keep a tight grip when we strike their line. Don't get tossed out into the river. I expect there'll be quite a shock. You'll have to look after yourself for a little while. I must get up into the bow, and your father will have to stand by the sheet."

He wheeled to Longburn.

"Have the rope in your hands, Alexander," he directed. "Be all ready to raise the square-sail if I give the word. The wind is shifting and the full turn round the butte ought to put it right in our backs."

"All right, go ahead," agreed Longburn laying hold of the sheet.

The Cree rowers had never slackened their pull. With a long heave, feet braced and backs thrown into the stroke, they surged the big craft along. Grim as some northern god in the stern Spring Wind steered unerringly, holding the boat to the midstream course.

"That's right, Spring Wind," Culross commended. "Hit them in the center. Right on the rope, between two craft if you can manage it. I'll attend to the rest."

Light as a dancer in his moccasined feet, Culross leaped between the Cree oarsmen and poised in the bow, a huge figure of a man, over six feet in height, broad of shoulders, great of strength. The flare of the beacon struck him fairly, flooding his close-cropped hair, flashing from his gray eyes and Mary Longburn, watching tensely as they plunged on for the Northwesters' barrier, thrilled strangely at the sight of him set for the struggle. It was a fighting man she glimpsed, a Norseman, a viking, ready to battle as desperately for her as for the Hudson's Bay Company flag he sailed under.

"All together, now," she heard him crying to the rowers. "Pull!"

It seemed the Crees were at the limit of their strength already, but in answer to Culross' shout they drew upon some secret reserves of their beings and quickened their pace. The long sweeps flew like magic with their hiss and swish. The spray shot over the prow of the York boat, spattering Culross with cool drops so that he laughed with pleasure in the fever of the moment.

He was poised in the drenched prow where nothing obstructed his view and the wild river scene was etched before him in unforgettable lines. The butte above his head was deserted now. Only the fire roared there, piled high with the last fuel the Northwesters had laid hands on before they rushed to their boats. Every man of them, *métis*, plains ranger, half-breed, Indian, all were afloat, cramming the boat-barrier, waiting to overwhelm the York boat when it reached them.

So near was he already that he could note the strength of the rope-lashings that joined the craft together. In the center they seemed of greatest strength, and in the center, too, he saw that Adolphe Norbert had reserved a place for himself where he could direct the maneuvring of the Red River boats and swing in his wings to close upon Culross as he came.

Culross was only a few York-boat lengths away as Norbert raised his hand and began to beckon the shore ends of the boat-barrier to swing in, always drawing a little upstream so that the Northwest line was like a huge inverted V into the jaws of which

the Hudson's Bay Company craft plunged with all the momentum of eight long oars. Once inside the tips of the wings, it seemed to Adolphe Norbert that he had his enemy safe, and he signaled with open palms for them to stop.

"You may as well backwater, Culross," he sneered. "I shall relieve you of Mademoiselle Mary one way or the other, so you would be wise to make the transfer peaceably."

"You scum of the plains," Culross roared back; "get out of our way or we'll trample you under our keel."

He whirled his ax above his head and shook it significantly at Longburn standing ready to raise the sail.

"Up with it," he nodded.

Swiftly Longburn shot the canvas in air, and as the wind caught it the Cree oarsmen suddenly felt the weight of the pull lifted from their blades. Still they remembered Culross' warning to stick to their blades and they bent their backs afresh, timing their pull anew to the York boat's jump under the bulging sail. Three long pulls they made and the prow struck the rope lashing of two Red River boats at the apex of the inverted V.

So great was the momentum of the York boat, so powerful the drive of the square-sail in the drafty gap of the river buttes, that at the moment of impact it carried the whole Northwest fleet down-stream for a space. The lashings held. The wings of the fleet were whirled in broadside to envelop the York boat and grind together, gunwale against gunwale, behind it. Thus for an instant Hudson's Bay men and Northwesters drifted in an island of boats, before their feet could bridge the water-gaps between the craft.

IT WAS just at that instant, as they poised themselves to spring upon each other with upraised oars, that Culross was aware of a solitary craft foaming up-stream just beyond Norbert's massed fleet.

He could see at a glance that it was a Northwest craft. Northwest men were rowing it and a Northwest scout was standing up amidships, shouting at the top of his lungs.

"Hudson's Bay Company men," he was blaring the warning as he came. "Hudson's Bay Company men under Governor Semple."

"The ——!" snarled Adolphe Norbert, whirling in his own craft. "Who is it that comes? Ha! Blondin, my Lake Winnipeg scout. More of the H. B. C. curs, you say? Where? How many?"

"A large party," cried Blondin. "Just off Lake Winnipeg into the Red. Where? *Dieu*, right on my heels. They sighted me as soon as I sighted them."

"*Ciel*, then, let us make an end of this," blurted Norbert.

The news of the swift advance of the Hudson's Bay Company force, coming at a critical moment, seemed to throw him into a momentary panic. He cursed aloud, barked conflicting orders at his men in the boats and whirled round again to confront Culross in the York boat's bow. The island of boats still drifted; the rope lashing of the two at the apex still taut across Culross' prow, when Culross, seizing the moment of Norbert's panic, leaned out as the latter's craft swung closer and with a single ax-blow severed the strained hawser.

The blow brought Norbert suddenly to his senses as the released York boat leaped ahead and began to slide past him.

"*Diable!*" he shouted. "Close on him."

With a vociferous roar the wings of his fleet surged in on both sides, grinding Culross' gunwale, hooking on to his sides and stern, striving to hold him till they could cast another rope across his bows. The river reverberated with a pandemonium of sound as they shouted and fought to get a sure hold on the craft. But Culross had timed his stroke well. The wind was behind him and he had forced the Northwesters to pit the strength of their arms against the might of the breeze.

The breeze was the stronger. Bellying the big square-sail, bending the stout mast till it creaked, it dragged Norbert's fleet along. Half the York boat's length was clear of enemy craft, the forward half, but they clung like a flock of water-beetles to the after part.

"Unship oars," Culross bellowed.

As one man the eight rowers swung in the long sweeps and raised them in air.

"Now, hammer them loose," the factor commanded.

His own weapon whirling in circles above his head, he set the example, crashing the razor-edge of his ax-blade through the nearest gunwales, laying the flat of the blade on men's heads. Nor were the Cree

oarsmen loath to follow his cue. They had taken blow and bruise without murmur the while they stuck to their work, and now was their chance to give back what they had received. With a wild shout they fell upon the craft that hemmed them in, flailing the occupants with the long sweeps, staving off the splintered gunwales, knocking the Northwesters back into the boat-bottoms.

Fiercely the Northwesters fought to keep their hold with boat-hooks, poles and oars, but craft after craft was staved off and disabled by Culross and the demon Crees. Once beyond the reach of oars, the Crees seized their trade-guns, turning their belching muzzles across the water-gap. Here and there Norbert's renegades pitched out of their seats to be swirled limply down-stream and boats began to sink under the riddling. The light boats and canoes of the Indians dropped away first, smashed like sieves by the murderous, flailing volleys.

One by one they whirled round in the current of the Red, some filling and sinking before they could reach the bank, others wallowing water-logged till they beached on the low point below the flaming butte.

The Hudson's Bay Company crew cheered as they realized their gain. Every craft they smashed aside lightened the drag on their own stanch York boat. Their sail drew more powerfully, accelerating their pace so that they began to swing round the butte and forge down-river with the remnants of Norbert's fleet clinging to their stern.

"*Diable!*" cried Norbert furiously. "Are you going to let them loose?"

He himself redoubled his efforts, bunching his boats to board Culross over the stern. The York boat was steered by the breeze alone, for, the Red River boats crowding so close astern, Spring Wind was compelled to unship his steering-oar with the rest and use his trade-gun on the boarders. Still it held the midstream course, rounding the butte before the breeze, and it was just as they rounded it that Culross caught the sound of boats up-river.

"York boats," he breathed. "Semple's close at hand."

Norbert's quick ears had caught the sound of the York boats also, and the knowledge that Governor Semple was almost within reach of them drove him into a fury. He leaped from his own craft into the stern of the York boat, several of his men at his heels in a desperate effort.

"*Ciel*," he gritted. "We will swamp your York boat and take your passengers under Semple's nose. Quick, *camarades*, then dash for the settlement."

With the strength of a maniac he staggered, Spring Wind and three more Crees in front of him, and pushed in between them to seize Mary Longburn where she crouched amidships under the shelter of the York boat's gunwale. Her father dropped the sheet to spring to her help, but Culross was before, leaping on Norbert with raised ax.

The flat of the blade caught the Northwester fairly on top of the head and he pitched sheer backward into the Red. The eddies pooled black as ink as his body smote the flame-carmined water and floated there senseless, lurching from side to side till some of his men in the nearest boat pulled him aboard.

At his fall the men who had heeled him over the York boat's stern wavered and their vacillation was their undoing. Longburn sprang toward them at the head of the Crees and swept them into the river.

Nor did their comrades in the Red River boats stay to pick them up. In a mad panic they left them to flounder ashore and fled for the Indian settlement, while the York boat, released of the drag, jumped suddenly forward into the van of the up-coming fleet.

On the edge of the firelight Culross could glimpse them, York boats crammed with Hudson's Bay Company men and new colonists from overseas foaming along under Governor Semple's flag with Semple himself standing under its blood-red folds.

"Look, Mary," Culross breathed to the girl at his side as the Hudson's Bay Company fleet enveloped them and he raised his hand in salute. "There's the governor's boat with the governor in the bow. I fulfil his commission, thank Heaven, and put you into his hands. Are you overly anxious to go?"

Culross looked into her face, manly pleading in his gray eyes, and Mary Longburn fathomed the depth of his meaning.

"James, James," she answered, laughing softly in the joy of victory, in the ecstasy of release from Adolphe Norbert's menace, "I'm—I'm in very good hands as it is."

A Five-Part Story

Guns of the Gods

Part 3

By Talbot Mundy

Author of "A Soldier and a Gentleman," "In Aleppo Bazaar," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

THE Russian Princess Sonia Omanoff was accused of the murder of her husband and sentenced to life-imprisonment in the Siberian mines. Intriguing friends smuggled her off to Paris. During her subsequent residence there she fell in love with Bubru Singh, a Rajput maharaja on his educational "Grand Tour." She married him and he took her to his kingdom in India. There he died soon after the birth of their daughter, Yasmini.

Gungadhura Singh, Bubru's nephew, succeeded him as maharaja. The new ruler assigned a palace in Sialpore to Sonia for her personal use, and there grew up the Princess Yasmini, who inherited from her mother all the cunning of Russian court-intriguers and from her father an intense love of India.

In Sialpore the money-lender Mukhum Dass leased a house to Dick Blaine. Blaine was an American mining engineer who had settled in Sialpore at the request of Gungadhura Singh for a mining expert to explore the old gold-workings in the hills. Dick Blaine was about forty; his wife, ten years younger.

Tess Blaine from the start loved India. One dawn she stole from her bed and stood, thinly clad, at her window to wonder at the rich colors of the gorgeous sunrise. After her husband had gone to work, a handsome and dandified young man called, a Rajput of Rajputs. Several slight mannerisms he affected led Tess to detect that her visitor was a very pretty young woman in male attire.

"I am the rightful Maharanee of Sialpore," the girl confessed after admitting her sex, "only those fools of English have given Sialpore to Gungadhura, who is a pig and loathes them."

Their chat was interrupted by the arrival of Tom Tripe. This eccentric fellow was drillmaster of the maharaja's troops and an admirer of the Blaines' democratic hospitality, so unlike the formality of the English residents. The woman in man's garb suddenly produced a Bank of India note for one thousand rupees and a fountain pen and before Tom entered the house scrawled Persian characters on the paper. Tess introduced her to Tom as Gunga Singh, but Tom immediately recognized her.

"So the Princess Yasmini is Gunga Singh this morning, eh? That won't do. I swore on my Bible oath to the maharaja day before yesterday that I'd left you closely guarded in the palace place across the river."

But protesting against the violation of her hospitality to all visitors, Tess refused to allow the drillmaster to take the princess to the palace.

The coming of the commissioner, leading his horse up the hill, spoiled all chances of Tom Tripe's persuading the princess to go with him. She whirled on Chamu, the Blaines' native butler, and accused him of stealing the bank-note.

"Feel in his cummerbund, Tom Tripe," she commanded. "I saw where the money went."

Tom produced the note from Chamu's sash.

"Go to the palace and tell the maharaja that the princess is at the house of the commissioner *sahib*," she stormed at the terrified butler, while he protested that he was innocent. "And keep the thousand-rupee note to pay thy son's gambling-debt to Mukhum Dass."

Chamu slunk away to do her bidding.

When Commissioner Samson was being entertained on the veranda by Tess and Tom had ridden away, Yasmini in the parlor listened to their conversation. The commissioner told Tess of the Sialpore Treasure. This was a vast ancestral hoard buried somewhere in that region. Although Gungadhura knew nothing of its whereabouts, he said, it was the maharaja's rightful inheritance from his ancestors. The secret had died with Bubru Singh. It was generally thought that Blaine had come to Sialpore to search for the Treasure rather than for the gold in the hills.

"Gungadhura Singh is a spendthrift," he declared. "Gungadhura will surely claim the Treasure if your husband finds it."

He also informed Tess of many other local conditions and asked her if they were sure of their lease on the house.

"I've been told there's a question about the title. Some one's bringing suit against your landlord for possession on some ground or other."

After he had gone, Yasmini jubilantly kissed Tess, saying that she behaved perfectly. The princess was sure Samson had a trick up his sleeve.

When Dick returned that night and Tess told him the events of the day, he declared his fidelity to Gungadhura.

Yasmini went to Mukhum Dass. She told the money-lender she knew that he had asked an intercession of a priest of the god Jinendra to help him recover a title deed to the Blaines' house which Mukhum Dass had lost. Dhulap Singh, Gungadhura's agent, was eager to get possession of the house for his master, she said, for the maharaja believed the Sialpore Treasure was hidden under it. And if Dhulap Singh found the title deed, it would establish the claim to the house he was about to present in a lawsuit.

"Chamu the butler will pay his son's gambling-debt. Give him a receipt, saying nothing. Your part is silence in all matters. Otherwise the priest of Jinendra will transfer the title deed to Dhulap Singh. Preserve the bank-note for thirty days and keep silence."

One afternoon while Dick Blaine was at the mine Tess had several visitors. One was Utirupa, a handsome Rajput prince. During his call Tom Tripe gave Tess a letter from Yasmini. Last of all, after Utirupa had gone, came Samson the commissioner. At his appearance Tom Tripe hid behind a clump of shrubbery. Tess and Samson strolled through the garden, and Samson grew unconventionally familiar and was rebuffed.

"There's an intrigue going on," said Samson, "and you can help me. People whose business it is to keep me informed have reported that Tom Tripe is constantly carrying letters from the Princess Yasmini to that young Prince Utirupa who was here this afternoon. If Gungadhura Singh were found committing treason he'd be deposed. Then Utirupa would be maharaja, being next in line. And I want to find out what the princess has to do with it. I want you to make the acquaintance of the princess, visit her tonight and find out what are the letters she writes to Utirupa."

And he gave her a letter that would admit her to the palace of Yasmini past the guards posted there.

Tess consented. It was the command of a government official.

Dick Blaine returned and Tess showed him the letter Tom had brought her from Yasmini, urging Tess to visit her at the palace at once. Tess already suspected that Samson was a rascal playing for political fortunes.

So in their dog-cart Dick drove Tess to the palace. But there the guard insolently ordered them away and it was only the intervention of Tom Tripe that gained Tess admittance to the stronghold where Gungadhura kept Yasmini prisoner.

Yasmini's chief interest was in the food Tess had brought, for the princess had fasted since the latest attempt of Gungadhura to poison her.

Then Yasmini informed Tess that the vein of gold Dick had discovered would soon run into English territory, over which the maharaja had no jurisdiction. Samson, she said, would claim the gold and make a fortune.

"Your husband," insisted Yasmini, "must dig in a new place. Let your husband show Samson how poor the specimens are he is digging and that will be the end of Gungadhura. Then I shall escape. Your husband shall wait for me with his dog-cart."

To this Tess agreed.

SO MANY look at the color,
So many study design;
Some of 'em squint through a microscope
To judge if the texture is fine.
A few give a thought to the price of the stuff,
Some feel of the heft in the hand;
But once in a while there comes one who can smile
And—appraising the lot—understand.
Look out
When the seemingly sold understand!
All's planned
For the cook of the stew to be canned
Out o' hand,
When the due-to-be-choused understand!

CHAPTER IX

"It means, the toils are closing in on Gungadhura!"

WITHIN the palace Tess was reveling in vaudeville. In the first place Yasmini had no Western views on modesty. Whatever her mother may have taught her in that respect had gone the way of all the other handicaps she saw fit to throw into the discard, or to retain for use solely when she saw there was advantage.

The East uses dress for ornament, and understands its use. The veil is for places where men might look with too bold eyes and covet. Out of sight of privileged men prudery has no place, and almost no advocates all the way from Peshawar to Cape Comorin.

And Yasmini had loved dancing since the days when she tottered her first steps for her mother's and Bubru Singh's delight. Long before an American converted the Russian Royal Ballet, and the Russian Royal Ballet in return took all the theater-going West by storm—scandalizing, then amazing, then educating bit by bit—Yasmini had developed her own ideas and brought them by arduous practise to something near perfection. To that her strength, agility and sinuous grace were largely due; and she practised no deceptions on herself, but valued all three qualities for their effect

on other people, keeping no light under a bushel.

The consciousness of that night's climactic quality raised her spirits to the point where they were irrepressible, and she danced her garments off one by one, using each in turn as a foil for her art until there was nothing left with which to multiply rhythm and she danced before the long French mirror yet more gracefully with nothing on at all.

Getting Tess disrobed was a different matter. She did not own to much prudery, but the maids' eyes were overcurious. And lacking, as she knew she did, Yasmini's ability to justify nakedness by poetry of motion, she hid behind a curtain and was royally laughed at for her pains. But she was satisfied to retain that intangible element that is best named dignity, and let the laughter pass unchallenged.

Yasmini, with her Eastern heritage, could be dignified as well as beautiful with nothing on. Not so Tess, or at any rate she thought not; and what one thinks is after all the only gage acceptable.

Then came the gorgeous fun of putting on Tess' clothes, each to be danced in as its turn came, and made fun of, so that Tess herself began to believe all Western clothes were awkward, idiotic things—until Yasmini stood clothed complete at last, with her golden hair all coiled under a Paris hat, and looked as lovely that way as any.

The two women were almost exactly the same size. Even the shoes fitted, and when Yasmini walked the length of the room with Tess' very stride and attitude, Tess got her first genuine glimpse of herself as another's capably critical eyes saw her—a priceless experience, and not so humiliating after all.

They dressed up Tess in man's clothes—a young Rajput's—a suit Yasmini had worn on one of her wild excursions; and what with the coiled turban of yellow silk and a little black mustache adjusted by cunning fingers she felt as happy as a child in fancy dress. But she found it more difficult to imitate the Rajput walk than Yasmini did to copy her tricks of carriage. For a few minutes they played at walking together up and down the room before the mirror, applauded by the giggling maids.

But then suddenly came anti-climax. There was a great hammering at the outer door, and one of the maids ran down to investigate, while they waited in breathless silence.

The news the maid brought back was the worst imaginable. The lookout at the northern corner of the wall—Yasmini kept watch on her captors as rigorously as they spied on her—had run with word to the gateman that Gungadhura himself was coming with three eunuchs, all four on foot.

Almost as soon as the breathless girl could break those evil tidings there came another hammering, and this time Hasamurti went down to answer. Her news was worse. Gungadhura was at the outer gate demanding admission, and threatening to order the guard to break the gate in if refused.

"What harm can he do?" demanded Tess. "He won't dare try any violence in front of me. Let us change clothes again."

Yasmini laughed at her.

"A prince on a horse may ride from harm," she answered. "When princes walk, let other folk 'ware trouble! He comes to have his will on me.

"Those eunuchs are the leash that always hunt with him by night. They will manhandle you, too, if they once get in, and Gungadhura will take his chance of trouble afterward. The guard dare not refuse him."

"What shall we do?" Tess wondered. "Can we hide?"

Then, pulling herself together for the sake of her race and her Western womanhood:

"If we make noise enough at the gate my husband will come. We're all right."

"If there are any gods at all," said Yasmini piously, "they will consider our plight. I think this is a vengeance on me because I said I will leave my maids behind. I will not leave them! Hasamurti—you and the others make ready for the street."

THAT was a simple matter. In three minutes all five women were back in the room, veiled from head to foot. But the hammering at the front door was repeated, louder than before. Tess wondered whether to hope that the corporal of the guard had already reported to Gungadhura the lady doctor's visit, or to hope that he had not.

"We will all go down together now," Yasmini decided, and promptly she started to lead the way alone.

But Hasamurti sprang to her side, and insisted with tears on disguising herself as her mistress and staying behind to provide one slim chance for the rest to escape.

"In the dark you will pass for the *memsahib*," she urged. "The *memsahib* will pass for a man. Wait by the gate until the maharaja enters, while I stand at the door under the lamp as a decoy.

"I will run into the house, and he will follow with the eunuchs, while the rest of you slip out through the gate and run before the guard can close it. Perhaps one at least of the other maids had better stay with me."

A second maid volunteered, but Yasmini would have none of that plan. First and last the great outstanding difference between her and the ordinary run of conspirators, Western or Eastern, was unwillingness to sacrifice faithful friends even in a pinch—although she could be ruthlessness itself toward half-hearted ones.

By the time they reached the little curtained outer hall the maids were on the verge of hysteria. Tess had herself well in control, and was praying busily that her husband might only be near enough to hear the racket at the gate; she was willing to be satisfied with that, and to ask no further favors of Providence, unless that Dick should have Tom Tripe with him. Outwardly calm enough, she could not for the life of her remember to stride like a man. Yasmini turned more than once to rally her about it.

Yasmini herself looked unaccountably meek in the Western dress, but her blue eyes blazed with fury and she walked with confidence, issuing her orders in a level voice. The gateman had come to the door again to announce that Gungadhura had issued a final warning. Two more minutes and the outer gate should be burst in by his orders.

"Tell the maharaja *sahib* that I come in person to welcome him," she retorted, and the gateman hurried back into the dark toward his post.

There were no lights at the outer gate. One could only guess how the stage was set—the maharaja hooded lest some enemy recognize him—the eunuchs behind him with cords concealed under their loose outer garments—and the guard at a respectful distance standing at attention. There was not a maharaja's sepoy in Sialpore who would have dared remonstrate with Gungadhura in dark or daylight.

Only as they passed under the yellow light shed by the solitary lantern on the iron bracket did Tess get an inkling of Yasmini's plan. Light glinted on the wrought hilt of a long Italian dagger, and her smile was cold—uncompromising—shuddersome.

Tess objected instantly.

"Didn't you promise you'd kill nobody?" she cried. "If we'd a pistol we could fire it in the air and my husband would come in a minute."

"How do we know that Gungadhura hasn't killed your husband, or shut him up somewhere?" Yasmini answered; and Tess had an attack of cold chills that rendered her speechless for a moment.

She threw it off with a prodigious effort.

"But I've no weapon of any kind, and you can't kill Gungadhura, three eunuchs and the guard as well!" she argued presently.

"Wait and see what I will do!" was the only answer. "Gungadhura caused my pistols to be stolen. But the darkness is our friend, and I think the gods—if there are any gods—are going to assist us."

They walked to the gate in a little close-packed group, and found the gateman stuttering through the small square hole provided for interviews with strangers, telling the maharaja for the third or fourth time that the princess herself was coming. Gungadhura's voice was plainly audible, growling threats from the outer darkness.

"Stand aside," Yasmini ordered. "I will attend to the talking now."

She went close to the square hole, but was careful to keep her face in shadow at the left-hand side of it.

"What can his Highness Gungadhura Singh want with his relative at this strange hour?" she asked.

"Open the gate!" came the answer.

He was very close to it—ready to push with his shoulder the instant the bolt was drawn, for black passion had him in hand. But in the darkness he was as invisible as she was.

"Nay, how shall I know it is Gungadhura Singh?"

"Ask the guard. Ho, there! Tell her who it is demands admission."

"Nay, they might lie to me. The voice

sounds strange. I would open for Gungadhura Singh; but I must be sure it is he and no other."

"Look then," he answered, and thrust his dark face close to the opening.

EVEN the utterly base have intuition. Nothing else warned him. In the very nick of time he stepped back, and Yasmini's long dagger that shot forward like a stab of lightning only cut the cheek beneath his eye, and slit it to the corner of his mouth.

The blood poured down into his beard and added fury to determination.

"Guards, break in the gate!" he shouted, and Yasmini stood back in the darkest shadow, about as dangerous as a cobra guarding young ones.

With her left hand she signed to all six women to hide themselves; but Tess came and stood beside her, minded in that minute to give Gungadhura Western aftermath to reckon with as well as the combined present courage of two women. Wondering desperately what she could do to help against armed men, she suddenly snatched one of the long hat-pins that she herself had adjusted in her own hat on Yasmini's head.

Yasmini hugged her close and kissed her.

"Better than sister! Better than friend!" she whispered.

Gungadhura had not been idle while he waited for his message to reach Yasmini, but had sent some of the guard to find a balk of timber for a battering-ram. The butts of rifles would have been useless against that stout iron.

The gate shook now under the weight of the first assault, but the guards were handling the timber clumsily, not using their strength together. Gungadhura cursed them, and spent two valuable minutes trying to show them how the trick should be worked, the blood that poured into his beard, and made of his mouth a spluttering crimson mess, not helping to make his raging orders any more intelligible.

Presently the second crash came, stronger and more elastic than the first. The iron bent inward, and it was plainly only a matter of minutes before the bolt would go. The gateman came creeping to Yasmini's side, and, with yellow fangs showing in a grin meant to be affectionate, displayed an Afghan *tulwar*.

"Ismail!" she said. "I thought you were afraid and ran to hide."

"Nay," he answered. "My life is thine, princess! Gungadhura took away all weapons, but this I hid. I went to find it. See," he grinned, feeling the edge with his thumb, "it is clean! It is keen! It will cut throats!"

"I will not forget," Yasmini answered, but the words were lost in the din of the third blow of wood on iron.

The odds began not to look so bad—two desperate women and a faithful Northern fighting man armed with a weapon that he loved and understood, against a wounded blackguard and three eunuchs. Perhaps the guard might look on and not interfere.

There was a chance to make a battle royal of it, whose tumult would bring Dick Blaine and Tom Tripe to the rescue. What was the dog doing? Tess wondered whether any animal could be so intelligent after all as Tom pretended his was. Perhaps the maharaja had seen the dog and killed him.

"Listen!" she urged. "Tell your maids to stampede for the street the instant the door breaks in. That will give the guard their work to do to hold them. Meanwhile——"

Thump! came the timber on the gate again, and even the hinges shook in their stone setting.

"Listen!" said Yasmini.

There was another noise up-street—a rushing to and fro, and a trumpeting that no one could mistake.

"I said that——"

Thump! came the balk of timber—not so powerfully as before.

There was distraction affecting the teamwork. The scream of an elephant fighting mad, and the yelp of a dog, that pierces every other noise, rent the darkness close at hand.

"I said that the gods——"

There came the thud of a very heavy body colliding with a wall, and another blood-curdling scream of rage—then the thunder of what might have been an avalanche as part of a near-by wall collapsed and a brute as big as Leviathan approached at top speed.

There was another thud, but this time the noise was that of the balk of timber falling on the ground, as guard, eunuchs and Gungadhura all took to their heels.

"Allah! Il hamdul' illah!" swore the gateman. ("Thanks be to God!")

"I *said* that the gods would help tonight!" Yasmini cried exultantly.

"Oh, Lord, what has happened to Dick?" groaned Tess between set teeth.

The thunder of pursuit drew nearer. Possessed by some instinct she never offered to explain, Yasmini stepped to the gate, drew back the bolt and opened it a matter of inches. In shot Tom Tripe's dog with his tongue hanging out and the fear of devils blazing in his eyes. Yasmini slammed the gate again in the very face of a raging elephant, and shot the bolt in the nick of time to take the shock of his impact.

IT WAS only a charge in half-earnest or he would have brought the gate down. An elephant is a very short-sighted beast, and it was pitch-dark. He could not believe that a dog could disappear through a solid iron gate, and after testing the obstruction for a moment or two, grumbling to himself angrily, he stood to smell the air and listen.

There was a noise farther along the street of a stampede of some kind. That was likely enough his quarry, probably frightening other undesirables along in front of him. With a scream of mingled frenzy and delight he went off at once full pelt.

"Oh, Trotters! Good dog, Trotters!" sobbed Tess, kneeling down to make much of him and giving way to the reaction that overcomes men as well as women. "Where's your master? Oh, if you could tell me where my husband is!"

She did not have long to wait for the answer to that. It took the two men a matter of seconds to get the horse on his feet, and no fire-engine ever left the station house one fraction faster than Dick tooled that dog-cart. The horse was all nerves and in no mood to wait on ceremony, which accounted for a broken spoke and a fragment of the gate-post hanging in the near wheel.

They forgot to unlash the wheels before they started, so the dog-cart came up-street on skids, as it were, screaming holy murder on the granite flags—which in turn saved the near wheel from destruction. It also made it possible to rein the terrified horse exactly in front of the palace gate; another proof that, as Yasmini said, the gods of India were in a mood to help that night. (Not that she ever believed the gods are one bit more consequential than men.)

Yasmini drew the bolt, and the gate creaked open reluctantly; the shock of the elephant's shoulder had about ended its present stage of usefulness. Tom Tripe, dismounting from his horse in a hurry and throwing the reins over the dog-cart lamp, was first to step through.

"Where's my dog?" he demanded. "Where's that Trótters o' mine? Did Akbar get him?"

A cold nose thrust in his hand was the answer.

"Oh, so there you are, you rascal! There —lie down!"

That was all the ceremonial that passed between them, but the dog seemed satisfied.

TESS was out through the gate almost sooner than Tom Tripe could enter it. They brushed each other's shoulders as they passed. Up in the dog-cart she and her husband laughed in each other's arms, each at the other's disguise, neither of them with the slightest notion what would happen next, except that Dick knew the dog-cart wheels would have to be unlashed.

"How many people will the carriage hold?" Yasmini called to them, appearing suddenly in the lamplight.

And Dick Blaine began laughing all over again, for except for the golden hair she looked so like the wife who sat on his left hand, and his wife so like a Rajput that the humor of the situation was its only obvious feature.

"I must not take my carriage, for they would trace it," Yasmini added; "and besides there is too little time. Can we all ride in your carriage? There are six of us."

"Probably. But where to?" Dick answered.

"I will direct. Ismail must come too, but he can run."

It was an awful crowd, for the dog-cart was built for four people at the most and in the end Tess insisted on riding behind Tom Tripe because she was dressed like a man and could do it easily. Ismail was sent back to close the gate from the inside and clamber out over the top of it. There was just room for a lean and agile man to squeeze between the iron and the stone arch.

"Let the watchmen who feared and hid themselves stay to give their own account to Gungadhura," Yasmini sneered scornfully. "They are no longer men of mine."

"Now, where away?" demanded Dick, giving the horse his head. "To my house? You'll be safe there for the present."

"No. They might trace us there."

Yasmini was up beside him, wedged tightly between him and Hasamurti, so like his own wife, except for a vague Eastern scent she used, that he could not for the life of him speak to her as a stranger.

"Listen!" she said excitedly. "I had horses here, there, everywhere in case of need. But Gungadhura sent men and took them all. Now I have only one horse—in your stable. I must get that tonight. First then drive my women to a place that I will show you."

Away in the distance they could hear the trumpeting of Akbar, and the shouts of men who had been turned out to attempt the hopeless task of capturing the brute. At each scream the horse trembled in the shafts and had to be managed skilfully, but the load was too heavy now for him to run away with it.

"If that elephant will continue to be our friend and will only run the other way for a distraction, so that we are not seen, one of these days I will give him a golden howdah!" vowed Yasmini.

And Akbar did that very thing. Whoever was awake that night in Sialpore and was daring enough to venture in the dark streets, followed the line of destruction and excitement, gloating over the broken property of enemies or awakening friends to make them miserable with condolences. The dog-cart threaded through the streets unseen, for even the scarce night-watchmen left their posts to take part in the hunt.

Yasmini guided them to the outskirts of the town in a line as nearly straight as the congenital deviousness of Sialpore's ancient architects allowed. There was not a street but turned a dozen times to the mile.

At one point Yasmini bade Dick stop, and begged Tess to let Tom Tripe take Tess home, promising to see her again within the hour. But Tess had recovered her nerve and was determined to see the adventure through, in spite of the discomfort of a seat behind Tom's military saddle.

They brought up at last in front of a low, dark house at the very edge of the city. It stood by itself in a compound, with fields behind it, and looked prosperous enough to belong to one of the maharaja's suite.

"The house of Mukhum Dass," Yasmini announced.

"The money-lender?"

"Yes."

Dick made a wry face, for the man's extortions were notorious. But Yasmini never paused to cast up virtue when she needed assistants in a hurry; rather she was adept at appraising character and bending it to suit her ends. Ismail, hot and out of breath from running at the cart-tail, was sent to pound the money-lender's door until that frightened individual came down himself to inquire—with the door well held by a short chain—what the matter was.

"I lend no money in the night," was his form of greeting.

He always used it when gamblers came to him in the heat of the loser's passion at unearthly hours—and sometimes ended by making a loan at very high interest on sound security. Otherwise he would have stayed in bed, whatever the thunderous importunity.

YASMINI was down at the door by that time, and it was she who answered.

"Nay, but men win lawsuits by gathering evidence. Are title deeds not legal in the dark?"

"Who are you?" he demanded, reaching backward for a little lamp that hung on the wall behind him and trying to see her face.

"I am the same who met you that morning on the hilltop and purchased silence from you at a price."

He peered through the narrow opening holding the lamp above his head.

"That was a man. You are a woman.'

For answer to that she stood on tipto and blew the lamp out. He would hav slammed the door, but her foot was in th way.

"By dark or daylight, Mukhum Das your eyes read nothing but the names o *hundis* (notes)! Now, what does the ear say? Does the voice tell nothing?"

"Aye, it is the same."

"You shall have that title deed tomorrow at dawn—on certain terms."

"How do I know?"

"Because I say it—I who said that

Chamu would repay his son's loan—I who knew from the first all about the title deed—I who know where it is this minute—I who know the secrets of Jinendra's priest—I whose name stands written on the thousand-rupee note with which the butler paid his son's debt."

"The princess! The Princess Yasmini. It was her name on the note!"

"Her name is mine!"

The money-lender stood irresolutely, shifting his balance from foot to foot. It was his experience that when people with high-born names came to him by night mysteriously there was always profit in it for himself.

And then there was that title deed. He had bought the house cheap, but its present value was five times what he gave for it. Its loss would mean more to him than the loss of a wife to some men—as Yasmini knew, and counted on.

"Open the door and let me in, Mukhum Dass. The terms are these——"

"Nay, we can talk with the door between us."

"Very well; then lose thy title deed. Dhulap Singh, thine enemy, shall have it within the hour."

She took her foot out from the door and turned away briskly. Promptly he opened the door wide, and called after her.

"Nay, come; we will discuss it."

"I discuss nothing," she answered with a laugh. "I dictate terms."

"Name them, then."

"I have here five women. They must stay in safety in your house until an hour before dawn."

"God forbid!"

"Until an hour before dawn; you hear me? If any come to inquire for them or me, you must deny all knowledge."

"That I would be sure enough to do. Shall I have it said that Mukhum Dass keeps a dozen women in his dotage?"

"An hour before dawn I will come for them."

"None too soon!"

"Then I will write a letter to a certain man, who on presentation of the letter will hand you the title deed at once without payment."

"A likely tale!"

"Was it a likely tale that Chamu would repay his son's debt?"

"Well—I will take the hazard. Bring them in. But I will not feed them. And if you fail to come for them before dawn I will turn them out and it shall be all over Sialpore that the Princess Yasmini——"

"One moment, Mukhum Dass. If one word of this escapes your lips for a month to come, you shall go to jail for receiving stolen money in payment of a debt. My name was on the money that Chamu paid you with. You knew he stole it."

"I did not know."

"Prove that in court, then."

"Bring the women in," he grumbled. "I am no cackler from the roofs."

Yasmini did not wait for him to change his mind but shepherded her scared dependents through the door, and called for Ismail.

"Did you see these women enter?" she demanded.

"Aye. I saw. Have I not eyes?"

"Stay thou here outside and watch. Afterward, remember, if I say nothing, be thou dumb as Tom Tripe's dog. But if I give the word, tell all Sialpore that Mukhum Dass is a satyr who holds revels in his house by night. Bring ten other men to swear to it with thee, until the very children of the streets shout it after him when he rides his rounds.

"Hast thou understood? Silence for silence. But talk for talk.

"Hast thou heard, too, Mukhum Dass? Good. Shut thy door tight, but thy mouth yet tighter. And try rather to take liberties with hornets than with those five women."

BEFORE he could answer she was gone, leaving Ismail lurking in the shadows. Tess had dismounted from behind Tom Tripe and climbed up beside her husband so that there were three on the front seat again.

"Now, Tom Tripe!" Yasmini ordered, speaking with the voice of command that Tom himself would have used to a subordinate. "Do you as the elephant did, and cause distraction. Draw Gungadhura off the scent."

"—— bells, deary me, your ladyship!" he answered. "All the drawing I'll do after this night's work will be my last month's pay, and lucky if I see that. Lordy knows what the guard'll tell the maharaja, nor what his rage'll add to it!"

"Nonsense. Gungadhura and the guard

ran from the elephant like dust before the wind. The guards are the better men, and will be back at their post before this; but Gungadhura must find a discreet physician to bind a slit face for him.

"Visit the guard now, and get their ear first. Tell them Gungadhura wants no talk about tonight's work. Then come to Blaine *sahib's* house and search the cellar by lamplight, letting Chamu the butler see you do it, but taking care not to let him see what you see. What you do see, leave where it lies. Then see Gungadhura early in the morning——"

"Lordy me, your ladyship, he'll ——"

"No, he won't! He'll want to know how much you know about his behavior at the gate. Tell him you know everything, and that you've compelled the guard to keep silence. That ought to reconcile the coward.

"But if he threatens you, then threaten him. Threaten to go to Samson *sahib*, with the whole story. (But if you do dare really go to Samson *sahib*, never look me in the face again.)

"Then tell Gungadhura that you searched the cellar, and what you saw there under a stone, adding that Blaine *sahib* was suspicious and watched you and afterward sealed the cellar door. Have you understood me?"

"I understand there's precious little sleep for me tonight, and —— in the morning."

"Poof! Are you a soldier?"

"I'm your ladyship's most thorough-paced admirer and obedient slave," Tom answered gallantly, his mutton-chop whiskers fairly bristling with the grin he made no effort to suppress.

"Prove it, then, this night."

"As if I hadn't! Well—all's well, your ladyship; I'm on the job, brib, crupper and breakfast-time, yours truly!"

"When you have finished interviewing Gungadhura, find for Blaine *sahib* a new cook and a new butler, who can be trusted not to poison him."

"If I can!"

"Of course you can find them. Tell Sita Ram, Samson *sahib's* babu, what is wanted. He will find men in one hour who have too much honor, and too little brains, and too great fear, to poison any one. Say that I require it of him.

"Have you understood? Then go. Go swiftly to the guard and stop their tongues."

Tom whistled his dog and rode off at a canter. Dick gave the horse his head and drove home as fast as the steepness of the hill permitted, Yasmini talking to him nearly all the way.

"You must dismiss Chamu," she insisted. "He is Gungadhura's man, and the cook is under the heel of Chamu. Either man would poison his own mother for a day's pay. Send them both about their business the first thing in the morning if you value your life.

"Before they go, letting them see you, put a great lock on the cellar door, and nail it as well, and put weights on it! If men come at any time to pry about the house, ask Samson *sahib* for a special policeman to guard the place."

"But what is all this leading to?" demanded Dick. "What does it mean?"

"It means," she said slowly, "that the toils are closing in on Gungadhura."

"The way I figure it," he answered, "some one else had a pretty narrow shave tonight."

Yasmini knew better than to threaten Dick, or even to argue with him vehemently, much less give him orders. But each man has a line of least resistance.

"Your wife has told you what Gungadhura attempted?" she asked him.

"Yes, while you were at the money-lender's—something of it."

"If the guard should tell Gungadhura that your wife was in the palace with me and could give evidence against him, what do you suppose Gungadhura would do?"

"—— him!" Dick murmured.

"There are so many ways—snakes—poison—daggers in the dark——"

"What do you suggest?" he asked her. "Leave Sialpore?"

"Yes, but with me. I know a safe place. She should come with me."

"When?"

"Tonight. Before dawn."

"How?"

"By camel. I had horses and Gungadhura took them all; but his brain was too sotted to think of camels, and I have camels waiting not many miles from here. I shall take my horse from your stable and ride for the camels, bringing them to the house of Mukhum Dass. Let your wife meet me there one hour before dawn."

"Dick!" said Tess, with her arm around him. "I want to go. I know it sounds crazy, and absurd, and desperate; but I'm

sure it isn't. I want you to let me go with her."

They reached the house before he answered, he turning it over and over in his mind, taking into reckoning a thousand things.

"Well," he said at last, "once in a while there's the strength of a man about you, Tess. Maybe I'm a lunatic, but—have it your own way, girl; have it your own way."

IN ODOR of sweet sanctity I bloom;
With surplus of beatitude I bless;
I'm the confidant of Destiny and Doom,
I'm the apogee of knowledge more or less.
If I lie, it is to temporize with lying
Lest obliquity should suffer in the light.
If I prey upon the widow and the dying,
They withheld; I but compel them to do right.
I am justified in all that I endeavor;
If I fail it is because the rest are fools.
I'm serene and unimpeachable forever—
The upheld, ordained interpreter of rules.

CHAPTER X

"Discretion is better part of secrecy!"

SOME of what follows presently was told to Yasmini afterward by Sita Ram, some of it by Tom Tripe, and a little by Dick Blaine, who had it from Samson himself. The rest she pieced together from admissions by Jinendra's fat priest and the gossip of some dancing-girls.

Sir Roland Samson, K. C. S. I., as told already, was a very demon for swift office work, routine pouring off him into the hands of the right subordinates like water into the runnels of a roof, leaving him free to bask in the sunshine of self-complacency. But there is work that can not be tackled, or even touched, by subordinates; and, the fixed belief of envious inferiors to the contrary notwithstanding, there are hours unpaid for, unincluded in the office schedule and wholly unadvertised, that hold such people as commissioners in durance vile.

On the night of Yasmini's escape Samson sat sweating in his private room, with moths of a hundred species irritating him by noisy self-immolation against the oil lamp—whose smoke made matters worse by being sucked up at odd moments by the punkah, pulled jerkily by a new man. Most aggravating circumstance of all perhaps was that the movement of the punkah flicked his papers away whenever he removed a weight. Yet he could not study them unless he spread them all in front of him; and without the punkah he felt he would die of apoplexy. He had to reach a decision before midnight.

Babu Sita Ram was supposed to be sitting under a punkah in the next room, with a locked door between him and his master. He was staying late, by special request and as a special favor, to copy certain very important but not too secret documents in time for the courier next day. There were just as many insects to annoy him, and the punkah flapped his papers too; but fat though he was, and sweat though he did, his smile was the smile of a hunter.

From time to time he paused from copying, stole silently to the door between the offices, gingerly removed a loose knot from a panel, and clapped to the hole first one and then the other avidious brown eye.

Samson wished to goodness there were some one he dared consult with. There were other Englishmen, of course, but they were all ambitious like himself. He felt that his prospects were at stake.

News had reached the State Department—by channels Sita Ram could have uncovered for him—that Gungadhura was intriguing with the tribes beyond the northwest frontier.

The tribes were too far away to come in actual touch with Sialpore, although they were probably too wild and childish to appreciate that fact. The point was that Gungadhura was said to be promising them armed assistance from the British rear—assistance that he never would possibly be able to render them; and his almost certain intention was, when the rising should materialize, to offer his small forces to the British as an inexpensive means of quelling the disturbance, thus restoring his own lost credit and double-crossing all concerned. A subtle motive, subtly suspected.

It was no new thing in the annals of Indian state affairs, nor anything to get afraid about; but what the State Department desired to know was, why Sir Roland Samson, K. C. S. I., was not keeping a closer eye on Gungadhura, what did he propose as the least troublesome and quietest solution, and would he kindly answer by return.

All that was bad enough, because a "beau ideal commissioner" rather naturally feels distressed when information of that sort goes over his head or under his feet

to official superiors. But he could have got around it. It should not have been very difficult to write a report that would clear himself and give him time to turn around.

But that very evening no less an individual than the High Priest of Jinendra had sent word by Sita Ram that he craved the favor of an interview.

"And," had added Sita Ram with malicious delight, "it is about the Treasure of Sialpore and certain claims to it that I think he wants to see you."

"Why should he come by night?" demanded Samson.

"Because his errand is a secret one," announced the babu, with a hand on his stomach as if he had swallowed something exquisite.

So Samson was in a quandary, going over secret records, getting ready for an issue with the priest. His report had to be ready by morning, yet he hardly dared begin it without knowing what the priest might have in mind; and on his own intricate knowledge of the situation might depend whether or not he could extract, from a man more subtle than himself, information on which to base sound proposals to his Government. His reputation was decidedly at stake; and dangerous intrigue was in the air, or else the priest would never be coming to visit him.

Sita Ram kept peeping at him through the knot-hole, as a cook peers at a titbit in the oven, to judge whether it is properly cooked yet.

JINENDRA'S priest had had time for reflection. True to his kidney, he trusted nobody; unlike Yasmini, who knew whom to trust, and when, and just how far. It was all over the city that Gungadhura's practises were hastening his ruin, so it was obviously wise not to espouse the maharaja's cause, in addition to which the priest had become convinced in his own mind that Yasmini actually knew the whereabouts of the Sialpore Treasure.

But he did not trust Yasmini either, nor did he relish her scornful promise of a mere percentage of the hoard when it should at last be found. He wanted at least the half of it, bargains to the contrary notwithstanding; and he had that comfortable conscience that has soothed so many priests, that argues how the church must be above all bargains, all bonds, all promises.

Was there any circumstance or man or woman who could bind and circumscribe Jinendra's High Priest? He laughed at the suggestion of it. Samson was the man to see—Samson the man to be inveigled in the nets. So the High Priest sent his verbal message by the mouth of Sita Ram—a very pious devotee of Jinendra by Yasmini's special orders—and, disguising his enormous bulk in a thin cloak, set forth long after dark in a covered cart drawn by two tiny bulls.

There were two doors to Sita Ram's small office; two to Samson's large one—three doors in all, because they shared the connecting one—which was locked just now—in common. At the first sound of the long-awaited heavy footsteps on the outer porch Sita Ram hurried to do the honors, and presently ushered into Samson's presence the enormous bulk of the High Priest, spreading a clean cloth for him on an easy-chair because the priest's caste put it out of the question for him to sit on leather defiled by European trousers.

Then, while the customary salaams were taking place, and the customary questions about health and other matters that neither cared a fig about, Sita Ram ostentatiously drew a curtain part-way over the connecting door and retired by way of the other door and the passage to remove the knot from its hole.

It was part of Samson's pride, and one of his stoutest rungs in the ladder of preferment, that he knew more Indian languages than any other man of his rank in the service, and knew them well. There were asterisks and stars and twiggly marks against his name in the blue book that would have passed muster as a secret code, and every one of them betokened passed examinations in some Eastern tongue.

So he was fully able to meet the High Priest on his own ground, as well as conscious of the advantage he held to begin with, in that the priest had come to him instead of his going to the priest.

"Well?" he demanded, cutting the pleasantries short abruptly as soon as Sita Ram had closed the door.

"I came to speak of politics."

"I listen."

Samson leaned back and scrutinized his visitor with deliberate rudeness. Having

the upper hand, he proposed to hold it.

But Jinendra's High Priest was no beginner either in the game of beggar-my-neighbor. He understood the value of a big trump to begin with, provided there is other ammunition in reserve.

"The whereabouts of the Treasure of Sialpore is known."

"The deuce it is!" said Samson, in good, plain English. "Who knows it?"

The High Priest smiled.

Samson, as was natural, felt that tingling up and down the spine and quickening of the heart-beats that announce crisis in one's personal affairs, but concealed it admirably. It was the High Priest's turn to speak. He waited.

"Half of that Treasure belongs to the priesthood of Jinendra," said the priest at last.

"Since when?"

"Since the beginning."

"Why?"

"We were keepers of the Treasure once, years ago, before the English came. There came a time when the reigning raja deceived us by a trick, including murder; and ever since the English took control the priests have had less and less authority. There has been no chance to—to bring any—to put pressure—to reestablish our rights. Nevertheless our rights in the matter were never surrendered."

"What do you mean by that exactly?"

"The English are now the real rulers of Sialpore."

Samson nodded. That was a significant admission, coming from a Brahman priest.

"They should claim the Treasure. But they can not claim it without knowing where it is. The priests of Jinendra are entitled to their half."

"You mean you are willing that my Government should take half the Treasure, provided the priests of Jinendra get the other half of it?"

The priest moved his head and his lips in a way that might be taken to mean anything.

"If you know where the Treasure is, dig it up," said Samson, "and you shall have your answer."

YASMINI in the heat of excitement had called Samson an idiot, but he was far from being that, as he knew as well as any one. He judged in that moment that if Jinendra's priest knew really where the Treasure was, he would never have come to drive a bargain for the half of it, but would have taken all and said nothing.

On the other hand, it well might be that Gungadhura's searchers had stumbled on it. In that case there was that secret letter from headquarters, hurriedly placed in his top drawer when the priest came in, that would give good excuse for putting screws on Gungadhura.

A *coup d'état* was not beyond the pale of possibility. As a champion of indiscretion and a judge of circumstances, he would dare. The gleam in his eyes betrayed that he would dare, and the priest grew uneasy.

"It is not I who know where the Treasure is. I know who knows."

"You mean Gungadhura knows."

The priest smiled again. The commissioner was not such a dangerous antagonist after all. Samson's eyes betrayed disappointment, and the priest took heart of grace.

"For one-half of the Treasure I will tell you who it is that knows. You can take possession of the person. Then——"

"Illegal. By what right could I arrest a person simply because some one else asserts without proof that that person knew where the Treasure is?"

"Not arrest, perhaps. But you might protect."

"From whom? From what?"

"Gungadhura suspects. He might use poison—torture—might carry the person off into hiding——"

He paused, for Samson's eyes were again a signal of excitement. He had it! He knew as much as the priest himself did in that instant! There was one particular individual in Sialpore who fitted that bill.

"Nonsense!" he answered. "Gungadhura would be answerable to me for any outrages."

The priest showed a slight trace of dejection, but went forward bravely to defeat.

"There is danger," he said. "If Gungadhura should lay hands on all that money there would be no peace in Rajputana. I should not bargain away what belongs to the priesthood, but discretion is permitted me; if you will agree with me tonight I will accept a little less than half of it."

Samson wanted time to think, and he was through with the priest—finished with

the interview—not even anxious to appear polite.

"If you bring me definite information," he said slowly, "and on the strength of that my Government should come in possession of the Sialpore Treasure, I will promise you in writing five per cent. of it for the funds of the priesthood of Jinendra, the money to be held in trust and administered subject to accounting."

Jinendra's High Priest hove his bulk out of the leather chair and went through the form of taking leave, contenting himself, too, with the veriest shell of courtesy—scorn for such an offer scowling from his fat face. Samson showed him to the door and closed it after him, leaving babu Sita Ram to do the honors outside in the passage.

"I kiss feet!" said the babu. "You must bless me, father. I kiss feet!"

The priest blessed him perfunctorily.

"Is there anything I can do, holy one? Anything a babu such as I can do to earn merit?"

Rolling on his ponderous way toward the waiting bull-cart, the priest paused a moment—eyed Sita Ram as a python eyes a meal—and answered him.

"Tell that woman from me that if she has a plan at all she must unfold it swiftly. Tell her that this Samson *sahib* is after the Treasure for himself; that he invited me to help him and to share it with him. Let her have word with me swiftly."

"What treasure?" asked Sita Ram ingenuously.

Having had his ear to the knot-hole throughout the interview, it suited him to establish innocence. The priest could have struck himself for the mistake, and Sita Ram for the impudence.

"Never mind!" he answered. "Tell her what I say. Those who obey and ask no unwise questions oftentimes receive rewards."

Inside the office Samson sat elated, wiping his forehead and setting blotter over writing-paper lest sweat from his wrists make the ink run. It was a bender of a night, but he saw his way to a brilliant stroke of statecraft that would land him on the heights of official approval forever. Heat did not matter. The man at the punkah had fallen asleep, but Samson did not bother to waken him.

Back at the knot-hole, babu Sita Ram watched him scribble half a dozen letters, tearing each up in turn until the last one pleased him. Finally he sealed a letter, and directed it by simply writing two small letters—r. s.—in the bottom left-hand corner.

"Sita Ram!" he shouted then.

THE babu let him call three times, for evidence of how hard it was to hear through that thick door. When he came it was round by the other way in a hurry.

"You called, sir?"

"You need not copy any more of those documents tonight, Sita Ram. I shall send a telegram in the morning and keep my report in hand for a day or two. But there's one more little favor I would like to ask of you."

"Anything, *sahib!* Anything! Am only desirous to please your Excellency."

"Do you know a man named Tripe—Tom Tripe—drill-instructor to the Maharajah's Guard?"

"Yes, *sahib.*"

"Could you find him, do you think?"

"Tonight, *sahib?*"

"Yes, tonight."

"*Sahib*, he is usually drunk at night, and very rough. Nevertheless, I could find him."

"Please do. And give him this letter. Say it is from me. He will know what to do with it. Oh, and Sita Ram——"

"Yes, *sahib.*"

"You will receive two days' extra pay from me, over and above your salary, for tonight's extra work."

"Thank you, *sahib.* You are most kind—always most generous."

"And—ah—Sita Ram——"

"*Sahib?*"

"Say nothing, will you? By nothing I mean nothing! Hold your tongue, eh?"

"Certainly, *sahib.* Aware of the honor of my confidential position, I am always most discreet."

"What are you doing with that waste basket?"

"Taking it outside, *sahib.*"

"The sweeper will do that in the morning."

"Am always discreet, *sahib.* Discretion is better part of secrecy! Better to burn all torn-up paper before daylight always."

"Very good. You're quite right. That

you, Sita Ram. Yes, burn the torn paper, please."

So Sita Ram, piecing together little bits of paper, got a very good idea of what was in the letter that he carried. The bonfire in the road looked beautiful and gladdened his esthetic soul, but the secret information thrilled him, which was better.

He crossed the river, and very late that night he found Tom Tripe, as sober as a judge, what with riding back and forth to the Blaines' house and searching in a cellar and what not. He gave Tom the letter, and received a rupee because Tom's dog frightened him nearly out of his wits. Tom swore at the letter fervently, but that was Tom's affair, who could not guess the contents.

Almost exactly at dawn Sita Ram, as sleepy as a homing owl, reached his own small quarters in the densest part of town. He had his hand on the door when another hand restrained him from behind.

"You know me?" said a voice he did not know.

A moment later his terrified eyes informed him.

"Mukhum Dass? I owe you nothing."

"Liar. You have my title deed. Hand it over before I bring the constabeel."

"I? Your title deed? I know nothing of it. What title deed?"

Mukhum Dass cut expostulation short, and denied himself the pleasure of further threatening.

"See. Here is a letter. Read it, and then hand me over my title deed."

"Ah! That is different," said Sita Ram, pocketing Yasmini's letter for precaution's sake. "Wait here while I bring it."

Two minutes later he returned with a parchment in a tin tube.

"Do I receive no recompense?" he asked. "Did I not find the title deed and keep it safe? Where is the reward?"

"Recompense?" growled Mukhum Dass. "To be out of jail is recompense. The next time you find property of mine, bring it to me, or the constabeel shall have work to do."

"Dog!" snarled the babu after him. "Dog of a usurer! Wait and see!"

To cover a trail is less than half the work, for any dog with a nose can smell it out. You should make a false trail afterward to deceive the clever folk.
—Eastern proverb.

CHAPTER XI

"Say; that little girl you're wanting to run off with is my wife!"

THE other side to the intrigue developed furiously up at the Blaines' house on the hillside. Yasmini gave directions from Tess' bedroom, where Tess hid her from prying servants, she electing to change clothes once more—this time into her hostess' riding-breeches, boots and helmet. But she insisted on Tess retaining the Rajput costume, only allowing a hand-bag to be packed with woman's things, skirt, blouse and so on.

"If I am seen there must be no mistake about me. They must swear that I am you. It doesn't matter who they believe that you are.

"Above all, Chamu the butler must not see me. When he is dismissed in the morning he will tell tales for very spite, and take his chance of my accusing him of theft; so be sure that he sees Tom Tripe search the cellar. Then he will confirm to the maharaja afterward that Tripe did search—and did see something—and that Blaine *sahib* did lock the cellar door afterward in anger, and put weights on it. That is the important thing.

"Blaine *sahib* must drive the carriage again to the house of Mukhum Dass; and be sure that I am not kept waiting there—we must start before the dawn breaks. Now give me paper and a pen to write the *chit* (letter) for Mukhum Dass."

There was no ink in the bedroom; Dick took her into the place he called his study and locked the door, glad of the excuse. He was minded to know more of the intrigue before letting his wife go off again that night on any wild adventure, second thoughts having stirred his caution.

He began by offering to lend Yasmini money, suspecting that a fugitive princess would need that more than anything. But she replied by drawing out from her bosom a packet containing thousands of rupees in Bank of India notes, and gave him money instead—not much, but she forced it on him.

"For the three beggars. Ten rupees each. Pay it to them in silver in the morning. They have been very useful often, and may be so again."

He watched her write the letter and seal the envelop. Then:

"Say," he said, "don't you allow you'd be

doing right by telling me more of this? I'll say nothing to a soul; but that little girl you're wanting to run off with is my wife, and I'll admit I'm kind o' concerned on her account."

Yasmini met his iron-gray eyes, judged him, and found him good.

"I never trusted man yet, not even the husband I shall marry, with all I shall tell you," she answered. "Will you give me silence in return for it?"

"Mum as the grave," he answered.

And Dick Blaine kept his word, not even hinting to Tess on the long drive afterward that there had been as much as a question asked or confidence exchanged. And Tess respected the silence, not deceived for a minute by it. He and Yasmini had been longer in that room together than any one-page letter needed, and she was sure there was only one subject they discussed.

Dick brought Yasmini's horse to the gate, not to the door, and she mounted outside in the road for additional precaution. Instantly then without a word of farewell she was off like the wind down-hill.

"It'll be all over town tomorrow that I'm dead or dying if anybody sees her," Dick told his wife. "They'll swear that was you, Tess, riding full pelt for the doctor."

Soon after that Tom Tripe came, and made Chamu hold a light for him while he searched the cellar.

"Hold the candle and your tongue, too, confound you!" he told the grumbling butler, who was indignant at being brought from bed.

Dick had already put the silver tube in place. Tom Tripe raised the stone and saw it—uttered a tremendous oath—and dropped the heavy stone back over the hole.

"What are you doing?" Dick demanded from the ladder-head, appearing with a lantern from behind the raised trap.

"Looking for rum," Tom answered.

Then he turned on Chamu.

"Did you see what I saw? Speak a word of it, you devil, and I'll tear your throat out. Silence; d'you understand?"

"Come out of there," Dick ordered angrily. "I'll have to lock this cellar door. I can't have people prospecting down there. I've got reasons of my own for keeping that cellar undisturbed. I'm surprized at you, Tom Tripe, taking advantage of me when my back's turned."

The minute they were up he put a padlock on the trap and nailed it down to the beams as well. Then, summoning Tom's aid, he levered and shoved into place on top of it the heavy iron safe in which he kept his specimens and money.

"That'll do for you, Chamu," he said finally. "I don't care to keep a butler who takes guests into the cellar at this hour of night. You may go. I'll give you your time in the morning."

CHAMU showed his teeth, by no means for the first time. It was a favorite method of his for covering up bad service to fall back on his reference.

"Maharaja *sahib* who is recommending me will not be pleased at my dismissal."

"You and your maharaja go to —— together," Dick retorted. "Tell him from me that I won't have inquisitive people in my cellar. Now go; there's nothing more to talk about.

"Fire the cook, too, as soon as he wakes. Tell him I don't like ground glass in my omelet. Not been any in it? Well, what do I care? I don't want any in it—that's enough. I'm taking no chances. Tell him he's fired, and you two pull your freight together in the morning first thing."

Ten minutes alone with Yasmini had worked wonders with Dick Blaine. Given to making up his mind and seeing resolution through to stern conclusions, he was her stout ally from the moment when he unlocked the study door again until the end—a good, silent ally, too busy apparently about his own affairs to be suspected. Certainly Samson never suspected Blaine's real share in the intrigue—Samson, the judge of circumstances, indiscretions, men and opportunity.

Blaine sent Tom Tripe packing, with a flea in his ear for Chamu's benefit, and a whispered word of friendship. Later he drove Tess down-hill in the dog-cart, first changing his own disguise for American clothes because the *saises* might be up and about when he returned at dawn, and for them to see him in the costume of a *sais* would only have added to the risk of putting Gungadhura's men on the scent of Yasmini. *Saises* are almost the most prolific source of rumor, but he had a means of stilling their tongues.

There was little to say during the dark drive. They were affectionate, those two, without too many words when it came to

leave-taking, each knowing the other's undivided love.

Tess had money—a revolver—cartridges—some food—sufficient change of clothing for a week—sun-spectacles; he reassured himself twice on all those points.

"If you're camel-sick fetch it up and carry on," he advised; "it'll soon pass. Then a hot bath, if you can get it, before you stiffen. Failing that, oil."

The camels, with Yasmini and her women already mounted, were kneeling in the darkness outside the house of Mukhum Dass.

"Come!" called Yasmini. "Hurry!"

Dick kissed his wife—waved his hand to Yasmini—helped Tess on to the last camel in the kneeling line—and they were off, the camel-men not needing to shout to make those Bikaneeri racers rise and start. They were gone like ghosts into the darkness, making absolutely no noise, before Dick could steady the nervous horse.

Then Ismail came and wanted to tie Yasmini's abandoned horse to the tail of the dog-cart, but Dick sent him to stable it somewhere at the other side of the town to help throw trackers off the scent. He himself drove home by a very wide circuit indeed, threading his cautious way among the hills toward the gold-diggings, where he drove back and forward several times around the edges of the dump.

There was some risk that a panther or even a tiger might try for the horse in the dark, but that was not the kind of danger that disturbed Dick Blaine much. A pistol at pointblank range is as good as a rifle most nights of the week.

He arrived home after daylight with a very weary horse, and ordered the sleepy *saises* to wash the wheels at once in order that the color of the dirt might be impressed on them thoroughly. They were quite sure he had been at the mine all night. Then he paid off Chamu and the cook and sent them packing.

He was looking for the beggars to pay them when Tom Tripe's dog arrived and began hunting high and low for Tess. Trotters had something in his mouth, wrapped in cloth and then again in leather, which he refused to surrender to Dick, defying threats and persuasion both. Dick offered him food, but the dog had apparently eaten—water, but he would not drink.

Then while Dick still tried to get possession of the package, whatever it was, the three beggars arrived on the scene and watched his efforts with the interest of spectators at a play. The dog appeared relieved to see them.

"Messenger!" said Bimbu finally.

That much was pretty obvious.

"Princess!" he added, seeing Dick was still puzzled.

It flashed across Dick's mind that on the dresser in the bedroom was Tess' hat that Yasmini had worn. Doubtless to a dog's keen nose it smelled of both of them.

He ran to fetch it, the dog following him, eager to get into the house. He offered the hat to the dog, who sniffed it and yelped eagerly.

"Bang goes fifty dollars then!" he laughed.

He took the hat to Bimbu.

"Can you ride a camel?" he demanded.

The man nodded.

"Another would drive it," Bimbu said.

"Do you know where to get one?"

Bimbu nodded again.

"Take this hat, so that the dog will follow you, and ride by camel to the home of Utirupa Singh. Here is money for the camel.

"If you overtake the princess there will be a fabulous reward. If you get there soon after she does there will be a good reward. If you take too long on the way there will be nothing for you but a beating.

"Go—hurry—get a move on! And don't you lose the dog!"

THERE are they who yet remember, when the depot's forty jaws
Through iron teeth that chatter to the tramping of a throng
Spew out the crushed commuter in obedience to laws
That all accord observance and that all agree are wrong;
When rush and din and hubbub stir the too responsive vein
Till head and heart are conquered by the hustle roaring by
And the sign looks good that glitters on the temple gate of Gain—
"There are spaces just as luring where the leagues untrodden lie!"

There are they who yet remember 'mid the fever of exchange,
When the hot excitement throttles and the millions make or break,
How a camel's silent footfall on the ashen desert range
Swings cushioned into distances where thoughts unfettered wake,
And the memory unbidden plucks an unconverted heart
Till the glamour goes from houses and emotion from the street,

And the truth glares good and gainly in the face of 'change and mart—
"There are deserts more intensive. There are silences as sweet!"

CHAPTER XII

"Ready for anything! If I weaken, tie me on the camel!"

THERE are camels and camels—more kinds than there are of horses. The Bishareen of the Sudan is not a bad beast, but compared to the Bikaneeri there are no other desert mounts worth a moment's consideration. Fleet as the wind, silent as its own shadow, enduring as the long hot-season of its home, the trained Bikaneeri swings into sandy distances with a gait that is a gallop really—the only saddle-beast of all that lifts his four feet from the ground at once, seeming to spurn the very laws of gravity.

They are favored folk who come by first-class Bikaneeri camels, for the better sort are rare, hard held to, and only to be bought up patiently by twos and ones. Fourteen of them in one string, each fit that instant for a distance race with Death itself, was perhaps the best proof possible of Yasmini's influence on the countryside. They were gathered for her and held in readiness by men who loved her and detested Gungadhura.

Normally the drivers would have taken a passenger apiece, and seven of the animals would have been ample; but this was a night and a dawn when speed was nine-tenths of the problem, and Yasmini had spared nothing—no man, no shred of pains or influence—and proposed to spare no beast. They rode in single file, each man with a led camel ridden by a woman, except that Yasmini directed her own mount and for the most part showed the way, her desert-reared guide being hard put to it to keep his own animal abreast of her. There is a gift, a trick, of riding camels, very seldom learned by the city-born; and he or she who knows the way of it enjoys the ungrudged esteem of desert men all the way from China to Damascus, from Peshawar to Khartum.

The camels detect a skilled hand even more swiftly than a horse does and like the horse do their best work for the rider who understands. So the only sound, except for a gurgle now and then, and velvet-silent footfalls on the level sand, was the grunts of admiration of the men behind. They had muffled all the camel-bells.

When they started the night was deepest purple, set densely with a mass of colored jewels; even the whitest of the stars stole color from the rest. But gradually as they raced toward the sky-line and the stars paled the sky changed into mauve.

Then without warning a belt of pale gold shone behind them, and with the false dawn came the cool wind like a legacy from the kindly night-gods to encourage humans to endure the day. A little later than the wind the true dawn came, fiery with hot promise, and Tess on the last camel soon learned the meaning of the cloak Yasmini had made her wear. Worn properly, it covers all the face except the eyes, leaving no surface for the hot wind to torture, and saving lips and lungs from being scorched.

In after years, when Yasmini was intriguing for an empire that in her imagination should control the world, she had the telegraph and telephone at times to aid her, as well as the organized, intricate system of British Government to manipulate from behind the scenes; but now she was racing against the wires, and in no mood to appeal for help to a Government that she did not quite understand as yet, but that she intended to fool royally in any case.

The easiest thing Gungadhura could do, and the surest thing he would attempt once word should reach him that she had vanished from Sialpore, would be to draw around her a network of his own men. Watchers from the hills and lurkers in the sand-dunes could pass word along of the direction she had taken; and the sequel, if Gungadhura was only quick enough, would depend simply on the loneliness or otherwise of the spot where she could be brought to bay.

If there were no witnesses his problem would be simple. But if murder seemed too dangerous, there was the Nesting-Place of Seven Swans up in the mountains, as well as other places even lonelier, to which she and Tess could be abducted.

Tess might be left perhaps to make her own way back and give her own explanation of flight with a maharaja's daughter; but for Yasmini abduction to the hills could only mean one of two things—unthinkable surrender, or sure death by any of a hundred secret means.

So the way they took was wild and lonely, frequented only by the little jackals that eat they alone know what, and watched by unenthusiastic kites that always seemed to be wheeling in air just one last time before flying to more profitable feeding-ground. Yet within a thousand paces of the line they took lay a trodden track, well marked by the sun-dried bones of camels—for the camel dies whenever he feels like it, without explanation or regret, and lies down for the purpose in the first uncomfortable place to hand.

Yasmini and the guide between them, first one, then the other assuming the direction, led the way around low hills and behind the long, blown folds of sand netted scantly down by tufted, dry grass, always avoiding open spaces where they might be seen, or hollows too nearly shut in on both sides, where there might be ambush.

TWICE they were seen before the sun was two hours high, the first time by a caravan of merchants headed toward Sialpore, who breasted a high dune half a mile away and took no notice; but that would not prevent the whole caravansary in the city's midst from knowing what they had seen, and just how long ago, and headed which way, within ten minutes after they arrived—as in fact exactly happened.

The second party to catch sight of them consisted of four men on camels, whose rifles, worn military fashion with a sling, betrayed them as Gungadhura's men. "Desert police" he called them. "Takers of tenths" was the popular, and much more accurate, description.

The four gave chase, for a caravan in a hurry is always likely to pay well for exemption from delay; and coming nearly at right angles they had all the advantage. It was crime to refuse to halt for them, for they were semi-military, uniformed police. Yet their invariable habit of prying into everything and questioning each member of a caravan would be certain to lead to discovery.

They had a signal station on the hill two miles behind them, to keep them in touch with other parties, north, south, east and west. It looked like Yasmini's undoing, for they were gaining two for one along the shorter course. Tess fingered the pistol her husband had made her take, wondering whether Yasmini would dare show fight—not guessing yet the limitless abundance of her daring—and wondering whether she herself would dare reply to the fire of authorized policemen. She did not relish the thought of being an outlaw with a genuine excuse for her arrest.

But the four police were oversure, and Yasmini too quick-witted for them. The police took a short cut down into a sandy hollow, letting their quarry get out of sight, plainly intending to wait on rising ground about a thousand yards ahead, where they could foil attempts to circumvent them and for the present take matters easily.

Instantly Yasmini changed direction, swinging her camel to the right, down a deep *nullah*, and leading full pelt at right angles to her real course. It was ten minutes before the men caught sight of them again, and by that time they had nearly drawn abreast, well beyond reasonable rifle-range, and were heading back toward their old direction, so that the police had lost advantage, and a stern chase on slower camels was their only hope but one. They fired half a dozen shots by way of calling attention to themselves—then wheeled and raced away toward the signal station on the hill.

Yasmini held her course for an hour after that, until a spur of the hillside and another long fold of the desert shut them off from the signalers' view. There she called a halt—unexpectedly, for the camels did not need it. She was worried about Tess—the one untested link in her chain of fugitives.

"Can you keep on through all the hot day?" she asked. "These other women are as lithe as leopards, for I make them dance. They are better able to endure than cheetahs. But you? Shall I put two women on one camel, and send you back to Sialpore with two men?"

Tess' back ached and she was dizzy, but her own powers had been tested many a time; this was not more than double the strain she had withstood before, and she was aware of strength in reserve, to say nothing of conviction that what Yasmini's maids could do she herself would rather perish than fall short of. There is an element of sheer, pugnacious, unchristian human pride that is said to damn, while it saves the best of us at times.

"Certainly not. I can carry on all day," she answered.

Yasmini emitted her golden bell-like

laugh that expresses such immeasurable understanding, and delight in all she understands. (It has overtones that tell of vision beyond the ken of folk who build in mud.)

"The maids shall knead your muscles for you at the other end," she answered. "Courage is good. You are my sister. You shall see things that the West knows nothing of.

"If those thrice-misbegotten takers of tenths had not seen us we would have reached our goal a little after midday. As it is they have certainly signaled to another party of Gungadhura's spawn somewhere ahead of us, who will be coming this way with eyes open and a lesson in mind for those who disregard their comrades' challenge to halt and be looted.

"When I am maharanee there shall be a new system of protecting desert roads. But I dare not try conclusions now. We must make a wide circuit and not reach our destination until night falls. Are you willing?"

"Ready for anything," said Tess. "If I weaken, tie me on the camel."

"Good! So speaks a woman. One woman of spirit is the master of a dozen men—always."

THEY all drank sparingly of tepid water, ate a little of the food each had, and were off again without letting the camels kneel—heading now away from the hills toward a dazzling waste of silver sand, across which the eyes lost all sense of perspective and all power to separate three objects in a row; a land of mirage and monotony, glittering in places with the aching white of salt deposits.

The heat increased, but the speed never slackened for an instant. Flies emerged from everywhere to fasten on to unprotected skin, and the only relief from them was under the hot cloaks that burned them with the heat absorbed from sun and wind.

But even in that ghastly wilderness there were other living things. Now and then a lean leopard stole away from in front of them; and once they saw a man, naked and thinner than a rake, striding along a ridge on Heaven knew what errand. There were scorpions everywhere.

Hour after hour, guided by desert instinct that needs no compass, and ever alert for sky-line watchers, Yasmini and the head man took turns in giving direction, he yielding to her whenever their judgment differed. And whether she was right or not in every instance, she brought them at last to a little desert oasis, where there was brackish water deep down in a sand-hole, and a great rock offered shadow to rest in.

There they lay until the sun declined far enough to lose a little of his power to scorch, and the camels bubbled to one another, thirstless, unwearied, dissatisfied, as the universal way of camels is, kneeling in a circle, rumps outward, each one resentful of the other's neighborhood and above all disgruntled at man's tyranny.

"By now," laughed Yasmini, smoking one of Tess' cigarets in the shadow of the rock, "Gungadhura knows surely that my palace is empty and the bird has flown. Ten dozen different people will have carried to him as many accounts of it, and each will have offered different explanation and advice.

"I wonder what Jinendra's fat priest has to say about it. Gungadhura will have sent for him. He would hardly ride to him through the streets, even in a carriage, with that love-token still raw and smarting with which I marked his face.

"Two reliable reports will have reached him already as to which direction I have taken. Yet the telegraph will have told him that I have not been seen to cross the border, and he will be wondering—wondering. May he wonder until his brains whirl round and sicken him!"

"What can he do?" suggested Tess.

"Do? He can be spiteful. He will enter my palace and remove the furniture, taking my mother's legacies to his own lair—where I shall recover them all within three weeks—and his own beside. I will be maharanee within the month."

"Aren't you a wee bit previous?" suggested Tess.

"Not I. I never boast. My mother taught me that. Or when I do boast it is to put men off the scent. I boasted once to Samson *sahib* when he offered to have me sent to college, telling him I was in the same school as himself and would learn the quicker. He has wondered ever since then what I meant.

"Krishna!" she laughed impiously. "I wonder what Samson *sahib* would not give to have me in his clutches at this minute! Have I told you that Gungadhura plots with the northwest tribes, and that the English know it? No? Didn't I tell you?

"Samson *sahib* would give me almost anything I asked, if he knew that it was I who told his Government of Gungadhura's plots; he would know then that with my knowledge to guide him he would be more than a match for Gungadhura, instead of a ball kicked this and that way between Gungadhura and the English. Sometimes I almost think he would consent to try to make me maharanee."

"Why not give him the chance then?"

"For two reasons. The English too often desert their commissioners. My sure way is better than his blundering attempts. The other reason is an even better one, and you shall know it soon. I think—I do not know—I think, and I hope, that the fat High Priest of Jinendra is playing me false, and has gone to Samson *sahib* to make a bargain with him.

"Samson *sahib* will consent to no bargains with that fat fool, if I am any judge of hucksters; but he will have his ears on end and his eyes sore with overwatchfulness from now forward. Oh, I hope Jinendra's priest has gone to him! I tried to stir treachery in his mind by browbeating him about the bargain that he tried to force from me."

"But what are you and the priest and Samson all bargaining about?" demanded Tess.

"The Treasure of Sialpore. But I make no bargains. I, who know where the Treasure is. Why should I offer to share what is mine? I will have a marriage contract drawn, and you shall be a witness. That Treasure is my dowry.

"Listen! Bubru Singh my father died without a son—the first of all that long line who left no son to follow him. The custom was that he should tell his son, and none else, the secret of the Treasure.

"He hated Gungadhura; and, not knowing which the English would choose for his successor, Gungadhura or another man, he told no one, making only hints to my mother on his death-bed and saying that if I, his daughter, ever developed brains enough to learn the secret of the Treasure, then I might also have wit enough to win the throne and all would be well."

"And you discovered it? How did you discover it?"

"Not I."

"Who then?"

"Your husband did!"

"My husband? Dick Blaine? But that can't be true; he never told me; he tells me everything."

"Perhaps he would have told if he had understood. He hardly understands yet. Only in part—a little."

"Then how in the world——"

Yasmini's golden laugh cut short the question as she rose to her feet with a glance at the westering sun.

"Let us go. Two hours from now we shall cross the border into another State. Two hours after nightfall our journey is ended. Then the last game begins—the last *chukker*—and I win!"

TESS wished then that they had never halted. The rest had given her muscles time to stiffen, and her nerves the opportunity to learn how tired they were.

As the camels rose jerkily and followed their leader in line at the same fast pace as before she grew sick with the agony of aching bones and the utter weariness of motion repeated again and again without varying or ceasing. Every ligament in her body craved only stillness, but the camel's unaccustomed thrust and sway continued, repeated to infinity, until her nerves grew numb and she was hardly conscious of time, distance, or direction.

Once again there was pursuit, but Tess was hardly conscious of it—hardly realized that shots were fired—clinging to the saddle in the misery of a sickness more weakening and deathly than the sort small boats provide at sea.

The sun went down and left her cooler, but not recovered. She knew nothing of boundaries, or of the changing nature of the countryside. It meant nothing to her that they were passing great trees now, and that once they crossed a stream by a wide stone bridge.

The only thought that kept drumming in her mind was that Dick, the ever dependable, had misinformed her. She had "fetched it up"—a dozen times. True to his instruction. she had "carried on." But it did not pass! She felt more sick, more agonized, more weary every minute.

But at last, because there is an end even to the motion of a camel, in this world of example instances, about two hours after nightfall the caravan halted in the shadow

of great trees beside a stone house with a wall about it. Her camel knelt with a motion like a landslide, and Tess fell off forward on the ground and fainted, only snatched away by strong hands in the nick of time to save her from the camel's teeth. Uncertain unforgiving brutes are camels—ungrateful for the toil men put them to.

For an hour after that she was only dimly conscious of being laid on something soft, and of supple, tireless women's hands that kneaded her, and kneaded her, taking the weary muscles one by one and coaxing them back to painlessness.

So she did not see the dog arrive—Trotters, the Rampore-Great Dane, cousin to half the mongrel stock of Hindustan, slobbering on a package that his set jaws hardly could release; Yasmini, scornful of the laws of caste and ever responsive to a true friend, pried it loose with strong fingers.

It was she too who saw to the dog's needs—fed him and gave him drink—removed a thorn from his forefoot and made much of him. She even gave Bimbu food with her own hands, and saw that his driver and camel had a place to rest in, before she undid the string that bound the leather jacket of the package.

Bimbu on the camel had led the dog by the short route and, having nothing to be robbed of, had had small trouble with policemen on the way.

The first thing Tess was really conscious of when she regained her senses was a great dog that slumbered restlessly beside her own finger-marked, disheveled, dusty, fifty-dollar hat on the floor near by, awaking at intervals to sniff her hand and reassure himself—then returning to the hat to sleep, and gallop in his sleep; a rangy, gray, enormous beast with cavernous jaws that she presently recognized as Trotters.

Then came the maids again, afraid for their very lives of the dog, but still more mindful of Yasmini's orders. They resumed their kneading of stiff muscles, rubbing in oil that smelt of jasmine, singing incantations while they worked.

They lifted the bed away from the wall, and one of the women danced around and around it rhythmically, surrounding Tess with what the West translates as "influence"—the spell that all the East knows keeps away evil interference.

LAST of all by candle-light Yasmini came, scented and fresh and smiling as the flower from which she has her name, dressed now in the soft-hued silken garments of a lady of the land.

"Where did you get them?" Tess asked her.

"These clothes? Oh, I have friends here. Have no fear now—there are friends on every side of us."

She showed Tess a letter, pierced in four places by a dog's eye-teeth.

"This is from Samson *sahib*. Do you remember how I prayed that Jinendra's priest might think to play me false? I think he has. Some one has been to Samson *sahib*. Hear this:

"The Princess Yasmini Omanoff Singh,
Sialpore.

"YOUR HIGHNESS:

"Word has reached me frequently of late of pressure brought to bear on you from certain quarters, and hints have been dropped in my hearing that the object of the pressure is to induce you to disclose a secret you possess. Let me assure you that my official protection from all illegal restraint and improper treatment is at your service. Further, that in case your secret is such as concerns vitally the political relations, present or future, of Sialpore, the proper persons to whom to confide it is myself.

"Should you see your way to take that only safe course, you may rest assured that your own interests will be cared for in every way possible.

"I have the honor to be,

"Your Highness' obedient servant,

"ROLAND SAMSON, K.C.S.I."

"That looks fair enough," said Tess. "I dislike Samson for reasons of my own, but——"

"Hah!" laughed Yasmini. "He makes love to you. Is it not so? He would make love to me if I gave him opportunity. What a jest for the gods if I should play that game with him and make him marry me! I could. I could make of Samson a power in India. But the man would weary me with his conceit and his 'orders from higher up' within a week. I can have power without his help. What a royal jest, though, to marry Samson and intrigue with all the jealous English wives who think they pull the strings of government!"

"You'd get the worst of it," laughed Tess.

"Maybe. I shall never try it. I am more of the East than the West. But I will answer Samson. Bimbu shall remain here lest he talk too much, but the dog shall take a letter to Tom Tripe at dawn.

"Samson knew hours ago that I have flown the nest. He will wonder how Tom Tripe holds communication with me, and so swiftly, and will have greater respect for him—which may serve us later."

"Let me add a letter to my husband then, to tell him I'm safe."

"Surely. But now eat. Eat and be strong. Can you stand? Can you walk? Have the maids put new life in you?"

Tess was astonished at her swift recovery. She was a little stiff—a little weak—a little tired; but she could walk up and down the room with her natural gait; and Yasmini clapped her hands.

"I will order food brought. Listen! Tonight I am Abhisharika. Do you know what that is—Abhisharika?"

Tess shook her head.

"I go to my lover of my own accord."

"That sounds more like West than East."

"You think so? You shall come with me and see. You shall play the part of *Chéti* (the indispensable handmaiden)—you and Hasamurti. You must dress like her. Simply be still and watch, and you shall see."

OF WHAT use were the gift of gods,
The buoyant sweetness of a virgin state,
The blossomy delight of youth
Ablow with promise of fruit consummate;
What use the affluence of song
And marvel of delicious motion meet
To grace the very revelings of Fawn,
Could she not lay them at another's feet?

CHAPTER XIII

"I am a king's daughter!"

THAT was a night when the full moon rose in a sea of silver, and changed into amber as it mounted in the sky. The light shone like liquid honey, and the shadowed earth was luminous and still. The very deepest of the shadows glowed with undertones of half-suggested color. Hardly a zephyr moved.

"You see?" said Yasmini. "The gods are our servants. They have set the stage."

Hand in hand—Yasmini in the midst in spotless silken white; Tess and Hasamurti draped in black from head to foot—they left the house by a high teak door in the garden wall and started down a road half-hidden by lacy shadows. All three wore sandals on bare feet, and Tess was afraid at first of insects.

"Have no fear of anything tonight," Yasmini whispered. "The gods are all about us. Wasuki, who is king of all the snakes, is on our side."

One could not speak aloud, for the spell of mystery overlay everything. They walked into the very heart of silent beauty. Overhead, enormous trees, in which the sacred monkeys slept, dropped tendrils like long arms yearning with the love of mother earth. Here and there the embers of a dying fire glowed crimson, and the only occasional sound was of sleepy cattle that chewed the cud contentedly—or when a monkey moved above them to change his roost.

Once a man's voice singing by a fireside conjured back for a moment the world's hard illusion; but the stillness and the mystery overcame him too, and all was true again, and wonderful.

Hand in hand they followed the road to its end and turned into a lane between thorn hedges. Now the moon shone straight toward them and there was no shadow, so that the earth was bright golden underfoot—a lane of mellow light on which they trod between fantastic woven walls.

At the end of the lane they came into a clearing at a forest-edge, where an ancient ruined temple nestled in the shadow of great trees, its stone front and the seated image of a long-neglected god restored to more than earthly sanctity and peace by the cool, caressing moonlight.

"Jinendra again," Yasmini whispered. "Always Jinendra. His priests are rascals, but the god himself is kind. When I am maharanee, that temple shall stand whole again."

In front of the temple, between them and the trees, was a pond edged with carved stone. Lotus leaves floated on the water, and one blue flower was open wide to welcome whoever loved serenity.

Still hand in hand, they crossed the clearing mid-way to the pond, and there Yasmini bade them stand.

"Draw no nearer," she said. "Only stand and watch."

She had a great blue flower in her bosom that heaved and fell for proof of her own emotion. Hasamurti's hand was trembling as she nestled closer, and Tess felt her own pulsing to quick heart-beats as she clasped the girl's.

Yasmini left them and walked alone to

the very edge of the pond, where she stood still for several minutes, apparently gazing at her own reflection in the moonlit water —or perhaps listening. There was no sign of any one else, nor sound of footfall.

Then, as if the reflection satisfied, or she had heard some whisper meant for her and none else, she began to dance, moving very slowly in the first few rhythmic steps, resembling a water-goddess, the clinging silk displaying her young outline as she bent and swayed.

She might have been watching her reflection still, so close she danced to the water's edge with her back turned to the moon. But presently the dance grew quicker, and extended arms that glistened in the light like ivory increased the sinuous perfection of each pose.

Still there was nothing wild in it— nothing but the very spirit of the moonlight, beautiful and kind and full of peace. She moved now around the water, in a measured cadence that by some unfathomable witchery of her devising conveyed a thought of maidenhood and modesty.

It dawned on Tess, who watched her, spellbound, that there was not one immodest thought in all Yasmini's throng of moods but only a scorn of all immodesty and its pretensions. And whether that was art, or sheer expression of the truth within her rather than a recognition of the truth without, Tess never quite determined; for it is easier to judge the spoken word and unexpected deed than to see the thought behind it. That night Yasmini's mood was simpler and less unseemly than the very virgin dress she wore.

PRESENTLY she danced more swiftly, making no sound, so fantom-light and graceful that the rhythm of her movement carried her with scarce a touch to earth. That was strength as well as art, but the art made strength seem spiritual power to float on air.

Gaiety grew now into her cadences—the utter joy of being young. She seemed to revel in a sense of buoyancy that could lift her above all the grim deceptions of the world of wrath and iron, and make her, like the moonlight, all-kind, all-conquering. Three times round the pond she leaped and gamboled in an ecstasy of youth undisillusioned.

Then the dance changed, though there was yet in it the heart of gaiety. There moved now in the steps a sense of mystery —a consciousness of close infinity unfolding far more subtly signified than by the clumsy shift of words.

And she welcomed all the mystery— greeted it with outstretched arms—was glad of it, and eager—impetuous to know the new worlds and the ways undreamed of. Minute after minute, rhapsody on rhapsody, she wooed the near, untouchable delights that, like the moonbeams, seem but empty nothing when the drudges seize them for their palaces of mud.

Nor did she woo in vain. There were stanzas in her dance of simple gratitude, as if the spirit of the mystery had found her mood acceptable and dowered her with new ability to see, and know, and understand. Even the two watchers, hand in hand a hundred paces off, felt something of the power of vision she had gained, and thrilled at its wonder.

Borne on new wings of fancy now, her dance became a very image of those infinite ideas she had seen and felt. She herself, Yasmini, was a part of all she saw— mistress of all she knew—own sister of the beauty in the moonlight and the peace that filled the glade. The night itself—moon, sky and lotus-dappled water—trees— growth and grace and stillness—were part of her and she of them. Verily that minute she, Yasmini, danced with the gods and knew them for what in truth they are— ideas a little lower, a little less essential, than the sons of men.

Then, as if that knowledge were the climax of attainment, and its ownership a spell that could command the very lips of night, there came a man's voice calling from the temple in the ancient Rajasthani tongue.

"O moon of my desire! O dear delight! O spirit of all gladness! Come!"

Instantly the dance ceased. Instantly the air of triumph left her. As a flower's petals shut at evening, fragrant with promise of a dawn to come, she stood and let a new mood clothe her with humility; for all that grace of high attainment given her were nothing, unless she, too, made of it a gift. That night her purpose was to give the whole of what she knew herself to be.

So, with arms to her sides and head erect, she walked straight toward the temple; and a man came out to meet her, tall and

strong, who strode like a scion of a stock of warriors. They met mid-way and neither spoke, but each looked in the other's eyes, then took each other's hands, and stood still minute after minute. Hasamurti, gripping Tess' fingers, caught her breath in something like a sob, while Tess could think of nothing else than *Brynhild's* oath:

"—O Sigurd, Sigurd,
Now harken while I swear!
The day shall die forever
And the sun to darkness wear
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd..."

Her lips repeated it over and over, like a prayer, until the man put his arm about Yasmini and they turned and walked together to the temple. Then Hasamurti tugged at Tess, and they followed, keeping their distance, until Yasmini and her lover sat on one stone in the moonlight on the temple porch, their faces clearly lighted by the mellow beams. Then Tess and Hasamurti took their stand again, hand in each other's hand, and watched once more.

It was love-making such as Tess had never dreamed of—and Tess was no familiar of hoydenish amours; gentle—poetic—dignified on his part—manly as the plighting of the troth of warriors' sons should be. Yasmini's was the attitude of simple self-surrender, stripped of all pretense, devoid of any other spirit than the will to give herself and all she had, and knowledge that her gift was more than gold and rubies.

For an hour they sat together murmuring question and reply, heart answering to heart, eyes reading eyes, and hand enfolding hand; until at last Yasmini rose to leave him and he stood like a lord of squadroned lances to watch her go.

"Moon of my existence!" was his farewell speech to her.

"Dear lord!" she answered.

Then she turned and went, not looking back at him, walking erect, as one whose lover is the son of twenty kings. Without a word she took Tess and Hasamurti by the hand, and, looking straight before her with blue eyes glowing at the welling joy of thoughts too marvelous for speech, led them to the lane—the village street—and the door in the wall again.

The man was still gazing after her, erect and motionless, when Tess turned her head at the beginning of the lane; but Yasmini never looked back once.

"Why did you never tell me his name?" Tess asked; but if Yasmini heard the question she saw fit not to answer it.

Not a word passed her lips until they reached the house, crossed the wide garden between pomegranate shrubs, and entered the dark door across the body of a sleeping watchman—or a watchman who could make believe he slept. Then:

"Good night," she said simply. "Sleep well. Sweet dreams. Come, Hasamurti—your hands are cleverer than the other women's."

Daughter of a king, and promised wife of a son of twenty kings, she took the best of the maids to undress her, without any formal mockery of excuse. Two of the other women were awake to see Tess into bed—no mean allowance for a royal lady's guest.

VERY late indeed that night Tess was awakened by Yasmini's hand stroking the hair back from her forehead. Again there was no explanation, no excuse. A woman, who was privileged to see and hear what Tess had seen and heard, needed no apology for a visit in the very early hours.

"What do you think of him?" she asked. "How do you like him? Tell me."

"Splendid!" Tess answered, sitting up to give the one word emphasis. "But why did you never tell me his name?"

"Did you recognize him?"

"Surely. At once—first thing!"

"No true-born Rajputni ever names her lover or her husband."

"But you knew that I know Prince Utirupa Singh. He came to my garden party!"

"Nevertheless, no Rajputni names her lover to another man or woman—calling him by his own name only in retirement, to his face."

"Why—he—isn't he the one who Sir Roland Samson told me ought to have been maharaja instead of Gungadhura?"

Yasmini nodded and pressed her hand.

"Tomorrow night you shall see another spectacle. Once, when Rajputana was a veritable land of kings and not a province tricked and conquered by the English, there was a custom that each great king held a durbar, to which princes came from everywhere, in order that the king's daughter might choose her own husband from among them.

"The custom died, along with other fashions that were good. The priests killed it, knowing that whatever fettered women would increase their sway. But I will revive it—as much as may be, with the English listening to every murmur of their spies and the great main not yet thrown. I have no father, but I need none. I am a king's daughter!

"Tomorrow night I will single out my husband, and name him by the title under which I shall marry him—in the presence of such men of royal blood as can be trusted with a secret for a day or two. There are many who will gladly see the end of Gungadhura.

"But I must try to sleep—I have hardly slept an hour. If a maid were awake to sing to me— But they sleep like the dead after the camel-ride, and Hasamurti, who sings best, is weariest of all."

"Suppose I sing to you?" said Tess.

"No, no; you are tired too."

"Nonsense. It's nearly morning. I have slept for hours. Let me come and sing to you."

"Can you? Will you? I am full of gladness, and my brain whirls with a thousand thoughts, but I ought to sleep."

So Tess went to Yasmini's room, and sat beneath the punkah crooning Moody and Sankey hymns and darky lullabies until Yasmini dropped into the land of dreams. Then, listening to the punkah's regular, soft swing, she herself fell forward on her arms, half-resting on the bed, half on the chair, until Hasamurti crept in silently and, laughing, lifted her up beside Yasmini and left her there until the two awoke near noon, wondering, in each other's arms.

He who is most easily persuaded is perhaps a fool, for the world is full of fools, and it is dangerous to deal with them. But perhaps he is a man who sees his own advantage hidden in the folds of your proposal; and that is dangerous too.

—Eastern Proverb.

CHAPTER XIV

"Acting on instructions from your Highness!"

IT TICKLED Gungadhura's vanity to have an Englishman in his employ; but Tom Tripe never knew from one day to another what his next reception would be. On occasion it would suit the despot's sense of humor to snub and slight the veteran soldier of a said-to-be superior race; and he would choose to do that when there was least excuse for it.

On the other hand, he recognized Tom as almost indispensable; he could put a lick and polish on the maharaja's troops that no amount of cursing and coaxing by their own officers accomplished. Tom understood to a nicety that drift of the Rajput's martial mind that caused each sepoy to believe himself the equal of any other Rajput fighting man, but permitted him to tolerate fierce disciplining by an alien.

And Tom had his own peculiarities. Born in a Shorncliffe barrack hut, he had a feudal attitude toward people of higher birth. As for a prince—there was almost no limit to what he would not endure from one, without concerning himself whether the prince was right or wrong.

Not that he did not know his rights; his limitations were not Prussian; he would stand up for his rights, and on their account would answer the maharaja back more bluntly and even offensively than Samson, for instance, would have dreamed of doing. But a prince was a prince, and that was all about it.

So on the morning following the flight of Yasmini and Tess, sore-eyed from lack of sleep but with an eye-opener of raw brandy inside him, and a sense of irritation due to the absence of his dog, he roundly cursed nine unhappy mahouts for having dared let an elephant steal his rum—drilled two companies of heavy infantry in marching order on parade until the sweat ran down into their boots and each miserable man saw two suns in the sky where one should be—dismissed them with a threat of extra parades for a month to come unless they picked their feet up cleaner—and reported, with his heart in his throat, at Gungadhura's palace.

As luck would have it the Sikh doctor was just leaving. It always suited that doctor to be very friendly with Tom Tripe, because there were pickings in the way of sick certificates that Tom could pass along to him, and shortcomings that Tom could overlook. He told Tom that the maharaja was in no mood to be spoken to, and in no condition to be seen.

"Then you go back and tell his Highness," Tom retorted, "that I've got to speak with him. Business is business."

The doctor used both hands to illustrate.

"But his cheek is cut with a great gash

from here to here. He was testing a sword-blade in the armory last night, and it broke and pierced him."

"Hasn't a soldier like me seen wounds before? I don't swoon away at the sight of blood. He can do his talking through a curtain if he's minded."

"I would not dare, Mr. Tripe. He has given orders. You must ask one of the eunuchs—really."

"I thought you and I were friends?" said Tom with whiskers bristling.

"Always! I hope always! But in this instance——"

Tom folded both arms behind his back, drillmaster-on-parade fashion.

"Suit yourself," he answered. "Friendship's friendship. Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. I want to see his Highness. I want to see him bad. You're the man that's asked to turn the trick for me."

"Well, Mr. Tripe, I will try. I will try. But what shall I tell him?"

Tom hesitated. That doctor was a more or less discreet individual, or he would not have been sent for. Besides, he had lied quite plausibly about the dagger-wound. But there are limits.

"Tell him," he said presently, "that I've found the man who left that sword in his armory o' purpose for to injure him. Say I need private and personal instructions quick."

THE doctor returned up the palace steps. Ten minutes later he came down again smiling, with the word that Tom was to be admitted. In a hurry then Tom's brass spurs rang on Gungadhura's marble staircase, while a breathless major domo tried to keep ahead of him. One takes no chances with a man who can change his mind as swiftly as Gungadhura habitually did.

Without a glance at silver shields, boars' heads, tiger-skins, curtains and graven gold ornaments beyond price, or any of the other trappings of royal luxury, Tom followed the major domo into a room furnished with one sole divan and a little buhl-work table. The maharaja sprawling on the divan in a flowered silk dishabille and with his head swathed in bandages, ignored Tom Tripe's salute, and snarled at the major domo to take himself out of sight and hearing.

Soldier-fashion, as soon as the door had closed behind him Tom stood on no ceremony, but spoke first.

"There was a fracas last night, your Highness, outside a certain palace gate."

He pronounced the word to rime with jackass, but Gungadhura was not in a mood to smile.

"An escaped elephant bumped into the gate and bent it. The guard took to their heels; so I've locked 'em all up, solitary, to think their conduct over."

The maharaja nodded.

"Good!" he said curtly.

"I cautioned the relieving guard that if they had a word to say to any one they'd follow the first lot into cells. It don't do to have it known that elephants break loose that easy."

"Good!"

"Subsequently, acting on instructions from your Highness, I searched the cellar of Mr. Blaine's house on the hill, Chamu the butler holding a candle for me."

"What did *he* see? What did that treacherous swine see?" snapped Gungadhura, pushing back the bandage irritably from the corner of his mouth.

"Nothing, your Highness, except that he saw me lift a stone and look under it."

"What did *you* see under the stone?"

"A silver tube, all wrought over with Persian patterns, and sealed at both ends with a silver cap and lots o' wax."

"Why didn't you take it, you idiot?"

"Two reasons. Your Highness told me to report to you what I saw, not to take nothing. And Mr. Blaine came to the top of the cellar ladder and was —— angry. He'd have seen me if I'd pinched a cockroach. He was that angry that he locked the cellar door afterward, and nailed it down, and rolled a safe on top of it."

"Did he suspect anything?"

"I don't know, your Highness."

"What did you tell him?"

"Said I was looking for rum."

"Doubtless he believed that; you have a reputation. You are an idiot! If you had brought away what you saw under that stone, you might have drawn your pension today and left India for good."

Tom made no answer. The next move was Gungadhura's. There was silence while a gold clock on the wall ticked off eighty seconds.

"You are an idiot!" Gungadhura broke out at last. "You have missed a golden

opportunity. But if you will hold your tongue—absolutely—you shall draw your pension in a month or two from now, with ten thousand rupees in gold into the bargain."

"Yes, your Highness."

A native of the country would have begun to try to bargain there and then. But there are more differences than one between the ranks of East and West; more degrees than one of dissimulation. Tom gravely doubted Gungadhura's prospect of being in position to grant him a pension, or any other favor, a month or two from then. A native of the country would have bargained nevertheless.

"Keep that guard confined for the present. You have my leave to go."

Tom saluted and withdrew. He was minded to spit on the palace steps, but refrained because the guard would surely have reported what he did to Gungadhura, who would have understood the act in its exact significance.

As he left the palace yard he passed a curtained two-wheeled cart drawn by small, humped bulls, and turned his head in time to see the High Priest of Jinendra heave his bulk out from behind the curtains and wheezily ascend the palace steps.

"A little ghostly consolation for the maharaja's sins!" he muttered as he headed toward his own quarters for another stiff glass of brandy and some sleep. He felt he needed both—or all three!

"If it's true there's no hell, then I'm on velvet," he muttered. "But I'm a liar. A liar by imputation—by suggestion—by allegation—by collusion—and in fact. Now if I was one o' them Hindus I could hire a priest to sing a hymn and start me clean again from the beginning.

"Trouble is, I'm a complacent liar. I'll do it again, and I know it. Brandy's the right oracle for me."

BUT there was no consolation, ghostly or otherwise, being brought to Gungadhura. Jinendra's fat High Priest, short-winded from his effort on the stairs, with aching hams and knees that trembled from exertion, was ushered into a chamber some way removed from that in which Tom Tripe had had his interview. The maharaja lay now with his head on the lap of Patali, his favorite dancing-girl, in a room all scent and cushions and contrivances. (That was how Yasmini learned about it afterward.)

It was against all the canons of caste and decency to accord an interview to any one in that flagrant state of impropriety—to a High Priest especially. But it amused Gungadhura to outrage the priest's alleged asceticism, and to show him discourtesy (without in the least affecting his own superstitious scruples in the matter of religion). Besides, his head ached, and he liked to have Patali's resourcefulness and wit to reenforce his own tired intuition.

The priest sat for several minutes recovering breath and equipoise. Then when the pain had left his thighs and he felt comfortable he began with a bomb.

"Mukhum Dass the money-lender has been to me to give thanks and to make a meager offering for the recovery of his lost title deed! He has it back."

Gungadhura swore so savagely that Patali screamed.

"How did he find it? Where?"

Mukhum Dass had told the exact truth, as it happened, but the priest had drawn his own conclusions from the fact that it was Samson's babu who returned the document. He was less than ever sure of Gungadhura's prospects, suspecting, especially since his own night interview with the commissioner, that some new dark plot was being hatched on the English side of the river. Having no least objection to see Gungadhura in the toils, he did not propose to tell him more than would frighten and worry him.

"He said that a hand gave him the paper in the dark. It was the work of Jinendra doubtless."

"Pah! Thy god functions without thee, then! That is a wondrous bellyful of brains of thine! Dost know that the princess has fled the palace?"

Jinendra's priest feigned surprize.

"Is it not as clear as the stupidity on thy fat face that the ten-times casteless hussy is behind this? Bag of wind and widows' tenths! Now I must buy the house on the hill from Mukhum Dass and pay the brute his price for it."

"Borrowing the money from him first?" the priest suggested with a fat smirk.

None guessed better than he how low debauch had brought the maharaja's private treasury.

"Go and pray!" growled Gungadhura.

"Are thy temple offices of no more use than to bring thee here twitting me with poverty? Go and lay that belly on the flags, and beat thy stupid brains out on the altar step!

"Jinendra will be glad to see thy dark soul on its way to Yum (the judge of the dead) and maybe will reward me afterward. Go! Get out of here! Leave me alone to think!"

The priest went through the form of blessing him, taking more than usual time about the ceremony for sake of the annoyance that it gave. Gungadhura was too superstitious to dare interrupt him.

"Better tell that Mukhum Dass to sell me the house cheap," said the maharaja as a sort of afterthought. Patali had been whispering to him. "Tell him the gods would take it as an act of merit."

"Cheap?" said the priest over his shoulder as he reached the door. "I proposed it to him."

That was not exactly true. He had proposed that Mukhum Dass should give the title to the temple as an act of grace.

"He answered 'that what the gods have returned to him must be doubly precious and certainly entrusted to his keeping; therefore he would count it a deadly sin to part with the title now on any terms."

"Go!" growled Gungadhura. "Get out of here!"

After the priest had gone he talked matters over with Patali, while she stroked his aching head. Whoever knows the mind of the Indian dancing-girl could reason out the calculus of treason. They are capable of treachery and loyalty to several sides at once; of sale of their affections to the highest bidder, and of death beside the buyer in his last extremity, having sold his life to a rival whom they loathe. They are the very priestesses of subterfuge—idolators of intrigue—past mistresses of sedition and seduction.

Yet even Patali did not know the real reason why Gungadhura lusted for possession of that small house on the hill. She believed it was for a house of pleasure for herself.

"Persuade the gold-digger to transfer the lease of it," she suggested. "He is thy servant. He dare not refuse."

But Gungadhura had already enough experience of Richard Blaine to suspect the American of limitless powers of refusal. He was superstitious enough to believe in the alleged vision of Jinendra's priest, that the clue to the Treasure of Sialpore would be found in the cellar of that house, where Jengal Singh had placed it; impious enough to double-cross the priest, and to use any means whatever, foul preferred, to get possession of the clue. But he was sensible enough to know that Dick Blaine could not be put out of his house by less than legal process.

PATALI, watching the expression of his eyes, mercurially changed her tactics.

"Today the court is closed," she said. "Tomorrow Mukhum Dass will go to file his paper and defeat the suit of Dhulap Singh. He will ride by way of the *ghat* between the temple of Siva and the place where the dead Afghan kept his camels. He must ride that way, for his home is on the edge of town."

But Gungadhura shook his head. He hardly dared seize Mukhum Dass or have him robbed, because the money-lender was registered as a British subject, which gave him full right to be extortionate in any State he pleased, with protection in case of interference. He could rob Dick Blaine with better prospect of impunity.

Suddenly he decided to throw caution to the winds. Patali ceased from stroking his head, for she recognized in his eyes the blaze of determination, and it put all her instincts on the defensive.

"Pen, ink and paper!" he ordered.

Patali brought them, and he addressed the envelop first, practising the spelling and the none too easily accomplished English.

"Why to him?" she asked, watching beside his shoulder. "If you send him a letter he will think himself important. Word of mouth——"

"Silence, fool! He would not come without a letter."

"Better to meet him then as if by accident and——"

"There is no time. That cursed daughter of my uncle is up to mischief. She has fled. Would that Yum had her! She went to Samson days ago. The English harass us. She has made a bargain with the English to get the Treasure first and ruin me. I need what I need swiftly!"

"Then the house is not for me?"

"No!"

He wrote the letter, scratching it laboriously in a narrow Italian hand; then sealed and sent it by a messenger. But Patali, sure in her own mind that her second thoughts had been best and determined to have the house for her own, went out to set spies to keep a very careful eye on Mukhum Dass and to report the money-lender's movements to her hour by hour.

IN LESS than an hour Dick Blaine arrived by dog-cart in answer to the note, and Patali did her best to listen through a keyhole to the interview. But she was caught in the act by Gungadhura's much neglected queen, and sent to another part of the palace with a string of unedifying titles ringing in her ears.

There was not a great deal to hear. Dick Blaine was perfectly satisfied to let the maharaja search his cellar. He was almost suspiciously complaisant, making no objection whatever to surrendering the key and explaining at considerable length just how it would be easiest to draw the nails. He would be away from home all day, but Chamu the butler would undoubtedly admit the maharaja and his men.

For the rest, he hoped they would find what they were looking for, whatever that might be; and he sincerely hoped that the maharaja had not hurt his head seriously.

Asked why he had nailed the cellar door down, he replied that he objected to unauthorized people nosing about in there.

"Who has been in the cellar?" asked Gungadhura.

"Only Tom Tripe." "Are you sure?"

"Quite. Until that very evening I always kept the cellar padlocked. It's a Yale lock. There's nobody in this man's town could pick it."

"Well—thank you for the permission."

"Don't mention it. I hope your head don't hurt you much. Good morning."

Dick little suspected, as he drove the dog-cart across the bridge toward the club, chuckling over the quick success of Yasmini's ruse, that he himself had set the stage for tragedy.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Frame-Up

By Gordon Young

Author of "Storm Rovers," "Bluffed," etc.

IT WOULD perhaps be best to say a word or two about the sort of educated thoughts that floated and drifted through the brain of Dr. Townsley, before telling of how he coldly murdered Dehane, expecting to marry his daughter, Margot.

Townsley believed man was an animal that had more or less accidentally through the use of fire become the dominant creature. He believed religion in any form was just superstition and that when a man died he was dead as a plucked turnip. He saw nothing in nature but impersonal laws that

had no regard for morals or virtues and he thought his fellow man was stupid and easily befuddled.

It took him a long time to decide to kill Dehane.

Dehane was a miserly old money-lender. He got no enjoyment out of his wealth, or what was supposed to be his wealth. All of it would go to Margot. The man that married Margot would be well fixed.

Townsley was a young physician with a great deal of surgical ability, largely because his fingers were steady as forceps. He was never enough concerned with sympathy for a patient to be agitated. He did not care for his profession and had to spend much of his income in keeping up appearances. He felt that Dehane was an old miser whose loss to the world would be a blessing—a feeling in part due to the way Dehane had resisted a small enough bill from the doctor for treating Margot.

Dr. Townsley liked Margot. She was a sweet girl, so unlike her father that the relation might almost be doubted. But Townsley did not believe in love as it is believed in by young girls, some older ones, and as practically all writers of stories pretend to believe in it.

Townsley reflected that he would work all of his life, killing people by mistakes, and when the best part of his life was gone he would still be without money; while if he schemed aright and killed but one person he would be comfortable, respected, influential. At least, so he said to himself. Little inaudible voices whispered over and over—

"Why not?"

Why not, indeed? He had butchered many cats, dogs and rabbits; and man was of no more importance to nature than a cat.

The only thing he had to fear was being suspected, convicted, punished. But any man with a clever cold brain could outplan and outwit the police. Detectives might say that even the cleverest criminals left clues and always overlooked some little detail, but that was a sort of precautionary discouragement to young would-be criminals. There were plenty of murders and robberies that remained unsolved.

Of course he must marry Margot. She liked him. He knew little enough about women to think that he could make almost any woman love him if he had a favorable chance to be with her. Many men think that.

The weakest position in his scheme of things was that he must not marry Margot until after her father's death. There were two reasons for this, the important one being that Dehane did not want her to marry. She saved him the expense of a housekeeper. That is what Townsley thought, anyway.

And suspicion would gravitate very quickly to a son-in-law who had not been on good terms with the old man, but who became in a way his heir. Besides, it would seem natural to marry a girl suddenly left alone in the world by a tragedy; it would seem that his sympathies had been touched.

Dr. Townsley was a cold-blooded schemer. He studied the situation from every angle and nobody suspected that a murderer's brain was poised behind his clear-cut face, with gray eyes full of alert intelligence.

Then Townsley made a speculative investment with more money than he could afford to lose, and lost it; and about the same time he discovered that for some time Margot had been receiving much attention from a young fellow by the name of Ranier. He met young Ranier and was as pleasant to him as possible, took him to lunch, had him up to his rooms and rapidly became what is superficially known as a good friend.

GEORGE DEHANE was murdered in the evening between half-past five and seven o'clock in his office on the third floor of an old and fourth-rate office building. He was a suspicious, watchful man who kept his customers in front of him and a loaded revolver in an open drawer by his elbow; yet the back of his head was broken in, crushed.

He was a money-lender, a usurer, loan-shark, one of those fellows who lend at five per cent. per month if your need is great enough and deduct the first month's interest from the principal. It was said that he would sell a mortgaged bed from under a dying man. Many people thought it was a wonder that somebody had not "got" him long before.

He was not an elderly man, but had a thin, sharp face, heavily wrinkled, that gave an impression of age, and round shoulders. When he walked there was a suggestion of huddling invisible money-bags to his bosom; and people had spoken of him as "Old

Dehane" for fifteen years simply because he had nothing of youth about him. There was no warmth in him. The mouth was a crack; the eyes were shriveled and sharp; his hands were lean, fleshless money-rakes.

In his one-room office he had a few chairs, two desks and a safe. That was all of the furniture. Two or three insurance calendars ornamented the wall, and the notary license, made out to his clerk, hung above the safe. The floor was bare and black except for a small worn rug near the center of the room. Dehane had been doing business in that same office for sixteen years and the calendars were about all that had been changed. Perhaps a penholder or two, but scarcely more.

During that time his large roll-top desk had been littered with papers, and possibly at the bottom might have been found notations and postmarks made in the early occupancy of the room. He was methodical, careful, about his money-papers; but circulars, bills, offers of investments, pleas for extensions and explanations why the interest could not be met, were left to lie just about as they fell and occasionally a large crystal-dome paperweight would be fished from under the papers and laid on top to keep them from getting away.

It was just such a paperweight as anybody for one dollar and thirty-five cents may get from the nearest stationery store; though anybody might be sure that Dehane had never paid any such sum for it. Probably it came with the desk, which he got second-hand.

Dehane always sat facing the door, with his back to a window, and his right elbow usually rested on the desk. He used the little sliding board above the top drawer to write on, and the people who did business with him sat in a straight kitchen chair in front of him. He was shrewd, watchful; but because he had money to lend, always people were coming to seek him out. Usually they were poor people, timid, grateful at the times; later to be resentful; though being poor, they might be used to being squeezed, pinched.

The janitor found the body. He did all the sweeping of halls and rooms by himself, and was late in getting around with his wide push-broom and bucket of moistened sawdust.

It surprized him to find Dehane's door unlocked. He pressed the switch by the door and had started for the waste-basket when he noticed the body half-sprawled on the floor like that of a drunken man. Then he saw the wound at the back of the head—and nothing more. He fled.

The janitor did not remember running down the stairs, but must have done so, for when he came to himself he was beside the cigar-stand next door to the building's entrance and telling the man behind the counter to telephone the police that old man Dehane had been murdered. The cigar-stand man said that the janitor was pale as skimmed milk.

The police took charge.

Right away they saw that robbery was not the motive. Then it must be revenge. A money-lender is likely to have many enemies.

They got in touch with Dehane's stenographer. Her name was Harriet Waldron. A policeman went in an auto and brought her down to headquarters.

She was well past forty, unmarried, of the stolid, dull, patient type. She had been with Mr. Dehane for sixteen years. She had always liked him. He was peculiar, but really kind-hearted when you got to know him.

Yes, Mr. Dehane had often been threatened. Usually by letter, by anonymous, badly scrawled, abusive letters, to which he paid no attention at all. Sometimes, but not often, he was threatened by telephone. He never tried to find out who made the threats. He was always suspicious and careful and kept the revolver at hand; but she thought it was fear of being robbed that made him take that precaution. He did not seem to have any fear for his life.

She sat stolid and half-sad, wearing a black bonnet-like hat and last season's jacket, while detectives sat and stood about her. They listened gravely, watchfully, and from time to time asked questions. There was no haste about them. They were patient, quiet, observant, kindly. The big, slow-voiced men were gentle with her.

"At what time did you leave the office, Miss Waldron?"

That seemed to remind her of something. She had left at half-past five. Mr. Dehane usually left at five, but Mr. Ranier had telephoned shortly before five o'clock and asked Mr. Dehane to remain until he came.

The captain of detectives cleared his throat slightly and moved forward an inch

or two in his chair. The sergeant of detectives, McCulley, a heavy, inscrutable man, half-shut his eyes and waited. This mystery might not be so difficult after all.

Mr. Howard Ranier. He was, she believed, with the Eagle Bond Company. He was a young fellow, not over twenty-two or three. A few times during the past year he had come into the office with Miss Margot Dehane, usually at noon, when she was down shopping.

So far as she knew there had never been any difficulties between Mr. Dehane and young Ranier; but there might have been and she not know. But yes; she remembered now that his voice had seemed a little strange and agitated when he telephoned that afternoon. He had not asked to speak to Mr. Dehane. She recalled distinctly what had been said; this:

"Miss Waldron? This is Mr. Ranier. Will you please ask Mr. Dehane to stay in the office until I come. I simply must see him on a matter of extreme importance. He must see me——"

Then the voice broke off. She thought central had switched the wires and waited a minute to see if the connection was made again, but it wasn't; then she turned and told Mr. Dehane.

He said:

"Hump! Why couldn't he have talked to me?"

Then he pulled out his watch to notice the time.

McCULLEY and Jackson, detective sergeants, were the experts of headquarters in picking up clues at the scene of crime, and neither of them looked particularly alert. McCulley was a heavy, dull sort of man, who had a habit of saying less than any other man on the force. Somehow he seemed to find words unnecessary and put in most of his time looking and staring.

This practise was disconcerting to the guilty. He had an air that it made no difference what people said to him, or what tales they told; because he knew much more about them than they suspected. The other man was Jackson, who talked continuously but was a good teammate for the silent McCulley. Both were painstaking, of inexhaustible patience and very successful.

When they went to examine Dehane's office before anything had been touched, they closed the door behind and left a policeman on watch. There were two electric lights dangling from the ends of long cords and after surveying the room for a long time, Jackson took one of the bulbs and stepped forward to examine the body.

"Knocked out first blow."

"Umph," Sergeant McCulley grunted and pointed to where lay a heavy glass paperweight.

It had the shape of an orange cut in two, and the flat side had sharp edges. The weight was about eight ounces. Apparently it had been used to strike Dehane and had then fallen from the murderer's hand.

Jackson's eyes glowed as he bent to it.

"Careful," he admonished himself as he reached out gently, eagerly.

There is scarcely anything better than glass for catching and holding finger-prints.

After a few minutes' examination of the room, Jackson said:

"Mac, I figure it this way. The murderer was somebody well known to Dehane. A stranger could never have got behind that old fellow to give him a wallop. Gun in the drawer there just waiting for the strangers that tried it. Here's my guess. Some friend comes in, sits down and they talk. They don't get angry, or at least not enough to make Dehane suspicious. The friend gets hold of the paperweight, examines it. He waits his chance.

"Dehane was writing something—pen on the floor, ink-spots. Looks like he was writing something. Friend steps up as if to look over his shoulder. A couple of blows. It's done. Simple. He grabs up what Dehane had wrote and gets out. Simple. The marks show whose fingers had that weight. And there's money in the drawer and some more in the safe untouched. It wasn't robbery."

HOWARD RANIER was found in bed by the two officers that visited his rooms at the Ashbury Apartments, though it was not much after nine o'clock. He was, or pretended to be, asleep. The girl at the switchboard downstairs could get no answer, but the officers went up anyway with the janitor and on a chance knocked hard just before trying to open the door with a pass-key. They had not expected to find Ranier, but hoped to find something in his room that might help

the case. They were patrolmen and eager to get on in the world.

Ranier came to the door in pajamas and seemed half-dazed, as a man does who awakens in a strong light. He blinked at the detectives in a nervous, disconcerted way and they glared at him accusingly.

"Why didn't you answer the phone? Asleep, huh. You don't know what's the matter? You better get into your clothes and come along with us to headquarters. What? Maybe it's news to you that old Dehane's been murdered."

Ranier was young, even for twenty-two or three. He had not been long out of college and by his father's influence had been started on a career in the Eagle Bond Company. He had been put into the office to familiarize himself with the ways of finance and investments rather than to earn a living. He had the sensitive features of the young man who has never had to work hard nor worry at all, and who has been moderate in his pleasures. His hair was brown and inclined to curl, for which reason he wore it very short. He was not the sort of youth who admired curly hair on himself; and his deep, clear blue eyes had the look of innocence. But every veteran police officer can tell of cold-blooded murderers, men and women, who were the pictures of innocence.

When young Ranier heard that Dehane had been murdered he put a slender hand to his forehead and stared like a man peering through a fog.

"Dead. You mean killed by somebody?"

The policemen smiled contemptuously. They thought he was making a very poor bluff of it.

"Get into your clothes, an' be quick. They'll tell you all about it at headquarters."

Ranier was brought to headquarters and hurried into the room of the captain of detectives where Sergeants McCulley and Jackson were also waiting. A stenographer sat to one side, fingering a pencil.

During the more than hour and a half that he was in the room McCulley did not say a half-dozen words; but he looked at Rainer almost continually. The boy was nervous, with an air of puzzlement that may have been assumed.

Of course he denied the crime. He denied very nearly everything. He had not been near Dehane's office for two weeks. He had not telephoned to Miss Waldron. Where had he been? He had been at home, in bed, asleep from half-past four until the policemen came.

His story was this:

He had lunched with Dr. Townsley—Dr. Frank Townsley.

Dr. Townsley had said:

"Howard, what is the matter with you? You are not looking well. Feverish. Rather sunken around the eyes. Come back to the office with me after lunch and I'll go over you pretty carefully."

He usually lunched with Dr. Townsley once or twice a week, and the doctor had been telling him for some time that he ought to look out for his health. After lunch he had gone to Dr. Townsley's office and had an examination. The doctor tested his heart, had him lift little objects to catch the muscular reaction, took his blood-pressure and did go over him carefully. Then the doctor had said he didn't think there was anything really serious the matter.

"Just a touch of fever. You ought to go home and turn in. Here's a bit of quinin. But you must go to bed."

He gave him a capsule and told him to take it just before he went to bed and to go to bed at once; but Ranier said there was some work he had to do at the office first. Dr. Townsley said:

"Well, go home as soon as you can. Telephone me when you get home—just before you turn in. I want to know that my advice is followed. Patients have a way of forgetting to do what they are told. Then they blame the doctor for not curing them."

Ranier had the delivery of several thousand dollars' worth of bonds to make to a customer, and when that was done there were other little matters to take care of, so he forgot all about going home and to bed until Dr. Townsley telephoned the office.

"All right, doctor. I'll go now."

"Telephone me when you get in bed."

"I'll do that."

And he did.

He did not remember another thing until the policemen had battered on the door.

The captain spoke in a low voice to the stenographer, mentioning Dr. Townsley's name. The stenographer nodded and left the room.

"Ranier," said the captain, "in our work

we have to examine a great many people, innocent people, to get our evidence." Then quickly, "You haven't any objections to letting us get your finger-prints?"

Ranier hesitated. Perhaps he did not quite understand, perhaps he understood too well that the recording of his finger-prints was identifying him with the guilty, with the branded. Besides, the captain had asked the question in a way that was almost startling and as if there was reason to expect resistance.

"No," said Ranier, shaking his head slightly with a quick, agitated motion, "I don't—you don't think it was me!"

His eyes had a frightened look of troubled inquiry. He was just beginning to realize what it meant to be suspected of murder; and though in dramatic literature the anguish of the guilty is very well set forth, there is a misguided inclination on the part of people to believe that the conscience of the innocent keeps them from suffering greatly.

"Son," said Jackson, not unfriendly, bringing out a little pad and running an inky rubber roller across it, "we'll very soon tell you all about what we think. Just put your hand here. Spread 'em a little. That's it. Now gently. Bear down lightly. A little more."

Then he held Ranier's hand at the wrist, and guided the pressure of each finger and thumb in turn on to a charted cardboard.

When the impression was taken the captain and McCulley bent their heads together studiously as from under the blotter of his desk the captain took the print of a photograph, still wet, so recently had it been made. They compared the photograph with the impressions.

"No doubt of it," said the captain in a low voice that was queerly solemn and exultant: solemn as a death-sentence, exultant as the hunter who has swiftly brought down dangerous game.

McCulley lifted his heavy, inscrutable face and gazed long at the boy's face. What thoughts the veteran detective had were as hidden as if behind a mask.

Ranier suddenly knew that they believed him guilty, and he rose from his seat protestingly; but before he could speak the captain, with a dramatic abrupt gesture thrust out his hand; and in his hand, with the unexpectedness of a magician's art, was a heavy glass paperweight.

"There," cried the captain. "There—you murdered him with this!"

Ranier pleaded in protest.

"No, no, no!" he begged. His voice was tight and choked. "I didn't—I couldn't! I was asleep!"

The captain of detectives laughed cynically. He was not laughing out of amusement; not at all. That laugh was a part of a mild third degree, designed and used to break down the self-assurance of criminals.

"Ho-ho-ho," went the captain.

"Ha-ha," Jackson echoed.

Sergeant McCulley kept silent, his eyes motionless.

"Asleep!" said the captain.

"That's good—I'll say that's good," Jackson answered.

Then the captain started up from his chair, glaring threateningly.

"Dehane's head was crushed with this glass. Your finger-prints are on it. Ranier, you haven't a chance in the world. You murdered Dehane! Why? *Why?*"

He and Jackson worried the boy with that imperative "Why?" The captain was alternately kindly and bullying, paternal and threatening. Carefully, over and over, he showed Ranier that there was not a vestige of doubt in the evidence and that nothing was to be gained by the stubbornness of denial.

He did not say so, but intimated coaxingly that Ranier would find it to his advantage to come clean, make a confession, tell all about just how it happened. The captain shrewdly stressed Dehane's unworthy character, called him a —— old miser; but Ranier would not confess. Jackson joined in with one sort of argument and another; but Sergeant McCulley said nothing and just stared at the boy.

Ranier scarcely knew what he was saying; and he had no sooner mentioned Margot's name than the captain and Jackson were boring at him with questions until they had got out of him the information that he loved her, that he was engaged to her, that the engagement was a secret between them because they knew Dehane would oppose their heart's desire.

At that the captain sat back with a heavy relieved sigh and lighted a cigar with the air of a man who has finished a hard, ticklish job.

"What do you think, Mac?" asked the

captain as he picked up the buzzing telephone.

Without moving, McCulley answered—"There's nothing to think."

From the front office the desk-sergeant was notifying the captain that Dr. Townsley, for whom he had sent, was there. Miss Margot Dehane was with him.

Margot came into the room ahead of the doctor. At once unerringly as by instinct, she looked at Ranier without a glance elsewhere and she ran to him with hands half-extended. She said—

"Howard, oh, Howard!"

He stood up unsteadily. He took her hands graspingly, as if there was nothing else left in the world to hold to, and pressed them to him. He seemed guilty; or at least he was lacking that assertive upright air popularly associated with innocence.

Dr. Townsley, quite erect and poised, had approached and laid a hand on the boy's shoulder and was looking earnestly toward his down-turned face.

Margot was almost diminutive, and those who knew her thought of her personality rather than of her beauty, for she had an odd little face, not at all classic but slightly irregular. The dark eyes were large, warm. Whatever she felt came into her eyes.

Jackson afterward said to McCulley:

"'Member Dave Wharton's wife? His jolt was fifteen year an' she waited for 'im. Them two women got the same kind o' eyes."

Margot's eyes were flooded with tears. They ran down her cheeks, but she was not sobbing.

"Oh, Howard, what is the matter? Why do they think it was you? Dr. Townsley telephoned me and I came right down with him. I had to come. Talk to me, Howard. I believe in you. Oh, Howard boy, what is it all about?"

Young Ranier answered—

"My——,I—I didn't!" and convulsively bent low over her shoulder.

Dr. Townsley spoke. He had the modulated voice of the professional man who has carefully schooled himself in every little detail of manner and has a firm enunciation, erect bearing, direct gaze. He said:

"Howard, my boy, brace up. We know there has been a mistake. It will come out all right. We will make it come out all right."

Dr. Townsley confirmed the boy's story in every detail. With deliberation, thoughtfully, he gave the exact wording of the conversation at the restaurant, office and over the telephone. Margot watched him gratefully. Ranier stared in a sort of hopeful daze. The detectives were polite, though the captain showed suppressed impatience by glancing at the ceiling, twiddling his fingers, looking repeatedly at his watch. Jackson scraped his feet once in a while. McCulley sat immobile as Buddha, his heavy eyes set on the doctor's face.

At last the captain interrupted:

"Yes, yes, doctor. That's all very well. Maybe he did telephone you that he was going to bed. Maybe he went to bed. But he got up again. He telephoned Dehane's office and he made an appointment. He went to that office and murdered Dehane with that paperweight. See? His finger-marks were on it. You can't get around that. He did it. It is easy to sneak out of bed.

"He says people saw him go up to his room. Maybe we can find some that saw him sneak out. If we can't it doesn't matter. He sneaked out. His finger-prints were here. Your orders and quinin helped make an alibi for him. He expected them to. Planned it. Pretended to be asleep when the officers went for him. No, there is not a jury under heaven that won't hang him——"

Margot had cried aloud, and sobbing, fell against the boy.

THE case was splattered and splashed over the newspapers for many days. All the ingredients of news were there. The murdered man had a few money-bags, though not nearly so many as were expected; the supposedly guilty man was a young fellow of good family whose parents were ready to spend thousands; but most newsy of all, the daughter of the murdered man remained engaged to the man of whose guilt there was no doubt. The papers wondered what the quarrel had been over; what had Dehane been writing at the time he was struck down. Some asked: Did Ranier commit the crime in his sleep? And so forth, with all manner of sensational and insincere conjectures.

It developed that Dehane had not left a fortune or anything like a fortune. In

the first place, usurers do not pile up fortunes. They play a game with loaded dice against the needy; but for all the astonishing figures relating to the theoretical penny invested by Moses at compound interest, there are no millionaire chattel-mortgagers. Mere interest doesn't make people rich. They must create and develop.

During days and weeks that followed, Dr. Townsley was a considerate friend of Margot's. He called often. He brought her little gifts. He discussed the case with her and very carefully avoided any suspicion that Ranier might be guilty. Her faith was strong as her love.

But as weeks went on, Dr. Townsley changed. He was not nearly so attentive and was more preoccupied than friends had ever seen him. Also ill-health seemed to have put out a hand toward him. He had troubles that he kept to himself.

Howard Ranier was tried by twelve men said to be good and true; and when the district attorney pointed out that there was but one chance in a million and a half of finger-prints being duplicated, and so but one chance in a million and a half of young Ranier not being the murderer, he was promptly found to be guilty.

The judge sentenced him to be hanged and Margot fainted in the court-room.

During the trying days that followed Margot was practically without a friend. Dr. Townsley came often, but he was strangely changed and would lapse into silences. But an odd friendship had almost imperceptibly grown up between Margot and Sergeant McCulley, who saw her frequently and at times took her to his home where Mrs. McCulley, a talkative, bustling, cheery woman, gave Margot more mothering in an afternoon than she had had in a lifetime.

"Listen, child," said Mrs. McCulley confidentially one evening while the sergeant stood with hose in hand watering the lawn. "Dan has never let on to anybody but me and his side-partner, Sergeant Jackson, but he believes your boy is innocent and that he is going to clear him. Oh, you mustn't breathe a word. Dan said I shouldn't tell you because the hope would be worse than if you never had it if Dan doesn't clear him.

"I can't tell you a thing, child, because I don't know. You see for yourself how much talking Dan does. Well, he don't do much more to me than to anybody else. But he's been thinking a lot lately. Do you know why he believes the boy is innocent? He says you wouldn't love a man that killed your father. Dan says you are the sort of woman that would have an instinct that'd keep you from such an unnatural thing. Dan has a lot of faith in what he calls a 'hunch'. There, there, girlie. Don't cry. I oughtn't to have talked and got you disturbed, but I thought——"

Margot was enfolded on a broad, ample bosom, and her hair was stroked caressingly by the tenderest hand she had felt since babyhood.

DR. TOWNSLEY stood behind the glass cabinet wherein lay numerous silver-plated implements and held a glass of whisky in his hand.

That is, he held whisky in one hand and in the other an unsigned letter. It was drug-store whisky, and he was getting it by writing a prescription for himself under another name and taking it to a store where he was personally unknown.

For some days now he had been needing increasingly large glasses of whisky, or ever since he began getting those strange, unsigned, badly scrawled letters. The first one had sifted in with the morning's mail and came addressed in pencil and dirty with much handling of unwashed fingers. He opened it. He read one sentence. His heart stopped for a moment. It seemed to have been struck by a dagger of ice. He was temperamentally cold, unmovable; but he had read:

Doc, you and me know who killed old Dehane, don t we?

And that was all, but sufficient to give him such nervous alarm as he had never before experienced. He tried to assure himself that the letter meant nothing, that he had left no clue, that nothing could possibly be known. He said over and over to himself:

"Steady, old man. Steady. Don't get excited. Don't weaken."

It was like the devil giving advice, and Townsley took it.

In a few days he received another badly smeared envelope. The idea came to him that if he carried the envelope to headquarters they could possibly look up and identify the writer; but the idea was flung far away, though oddly enough Sergeants McCulley

and Jackson dropped in on him that morning. Jackson was having a little stomach trouble and asked for a bit of advice.

The second letter strained rather than jarred his nervous system. He was prepared against surprize and braced for a shock. He got it. The letter read:

Get ready, doc. I'm going to need a little money soon.

Blackmail was threatened, and there was no way that he could meet it easily. He did not have money. He wished that he dared to turn the letter over to McCulley and Jackson. The latter became a regular patient and dropped in frequently. Sometimes both of the detectives dropped in, and Townsley wished them ten fathoms deep in the Sulfur Lake because they assumed that he was as much interested in the Dehane case as ever, and Jackson talked of it continuously.

The day after young Ranier was sentenced another note arrived:

Doc, what if I had gone on the stand? Whose neck would have been ordered cracked then? We'll meet soon.

The last sentence nearly unnerved Townsley, who was not easily shaken; and the thought went across his brain, "I must kill him." When he realized what he had thought, he was shocked. Murder seemed more dreadful to him now than it had before he tried it; but he would have to kill that blackmailer. He told himself over and over that he had not expected Ranier to be hanged. Sentenced for life, perhaps; as if being sealed between stone walls for life was more desirable than the narrow confines of wood after death.

His plans had not prospered. Margot, with a stupid, blind, unreasoning womanish tenacity—and in spite of the scandal to her name—clung to Ranier. The newspaper made much of that. Townsley had not ventured to try to supplant the boy in her affections.

Then the anonymous letter-writer had popped up; and the thought, "I must kill him," was the instinctive decision. The fellow would put in an appearance some time soon, and though in the other affair Townsley had been at pains to make it look as unlike a doctor's crime as possible, he would not scruple to use poison or anything with the blackmailer.

But silence followed for several days. Townsley lived in a state of tension. Every strange patient admitted by his office girl was regarded with heart-paused scrutiny, and he was half-expectant to hear the request for money made with a knowing, intimate, half-mocking air.

Nothing happened, except that the doctor used much drug-store whisky; then the fourth letter came. It was business-like and ran:

Listen, doc. I've got to duck in a hurry or get in bad. And take it from me, if I get grabbed I'm going to do the drowning-man act and reach for straws. Get me? I'll tell all I know and get off with as light a jolt as I can. Well, as this is a rush order, I'll let you off easy. Slip a package of money, one thousand dollars, registered, to Thomas H. O'Brien, General Delivery. I need the money. Otherwise—well, I guess I could get it from the Ranier family. I might be tempted to try. Get me? You've got just twenty-four hours. If you be good, I'll say good-by and not bother you any more. But come through, doc, or—you can guess.

That was all.

Like most of the people in the world who have never been subjected to blackmail, Townsley had always held those who yielded to it in great contempt; but no one is likely to understand the almost irresistible lure of hope, the desperate urge to do anything to fend off exposure, until he or she has been offered the choice between paying a blackmailer for silence and paying a lawyer for eloquence.

Townsley was putting in most of his time trying to imagine what this anonymous creature knew, and how he had come to know it. There were no clues. A crime had never been committed with more perfection of detail. Yet some unidentified voice was reaching out of the city's babble and hum with all the assurance of an eye-witness to threaten him. The anxiety worked on Townsley night and day. Peace of mind was gone. Every shadow might be that of the approaching blackmailer; any voice might rise to mocking laughter at him for thinking that he had been clever at crime. And here relief was offered for one thousand dollars.

Like many a man who has become involved with more or less gambling investments and who must live up to appearances, he did not have much money on hand or near at hand. He could raise it, but with effort. He knew, as almost every one knows, that paying a blackmailer is like throwing paper money on a fire to put it out. He

would have advised any other person against doing such a thing.

But as long as there is that quality in human nature that lets people imagine their oil-stock may bound from ten cents to a thousand dollars, victims will also hope that their blackmailer will be appeased by something less than can possibly be squeezed out of them.

Townsley, with letter in hand, was hesitating in his decision, or at least was not sure where he could raise the money, when Jackson came in unannounced.

Townsley rammed the letter into his pocket and forced a cheerful professional manner as he raised the emptied whisky-glass and asked the detective to "Have one?"

"Nope. No," said Jackson. "I still got my bad stomach. By the way, you must have a little bill for me. Fifty dollars. That's really what I come about, but doc—" he removed a bill from his wallet and extended it—"I wanted to show you this letter too. Look at it, will you? You've been interested in the case."

Townsley was looking hard, for he recognized the cheap envelope and penciled address as Jackson fished the letter from his pocket and said:

"Just listen, doc. This is how it goes: 'Chief of Police, Dear Sir: Your dicks are boobs. Ranier is no more guilty than I am. Maybe I'll have something interesting to tell you. But if your boobs could catch me, I'd cough up what I know. It's a lot, believe me. I didn't kill Dehane. But I know who did and all about it. Yours truly—but just guess who I am.'

"Of course," Jackson concluded as he folded the letter and put it back into his pocket, "we're not paying any attention to that. The world's full of cranks that write letters. But if this fellow walks in and tries to tell us something, we'll listen. That's our business, listening."

But Dr. Townsley was not listening. He was pouring himself another drink, and nervously tried to pile the liquor above the brim, so that it spilled on to the floor.

TWO days later Dr. Townsley was visited by Sergeants McCulley and Jackson at his office. He knew there was something wrong at once and steeled himself to appear at ease; but he felt that the steady heavy eyes of McCulley were looking deep within him. There was a psychological impact from McCulley's presence and a sense of power in his silence. The doctor at first had thought him slow and stupid, but later had grown to dread his enigmatic stare.

"We've got to have a little talk with you, doctor," said Jackson with ominous directness and pointing to a chair.

"Certainly. Certainly. But what is the matter?" Townsley asked, agreeable to the best of his efforts.

"That's just it. We want to talk over a little matter."

Jackson placed a chair almost directly in front of the doctor and sat down. McCulley sat on a corner of the table, and scarcely moved. Though it was Jackson who did the talking, it was toward McCulley that the doctor looked repeatedly. Perhaps he felt the force of McCulley's steady eyes that had a kind of weary watchfulness. On the table was a paperweight of glass, a perfect crystal dome about the size of half an orange; and McCulley's fingers idly toyed with it from time to time.

"Doctor," Jackson began, "we know who killed Dehane."

Townsley was expecting something of the kind. He was braced, prepared. He took it with surprizing coolness. It surprized even himself. He said:

"Wasn't it Ranier? I'm certainly glad to hear that! Who is it? I didn't know there was any doubt, though."

"Yes, oh, yes. McCulley here has always had some doubt. Mac doesn't say much. But he never did believe Ranier was guilty. For a while he thought maybe the boy was hypnotized——"

"Hypnotized!"

"But Mac isn't much of a hand to believe in nonsense. And we were pretty much stumped until we got in touch with O'Brien."

Townsley almost collapsed, but set himself rigidly. Every muscle was tense, strained. He would admit nothing. He would show nothing. He even smiled a little. They would not trick him into a confession or into an admission. Let them bring on O'Brien. Nothing could be proved. Those were the thoughts and that was the mood Townsley was in as he listened with increasing amazement.

"O'Brien says that capsule you gave young Ranier wasn't quinin at all, but dope. And you sent him to bed, took pains to

make sure he was in bed, so nobody would see him or know where he was and he couldn't prove an alibi. That give you a free hand. Now, just a minute, doctor. Your turn 'll come to talk. Then when you knew the boy was due for a long sleep, you telephoned Dehane's office, changed your voice a little, pretended to be excited, and made an appointment in Ranier's name.

"Sit still, doctor. Just keep quiet a minute or two longer. You'll hear all about it. You went to the office after you knew Dehane's stenographer was gone. You may have worn smoked glasses so nobody would recognize you on the stairs. The elevator wasn't running anyway, so there wasn't much chance of your being seen. You told Dehane you just dropped in, or something like that.

"Then you asked him to write out a little something—O'Brien isn't quite sure just what—maybe an address or something. He started to write it, and you struck him over the head. Then you very carefully laid down on the floor the paperweight you gave young Ranier to hold when he was getting an examination in your office after that lunch. You handled it with gloves so no marks would show but his. Then you took away the paperweight on Dehane's desk——"

"That's a lie! A —— lie!" Townsley cried, jumping up.

"No," said the heavy, slow voice of McCulley. "No. One thing you overlooked. Every criminal makes a mistake or two; and there was one thing you overlooked, doctor. Dehane's paperweight was just like the one you used excepting Dehane's had his initials scratched on the bottom."

With an anxious, desperate flash-like gesture, Townsley reached to the desk and snatched up the paperweight from near McCulley's fingers; and he rapidly searched its surface.

"Nothing of the kind!" he cried triumphantly. Then too late he realized that he had been tricked, trapped, beaten. "I mean—I—there's been— Oh,——!"

He could not even make an attempt at bluffing it out. Too long he had been using whisky for strength, and when the crash came his nerve was gone. The long strain of the O'Brien menace was over. Men confess crimes that hang them with a sense of relief. Their faces are not toward the future. They are glad to tell the truth. It is like dropping a great burden. And surprized, tricked and shattered, Townsley gave way.

By his impulsive and unsuspecting admission that the paperweight on his desk was the one removed from Dehane's office, all the other evidence automatically was established, for he could not explain away the paperweight except by confession. He gave in completely. He was wrecked, hopeless; and before the expressionless face of McCulley, held out his wrists in abject surrender.

THAT'S the story, but this by way of Post Script.

McCulley and Jackson were wise detectives and realized that their case against him would not be worth much if a clever criminal lawyer should coach the doctor to a complete denial of the confession. So they had a consultation with the district attorney, and another one with the judge; and before Townsley had a chance to get back his nerve or had demanded a lawyer the detectives pointed out to him that if he should be convicted by a jury, the sentence would undoubtedly be death. But if he would go into court and confess he would get off with something lighter—with ninety-nine years.

"And of course," said Jackson, with the careless convincing way that detectives have at times, "you know we've got a cinch the minute O'Brien goes on the stand. It is up to you to say whether you hit the chair or do life. A lot o' things can happen in ninety-nine years, you know. Pardons an' things."

So it was that Dr. Townsley went into court, confessed, was sentenced and inside of forty-eight hours was handcuffed to Jackson and on his way to prison.

Most of the way he was morose, lifeless. But near the end of the trip he stirred from his black meditations and he said—

"Tell me one thing, will you?"

"Yes," said Jackson. "Anything."

"Who is this O'Brien? And how in —— did he find out?"

And Jackson answered:

"There is no O'Brien. Y'see, Mac didn't hardly even dare suspect you; but he took a chance an' wrote you a note. You never peeped to anybody. That looked bad. So he made it a little stronger next time. You began to look worried. Then he started to dig in, an' you showed you were being hit—

ever' time. When you paid blackmail he knew we had you. That fifty I handed you was a marked bill. We took a chance you'd be so short you'd have to use it. An' we figured that at best we'd be mighty hard up for evidence. We were too."

Townsley almost leaped from the seat. He saw how he had been cheated, bluffed, trapped—and now was at the door of the penitentiary. He cursed himself.

"No, no, doctor. You're wrong there. You oughtn't to think we didn't have a thing on you—or even a clue. Mac don't say much, but one o' the things he does say is that ever' criminal carries the best clue right around with him an' can't shake it—that's a sense of guilt. An' it's what tripped you."

SIGN-TALK

by Henry Herbert Knibbs

MOCCASIN-SHOD, and his black hair a-glisten with rain,
Ni-tan-man-kwi-i, The Lone Wolf, made gesture of greeting;
Hard riding; the night—then a galloping horse on the plain,
A camp in the hills and the journey that led to our meeting.

He flung himself close to my fire and in silence he lay,
His gaze on the embers, his deep eyes so somberly dreaming.
The shadows fell swiftly, and swift on the wind went the day.
In the firelight his blanket and rain-sodden shoulders were steaming.

"Lean hunger kept pace with your ride over desolate sands,"
So I told him, endeavoring pictureful words without speaking.
He nodded and smiled; then a swift, graceful turn of his hands;
"Yet riding is better than walking—and finding, than seeking."

"Your horse," I made sign, "he is out in the night and the storm."
The Lone Wolf's quick fingers were laced in the form of a tipi,
Then they twinkled as grass that is growing. "Round-bellied and warm,
He stands in your stable." Head nodding—plain sign-talk for "sleepy."

We ate by the fire, as of old. We had made many fires
On the trail and the hunt—in the lodge when the rough Winter weather
Was wild as the spirit that surged through the heart of his sires,
Many moons, many suns since The Lone Wolf and I rode together.

He had found me outworn in the desert, a chattering ghost;
He had given me water and fought my wild frenzy of drinking;
Helped me up to his horse, led the long, weary way to the post.
A fillip of Chance made us brothers. . . . The embers were sinking.

He read in my eyes that our youth was the theme of my thought.
He touched his breast lightly, then, closing his finger-tips, hollowed
A cup—thus he imaged a memory suddenly caught
From the chasm of years that divided the trails we had followed.

He slept by my fire while the roar of the wind and the rain
Died away to a whisper. I woke with the dawn; it was snowing.
I saw from the portal a rider far out on the plain.
He was gone. On the hearth a dim ember was fitfully glowing.

In Self-Defense

By Captain Dingle

Author of "The Liar," "Every Man's Hand," etc.

"STOW that racket, for'ard!"

It was an unusual order. The dog-watches are the men's own at sea, barring vitally necessary ship's work; and the little knot of men that lounged about the fore-hatch, applauding the clever clog-dancing of young Anderson, glanced aft at the mate with something of bovine wonder in their incredulous faces. Anderson did not hear the order, for his clogs were clattering merrily. But again it came—

"Stow that racket, you gol-darned mule!"

This time it was accompanied by backing in the shape of a greenheart belaying-pin which bounced off young Anderson's skull into the coiled gear at the fore fiferail and stretched him dazed and bleeding on the hatch. Muttered oaths were severely muffled as the men picked up their messmate and took him to his berth; dark faces which ought to have worn the look of men affronted now gloomed like the masks of wooden men.

For the *Ruapehu* was a hot ship. Not all the blood boats and buckos passed out with the Western Ocean packets and Cape Horners. Here was a ship, plying the Australian and New Zealand coasts, which had earned the name of a hot one indeed. With her bald-headed bowsprit and sawed-off t'gallant-masts she lacked some of the glory that had been hers when she flew the cock on the out-and-home Colonial run. She sometimes had trouble in gathering cargoes; but by dint of poking her sharp nose into out-of-the-way ports between steamers she contrived to sweep up enough wool and hides and rabbit skins and tinned bunny to pay her owners a dividend. But always her troubles in keeping crews were real ones, for her skipper was a smug, slick, superior sort of pig-man, who, possessing every intellectual merit possessable by man, looked for the grosser animal qualities in his mates; and they, glad of the easy berth and absence of interference from the skipper, saw to it that the men they shipped were kept in mind of their relative places.

But even men trampled underfoot will squirm sometimes, if only vocally. The men who washed and bandaged young Anderson's cracked head could not be kept quiet in the forecastle, out of hearing of those rawhiding mates.

"Dot mate neets von bick hammerin'!" growled Werter, a six-foot-two hulk of an A.B. with a fifty-inch chest.

"Then why the —— don't you take a crack at him?" snapped Anderson furiously. "You're big enough and ugly enough to eat the blighter."

"Aw, 'Dutch' is shootin' off his mouth as usual," rejoined a meek old man holding a basin of water for the first-aid performer. "I wish I was built like him, by golly!"

"Oh, shut up, you fo'csle heroes!" Anderson cried with passionate anger. "You can all lick 'em one hand when you're down here and they can't see or hear you; but

you'll all stand by, a dozen of you, and see one of the big sweeps lay a fellow out with a club and none of you will make a peep. You give me a worse pain than the pin. Give us a rest, for ——'s sake."

That was about the truth of the case. Talk they would, and talk they did, when distance lessened the risk; but the anger that bit into Anderson's young soul was bitter as gall, because he, of them all, had made an effort once, and had failed for lack of the backing that had been vowed to him. He had boldly protested to the mate when the meek old seaman had been brutally beaten, and had got a beating from both mates for his pains.

That might have been endured, for bruises heal; but the young fellow's merry heart ever urged his nimble feet to dance, and his dancing gave many a treat to weary, subdued shipmates. As a clog-dancer he had few peers even in the professional ranks. At times the skipper himself had stood and watched him with interest. And now, carrying the grudge into the dog-watches, the mate had stopped their one means of amusement, and stopped it brutally.

"Oh, well, tide rises after it falls," Anderson consoled himself over a soothing pipe. "Some time or other I'll get a turn. Why worry?"

The *Ruapehu* was beating slowly against the westerly winds of the Great Bight when the dancing was stopped. There was no more merrymaking in dog-watches until she swam into Israelite Bay looking for a parcel of Western Australia wool. Wool she found, and timber too, an unlooked-for freight that more than three-parts loaded her to her marks. But there was more yet for superior Captain Bailey; for he came on board, on the day she started loading out of lighters alongside, in company with four men attired like the poppies of the field, whose appearance, otherwise, however, was far from bearing out the grandeur of their clothes.

The news soon came forward, filtering through by way of the Japanese steward and the Chinese cook, that the strangers were wealthy miners going home and had booked expensive passages to New Zealand.

"Ho, me sabbee plenty!" chattered Kwung Ling, the Chinese cook, and he had the appearance of panic personified as he peered aft through the door crack. "Sabbee plenty that fashion miners," he gabbled on, and though he was shivering as if with intense chill, he deliberately went to his knife-rack, selected a long French poultry-knife and a cleaver and sat down with a whetstone and steel to put a keener edge on blades already razor-sharp.

The first sign of the unrest which was to come upon all parts of the ship from the gaudily attired miners was seen when the cook stubbornly refused to move out of his galley except by night or early morning. He and the Japanese steward speedily came to high words and almost to blows, for cookie would not go aft for stores nor yet draw his water from the forward tanks.

Those were trifles, however; for, although the *Ruapehu* was different from other hell-ships of an earlier day, inasmuch as the crew fed sumptuously after the Australian fashion, there never was a windjammer seaman yet who was so well fed that he would not do little jobs for the cook in exchange for bits of cabin food; so Kwung Ling's retirement worked no hardship on anybody but himself.

Trouble which threatened greater results, however, loomed large when the mates were forbidden to go ashore. The foremast hands had been kept to the ship; that was the only way to keep them at all; but it was unheard of for the officers to be confined to the ship like so many apprentices under punishment. They could be heard, in no meek and mild terms, laying down the law to the skipper while the miner passengers looked on with joyful grins.

Then came so sudden a change that all hands talked about it in whispers. There was a sharp discussion, in which the miners joined; there were angry hints thrown out that they had better mind their own affairs; then the noise subsided, they all trooped below, to emerge half an hour later in the uttermost good-fellowship.

The skipper's oily face was more greasy and bland; the mates swaggered with an air of owning the ship at least, with hopes of scooping in the earth later on, and had, too, a suspicious appearance of having imbibed more than one drink of stuff which fitted them with rose-colored dream-glasses through which they saw the miners in very different light.

The lading was rushed, too, and no communication was had with the shore after the last raft of timber was shipped except when the skipper went to get his clearance.

While he was ashore, the miners stamped the maindeck, in the lee of the high bulwarks, in obvious impatience. They regained their high spirits when the skipper at last appeared and gave the order to man the windlass before he stepped on deck.

He glanced queerly at the jubilant passengers and hesitated before going below with his papers. Then his smug, superior countenance assumed a greasy smirk as he caught their eyes, and with the least perceptible nod he beckoned them to follow him.

What occurred in the saloon remained largely unrevealed, except for the scratchy bits of talk reported in the forecastle later on by the man who had the wheel on leaving, and who insisted he heard a whole lot through the skylight.

"I tell ye I heared it!" asserted the seaman hotly. "They called the Old Man a bloody pirate, that they did, and he jist laughed like 'twas a good joke. Only laughed harder, he did, when they cussed him like mad. Then he said, sort o' softlike, as there wasn't no call for him to tell the mates, and after that I didn't hear no more except some'at like money passin'."

IT WAS thus early made plain that all was not clear and aboveboard in the ship. What the mystery was remained undiscovered for the time being; what effect it had upon the captain was for all hands to see, for he paced the poop when the ship had got to sea like an admiral rather than a tramp windjammer master. He left the working to the mates entirely, never stooping to give an order, and only toyed with a sextant now and then as if he felt the necessity of keeping a check on the navigation but considered it a horrid bore anyhow.

For the first day or two, while the ship was yet in the Bight, the passengers stayed below most of the time, and their occupation during that time could be guessed by the number of empty bottles that came up and the savory dishes of strange foods that went below. In fact the galley was never without the smell of something tasty, though whatever it was always went aft, and never by any chance into the forecastle. But the *Ruapehu* was not a hungry ship, and the men were satisfied so long as they were not hazed or worked up; and this seemed to have ceased, too, in a very pleasantly marked degree since the advent of the miners. The mates were being too well fed, were too well satisfied with themselves, to waste time bullying a crew which did its work in shipshape fashion.

But once the ship squared away before a singing breeze for Nelson, where her cargo would go to fill up spaces in many a homeward bounder's half-filled holds, the miners appeared on deck again, and still another change came over the vessel. What drinking had gone on had been done below; now it was done at all times and in all places; even the mates took swigs out of black bottles without attempting concealment; they were growing redder of face daily, and even the skipper was greasier and more superior as his eyes grew bright with inner fires.

So things went on for days on end. With a hard, steady quartering breeze, the *Ruapehu* sped east on an easy helm, her sheets and braces untouched, her decks dry and almost level. But never once did young Anderson click his clogged heels; in spite of his shipmates' entreaties, and in spite of the obvious change in the mates' tempers, the tuneful mouth-organ was tuneless, the merry clogs dead.

This was the more noticeable when the second mate came forward especially to fetch Anderson to dance for the passengers.

"Shake a leg, Anderson," the officer bawled through the forecastle door; "the passengers want to see you dance. You'll get a hooker of rum and maybe a piece of money too. Get a move on."

"I can't dance, sir," replied young Anderson shortly.

"Can't— Why, —— yer eyes! Come out here. Why can't you dance?"

"I've got a sore toe, sir."

Voices were heard aft, roaring for the clog-dancer. The second mate glared suspiciously at the seaman, glancing down at his feet, which seemed quite able; then he went out, telling Anderson to stand by.

"Wait till we see what the Old Man says about it," he said. "I bet you'll dance, my bully."

He hastened aft, and the seamen gathered around the unwilling dancer.

"Go on out and dance," said one. "Gor'bli'me, we ain't seen y' shake a leg since——"

"And you won't again in this ship," snapped Anderson, and he said it as if he meant it.

"Aw, don't sulk, lad," urged another older

man. "Ain't got mad at yer shipmates, have y'? Besides, them miners is good for a shot o' rum, maybe for all hands, and just for a few flings o' yer heels. And the mates ain't so bad, nuther, lately, boy."

"To —— with the mates! And to —— with the miners!" cried the young seaman furiously. "D'ye think I forget having my skull cracked by one of those same mates? And the miners, as you call them, they look to me a darned sight more like bushrangers than miners. I've been up to the diggings myself, and miners I've seen in plenty. I won't shake a foot for the likes of them, nor the mates nor skipper either."

"Maybe you're wrong about them miners, lad," the oldest seaman put in gently. "And you might——"

"I'm not so wrong as they are, I'll bet. Look at the poor —— of a Chink. Has he stuck his head outside the galley door in daylight? Not since the miners came on board. You know well enough that Kwung Ling isn't so easily scared, too. He's cooked in the camps and knows a tough when he sees one. No, sir. I don't like the crowd aft, and I don't dance for them."

Down through the humming breeze under the foot of the fore course came the second mate's voice, sharp and commanding.

"Below, there! Send Anderson aft to the captain!"

Young Anderson hurriedly slipped on his shoes, as if to lend color to his claim to a sore toe, and went aft with the full determination to yield nothing of his manhood's privilege to authority. Dancing was his own personal accomplishment, in no way part of his seamanly accomplishments, and he would dance or not, just as he chose, and would see captain, mates and miners in a hotter place than the Great Bight before he'd dance for them against his own choice.

THAT was what he thought as he hurried along the maindeck. In the forecastle doors his shipmates clustered, all peering out to see what was afoot. Kwung Ling peeped out through the cracks of his half-door, with his bright oblique eyes almost closed by the frown on his forehead.

On the poop stood the skipper and his four passengers, and all wore the appearance of having just risen from a prolonged and lurid debauch. Never had the superior captain appeared so foolishly superior. His expression, meant to imply a vast and overwhelming dignity, was by virtue of much Australian Burgundy and Scotch whisky transformed into a vacuous mask of ruddy, inflamed imbecility.

The passengers, having relapsed into their natural estate of semi-intoxication, flung aside what small advances they had made to the decencies of civilization and looked more than ever precisely what they were: tough, half-savage white rascals, disheveled of hair, flushed of face, careless of dress and deportment.

One of them had slung a pistol-belt about his waist, and from time to time took a pot-shot at the bottles as they were flung overside. He reloaded his weapons as Anderson came up to the ladder-foot, and leaned over the rail beside the captain, glowering down upon the young fellow who refused to amuse that august company.

"So you decline to obey orders, eh?" drawled the skipper, staring down superciliously.

"No, sir; I do not," retorted Anderson. "My work does not include dancing. I have never refused to obey an order, sir."

"Then I order you to show these gentlemen, my passengers, some of your steps. Fetch along some music, my man."

"Beg pardon, sir, but I can't dance," insisted Anderson.

"What d'ye mean, can't?"

"I have a sore toe, sir."

The armed miner suddenly leaned down and whispered into the captain's ear, then darted down the cabin companionway, leaving the skipper grinning vacantly at what he had heard. Anderson stood by the ladder, awkwardly waiting to be dismissed; but his dismissal did not come. He shifted from one foot to the other and became vaguely aware that all those red faces at the rail above him were turned upon him with expressions that boded little good for him.

As he half-turned in his uneasy fidgetting, he could see the dodging shapes of the crew under the foresail, and suddenly the whole atmosphere around him seemed evil; he felt a cold sweat breaking out on his neck.

Then there came a noisy flourish on a mouth-organ, followed by a shrill bushman's yell and a capering of heavy boots.

"Le's see whether we can make him dance or not!"

Down the weather poop-ladder stamped the armed miner, a mouth-organ in his

right hand, a heavy revolver in his left.

"Now, li'l' obstinate," he yelled, waving the revolver, "kick them feetsies around! Step, now, lively, an' do yer bestest best onless y' have toes to spare 'stid o' sore toes."

He clapped the mouth-organ to his lips and began to play a rollicking dance-tune with some musical skill. With his pistol he menaced young Anderson's feet, and the seaman backed along the deck. The music stopped.

"Dance, curse y'!" the man roared. "D'ye think I got wind to spare? Start now, afore I git through the introduction, or off goes yer tootsies."

The music started again, and Anderson, still backing, stared around for some means of escape. Then, with his back against the edge of the galley door, his tormentor lost patience and fired the first shot.

The bullet tore leather from his shoe, and his foot tingled as if a galvanic battery had been applied to it. He heard a roar of laughter from aft as the skipper and other passengers saw what was coming, and dimly he saw all of them come down the ladders and draw nearer, intent on the sport. Suddenly realizing the true gravity of his situation when he glanced into the miner's face and saw the red devil lurking there, the young seaman shuffled his feet nervously and gradually broke into a dance.

Another shot speeded his steps, and the music quickened. Soon he was lost in the intricacies of his cleverest steps, and only dimly did he see the threatening figure in front of him. Then the miner's innate brutality urged him to fire another unnecessary shot which tore through leather again and pinched the flesh, and the shot proved the spark which fired the blast.

Fury swift and fiery surged through Anderson's veins. The smoke from the shot had scarcely blown clear of the rail when he changed his step to a rapid climax and finished with a high double kick.

Everything had gone red about him, but he knew that his left toe had smashed the mouth-organ against the miner's lips and that his right shoe had sent the revolver flying from the ruffian's left hand, numbing that member to the wrist. He heard behind him the gasps of his shipmates; he heard the foul oaths of the astonished rascal before him; he had some notion that the officers and passengers were closing in on him.

Then, as in a nightmare, he saw the bleeding-mouthed miner stop wringing his tingling hand, clench his fist and swing a terrific punch for his face. Still as if in a dream he knew that he drew back in time and that the impetus of the wild swing carried the striker completely around. As the man's back was turned to him, he saw his right hand tugging at his second revolver—then the next thing he knew, clearly, was coming to his senses and finding himself gripped by the mates, with a sort of awed solemnity on every face about him, and, at his feet, the dead body of his late tormentor, with the handle of a knife he had surely never seen before sticking out from between his shoulder-blades.

"Get irons and put him below," ordered the captain.

"What's it mean? I didn't kill him!" stammered Anderson, helplessly looking around for a face which did not scowl at him.

A half-laugh answered him.

"Oh, no," rasped the voice of one of the miners. " 'Course you didn't do it! That knife come down out o' heaven, I s'pose? You tell that to the judge, ol' hoss."

Dumbly the seaman submitted to be led aft. He was sure of nothing, except that he had been made to dance, and this horrid thing had happened. But tapping at his brain was the insistent suggestion of some one having whispered as he was led away:

"You no wolly, An'son. Evelly t'ing come light plopel time. I see."

TO THE closed door of the sail-room where the prisoner had eventually been put came the second mate. Still sore at the seaman for flouting his command to amuse the passengers, the officer now discovered a splendid method of sticking splinters into Anderson's soul.

"So you danced, hey?" he jibed, his face close to the circular ventilator of the door. "You're a fine dancer, all right, my bucko, but you're a darn poor specimen of a murderer!"

"I'm no murderer!" Anderson yelled back, stung out of his moody silence. "If I killed that man it was in self-defense, and all you who say you saw me kill him know that!"

"Huh! Self-defense? Knifed in the back?" the second mate chuckled wickedly, listening intently for the groan he could always wring out by that taunt.

Then he wandered aft, bent upon imparting the secret to the mate, so that he, too, might go and take a hack at the tortured seaman.

WHILE Anderson suffered the torments of a damned soul in the sail locker, Captain Bailey held session with the three miners in the seclusion of his own private state-room. The dead man lay in his own bed, where the carpenter was measuring him for a canvas shroud, to be made in case it were found impossible to carry the body into port.

The subject of the discussion was a weighty one.

"D'ye think we'd better chance Melbourne?" asked one of the passengers doubtfully.

"Oh, it's Melbourne without a doubt, gentlemen!" put in the skipper with decision. "I'm not going to carry a murderer a fathom farther than I can help. You can bury your mate decently, too."

"You don't figure in it at all, mister," growled a second miner savagely. "We paid you to carry us direct to New Zealand; paid you —— well, too. You do what we want, see?"

Captain Bailey's superiority almost vanished in face of the venomous look turned upon him by the lowering speaker. The third miner took up the argument.

"Don't start yappin' about orders in a man's ship," he said sharply. "Thing is, do we want to see a pal dumped to the fishes like a lump o' pork, or do we want to see him planted in style and then see that the man as knifed him gets what's due to him?"

"Is there a telegraph from Culver?" muttered the first speaker.

"Oh, I think there's little need to worry about that," the skipper put in again eagerly. "There is a line from Israelite Bay, of course, but I believe I am the only man who could swear to seeing you gentlemen there. I'm certain that nobody else in my ship saw that ——"

"Say, mister, what exackly is your bleedin' game?" came the suspicious growl from the previous critic of the skipper's motives. "Ye're —— anxious to git to Melbourne, seems to me. Don't hunt trouble, I warn ye."

"My dear chap," beamed Bailey with an effort at ease, "my motives are entirely sincere. I have a dead man on board, and he deserves shore burial if possible. I have a murderer on board, who deserves shore burial, too. Ha-ha! I think that's rather good, hey? However, as for my feelings toward you gentlemen, you have paid me, and paid well, for what you want, and if you insist upon standing on for Nelson, why, we'll just read a few words over your unfortunate friend, slip him overboard, and let Anderson sweat a few days longer. His rope will tickle his throat just as much in New Zealand as in Victoria, what?"

"I think we'll take a chance," suggested the first miner with a queer grin at his mates. "We stand to lose that little bet with the other crowd, you know, about gettin' home first, but ——"

He completed the sentence with a harsh laugh in which his mates joined mirthlessly.

"Right y'are, cap'n', Melbourne it is," was the decision.

WHEN the *Ruapehu* reached Melbourne there was just barely time to allow the police to satisfy themselves that the dead man had been stabbed in the back, before the corpse shrieked for burial with an insistence not to be longer denied.

Then came Anderson's trial. It was not delayed unnecessarily, for the corpse was there, the murderer, the knife and a host of witnesses. Anderson stoutly maintained that he had killed the miner in self-defense, if he had killed him at all. He pleaded not guilty at first, refusing to admit even to the counsel provided for him that his hand had driven home that knife. But even the crew, and last of all, the Chinese cook, testified that he had struck the blow, and he thereafter stuck to his plea of self-defense.

The case was so clear, the witnesses so obviously unbiased—his shipmates were too openly sympathetic toward him for their sincerity to be doubted—that Captain Bailey and his passengers were ready to resume their interrupted voyage by the end of the second day. There was no reason for further delay, so far as they could see; but the judge postponed sentence to give the defense the chance asked for to examine Kwung Ling again.

Next day Kwung Ling had disappeared, and the court waited impatiently. Anderson saw his chances dwindling every minute, for, since the trial opened, he had become more and more convinced in his mind

that Kwung Ling himself had driven home that knife, which, nobody denied, was a French poultry-knife from the galley. His belie was strengthened now by the cook's disappearance, and he told his counsel his suspicions. The barrister smiled rather queerly, but begged for a little more time.

The long wait began to get on the nerves of the three miners and the captain. They whispered together and started to leave the court, only to be stopped by some policemen at the door.

"Oh, but you don't want me," expostulated Captain Bailey with a greasy smile. "I am not a material witness, you know."

"Never mind, sir. Just hold on a bit longer," was the reply. "You'll all get told off in a little while. No hurry."

The judge grew impatient and put an end to the delay. He started to sum up, and arrived at the point where grave doubt was to be cast on a plea of self-defense in a case where the victim was clearly knifed in the back.

"That could hardly be, gentlemen," he said to the jury. "A man stabbed in the back can not be threatening the person who deals the stroke——"

"Hol' on; hol' on; I tellee you!"

Kwung Ling hurried into court, followed by two plain-clothes detectives who remained at the doors. The little Chinaman's head was held well up now, and when he caught sight of the three miners he did not avert his face, as hitherto.

Then he went on to tell how it was that Anderson could kill in self-defense a man who had his back turned to him. If he had failed to make his evidence clear before, he made no error now. Kwung Ling was a changed man since he had vanished for those vital hours. At times he glanced at the two detectives as if to gain confidence from them, and in his soft, rolling syllables he told the court:

"Long time I know miner fella. I cook fol camp whe' they stopalong one time. —— robbels, I tell you! I 'flaid fo' me when they come to *Roopeloo*. Man make An'son dance; plenty shoot him feet; sailol kick gun away, minel swing big punch an' not hit it; then minel reach fo' mol' gun when he miss, an' I put knife in sailol's hand and he fling it, so!"

Kwung Ling illustrated by arm-motion the way in which Anderson, unconscious of the act, had thrown the pointed knife like a javelin into the miner's back.

"Why did you interfere? Do you know that ——"

Kwung Ling interrupted the court without a qualm.

"I know s'pose An'son no kill that man, he kill An'son. An' I sabbee s'pose he see me, he kill me too! He——"

In the back of the court there was a sudden scrimmage, and shouting, and a shot crashed out on the stifling air of the room. Captain Bailey stood in dismay, staring down at handcuffs upon his wrists and wondering how it had all happened. But the two detectives and the police together were finding their hands full with the three alarmed miners, and in their mad struggles they knocked him endwise into the huddled crowd, where he remained until he was led away with the robbers of miners' gold whose bribes he had taken to carry them from the scene of their crimes into safety.

"The Chinaman, Kwung Ling, laid information with us that these men were a notorious gang of goldfields highwaymen, your honor," one of the detectives told the judge. "We telegraphed to Culver and gave descriptions of the three men and their dead mate. The reply just came in, *via* Israelite Bay, from Menzies, that all four are wanted for robbing the Menzies Miners' Bank and killing the cashier and a teller. We shall carry them back, sir, if you will arrange the necessary papers for us."

"*H'm!*" mused the judge, glancing keenly at young Anderson. "And what of this Captain Bailey? What has he done that you're holding him?"

"Kwung Ling tells us that the steward told him that the captain knew all along who the passengers were. He had seen a notice ashore after taking them as passengers, and they paid him a thousand pounds to carry on and say nothing."

"I see."

The judge riffled over his papers for a moment; then, turning to the prisoner, he said:

"You are discharged, Anderson. I congratulate you. Things looked very black at one time, and I will state here that I never expected ever to see a case of killing in self-defense where the slain man received his death-wound in the back. However, this proves that such a thing may well be;

but Kwung Ling there ought to have spoken up in the course of his evidence. He almost hanged you, leaving his real evidence until so late."

The judge glared over his spectacles at the inscrutable little Chinaman, and Kwung Ling, with his hands up his sleeves, replied simply:

"I sabbee self-defense, too, judge. S'pose I tellum all yes'day an' day befo', I git killum in night s'pose de thlee man stay loose. S'pose I git detective fi'st, an' detective git thlee bad man plopelly in plison, I no git kill' judge. Sabbee?"

"Yes," smiled the judge, and the bystanders joined in. "I think I sabbee, Kwung Ling. You had almost to kill your young friend here, in self-defense. All right. Run along to your ship. You're a yellow peril—to scamps."

"THE LOST DAUPHIN"

by Hugh Pendexter

ELEAZAR WILLIAMS was the son of Tehoragwanegen, the great war-chief of the Caughnawaga Mohawks. When twelve years old he was taken by his father to Massachusetts to be educated for the white man's road. When he was nineteen he was urged to become a missionary to the Indians. He eagerly accepted the suggestion. He continued under the guidance of various Protestant ministers and at the age of twenty-four represented the American Board of Missions in Canada.

He joined the Indian Department as superintendent-general in 1812, his duties being to dissuade his people from taking up the ax for England. He rendered excellent service for the United States in obtaining information concerning the British troops, and was wounded at the battle of Plattsburg, N. Y.

He took up his residence at Oneida Castle with General A. G. Ellis and remained with him for several years, having promised to teach him Latin, Greek and French. Ellis afterward said Williams knew nothing of these languages, and had for his sole object the acquiring of English from him, Ellis. However, he induced the majority of the Oneidas to abandon paganism. There followed dissension among the Oneidas, who charged Williams with gravely mismanaging a church and school fund.

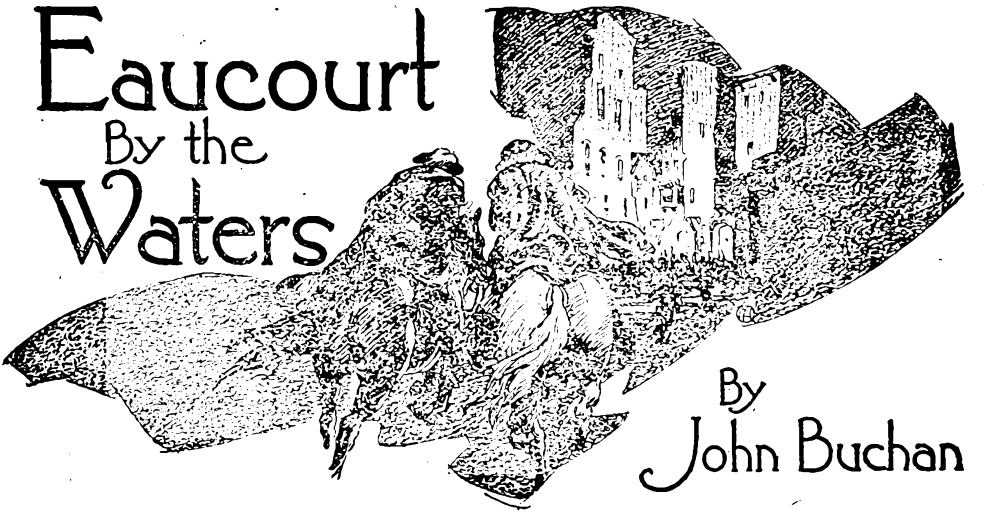
At the age of thirty-two Williams became interested in a scheme to induce the Six Nations to remove to the Lake Michigan country. This idea originated with Rev. Jedediah Morse, who had traveled extensively through the Northwest. Williams took credit for the plan. The Oneidas in council strongly denounced the project. Williams, as interpreter, faked their speech in translating it to Morse. At the next session, Williams absent, the Oneidas declared his report of their first speeches was an absolute falsehood.

In the mean while Williams was at Green Bay, Wis., planning an Indian empire with an emperor, doubtless himself. Now, indeed, was Williams a very busy man. The Ogden Land Company held preemption rights to nearly all Indian lands in western New York. Williams hastened back from the West to enlist the company's aid and to receive the company's money. He besieged the War Department for recognition of his project, once the project of Rev. Jedediah Morse. Williams was great on taking up the other fellow's game and squeezing a penny from it. The land company threw its influence into the scales, and Williams was told to go ahead and escort a party of Indians to Green Bay, the trip being "under the patronage, protection, and with the assistance of the Government." The Iroquois flatly turned down the offer, Red Jacket being their spokesman.

Yet so astute was Williams in scheming that some Oneidas went to Wisconsin.

Then came an eclipse for Williams. The Indians would have none of him. The various missionary societies wearied of his reprehensible activities, and he disappeared, a ruined man. Not until 1853 did he bob to the surface, claiming to be the Dauphin of France, the Lost Prince. Ridiculous as were his claims there were those who believed in him. Rev. John H. Hanson wrote and published "The Lost Prince," 1854, supporting the claim. Williams showed scars on his arms and legs, and declared they were inflicted on him by his jailor, Simon, in the Tower of the Temple, Paris.

Eaucourt By the Waters



By John Buchan

Author of "Prester John."

The Seventh Tale in the Series, "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself

The Story behind the Stories

SO THAT the general idea of this series of stories may be more visible in each issue, two of them each time appear together. For in the stories themselves there is practically nothing concrete to indicate any connection between one of them and any of the others. Each story stands entirely on its own feet, complete in itself and differing from all the others in place and time and plot. Yet through them all runs a Path—a Path of a thousand years—"The Path of a King."

As expressed in the author's foreword to the series, it is not for nothing that a great man leaves posterity. The spark once transmitted may smolder for generations under ashes, but at the appointed time it will flare up to warm the world. God never allows waste. Yet we fools rub our eyes and wonder when we see genius come out of the gutter. We none of us know our ancestors beyond a little way. We all of us may have king's blood in our veins. The dago who blacked your boots may be descended by curious byways from Julius Cæsar.

"I saw the younger sons carry the royal blood far down among the people, down even into the kennels of the outcast. Generations follow, but there is that in the stock which is fated to endure. The sons and daughters blunder and sin and perish, but the race goes on, for there is a fierce stuff of life in it. Some rags of greatness always cling to it, and somehow the blood drawn from kings it never knew will be royal again. After long years, unheralded and unlooked for, there comes the day of the Appointed Time."

You will note that practically the only surface suggestion of any kind of connection between one story and any of the others is that the king's ring of the old Norse viking, introduced in the first story, is more or less casually mentioned in following stories and of course is always in possession of some one descended from that king, though the king himself has long since faded from human memory.

THE horseman rode down the narrow vennel which led to the St. Denis Gate of Paris, holding his nose like a fine lady. Behind him the city reeked in a close August twilight. From every entry came the smell of coarse cooking and unclean humanity, and the heaps of garbage in the gutters sent up a fog of malodorous dust when they were stirred by prowling dogs or hasty passengers.

"Another week of heat and they will have the plague here," he muttered. "Oh for Eaucourt—Eaucourt by the waters! I have too delicate a stomach for this Paris."

His thoughts ran on to the country beyond the gates, the fields about St. Denis, the Clermont downs. Soon he would be stretching his bay on good turf.

But the gates were closed, though it was not yet the hour of curfew. The lieutenant of the watch stood squarely before him with

a forbidding air, while a file of *arquebusiers* lounged in the archway.

"There's no going out tonight," was the answer to the impatient rider.

"Tut, man, I am the Sieur de Laval, riding north on urgent affairs. My servants left at noon. Be quick! Open!"

"The keys are at the Louvre. You must seek them there." The fellow grinned impudently.

"Who ordered this folly?"

"The Marshal Tavannes. Go argue with him, if your mightiness has the courage."

The horseman was too old a campaigner to waste time in wrangling. He turned his horse's head and retracted his path up the vennel.

"Now what in God's name is afoot tonight?" he asked himself, and the bay tossed his dainty head, as if in the same perplexity. He was a fine animal with the deep barrel and great shoulders of the Norman breed, and no more than his master did he love this place of alarums and stenches.

Gaspard de Laval was a figure conspicuous enough even in that city of motley. For one thing he was well over two yards high, and, though somewhat lean for perfect proportions, his long arms and deep chest told of no common strength. He looked more than his thirty years, for his face was burned the color of teak by hot suns and a scar just under the hair wrinkled a broad low forehead. His small pointed beard was bleached by weather to the hue of pale honey. He wore a steel back and front over a doublet of dark taffeta, and his riding-coat was blue velvet lined with cherry satin.

The man's habit was somber except for the shine of steel and the occasional flutter of the gay lining. In his velvet bonnet he wore a white plume. The rich clothing became him well and had just a hint of foreignness, as if commonly he was more roughly garbed. Which was indeed the case, for he was newly from the Western seas and had celebrated his homecoming with a brave suit.

As a youth he had fought under Condé in the religious wars, but had followed Jean Ribaut to Florida and had been one of the few survivors when the Spaniards sacked St. Caroline. With de Gourgues he had sailed west again for vengeance, and had got it. Thereafter he had been with the privateers of Brest and La Rochelle, a hornet to search out and sting the weak places of Spain on the Main and among the islands.

But he was not born to live continually in outland parts, loving rather to intercalate fierce adventures between spells of housekeeping. The love of his green Picardy manor drew him back with gentle hands. He had now returned like a child to his playthings, and the chief thoughts in his head were his gardens and fish-ponds, the spinneys he had planted and the new German dogs he had got for boar-hunting in the forest. He looked forward to days of busy idleness in his modest kingdom.

But first he must see his kinsman, the admiral, about certain affairs of the New World which lay near to that great man's heart. Coligny was his godfather, from whom he was named; he was also his kinsman, for the admiral's wife, Charlotte de Laval, was a cousin once removed.

So to Chatillon Gaspard journeyed, and thence, to Paris, whither the Huguenot leader had gone for the marriage fêtes of the King of Navarre. Reaching the city on the Friday evening, he was met by ill news. That morning the admiral's life had been attempted on his way back from watching the king at tennis. Happily the wounds were slight, a broken right forefinger and a bullet through the left forearm, but the outrage had taken away men's breath. That the Admiral of France, brought to Paris for those nuptials which were to be a pledge of a new peace, should be the target of assassins shocked the decent and alarmed the timid. The commonwealth was built on the side of a volcano, and the infernal fires were muttering. Friend and foe alike set the thing down to the Guises' credit, and the door of Coligny's lodging in the rue de Béthisy was thronged by angry Huguenot gentry, clamoring to be permitted to take order with the Italianate murderers.

On the Saturday morning Gaspard was admitted to audience with his kinsman, but found him so weak from Monsieur Ambrose Paré's drastic surgery that he was compelled to postpone his business.

"Get you back to Eaucourt," said Coligny, "and cultivate your garden till I send for you. France is too crooked just now for a forthright fellow like you to do her service, and I do not think that the air of Paris is healthy for our house."

Gaspard was fain to obey, judging that the admiral spoke of some delicate state business for which he was aware he had no talent. A word with M. de Teligny

reassured him as to the admiral's safety, for according to him the king now leaned heavily against the Guises.

But lo and behold! The gates of Paris were locked to him, and he found himself interned in the sweltering city.

He did not like it. There was an ugly smack of intrigue in the air, puzzling to a plain soldier. Nor did he like the look of the streets now dim in the twilight. On his way to the gates they had been crammed like a barrel of salt fish, and in the throng there had been as many armed men as if an enemy made a league beyond the walls.

There had been, too, a great number of sallow Southern faces, as if the queen mother had moved bodily thither a city of her countrymen. But now, as the dark fell, the streets were almost empty. The houses were packed to bursting—a blur of white faces could be seen at the windows, and every entry seemed to be alive with silent men. But in the streets there was scarcely a soul except priests, flitting from door to door, even stumbling against his horse in their preoccupation. Black, brown and gray crows, they made Paris like Cartagena.

The man's face took a very grim set as he watched these birds of ill omen. What in God's name had befallen his honest France? He was used to danger, but this secret massing chilled even his stout heart. It was like a wood he remembered in Florida where every bush had held an Indian arrow, but without sight or sound of a bowman. There was hell brewing in this foul caldron of a city.

He stabled his horse in the yard in the rue du Coq behind the glover's house where he had lain the night before. Then he set out to find supper. The first tavern served his purpose. Above the door was a wisp of red wool, which he knew for the Guise colors. Inside he looked to find a crowd, but there was but one other guest. Paris that night had business, it seemed, which did not lie in the taverns.

That other guest was a man as big as himself, clad wholly in black, save for a stiff cambric ruff worn rather fuller than the fashion. He was heavily booted and sat sidewise on a settle with his left hand tucked in his belt and a great right elbow on the board. Something in his pose, half-rustic, half-braggart, seemed familiar to Gaspard. The next second the two were in each other's arms.

"Walter Champernoun!" cried Gaspard. "When I left you by the Isle of Pines, I never hoped to meet you again in a Paris inn. What's your errand, man, in this den of thieves?"

"Business of state," the Englishman laughed. "I am here with Walsingham, her Majesty's ambassador, and looked to start home tonight. But your city is marvelously unwilling to part with her guests. What's toward, Gaspard?"

"For me, supper," and he fell with zest to the broiled fowl he had ordered.

THE other sent for another flask of the wine of Anjou, observing that he had a plaguey thirst.

"I think," said Gaspard, at last raising his eyes from his food, "that Paris will be unwholesome tonight for honest men."

"There's a murrain of friars about," said Champernoun, leisurely picking his teeth.

"The place hums like a beehive before swarming. Better get back to your ambassador, Walter. There's sanctuary for you under his cloak."

The Englishman made a pellet of bread and flicked it at the other's face.

"I may have to box your ears, old friend. Since when have I taken to shirking a fracas? We were together at St. John d'Ulloa and you should know me better."

"Are you armed?" was Gaspard's next question.

Champernoun patted his sword.

"Also there are pistols in my holsters."

"You have a horse, then?"

"Stabled within twenty yards. My rascally groom carried a message to Sir Francis, and as he has been gone over an hour, I fear he may have come to an untimely end."

"Then it will be well this night, for us two to hold together. I know our Paris mob and there is nothing crueler out of hell. The pistoling of the Admiral de Coligny has given them a taste of blood, and they may have a fancy for killing *Luteranos*. Two such as you and I, guarding each other's backs, may see sport before morning, and happily rid the world of a few miscreants. What say you, *camerado?*"

"Good. But what account shall we give of ourselves if some one questions us?"

"Why, we are Spanish esquires in the train of King Philip's Mission. Our clothes are dark enough for the dons' fashion, and we both speak their tongue freely. Behold in

me the Señor Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza, a poor knight of Castille, most earnest in the cause of holy church."

"And I," said the Englishman with the gusto of a boy in a game, "am named Rodriguez de Bobadilla. I knew the man, who is dead, and his brother owes me ten crowns. But if we fall in with the Ambassador's gentlemen?"

"We will outface them."

"But if they detect the imposture?"

"Why, wring their necks. You are getting as cautious as an apple-wife, Walter."

"When I set out on a business, I like to weigh it, that I may know how much is to be charged to my own wits and how much I must leave to God. Tonight it would appear that the Almighty must hold us very tight by the hand. Well, I am ready when I have drunk another cup of wine."

He drew his sword and lovingly fingered its edge, whistling all the while.

Gaspard went to the door and looked into the street. The city was still strangely quiet. No roysterers swaggered home along the pavements, no tramp of *cuirassiers* told of the passage of a great man. But again he had the sense that hot fires were glowing under these cold ashes.

The mist had lifted and the stars were clear, and over the dark mass of the Louvre a great planet burned. The air was warm and stifling, and with a gesture of impatience he slammed the door. By now he ought to have been drinking the cool night on the downs beyond Oise.

The Englishman had called for another bottle, and it was served in the empty tavern by the landlord himself. As the wine was brought in, the two fell to talking Spanish, at the sound of which the man visibly started. His furtive, sulky face changed to a sly friendliness.

"Your Excellencies have come to town for the good work," he said, sidling and bowing.

With a more than Spanish gravity Gaspard inclined his head.

"When does it start?" he asked.

"Ah, that we common folk do not know. But there will be a signal. Father Antoine has promised us a signal. But *messieurs* have not badges. Perhaps they do not need them, for their faces will be known. Nevertheless for better security it might be well——"

He stopped with the air of a huckster crying his wares.

Gaspard spoke a word to Champernoun in Spanish. Then to the landlord:

"We are strangers, so must bow to the custom of your city. Have you a man to send to the Hôtel de Guise?"

"Why trouble the duke, my lord?" was the answer. "See, I will make you badges."

He tore up a napkin and bound two white strips crosswise on their left arms and pinned a rag to their bonnets.

"There, *messieurs*, you are now wearing honest colors for all to see. It is well, for presently blood will be hot and eyes blind."

Gaspard flung him a piece of gold, and he bowed himself out.

"*Bonne fortune*, lordships," were his parting words. "'Twill be a great night for our Lord Christ and our lord king."

"And his lord the devil," said Champernoun. "What madness has taken your good France? These are Spanish manners, and they sicken me. Cockades and signals and such like flummery!"

The other's face had grown sober.

"For certain, hell is afoot tonight. It is the admiral they seek. The Guisards and their *reitars* and a pack of 'prentices maddened by sermons. I would to God he were in the palace with the King of Navarre and the young Condé."

"But he is well guarded. I heard that a hundred Huguenot swords keep watch by his house."

"Maybe. But we of the religion are too bold and too trustful. We are no match for the Guises and their Italian tricks. I think we will go to Coligny's lodgings. Mounted, for a man on a horse has an advantage if the mob are out."

The two left the tavern, both sniffing the air as if they found it tainted. The streets were filling now, and men were running as if to a rendezvous, running hot-foot without speech and without lights. Most wore white crosses on their left sleeve.

The horses waited, already saddled, in stables not a furlong apart, and it was the work of a minute to bridle and mount. The two as if by a common impulse halted their beasts at the mouth of the rue du Coq and listened. The city was quiet on the surface, but there was a low, deep undercurrent of sound, like the soft purring of a lion before he roars. The sky was bright with stars. There was no moon, but over the isle was a faint, tremulous glow.

"It is long past midnight," said Gaspard. "In a little it will be dawn."

Suddenly a shot cracked out. It was so sharp a sound among the muffled noises that it stung the ear like a whip-lash. It came from the dark mass of the Louvre, from somewhere beyond the Grand Jardin.

It was followed instantly by a hubbub far down the rue St. Honoré, and a glare kindled where that street joined at the rue d'Arbre Sec.

"That way lies the admiral," Gaspard cried. "I go to him,"and he clapped spurs to his horse.

But as his beast leaped forward, another sound broke out, coming apparently from above their heads. It was the clanging of a great bell.

There is no music so dominant as that of bells. Their voice occupies sky as well as earth, and they overwhelm the senses, so that a man's blood must keep pace with their beat. They can suit every part, jangling in wild joy or copying the slow pace of sorrow or pealing in ordered rhythm, blithe but with a warning of mortality in their cadence.

But this bell played dance-music. It summoned to an infernal jig. Blood and fever were in its broken fall, hate and madness and death.

Gaspard checked his plunging horse.

"By ——, it is from St. Germains l'Auxerrois! The Palace Church! The king is in it. It is a plot against our faith. They have got the pick of us in their trap and would make an end of us."

From every house and entry men and women and priests were pouring to swell the army that pressed roaring eastward. No one heeded the two as they sat their horses like rocks in the middle of a torrent.

"The admiral is gone," said Gaspard with a sob in his voice. "Our few hundred spears can not stand against the king's army. It remains for us to die with him."

Champernoun was cursing steadily in a mixture of English and Spanish, good mouth-filling oaths delivered without heat.

"Die we doubtless shall, but not before we have trounced this bloody rabble."

Still Gaspard did not move.

"After tonight there will be no gentlemen left in France, for we of the religion had all the breeding."

Then he laughed bitterly.

"I mind Ribaut's last words, when Menendez slew him. 'We are of earth,' says he, 'and to earth we must return, and twenty years more or less can matter little!' That is our case tonight, old friend."

"Maybe," said the Englishman. "But why talk of dying? You and I are Spanish *caballeros*. Walsingham told me that the king hated that nation and that the queen mother loved it not, but it would appear that now we are very popular in Paris."

"Nay, nay, this is no time to play the Nicodemite. It is the hour for public confession. I'm off to the dead admiral to take order with his assassins."

"Softly, Gaspard. You and I are old companions in war, and we do not ride against a stone wall if there be a gate. It was not thus that de Guorgues avenged Ribaut at St. John's. Let us thank God that we hold a master card in this game. We are two foxes in a flock of angry roosters, and by the Lord's grace we will take our toll of them.

"Cunning, my friend. A stratagem of war! We stand outside this welter and, having only the cold passion of revenge, can think coolly. God's truth, man, have we fought the Indian and the Spanish for nothing? Wily is the word. Are we two gentlemen who fear God to be worsted by a rabble of *papegots* and *marannes?*"

IT WAS the word "*marannes*" or, as we say "half-castes" which brought conviction to Gaspard. Suddenly he saw his enemies as less formidable, as something contemptible—things of a lower breed, dupers who might themselves be duped.

"Faith, Walter, you are the true campaigner. Let us forward and trust to God to show us a road."

They galloped down the rue St. Honoré, finding an open space in the cobbles of the center, but at the turning into the rue d'Arbre Sec they met a block. A great throng with torches was coming in on the right from the direction of the Bourbon and d'Alençon hôtels.

Yet by pressing their horses with whip and spur and by that awe which the two tall, dark cavaliers inspired even in a mob which had lost its wits, they managed to make their way to the entrance of the rue de Béthisy. Here they came suddenly upon quiet.

The crowd was held back by mounted men, who made a ring around the gate of a

high, dark building. Inside its courtyard there were cries and the rumor of fighting, but out in the street there was silence. Every eye was turned to the archway, which was bright as day with the flare of fifty lanterns.

The two rode to the ring of soldiers.

"Make way," Gaspard commanded, speaking with a foreign accent.

"For whom, *monsieur?*" one asked, who seemed of a higher standing than the rest.

"For the ambassador of the King of Spain."

The man touched his bonnet and opened up a road by striking the adjacent horses with the flat of his sword, and the two rode into the ring so that they faced the archway. They could see a little way inside the courtyard, where the light gleamed on armor. The men there were no rabble, but Guise's Swiss.

A priest came out, wearing the Jacobin habit, one of those preaching friars who had been fevering the blood of Paris. The crowd behind the men-at-arms knew him, for even in its absorption it sent up shouts of greeting. He flitted like a bat toward Gaspard and Champernoun and peered up at them. His face was lean and wolfish, with cruel, arrogant eyes.

"Hail, father!" said Gaspard in Spanish. "How goes the good work?"

He replied in the same tongue.

"Bravely, my children. But this is but the beginning. Are you girt and ready for the harvesting?"

"We are ready," said Gaspard.

His voice shook with fury, but the Jacobin took it for enthusiasm. He held up his hand in blessing and then fluttered back to the archway.

From inside the courtyard came the sound of something falling and then a great shout. The mob jumped to a conclusion.

"That is the end of old Toothpick," a voice cried, using the admiral's nickname.

There was a wild surge round the horsemen, but the ring held. A body of soldiers poured out of the gate with blood on their bare swords. Among them was one tall fellow all in armor, with a broken plume in his bonnet. His face was torn and disfigured and he was laughing horribly. The Jacobin rushed to embrace him, and the man fell on his knees to receive a blessing.

"Behold our hero," the friar cried. "His good blade has rid us of the arch-heretic," and the mob took up the shout.

Gaspard was cool now. His fury had become a cold thing like a glacier.

"I know him!" he whispered to Champernoun. "He is the Italian Petrucci. He is our first quarry."

"The second will be that damned friar," was the Englishman's answer.

Suddenly the ring of men-at-arms drew inward as a horseman rode out of the gate followed by half a dozen attendants. He was a tall young man, very noble to look upon, with a flushed face like a boy warm from the game of *paume.* His long satin coat was richly embroidered, and round his neck hung the thick gold collar of some order. He was wiping a stain from his sleeve with a fine lawn handkerchief.

"What is this thing, gilt like a chalice?" whispered Champernoun.

"Henry of Guise," said Gaspard.

The duke caught sight of the two men in the center of the ring. The lanterns made the whole place bright and he could see every detail of their dress and bearing. He saluted them courteously.

"We make your Grace our compliments," said Gaspard. "We are of the household of the ambassador of Spain and could not rest indoors when great deeds were being done in this city."

The young man smiled pleasantly. There was a boyish grace in his gesture.

"You are welcome, gentlemen. I would have every Catholic in Europe see with his own eyes the good work of this Bartholomew's Day. I would ask you to ride with me, but I leave the city in pursuit of the Count of Montgomery, who is rumored to have escaped. There will be much for you to see on this happy Sunday.

"But stay! You are not attended, and our streets are none too safe for strangers. Presently the Huguenots will counterfeit our white cross, and blunders may be made by the overzealous."

He unclasped the jewel which hung at the end of his chain. It was a little Agnus of gold and enamel, surmounting a lozenge-shaped shield charged with an eagle.

"Take this," he said, "and return it to me when the work is over. Show it if any man dares to question you. It is a passport from Henry of Guise. And now forward," he cried to his followers. "Forward for Montgomery and the Vidame."

The two looked after the splendid figure.

"That bird is in fine feather," said Champernoun.

Gaspard's jaw was very grim.

"Some day he will lie huddled under the assassin's knife. He will die as he has made my chief die, and his body will be cast to the dogs. But he has given me a plan," and he spoke in his companion's ear.

The Englishman laughed. His stolidity had been slow to quicken, but his eyes were now hot and he had altogether ceased to swear.

"First let me get back to Walsingham's lodging. I have a young kinsman there—Walter Raleigh—who would dearly love this venture."

"Tut, man, be serious. We play a desperate game, and there is no place for boys in it. We have Guise's jewel, and by the living God we will use it. My mark is Petrucci."

"And the priest," said Champernoun.

The crowd in the rue de Béthisy was thinning, as bands of soldiers, each with its tail of rabble, moved off to draw other covers. There was fighting still in many houses, and on the rooftops as the pale dawn spread could be seen the hunt for fugitives. Torches and lanterns still flickered obscenely, and the blood in the gutters shone sometimes golden in their glare and sometimes spread drab and horrid in the waxing daylight.

The Jacobin stood at their elbow.

"Follow me, my lords of Spain," he cried. "No friends of God and the duke dare be idle this happy morn. Follow, and I will show you wonders."

He led them east to where a broader street ran to the river.

"Somewhere here lies Teligny," he croaked. "Once he is dead, the second head is lopped from the dragon of Babylon. Oh that God would show me where Condé and Navarre are hid, for without them our task is incomplete."

There was a great crowd about the door of one house, and into it the Jacobin fought his way with prayers and threats. Some Huguenot—Teligny it might be—was cornered there, but in the narrow place only a few could join in the hunt, and the hunters, not to be impeded by the multitude, presently set a guard at the street door.

The mob below was already drunk with blood and found waiting intolerable; but it had no leader, and foamed aimlessly about the causeway. There were women in it, with flying hair like Maenads, who shrilled obscenities, and drunken butchers and watermen and grooms who had started out for loot and ended in sheer lust of slaying and dozens of broken desperadoes and lid-captains, who looked on the day as their carnival. But to the mob had come one of those moments of indecision when it halted and eddied like a whirlpool.

Suddenly in its midst appeared two tall horsemen.

"Men of Paris," cried Gaspard with that masterful voice which is born of the deep seas. "You see this jewel. It was given me an hour back by Henry of Guise."

A ruffian examined it.

"Ay," he murmured with reverence. "It is our duke's. I saw it on his breast before Coligny's house."

The mob was all ears.

"I have the duke's command," Gaspard went on. "He pursues Montgomery and the Vidame of Chartres. Coligny is dead. Teligny in there is about to die. But where are all the others? Where is La Rochefoucault? Where is Rosny? Where is Gramont? Where above all are the young Condé and the King of Navarre?"

The names set the rabble howling. Every eye was on the speaker.

Gaspard commanded silence.

"I will tell you. The Huguenots are cunning as foxes. They planned this very day to seize the king and make themselves masters of France. They have copied our badge," and he glanced toward the left arm. "Thousands of them are waiting for revenge, and before it is full day, they will be on you. You will not know them. You will take them for your friends, and you will have your throats cut before you find out your error."

A CROWD may be wolves one moment and chickens the next, for cruelty and fear are cousins. A shiver of apprehension went through the more sober parts. One drunkard who shouted was clubbed on the head by his neighbor. Gaspard saw his chance.

"My word to you—the duke's word—is to forestall this deviltry. Follow me, and strike down every band of white-badged Huguenots. For among them be sure is the cub of Navarre."

It was the leadership which the masterless

men wanted. Fifty swords were raised, and a shout went up which shook the windows of that lodging where even now Teligny was being done to death. With the two horsemen at their head the rabble poured westward toward the rue d'Arbre Sec and the Louvre, for there in the vicinity of the palace were the likeliest coverts.

"Now Heaven send us Petrucci," said Gaspard. "Would that the little man had been alive and with me! This would have been a ruse after his own heart."

"I think the great Condé would have specially misliked yon monk," said the Englishman.

"Patience, Walter. One foe at a time. My heart tells me that you will yet get your priest."

The streets, still dim in the dawn, were thickly carpeted with dead. The mob kicked and befouled the bodies, and the bravos in sheer wantonness spiked them with their swords. There were women there and children, lying twisted on the causeway. Once a fugitive darted out of an entry, to be brought down by a butcher's ax.

"I have never seen worse in the Indies," and Champernoun shivered. "My stomach turns. For Heaven's sake let us ride down this rabble!"

"Patience," said Gaspard, his eyes hard as stones. "Cursed be he that putteth his hand to the plow and then turns back."

They passed several small bodies of Catholic horse, which they greeted with cheers. That was in the rue des Poulier; and at the corner where it abutted on the quay before the Hôtel de Bourbon a ferret-faced man ran blindly into them.

Gaspard caught him and drew him to his horse's side, for he recognized the landlord of the tavern where he had supped.

"What news, friend?" he asked.

The man was in an anguish of terror, but he recognized his former guest.

"There is a band on the quay," he stammered. "They are mad and do not know a Catholic when they see him. They would have killed me, had not the good Father Antoine held them till I made off."

"Who leads them?" Gaspard asked, having a premonition.

"A tall man in crimson with a broken plume."

"How many?"

"Maybe a hundred, and at least half are men-at-arms."

Gaspard turned to Champernoun.

"We have found our quarry," he said.

Then he spoke to his following and noted with comfort that it was now some hundreds strong and numbered many swords.

"There is a Huguenot band before us," he cried. "They wear our crosses, but this honest fellow has barely escaped from them. They are less than threescore. On them, my gallant lads, before they increase their strength, and mark specially the long man in red, for he is the devil. It may be Navarre is with them."

The mob needed no second bidding. Their chance had come, and they swept along with a hoarse mutter more fearful than any shouting.

"Knee to knee, Walter," said Gaspard, "as at St. John d'Ulloa. Remember, Petrucci is for me."

The Italian's band, crazy with drink and easy slaying, straggled across the wide quay and had no thought of danger, till the two horsemen were upon them. The songs died on their lips, as they saw bearing down on them an avenging army. Their scared cries of "The Huguenots!" "Montgomery!" were to Gaspard's following a confirmation of their treachery.

The swords of the bravos and the axes and knives of the Parisian mob made havoc with the civilian rabble, but the men-at-arms recovered themselves and in knots fought a stout battle. But the band was broken at the start by the two grim horsemen who rode through it as through meadow-grass, their blades falling terribly, and then turned and cut their way back.

Yet a third time they turned, and in that last mowing they found their desire. A tall man in crimson appeared before them. Gaspard flung his reins to Champernoun and in a second was on the ground, fighting with a fury that these long hours had been stifled. Before his blade the Italian gave ground till he was pinned against the wall of the Bourbon Hôtel. His eyes were staring with amazement and dawning fear.

"I am a friend," he stammered in broken French and was answered in curt Spanish.

Presently his guard weakened, and Gaspard gave him the point in his heart. As he dropped to the ground, his conqueror bent over him.

"The admiral is avenged," he said. "Tell your master in hell that you died at the hand of Coligny's kinsman."

Gaspard remounted and, since the fight had now gone eastward, they rode on to the main gate of the Louvre, where they met a company of the royal guards coming out to discover the cause of an uproar so close to the palace. He told his tale of the Spanish embassy and showed Guise's jewel.

"The streets are full of Huguenots badged as Catholics. His Majesty will be well advised to quiet the rabble or he will lose some trusty servants."

In the rue du Coq, now almost empty, the two horsemen halted.

"We had better be journeying, Walter. Guise's jewel will open the gates. In an hour's time all Paris will be on our trail."

"There is still that priest," said Champernoun doggedly.

He was breathing heavily, and his eyes were light and daring. Like all his countrymen he was slow to kindle but slower to cool.

"In an hour, if we linger here, we shall be at his mercy. Let us make for the St. Antoine Gate."

The jewel made their way easy, for through that gate Henry of Guise himself had passed in the small hours.

"Half an hour ago," the lieutenant of the watch told them, "I opened to another party which bore the duke's credentials. They were for Amiens to spread the good news."

"Had they a priest with them?"

"Ay, a Jacobin monk, who cried on them to hasten and not spare their horses. He said there was much to do in the North."

"I think the holy man spoke truth," said Gaspard, and they rode into open country.

They broke their fast on black bread and a cup of wine at the first inn, where a crowd of frightened countrymen were looking in the direction of Paris. It was now about seven o'clock, and a faint haze, which promised heat, cloaked the ground. From it rose the towers and high-peaked roofs of the city, insubstantial as a dream.

"Eaucourt by the waters!" sighed Gaspard. "That the same land should hold that treasure and this foul city."

Their horses, rested and fed, carried them well on the north road, but by ten o'clock they had overtaken no travelers, save a couple of servants on sorry nags who wore the Vidame of Amiens' livery. They were well beyond Oise ere they saw in the bottom of a grassy vale a little knot of men.

"I make out six," said Champernoun, who had a falcon's eye. "Two priests and four men-at-arms. Reasonable odds, such as I love. Faith, that monk travels fast!"

"I do not think there will be much fighting," said Gaspard.

Twenty minutes later they rode abreast of the party, which at first had wheeled round on guard and then had resumed its course at the sight of the white armlets.

IT WAS as Champernoun had said. Four lusty *arquebusiers* escorted the Jacobin. But the sixth man was no priest. He was a Huguenot minister whom Gaspard remembered with Condé's army, an elderly, frail man bound with cruel thongs to a horse's back and his legs tethered beneath its belly.

Recognition awoke in the Jacobin's eye.

"Ah, my lords of Spain! What brings you northward?"

Gaspard was by his side, while Champernoun a pace behind was abreast the minister.

"To see the completion of the good work begun this morning."

"You have come the right road. I go to kindle the North in a holy emulation. That heretic dog behind is a Picard, and I bring him to Amiens that he may perish there as a warning to his countrymen."

"So?" said Gaspard, and at the word the Huguenot's horse, pricked stealthily by Champernoun's sword, leaped forward and dashed in fright up the hill, its rider sitting stiff as a doll in his bonds.

The Jacobin cried out and the soldiers made as if to follow, but Gaspard's voice checked them.

"Let be. The beast will not go far. I have matters of importance to discuss with this reverend father."

The priest's face sharpened with a sudden suspicion.

"Your manners are somewhat peremptory, Sir Spaniard. But speak and let us get on."

"I have only the one word. I told you we had come north to see the fruition of the good work, and you approved. We do not mean the same. By good work I mean that about sunrise I slew with this sword the man Petrucci, who slew the admiral. By its fruition I mean that I have come to settle with you."

"You?" the other stammered.

"I am Gaspard de Laval, a kinsman and humble follower of Coligny."

The Jacobin was no coward.

"A traitor!" he cried. "A Huguenot! Cut them down, my men," and he drew a knife from beneath his robe.

But Gaspard's eye and voice checked the troopers. He held in his hand the gold trinket.

"I have no quarrel with you. This is the passport of your leader, the duke. I show it to you, and if you are questioned about this day's work you can reply that you took your orders from him who carried Guise's jewel. Go your ways back to Paris, if you would avoid trouble."

Two of the men seemed to waver, but the cry of the priest detained them.

"They seek to murder me!" he screamed. "Would you desert God's Church and burn in torment forever?"

He hurled himself on Gaspard, who caught his wrist so that the knife tinkled on the highroad while the man overbalanced himself and fell. The next second the mêlée had begun.

It did not last long. The troopers were heavy fellows, cumbersomely armed, who, even with numbers on their side, stood little chance against two swift swordsmen who had been trained to fight together against crazy odds. One Gaspard pulled from the saddle so that he lay senseless on the ground. One Champernoun felled with a sword-cut of which no morion could break the force. The two others turned tail and fled, and the last seen of them was a dust cloud on the road to Paris.

Gaspard had not drawn his sword. They stood by a little river, and he flung Guise's jewel far into its lilied waters.

"A useful bauble," he smiled, "but its purpose is served."

The priest stood in the dust, with furious eyes burning in an ashen face.

"What will you do with me?"

"This has been your day of triumph, father. I would round it off worthily by helping you to a martyr's crown. Walter," and he turned to his companion, "go up the road and fetch me the rope which binds the minister."

The runaway was feeding peaceably by the highway. Champernoun cut the old man's bonds and laid him fainting on the grass. He brought back with him a length of stout cord.

"Let the brute live," he said. "Duck him and truss him up, but don't dirty your hands with him. I'd as lief kill a woman as a monk."

But Gaspard's smiling face was as a rock.

"This is no Englishman's concern. To-day's shame is France's, and a Frenchman alone can judge it. Innocent blood is on this man's hands, and it is for me to pay the first instalment of justice. The rest I leave to God."

So when an hour later the stunned troopers recovered their senses, they found a sight which sent them to their knees to patter prayers. For over the arch of the bridge dangled the corpse of the Jacobin. And on its breast it bore a paper setting forth that this deed had been done by Gaspard de Laval, and the Latin words *"O si sic omnes!"*

Meantime far up in the folds of the Santerre a little party was moving through the hot afternoon. The old Huguenot, shaken still by his rough handling, rode as if in a trance. Once he roused himself and asked about the monk.

"I hanged him like a mad dog," said Gaspard.

The minister shook his head.

"Violence will not cure violence."

"Nay, but justice may follow crime. I am no Nicodemite. This day I have made public confession of my faith and abide the consequences. From this day I am an exile from France so long as it pleases God to make His church an anvil for the blows of His enemies."

"I too am an exile," said the old man. "If I come safe to Calais, I shall take ship for Holland and find shelter with the brethren there. You have preserved my life for a few more years' toil in my Master's vineyard. You say truly, young sir, that God's church is now an anvil, but remember for your consolation that it is an anvil which has worn out many hammers."

Late in the evening they came over a ridge and looked down on a shallow valley all green and golden in the last light. A slender river twined by alder and willow through the meadows. Gaspard reined in his horse and gazed on the place with a hand shading his eyes.

"I have slain a man to my hurt," he said. "See, there are my new fish-ponds half-made, and the herb-garden and the terrace that gets the morning sun. There is the green lawn which I called my quarter-deck,

the place to walk of an evening. Farewell, my little gray dwelling?"

Champernoun laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"We will find you the mate of it in Devon, old friend," he said.

But Gaspard was not listening.

"Eaucourt by the waters," he repeated like the refrain of a song, and his eyes were full of tears.

The Hidden City*

The Eighth Tale in the Series, "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself

THE two ports of the cabin were disks of scarlet, that pure translucent color which comes from the reflection of sunset in leagues of still water. The ship lay at anchor under the high green scarp of an island, but on the side of the ports no land was visible—only a circle in which sea and sky melted into the quintessence of light.

The air was very hot and very quiet. Inside a lamp had been lighted, for in those laditudes night descends like a thunderclap. Its yellow glow joined with the red evening to cast orange shadows. On the wall opposite the ports was a small stand of arms, and beside it a picture of the Magdalen, one of two presented to the ship by Lord Huntingdon; the other had been given to the wife of the governor of Gomera in the Canaries when she sent fruit and sugar to the voyagers. Underneath on a couch heaped with deerskins lay the admiral.

The fantastic light revealed every line of the man as cruelly as Spring sunshine. It showed a long, lean face cast in a high mold of pride. The jaw and cheekbones were delicate and hard; the straight nose and the strong arch of the brows had the authority of one who all his days had been used to command.

But age had descended on this pride—age and sickness. The peaked beard was snowy white, and the crisp hair had thinned from the forehead. The forehead itself was high and broad, crossed with an infinity of small furrows. The cheeks were sallow with a patch of faint color showing as if from a fever. The heavy eyelids were gray like a parrot's. It was the face of a man ailing both in mind and body.

But in two features youth still lingered. The lips under their thatch of white mustache were full and red, and the eyes, of some color between blue and gray, had for all their sadness a perpetual flicker of quick fire.

He shivered, for he was recovering from the fifth fever he had had since he left Plymouth. The ailment was influenza, and he called it a calenture. He was richly dressed, as was his custom even in outlandish places, and the furred robe which he drew closer round his shoulders hid a doublet of fine maroon velvet. For comfort he wore a loose collar and band instead of his usual cut ruff.

He stretched out his hand to the table at his elbow where lay the Latin version of his "Discovery of Guiana," of which he had been turning the pages, and beside it a glass of whisky, almost the last of the thirty-two-gallon cask which Lord Boyle had given him in Cork on his way out. He replenished his glass with water from a silver carafe and sipped it, for it checked his cold rigors. As he set it down, he looked up to greet a man who had just entered.

The newcomer was not more than forty years old, but life had played havoc with his body. He was a tall man like the admiral, but he was lame of his left leg and held himself with a stoop. His left arm, too, hung limp and withered by his side. The skin of his face was gnarled like the bark of a tree and seamed with a white scar which dropped over the corner of one eye and so narrowed it to half the size of the other. He was the captain of Raleigh's flagship, the *Destiny*, an old seafarer, who in twenty years had lived a century of adventure.

"I wish you good evening, Sir Walter," he said in his deep voice. "They tell me the fever is abating."

* *See note to preceding story.*

The admiral smiled wanly, and in his smile there was still a trace of the golden charm which had once won all men's hearts.

"My fever will never abate this side the grave," he said. "Jasper, old friend, I would have you sit with me tonight. I am like King Saul, the sport of devils. Be you my David to exorcise them. I have evil news. Tom Keymis is dead."

The other nodded. Tom Keymis had been dead for ten days, since before they left Trinidad. He was aware of the obsession of the admiral's, which made the tragedy seem fresh news daily.

"Dead," said Raleigh. "I slew him by my harshness. I see him stumbling off to his cabin, an old bent man, though younger than me. But he failed me. He betrayed his trust. Tush, what does that matter? We are all dying. Old Tom has only gone on a little way before the rest. And many went before him."

The voice had become shrill and hard. He was speaking to himself.

"The best—the very best. My brave young Walter and Cosmor and Piggot and John Talbot and Ned Coffyn. Ned was your kinsman, Jasper?"

"My cousin—the son of my mother's brother."

The man spoke like Raleigh in a Devon accent, with the creamy slur in the voice and the sing-song fall of western England.

"Ah, I remember. Your mother was Cecily Coffyn, from Combas on the Moor at the back of Lustleigh. A pretty girl—I mind her long ago. I would I were on the moor now, where it is always fresh and blowing. And your father—the big Frenchman who settled on one of Walter Champernoun's manors. I loved his jolly laugh. But Cecily sobered him, for the Coffyns were always a grave and pious race. Walter is dead these many years. Where is your father?"

"He died in '82 with Sir Humfrey Gilbert."

Raleigh bowed his head.

"He went to God with brother Humfrey! Happy fate! Happy company! But he left a brave son behind him, and I have lost mine. Have you a boy, Jasper?"

"But the one. My wife died ten years ago come Martinmas. The child is with his grandmother on the moor."

"A promising child?"

"A good lad, so far as I have observed him, and that is not once in a twelvemonth."

"You are a hungry old sea-dog. That was not the Coffyn fashion. Ned was forever homesick out of sight of Devon. They worshiped their bleak acres and their fireside pieties.

"Ah, but I forget. You are de Laval on one side, and that is strong blood. There is not much in England to vie with it. You were great nobles when our Cecils were husbandmen."

He turned on a new tack.

"You know that Whitney and Wollaston have deserted me. They would have had me turn pirate, and when I refused, they sailed off and left me. This morning I saw the last of their topsails. Did I right?" he asked fiercely.

"In my judgment you did right."

"But why—why?" Raleigh demanded. "I have the commission of the King of France. What hindered me to use my remnant like hounds to cut off the stragglers of the Plate Fleet? That way lies much gold, and gold will buy pardon for all offenses. What hindered me, I say?"

"Yourself, Sir Walter."

Raleigh let his head fall back on the couch and smiled bitterly.

"You say truly—myself. 'Tis not a question of morals, mark ye. A better man than I might turn pirate with a clear conscience. But for Walter Raleigh it would be black sin. He has walked too brazenly in all weathers to seek common ports in a storm. It becomes not the fortune in which he once lived to go journeys of picory.

"And there is another reason. I have suddenly grown desperate old. I think I can still endure, but I can not institute. My action is by and over and my passion has come."

"You are a sick man," said the captain with pity in his voice.

"Sick! Why yes. But the disease goes very deep. The virtue has gone out of me, old comrade. I no longer hate or love, and once I loved and hated extremely. I am become like a frail woman for tolerance. Spain has worsted me, but I bear her no ill-will, though she has slain my son. Yet once I held all Spaniards the devil's spawn."

"You spoke kindly of them in your history," said the other, "when you praised their patient virtue."

"Did I? I have forgot. Nay, I remember. When I wrote that sentence, I was thinking of Berreo. I loved him, though I took this city. He was a valiant and liberal gentleman and of a great heart. I mind how I combated his melancholy, for he was most melancholic.

"But now I have grown like him. Perhaps Sir Edward Coke was right and I have a Spanish heart. I think a man can not strive wholeheartedly with an enemy unless he have much in common with him, and as the strife goes on, he gets liker. Ah, Jasper, once I had such ambitions that they made a fire all around me. Once I was like Kit Marlowe's in *Tamburlaine*—

> Threatening the world with high astounding terms
> And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

But now the flame has died and the ashes are cold. And I would not revive them if I could. There is nothing under heaven that I desire."

The seaman's face was grave and kindly.

"I think you have flown too high, Sir Walter. You have aimed at the moon and forgotten the merits of our earthly hills."

"True, true!"

Raleigh's mien was for a moment more lively.

"That is a shrewd comment. After three score years I know my own heart. I have been cursed with a devil of pride, Jasper. Man, I have never had a friend. Followers and allies and companions, if you please, but no friend. Others—simple folk—would be set singing by a May morning or a warm tavern fire or a woman's face. I have known fellows to whom the earth was so full of little pleasures that after the worst clouts they rose like larks from a furrow.

"A wise philosophy—but I had none of it. I saw always the little pageant of man's life like a child's peep-show beside the dark wastes of eternity. Ah, I know well I struggled like the rest for gauds and honors, but they were only tools for my ambition. For themselves I never valued them. I aimed at a master fabric, and since I have failed, I have now no terrestrial cover."

The night had fallen black, but the cabin windows were marvelously patined by stars. Raleigh's voice had sunk to the hoarse whisper of a man still fevered. He let his head recline again on the skins and closed his eyelids. Instantly it became the face of an old and very weary man.

THE sailor, Jasper Lauval—for so he now spelled his name on the rare occasions when he wrote it—thought he was about to sleep and was rising to withdraw, when Raleigh's eyes opened.

"Stay with me," he commanded. "Your silence cheers me. If you leave me, I have thoughts that might set me following Tom Keymis. Kit Marlowe again! I can not get rid of his accursed jingles. How do they go?"

> "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
> In one self-place; for where we are is hell,
> And where hell is there must we ever be."

Laval stretched out a cool hand and laid it on the admiral's hot forehead. He had a curiously steadfast gaze for all his drooping left eye. Raleigh caught sight of the withered arm.

"Tell me of your life, Jasper. How came you by such a mauling? Let the tale of it be like David's harping and scatter my demons."

The seaman sat himself in a chair.

"That was my purpose, Sir Walter. For the tale is in some manner a commentary on your late words."

"Nay, I want no moral. Let me do the moralizing. The tale's the thing. See, fill a glass of this Irish cordial. 'Twill keep off the chill from the night air. When and where did you get so wofully battered?"

"'Twas six years back when I was with Bovill."

Raleigh whistled.

"You were with Robert Bovill? What in Heaven's name did one of Coffyn blood with Robert? If ever man had a devil, 'twas he. I mind his sullen black face and his beard in two prongs. I have heard he is dead—on a Panama gibbet?"

"He is dead; but not as he lived. I was present when he died. He went to God a good Christian, praying and praising. Next day I was to follow him, but I broke prison in the night with the help of an Indian and went down the coast in a stolen *patache* to a place where thick forests lined the sea. There I lay hid till my wounds healed, and by and by I was picked up by a Bristol ship that had put in to water."

"But your wounds—how got you them?"

"At the hands of the priests. They

would have made a martyr of me and used their engines to bend my mind. Being obstinate by nature, I mocked them till they wearied of the play. But they left their marks on this arm and leg. The scar I had got some months before in a clean battle."

"Tell me all. What did Robert Bovill seek? And where?"

"We sought the Mountain of God," said the seaman reverently.

"I never heard o't. My own Manoa, maybe, where gold is quarried like stone."

"Nay, not Manoa. The road to it is from the shore of the Mexican Gulf. There was much gold."

"You found it?"

"I found it and handled it. Enough, could we have brought it off, to freight a dozen ships. Likewise jewels beyond the imagining of kings."

Raleigh had raised himself on his elbow, his face sharp and eager.

"I can not doubt you, for you could not lie were it to win salvation. But Heavens, man, what a tale! Why did I not know of this before I broke my fortune on Tom Keymis' mine?"

"I alone know of it, the others being dead."

"Who first told you of it?"

"Captain Bovill had the rumor from a dying Frenchman who was landed in his last hours at Falmouth. The man mentioned no names, but the tale set the captain inquiring, and he picked up the clue in Bristol. But 'twas in north Ireland that he had the whole truth and a chart of the road."

"These charts!" sighed Raleigh. "I think the fairies have the making of them, for they bewitch sober men. A scrap of discolored paper and a rag of canvas; some quaint lines drawn often in a man's blood and a cross in a corner marking 'much gold.' We mortals are eternally babes, and our heads are turned by toys."

"This chart was no toy, and he who owned it bought it with his life. Nay, Sir Walter, I am of your mind. Most charts are playthings from the devil. But this was in a manner of speaking sent from God. Only we did not read it right. We were blind men that thought only of treasure."

"It is the common story," said Raleigh. "Go on, Jasper."

"We landed in the gulf, at the point marked. It was at the mouth of a wide river so split up by sand-bars that no ship could enter. But by portage and hard rowing we got our boats beyond the shoals and found deep water. We had learned beforehand that there were no Spanish posts within fifty miles, for the land was barren and empty even of Indians. So for ten days we rowed and poled through a flat plain, sweating mightily, till we came in sight of mountains.

"At that we looked for more comfort, for the road on our chart now led away from the river up a side valley. There we hoped for fruits, since it was their season, and for deer, and 'twas time, for our blood was thick with rotten victuals."

The man shivered, as if the recollection had still terrors for him.

"If ever the Almighty permitted hell on earth, 'twas that valley. There was no stream in it and no verdure. Loathsome fleshy shrubs, the color of moldy copper, dotted the slopes, and a wilderness of rocks through which we could scarce find a road. There was no living thing in it but carrion birds. And serpents. They dwelt in every cranny of stone, and the noise of them was like bees humming. We lost two stout fellows from their poison.

"The sky was brass above us and our tongues were dry sticks, and by the foul vapors of the place our scanty food was corrupted. Never have men been nearer death. I think we would have retreated but for our captain, who had a lion's heart. He would point out to us the track in the chart running through that accursed valley, and at the end the place lettered 'Mountain of God.' I mind how his hand shook as he pointed, for he was as sick as any. He was very gentle too, though for usual a choleric man."

"Choleric, verily," said Raleigh. "It must have been no common sufferings that tamed Robert Bovill. How long were you in the valley?"

"The better part of three days. 'Twas like a sword-cut in a great mountain plain, and on the third day we came to a wall of rock which was the head of it. This we scaled, how I do not know, by cracks and fissures, the stronger dragging up the weaker by means of the tow-rope which by the mercy of God we carried with us. There we lost Francis Derrick, who fell a great way and crushed his skull on a boulder. You knew the man?"

"He sailed with me in '95. So that was the end of Francis?"

"We were now eleven, and two of them dying. Above the rocks on the plain we looked for ease, but found none. 'Twas like the bottom of a dry sea, all sand and great clefts, and in every hollow monstrous crabs that scattered the sand like spindrift as they fled from us. Some of the beasts we slew, and the blood of them was green as ooze, and their stench like a charnel-house.

"Likewise there were everywhere fat vultures that dropped so close they fanned us with their wings. And in some parts there were cracks in the ground through which rose the fumes of sulfur that set a man's head reeling."

Raleigh shivered.

"*Madre de Dios*, you portray the very floor of hell."

"Beyond doubt the floor of hell. There was but one thing that could get us across that devil's land, for our bones were molten with fear. At the end rose further hills, and we could see with our eyes they were green.

"Captain Bovill was like one transfigured. 'See,' he cried, 'the Mountain of God! Paradise is before you, and the way to paradise, as is well known, lies through the devil's country. A little longer, brave hearts, and we shall be in port.'

"And so fierce was the spirit of that man that it lifted our weary shanks and fevered bodies through another two days of torment. I have no clear memory of those hours. Assuredly we were all mad and spoke with strange voices. My eyes were so gummed together that I had often to tear the lids apart to see. But hourly that green hill came nearer, and toward dusk of the second day it hung above us. Also we found sweet water and a multitude of creeping vines bearing a wholesome berry. Then as we lay down to sleep, the priest came to us."

Raleigh exclaimed:

"What did a priest in those outlands? A Spaniard?"

"Aye. But not such as you and I have ever known elsewhere. *Papegot* or no, he was a priest of the Most High. He was white and dry as a bone, and his eyes burned glassily. Captain Bovill, who liked not the dark brothers, would have made him prisoner, for he thought him a forerunner of a Spanish force, but he held up a ghostly hand and all of us were struck with a palsy of silence. For the man was on the very edge of death.

"'*Morituus te saluto*,' he says, "and then he fell to babbling in Spanish, which we understood the better. Food, such as we had, he would not touch, nor the sweet well-water. 'I will drink no cup,' he said, 'till I drink the new wine with Christ in His Father's kingdom. For I have seen what mortal eyes have not seen, and I have spoken with God's ministers and am anointed into a new priesthood.'

"I mind how he sat on the grass, his voice drifting faint and small like a babe's crying. He told us nothing of what he was or whence he came, for his soul was possessed of a revelation.

"'These be the Hills of God,' he cried. 'In a little you will come to a city of the old kings, where gold is as plentiful as sand of the sea. There they sit frozen in metal waiting the judgment. Yet they are already judged, and, I take it, justified, for the dead men sit as warders of a greater treasure-house.'

"I think that we eleven—and two of us near death—were already half out of the body, for weariness and longing shift the mind from its moorings. I can hear yet Captain Bovill asking very gently of this greater treasure-house, and I can hear the priest like one in a trance, speaking high and strange.

"'It is the Mountain of God,' he said, 'which lies a little way farther. There may be seen the heavenly angels ascending and descending.'"

RALEIGH shook his head.

"Madness, Jasper—the madness begot of too much toil. I know it. And yet I do not know. 'Tis not for me to set limits to the marvels that are hid in that western land. What next, man?"

"In the small hours of the morning the priest died. Likewise our two sick. We dug graves for them, and the captain bade me say prayers over them. The nine of us left were shaking with a great awe. We felt lifted up in bodily strength, as if for a holy labor. Captain Bovill's stout countenance wore an air of humility.

"'We be dedicate,' he said, 'to some high fortune. Let us go humbly and praise God.'

"The first steps we took that morning we

walked like men going into church. Up a green valley we journeyed, where every fruit grew and choirs of birds sang—up a crystal river to a cup in the hills. And I think there was no one of us but had his mind more on the angels whom the priest had told of than on the golden kings."

Raleigh had raised himself from the couch and sat with both elbows on the table, staring hard at the speaker.

"You found them? The gold kings?"

"We found them. Before noon we came into a city of tombs. Grass grew in the streets and courts and the bronze doors hung broken on their hinges. But no wild things had laired there. The place was clean and swept and silent. In each dwelling the roof was of beaten gold, and the square pillars were covered with gold plates, and where the dead sat was a wilderness of jewels.

"I tell you, all the riches that Spain has drawn from all her Indies since the first *conquistador* set foot in them would not vie with the preciousness of a single one among those dead king's houses."

"And the kings?" Raleigh interjected.

"They sat stiff in gold on their thrones, their bodies fashioned in the likeness of men. But they had no faces—only golden plates set with gems."

"What fortune! What fortune! And what did you then?"

"We went mad."

THE seaman's voice was slow and melancholy.

"We, who an hour before had been filled with high contemplations, went mad like common bravos at the sight of plunder. No man thought of the greater treasure which these gold things warded. We laughed and cried like children and tore at the plated dead. . . . I mind how I wrenched off one jeweled face with the haft of my dagger, and a thin trickle of bones fell inside.

"And yet, as we ravened and plundered, we would fall into fits of shivering, for the thing was not of this world. Often a man would stop and fall to weeping. But the lust of gold consumed us, and presently we only sorrowed because we had no sumpter mules to aid its transit and had a terror of the infernal plain and valley we had traveled.

"Captain Bovill made camp in a mead outside the city, and one of us shot a deer so that we supped full. He unfolded his purpose, which was that we should pack about our persons such jewels as were the smallest and most precious, and some gold likewise as an earnest, and by striking northward through the mountains seek to reach at a higher point in its course the river by which we had entered from the sea. I mistrusted the plan, for the chart had shown but the one way, but the terror of the road we had come was strong on me and I made no protest. So we packed our treasure, so that each man staggered under it, and before noon left the place of the kings."

"And then? Was the road desperate?"

Raleigh's pale eyes had the ardor of a boy's.

"Desperate beyond all telling. An escalade of sheer mountains and a battling through vales choked with unbelievable thorns. Yet there was water and food, and the hardships were not beyond mortal endurance. 'Twas not a haunted hell like the way up. Wherefore I knew it would lead us to disaster, for 'twas not ordained, as the path in the chart had been."

Raleigh laughed.

"Faith, you show your mother's race. All Coffyns have in their souls the sour milk of Jean Calvin."

"Judge if I speak not the truth. Bit by bit we had to cast our burdens till only the jewels remained. And on the seventh day, when we were in sight of the river, we met a Spanish party, a convoy from their northern mines. We marched loosely and blindly, and they came on us unawares. We had all but reached the river's brink, so had the stream for a defense on one side, but before we knew, they had taken us on flank and rear."

"Many?"

"A matter of threescore fresh and well armed against nine weary men mortally short of powder. That marked the end of our madness, and we became again sober Christians. Most notable was Captain Bovill.

" 'We have seen what we have seen,' he told us, as we cast up our defenses under Spanish bullets, 'and none shall wrest the secret from us. If God wills that we perish, 'twill perish too. The odds are something heavier than I like, and if the worst befall, I trust every man to fling into the river what jewels he carries sooner than let them

become spoils of war. For if they see such preciousness, they will be fired to inquiry and may haply stumble on our city. Such of us as live will some day return there.'

"I have said we had little powder, but for half a day we withstood the assault, and time and again when the enemy leaped inside our lines we beat him back. At the end, when hope was gone, you would hear little splashes in the waters as this man or that put his treasures into eternal hiding. A Spanish sword was like to have cleft my skull, but before I lost my senses, I noted Captain Bovill tearing the chart in shreds and using them to hold down the last charges for his matchlock. He was crying, too, in English that some day we would return the road we had come."

"And you returned?"

The seaman shook his head.

"Not with earthly feet. Four of us they slew outright, and two more died on the way coastward. For long I was between death and life, and knew little till I woke in the *almirante's* cell at Panama. The rest you have heard. Captain Bovill died praising God, and with him three stout lads out of Somerset. I escaped and tell you the tale."

Raleigh had sunk his brow on his hands as if in meditation. With a sudden motion he rose to his feet and stared through the port, which was now tremulous with the foreglow of the tropic dawn. He put his head out and sniffed the sweet, cold air. Then he turned to his companion.

"You know the road back to the city?"

The other nodded.

"I alone of men."

"What hinders, Jasper?"

Raleigh's face was sharp and eager, and his eyes had the hunger of an old hound on a trail.

"They are all deserting me and look but to save their throats. Most are scum and have no stomach for great enterprises. I can send Herbert home with three shiploads of faint hearts, while you and I take the *Destiny* and steer for fortune. Ned King will come—ay, and Pommeroz. What hinders, old friend?"

The seaman shook his head.

"Not for me, Sir Walter."

"Why, man, will you let that great marvel lie hid till the hills crumble and bury it?"

"I will return—but not yet. When I have seen my son a man, I go back, but I go alone."

"To the city of the gold kings?"

"Nay, to the Mount of the Angels, of which the priest told."

There was silence for a minute. The light dawn wind sent a surge of little waves against the ship's side, so that it seemed as if the now flaming sky was making its song of morning. Raleigh blew out the flickering lamp, and the cabin was filled with a clear green dusk like palest emerald. The air from the sea flapped the pages of the book upon the table. He flung off his furred gown and stretched his long arms to the ceiling.

"I think the fever has left me. You said your tale was a commentary on my confessions. Wherefore, O Ulysses?"

"We had the chance of immortal joys but we forsook them for lesser things. For that we were thoroughly punished and failed even in our baseness. You too, Sir Walter, have glanced aside after gauds."

"For certain I have," and Raleigh laughed.

"Yet not for long. You have cherished most resolutely an elect purpose and in that you can not fail."

"I know not. I know not. I have had great dreams and I have striven to walk in the light of them. But most men call them will-o'-the-wisps, Jasper. What have they brought me? I am an old sick man penniless and disgraced. His slobbering Majesty will give me but a dusty welcome. For me the Mount of the Angels is like to be a scaffold."

"Even so. A man does not return from those heights. When I find my celestial hill, I will lay my bones there. But what matters the fate of these twisted limbs of even of your comely head? All's one in the end, Sir Walter. We shall not die. You have lit a fire among Englishmen which will kindle a hundred thousand hearths in a cleaner world."

Raleigh smiled, sadly yet with a kind of wistful pride.

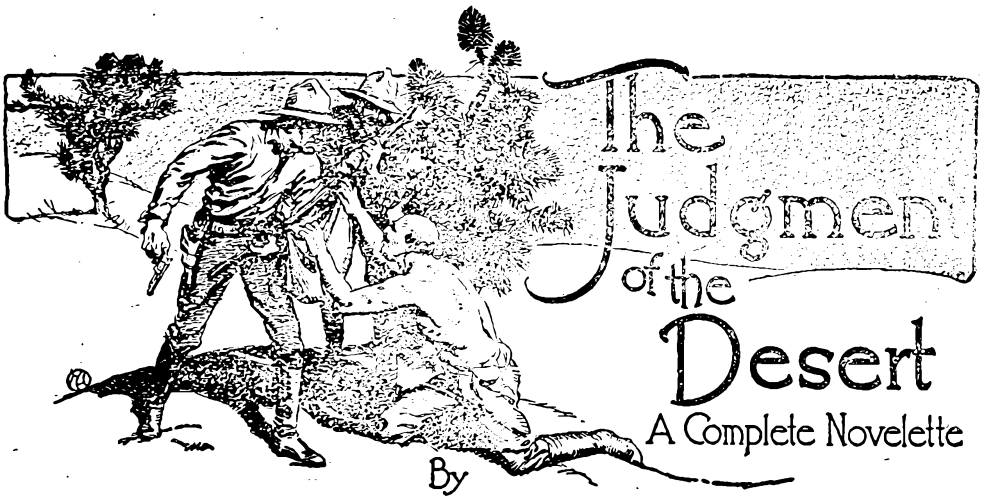
"God send it! And you?"

"I have a son of my body. That which I have sowed he may reap. He or his son, or his son's son."

The morning had grown bright in the little room. Of the two the admiral now

looked the younger The fresh light showed the other like a wrinkled piece of drift-weed. He rose stiffly and moved toward the door.

"You have proved my David in good truth," said Raleigh. "This night has gone far to heal me in soul and body. Faith, I have a mind to breakfast. What a miracle is our ancient England! French sire or no, Jasper, you have that slow English patience that is like the patience of God."



The Judgment of the Desert

A Complete Novelette

By

E. E. Harriman

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THE desert glare had just faded into dusky gray with purple and mauve shadows when Jake Miller sighted Hiranya. Jake harmonized with his surroundings to a wonderful extent. Thirty years of burro-punching had neutralized and colored him till he could lie down almost any old place and melt into the general scheme of the landscape, as a quail will hide. There were no high lights about Jake.

Gaunt, grizzled, loose-jointed, slouching and taciturn, Jake poked his gray old burro with a shiny stick and croaked at him.

"Git, ye danged ol' desert turtle," he said huskily. "Cool water in sight an' a shady camp a-waitin' fer us. Hike!"

The burro pointed his huge ears forward as if just perceiving the distant village, and brayed in one short gasp. Then the little battered hoofs moved more nimbly and Jake quickened his pace.

"Thutty years o' —— an' down to bedrock with nary a color," he said somewhat bitterly. "Raked this yere desert with a fine-toothed comb an' barely made a livin'. Now I'm comin' in busted flat."

He shut his mouth grimly and whacked the burro. The rope-like tail gave a flirt to acknowledge the favor; but the beast gave no other sign that it knew Jake was urging it to speed up.

"Gotta git grubstaked ag'in fer the fust time in ten year," the old man mumbled. "Allus managed to hev a few ounces ready fer buyin' my stuff afore; but luck was ag'in' me this time. I wonder will Liar Louis git nasty er will he ack human-like. I dunno."

The burro pattered across a stretch of hard-packed pebbles in a clay base, turned down a slight depression and clambered up the steep slope beyond. Jake nodded slightly with a satisfied look.

"Jest two mile to go from here an' then we git a rest an' water without no alkali an' dead critters in it," he said. "Git, you Jack!"

Hiranya lay among cottonwoods just where the fan-shaped talus at the mouth of a cañon began to open out to the desert.

It consisted of mine buildings, a warehouse store, a blacksmith shop, saloon and a score of shack dwellings. The deposit of mineral had been located by a whiskery old college professor who came here to study desert botany. He had given the mine the name, Sanskrit for gold, sold out and gone back to his books and manuscripts.

A renegade Jew, despised by his own people for his selfishness and all-around crooked practises, had bought a controlling interest in the mine. He had acquired nearly all the land that was suitable for hut-building and had become landlord to almost every man in Hiranya.

"Louis is such a liar you can't tell once has he got something so good or not," his own brother had said of him on his only visit to Hiranya. "He tells me yarns of this place and I have to see it myself *oder* I don't know is it one thing or another."

Promptly the name of Liar Louis became Louis Jacobsohn's name in the camp, and it spread everywhere. Liar Louis made no protest against the name tacked on him, but brought out to the camp his own pick of men to act as his lieutenants.

He placed Billy McCann, a hard-fisted, hard-natured product of the Barbary Coast, in charge of the saloon. Over the store, which was merely a warehouse with a pine counter in one end, he placed an importation from New York, a bat-eared, degenerate American named Johnny Ludlow, who was possessed of a certain trading instinct.

Liar Louis got an able and willing assistant in the art of doing up the purchaser when Johnny took hold. Together they fixed prices at cutthroat figures. Together they discussed the limit they might go in skinning the miners and others in Louis' employ. Johnny licked his lips in anticipation when Louis agreed to pay him a commission on all profits received above a certain large per cent.

"Leave it to me," he said. "When I get through with 'em they'll bleed, I'll skin 'em so close. Give 'em credit and take the bill out of their pay every month. Most of 'em don't keep tab and they'll never know if the account grows in the night."

"You'll have to go easy on buyers from other camps," said Louis. "We got the railroad here and that makes us the natural wholesalers for them other camps that's off the road. We can stick 'em some, but not too hard, *oder* they don't buy from us."

"Leave it to me," reiterated Johnny. "I'll fix 'em right."

"Another thing, Johnny," said Louis, speaking low and looking out to see that no person approached. "If any of these here prospectors is lucky—y' know, makes a strike—let me know right away off. Sometimes a feller makes a good thing by such news."

"Ye-uh! I got ye. I'll keep my eye peeled and both ears busy and I'll phone ye right away if anything turns up," promised Johnny.

"All right. Don' be too easy when they comes after grubstakes, if it looks like luck is leaving them. A lucky feller, now we might let him have a grubstake; but a rat that ain't showed no luck, not."

"Sure thing. I got ye. You won't have no complaints to make about my bein' too soft," Johnny assured him, and Louis was satisfied.

TO THIS sort of skin game the inhabitants of Hiranya had become accustomed, and toward this crook-controlled outfit old Jake Miller was heading. The gray burro pattered into the grove of cottonwoods and found the spot where he had camped before. There he stopped and waited for Jake to unpack his burden.

Making camp was a simple matter for Jake. He carried a little tent of the simplest sort and he set it up quickly. He stretched both of its sides out at long angles and piled his duffel under them. Before his jack had finished his tiny ration of barley and attacked the hay which Jake pulled from a stack near by, the camp was ready.

Jake struck out for the saloon the moment he had his camp made. He could not be called a sot; for nine-tenths of his time was spent in prospecting without a drop of hard liquor along. He was not given to periodical sprees, since his periods varied so greatly; but Jake did like to feel a stiff jolt of whisky begin work on his interior furnishings after a long drouth. It helped that vacation feeling.

Just before he reached the saloon, he crossed the trail followed by Johnny Ludlow. Johnny caught sight of him and hailed at once.

"H'lo, Jake! Struck it rich this trip?" he called in imitation of friendly good-will. "Hope you made a ten-strike."

"Naw, can't say as I did," responded

Jake, deceived by the tone. "I kinda sorta seemed outa luck. Didn't do as well as usual. Never got a color but once in the whole danged pasear. Picked up a leetle bit where some feller'd cleaned out a pocket and missed a speck. On'y 'bout half an ounce in pin-head nuggets.

"I reckon I'll have to ask ye to grubstake me fer the next trip, though I hate ter; but you know how it is, Johnny. Jest a small stake, 'nough fer two months. I know right where I kin git that much out from old diggin's in three weeks er less. I'll git busy and rustle that afore I look furder. I'll pay ye next time I come in."

"The —— ye will!" said Johnny, his manner changing instantly. "I don't grubstake no has-been. Your luck is played. I'll stake a lucky guy; but when a old rat has just played even for thirty years and then takes a tumble—not me! No, sir! Nothin' doin' with me!"

Johnny hurried on, casting a sneering look at Jake as he passed. The old man watched him for a moment and then moved on slowly. The spring had gone out of his legs, and he felt miserably old all at once. He entered the saloon with chagrin, disappointment and anger showing in his face. He walked across to the bar, scowling.

"What's the matter, old-timer?" asked Billy McCann, reaching for the old man's favorite bottle. "Anybody bit ye? Never see ye look so —— het up and flustered. Take a snort and cheer up."

"I am het up," answered Jake as Billy reached for a glass. "That thar bat-eared, hatchet-faced Johnny Ludlow jest tol' me he wouldn't let me have no grubstake. Thinks I'm down and out 'cause I missed my clean-up this trip. Make that snort a good one, Billy. I need it."

"Broke, eh?" said Billy, annexing the bottle once more. "Luck gone?"

He slid the bottle back among its fellows and replaced the glass.

"I guess you don't want no hooch over this bar, Jake. We don't serve fellers that's broke unless they has a sure-thing wad comin' later."

The old man's hand went to his hip like the dart of a striking rattler, and the old .45 slipped half out of its holster before he caught himself. Two loafing miners who leaned on the bar slipped aside.

"Billy McCann, you low-down hyderfoby skunk!" said the prospector, his voice suddenly losing its rather high-pitched, querulous note and sounding soft and low, but with a peculiar metallic quality. "I come dang near wastin' a shell on your rotten carcass fer that insult. Ye ain't wuth it, dang yer hide. It ain't what ye said as much as how ye said it that riles me. Stand still, ye fool, and let me show ye."

His left hand went into a pocket and came out holding a short vial that was filled halfway up with little yellow grains.

"Look at that, Billy McCann, and remember that Jake Miller never asked fer hooch in all his life unless he had the price. I'll take credit fer grub and clo'es, but never fer t'rantler juice. Now dang yer li'l' shriveled-up soul, come out from behind that bar and face a man if ye dare. I'm twice your age, but I kin lick —— out'n ye."

That right hand came up from the hip, the Colt slid down into the leather and the hand swept up a glass a miner had left. In it rested a third of a drink, just the fag end. With a swift sureness Jake sent the dregs into the bad face across the bar and followed it up with the empty glass. His aim was perfect and his action too quick to dodge. The glass landed just as the whisky had done.

"Come on around that bar," Jake invited. "Git action on ye. Fists er guns, jest as you like. I'm a-waitin' and itchin' to go."

Billy glanced at the two miners, but found no comfort there.

"Aw, ——, Jack. What's the use of gittin' hostyle thataway?" he said. "I didn't offer no insult ner nothin'."

"Ye did. Ye tucked up yer ugly lip like a trapped kiote and yer voice sounded like you looked. Ye never asked me had I the price and ye done talked like I was a dummed tramp. They was a insult in every word and every look ye give me.

"Now yer afraid to come out and meet me man to man fer fear I'm as low as you be and will pull the gun on ye after I've give ye yer choice, fist er guns. Yah! Yeller polecat!"

Jake turned on his heel and walked out of the saloon. His step was quick and firm, his head up and his eyes fearless. All the old desert slouch was gone and he walked erect. Anger had made him younger.

He started directly for the camp among the cottonwoods. Jack saw him coming and brayed in his most engaging manner.

JUST as Jake was crossing the tiny creek that ambled through the cottonwoods he saw Jim Baker, mine foreman, coming. Jim waved a hand and his face lighted in a grin of welcome.

"H'are ye, Jake? Glad to see ye back. Strike anything rich?" he said.

"Naw! Wust trip in ten year," said Jake. "On'y got half an ounce in five weeks and that won't feed Jack."

"Too bad. Too dang bad. Sorry, old man, but that ain't no excuse fer you lookin' like you'd like to wipe Hiranya off the map. What in all git-out ails ye?" asked Jim. "You look mad, pisen mad."

"I am mad, plumb fightin', howlin', cussin' mad," answered Jake, and told him what had happened. "It riled me to have that thar Johnny that hain't got no more brains than a niggerhead cactus treat me like I was a dead-beat; but when Billy sneered and stuck his ugly jaw out at me like I was a bum, I went loco. I'd 'a' fit 'im either way he said and never tried no low-down bartender tricks neither.

"Now I got to pull out fer Willow and see if Bob Lacy will stake me fer two months. It takes me 'leven miles out'n my road, but they ain't nothin' else fer me to do, as I see.

"—— that Fenian up there behind the bar! He might have acted human without hurtin' business. Seems like Liar Louis has picked the most unfeelin' pair he could find to handle his store and bar. He's so infernally crooked himself his own folks won't do business with him and he wants crooks and low, heartless critters to ack fer 'im."

"Now you looky here, Jake," expostulated Jim. "Don't go pikin' off to Willow jest yit. It ain't a-goin' to take sech a dodgasted lot to stake ye fer sixty days.

"Wait a bit. Come up to my shack and I'll git Dick Forgay and Walt Rannells to come over and we'll talk over the matter of stakin' you ourselves. Godfrey! It won't bust us. Does that go, or are ye so mad ye can't see no one in Hiranya?"

"I hain't no quarrel with none o' you fellows and I take it most mighty kind of you to offer," Jake replied. "It goes, and I'll make good on this stake or bust a b'iler. If I can't strike mineral I'll go to the potash beds and work there till I can pay back what I owe you boys. This ain't goin' to be any ordinary grubstake, Jim. It's goin' to be a grubstake and a debt of honor, too."

"All right, Jake," said Jim, dropping a big hand on the shoulder nearest him. "Have it any way that suits you best; but we ain't askin' no more of you than we asks of Slim Kearney when he deals faro. We bets our money on the turn of a kyard or on them eyes o' yourn, with jest the same kind of a grin. I'll see Dick and Walt right away. You come to supper and they'll come over afterwards. So long!"

Jim stuck his head inside the assayer's shack and hailed Walt, who was sweating over his pulverizer, told him briefly what was wanted and invited him over for a conference. He received a nod of agreement and went on.

He paused at the blacksmith shop and Dick's hammer stopped, hanging idly in his grasp as he listened. He understood the attitude of the bat-eared clerk and had little to say about that, but he blew up just as Jim and Walt had when he heard of the bartender's action.

"I'll be ——! Choking a feller off after he's spent as many good dollars over the bar as Jake has, without one teeny little drink! I never knowed Billy McCann was that much of a hog. I reckon Louis picked his men careful when he sent Johnny and Billy here. Hadn't no doubt about their careful ways with his stuff and knowed they'd take orders. Gosh! 'Course I'm in on the grubstake."

"All right, fellers," said Jim. "We three stakes the old man; but I don't want him to go to Johnny for so much as a plug of eatin'-tobacco. We're all married men an' got supplies at home. Jest s'pose we pick over our stuff an' fix Jake up an' let him slide. I got a whole slab o' bacon fer 'im an' canned tomaters enough, besides some flour."

The three men talked this over that night, then went to their homes and consulted wives, who were just as sympathetic. The result was that Jake had his replenished pack on his burro and was heading into the desert fifteen minutes after the moon had risen.

The three who had grubstaked him watched him go, and not one of the three expected anything more from this expedition than had come from a hundred others in the past.

Jake Miller had prospected for thirty

years, and never but once had Fortune smiled on him in that time. Now and then she had dropped a few crumbs where he might gather them, just enough to whet his appetite and keep him eager.

"Pore ol' Jake," said Dick Forgay. "He'd never be happy anywheres else, 'cept taggin' that ol' jack-burro. He never has found nothin' an' 'tain't likely he ever will; but I votes we keep 'im goin'."

FAR out on the desert where the nearest spring lay a whole day's journey behind him, Jake made his first stop for a real search. He had seen rock here, when he was hurrying in with little food and less water, that called for inspection.

He devoted two days to the ledge, hoping every moment to see value there. He gave up with a sigh at last. Not a color to be seen anywhere. Just another failure.

From here he wandered on into the trackless distances, carrying a double water-bag across the neck of his burro. Till his two months were gone and the grubstake had dwindled to a mere tantalization he ranged the wastes, examining every ledge and dike of rock he found.

At last he wadded his bit of food into a tiny bundle and looked at it. Sorrow was heavy upon him. Despair was gripping him. He had failed once more and must go back to the friends who had staked him, his hands empty. He felt his years as he never had felt them before.

"I cain't ask them boys to stake me over ag'in," he muttered. "I'm busted. All in as fur as prospectin' goes. Reckon I'll git me a job an' settle down to bein' a watchman er suthin' like that. Oh, ——!"

He got up from the rock where he had sat while eating and began to pack the burro again. He moved listlessly and once he paused, took his old .45 from its holster and looked at it. Then he shook his head and dropped it back again. He was not quite ready for that.

"Might as well, an' be done with it," he muttered. "I cain't help hopin' fer a streak o' luck though, an' I don't want to quit till it comes my way. I'd like to win, even if it don't do me no good."

Once more he headed back toward Hiranya, plodding dejectedly at the tail of his burro. With the old stick he had carried for years he tap-tap-tapped the shaggy rump. The burro did not mind it in the least and it seemed to give his master some amusement, so why should he kick?

Steadily they plodded until the sun was near the meridian. Nothing happened, nothing appeared save the usual sand and stones and scrubby desert growths. Then the burro, shifting his course a trifle, headed toward a rock that rose high above the sand, promising shade. He had timed the moment for the midday rest and meal.

As he walked with pattering hoofs a slight obstruction made him curve a pace to the right. A thin triangle of rock lay athwart his path, its peak about knee-high to man.

As the gray legs of the burro passed this rock scale there came the metallic singing of a desert rattler's warning. The burro leaped aside and forward. The hand of Jake opened and dropped to the old Colt as his stick fell.

He leaped past the rock a good six feet away from its edge, whirling as he landed. The gun spat once, twice, then slid into the worn leather again. The snake was writhing, with its head and two inches of the neck missing, lying up against the rock. Jake walked back and recovered his stick, seasoned by many years of desert sun, polished by years of use.

With its tip he flipped the severed head far out on the sand, then paused to note where his first shot had struck. In his haste he had shot high. The heavy bullet, driven by smokeless powder, had clipped the triangle about ten inches above the ground and only a finger-breadth below the edge. It had broken a fragment from the rock.

With the habit of years strong upon him Jake stooped to examine the fresh break. A moment later he was pounding with his belt-pick, breaking off other bits and taking samples. His luck had turned.

With his old heart singing in his breast Jake got his shovel from the pack and dug away the sand about the triangle. A little excavating proved the truth of what he had hoped for, that this was but a flange or fin thrust up from a solid mass below. He bared the rock and traced the quartz seam both ways from the center.

"It's the apex. I've struck it rich after thirty years of hopin'. I haven't kep' a-hopin' fer nothin' after all. ——, but I feel like dancin' an' I feel like prayin', all

muxed up together," he told the dead snake as he peeled its skin off. "I'm jest a'goin' to eat your danged carcass. It'll help out some an' give me time to monument my claim without goin' hungry too durn long. An' I'll tie your skin on a stick an' let it hang over the discovery monument. I'll call this the 'Rattlesnake Claim,' too, by Godfrey."

He carried stones and built a pyramind, laying them up carefully to make it stable. In the tiny space in the center he left a carefully worded description of his claim, written with a stubby indelible pencil on a leaf from a pocket note-book. This he rolled and on each end stuck one of the empty shells he had fired at the snake.

Pacing off the distances, he built four corner monuments and in each left a written record. All this took time, and the gathering of samples required more.

The burro had been unpacked and allowed to roam after such sparse vegetation as he could find. The snake had been cooked and eaten and he had taken two scant meals from his dwindling pack before he thought of leaving.

Then the burro, thirsty, nosed the double water-bag in the night and made it fall from where it hung on a scrub mesquite. Jake woke and drove the burro away, but the thirsty sands had taken all the water, save about half a gallon.

"Now you've went an' done it, Jack," said the old man sadly and a trifle reproachfully. "That means claw out'n here immejit. You gotta git under that there pack *muy pronto* an' light out fer Tinaja, er we jine the rest of the fools who forgot their bones an' left 'em out to dry. You'll wish you was a camel with all yer stummicks full afore long, er I'm a Chinaman. Keep yer eye peeled fer a barrel cactus now."

He threw the sawbuck saddle on the burro and packed him in haste. His tools he left by the discovery monument. He discarded everything he could spare, but he packed securely his samples. Then he drove the burro out into the moonlit desert, heading for far-away Tinaja.

THE desert tide of heat was at its full though it had not as yet attained that intensity it held in mid-Summer. The wide gray plain, endless as the ocean, danced, dissolved and renewed itself, only to be hidden once more by the deceptive paintings of the mirage. Scenes of beauty, cool groves and limpid waters sprang into being for a moment, only to fade with the next change of elevation.

Dust devils alone and dust devils in files marched, circled, danced and wavered about the plain, following one another like drilling soldiers or doing whirling-dervish solos. Often one or more would go through a pictured dream of heavenly cool water that offered mock salvation.

A gray burro followed by a dust-gray man came out of a channel between two sand-hills. The burro pattered on little, worn hoofs that lacked somewhat of their normal certainty. The old man strode heavily with feet rather wide apart, scuffing the sand. The gaunt face under the wide hat-brim was deeply furrowed.

"Huddup, ye danged desert turtle," croaked a husky voice around a swelling tongue, and a worn stick rapped a flank. "Hump yerself. The water-bag's empty. Gotta make Tinaja er bust. Git, dang ye!"

A stroke of the stick whacked a gambrel joint and the limp tail of the burro jerked upward. The left hand of the man caught it and clung there while he struck again. The burro lunged forward in a spurt that made the man run awkwardly for half a dozen steps. Then the pace died down to the old, steady, hideous shuffle-shuffle.

"Nothin' in sight," whispered the old man, peering ahead. "I'll hang on as long as I kin, but I'm failin' fast."

Steadily the burro threaded his way among the little sand-hills, but always his head swung back to the one direction. He knew where he was going and nothing could divert him permanently.

Hour after hour they plodded painfully onward. Hour by hour the sun took toll of their strength. Steadily the fountain of life lost its vigor. Inexorably the dry atmosphere reduced the water content of their bodies and set the fires of fevered blood against the fires of superheated sand and air. Burning within and without they hastened.

Speech became impossible to the man. The burro tried to bray and produced only a muffled, wheezing gasp. The leg no longer jerked its protest against the futile tapping of the stick. No longer the face under the flopping brim turned this way and that with keen old eyes searching for remembered landmarks. Yet still the lean

hand gripped the rope-like tail and the tiny hoofs kept crunching the sand.

Twice the old eyes glanced around and returned to the gray rump and the dusty pack in horrified intensity. They had begun to see the rocks and hills, the Joshua trees and scattered mesquites, as something different.

The desert rat knew his eyes had lied to him when they told him that huge rock with the Joshua tree in front was a cottage and shade-tree. His brain told him of the traitorous falsity when they said a shaft of rock was a friendly man, beckoning him on to water, rest and comfort.

So he held his gaze to the shaggy rump and the dusty tarp and left the guidance to the instinct of Jack.

Mechanically his feet swung forward in the step. Mechanically he poked with a stick he could not raise for a blow. Without further volition he clung to that tail, following where it led.

SUDDENLY the lean neck of the burro straightened, the big ears flopped forward and stiffened, the mouth opened in an attempted bray and the little feet quickened.

A wheezing, gasping rush of air from a dried and unresponsive larynx startled the old man. Then his feet struck a granite turtleback, the burro wheeled around a huge knee of rock—and the old man knew.

Clawing frantically along the hairy rump, the wrinkled tarp, the low withers, he slid down the steeply sloping neck and buried his face in the cool waters of Tinaja beside the little gray nose.

Never an inch moved hairy gray nose for hairy gray chin. Together, as they had dared death, they sucked life from the pot-like pool in the granite rock. Only a swallow or two and then old Jake beat and pushed and squeezed the gray nose away and covered the pool with his body. The hard little forehoof pawed at his shoulder, the insistent nose burrowed and nipped to reach the water.

For five minutes Jake held his place, then rolled aside and the burro buried his nose half-way to the eyes once more in the water.

Over and over they fought the battle, Jake protecting the brute as he protected himself, from the disaster of too free indulgence after long abstinence.

At last man and beast drank freely and both lay down in the shade of the great rock that shadowed the spring. Jake had loosened the pack and dropped it on the rock floor. He had fallen along it in a stupor and relaxed in sleep.

Hours later he woke and crawled to the water-hole again. He saw the burro nosing about and eating the scanty herbage below the spring. He drank and went back to the tarp and blankets.

"It wa'n't my time," he reflected with desert fatalism, and slept.

He woke once more as the sunset glare was fading in the west. A young coyote looked at him from a clump of weeds thirty yards away. He slipped the long revolver from its holster.

The shot startled a couple of buzzards from the ground behind him, and he grinned sardonically at the heavy flap of their wings.

"Not this time, dang yer dirty souls," he muttered, rising.

Twenty minutes later the blue smoke of a little fire rose on the still air and the smell of roasting meat went with it. Jake was on the way to a square meal, with several cold snacks to follow.

The little wolf of the desert cooked over a little fire between two rocks gave the old man strength, and he pulled out when the moon rose with his water-bags full. What remained of the roasted meat he had carefully stowed away for the long hike back to Hiranya. He ate the last of it while he was still eighteen miles out.

He unpacked and stole a feed of hay from the little stack a Polack miner kept for his goats. This he fed to Jack and then started for Jim Baker's cabin.

The lights were just beginning to glow yellow from the shacks of the miners when Jake Miller sloshed through the shallow creek. He was too weary to care whether he waded or swam it, but he still had enough respect for Mrs. Baker to kick the wet dust off his battered boots at the steps. Jim's little girl looked out to see who was doing the kicking and spoke to her father. Jim came to the door.

"H'lo, Jake. How's tricks, old man?" he said. "Come right in and set. Jennie, run tell ma to set table fer Jake. Lemme help ye off with the pack, Jake. Gosh! Heavy, ain't it? Specimens, eh?"

"Uh-huh. A few fer Walt to assay. Gi'n up and lit out fer Tinaja with on'y a half-gallon o' water, without locatin' a

thing. Kilt a rattler and found color in the rock he was hidin' behind. Staked a claim and made it to the water-hole by the help o' two biznaga. Most likely I'd 'a' croaked if it hadn' 'a' been fer them barrel cactus."

"How does the rock look, rich er only middlin'?" asked Jim.

"I'll show ye," said Jake, stooping to open the pack.

"Come and eat first, Jake," said Mrs. Baker from the doorway. "You can talk mineral till sunup for all I care after supper is eaten."

At the table Jake talked around and through his food, telling his experiences. His taciturnity dropped off like a cloak before the kind and sympathetic group.

With careless phrase he "reckoned Jack and me come danged near stayin' out there; but we win through, so what's the differ'? Them barrel cactus, the snake and the kiote is what kep' me alive. Jack found a goodish bit o' burro-weed and galleta grass [illegible] the water-hole, and he and me both et some mesquite beans twice. We got kinda dry, but we made it."

"Eddie, you run over and tell Dick and Walt I want 'em right away," said Jim to his small son after supper. "Tell 'em to come a-flukin'."

The other two partners came at once, hailing Jake with hearty words.

"I'm bettin' my wad you got good news to tell this time, Jake," said Dick as he shook the old man's hand. "Your eyes look all kinda crinkly and happy around the corners. Strike it rich, eh?"

Outside, a hatchet-faced, bat-eared individual who had seen Jake on his way, and later saw Dick and Walt hurrying, slipped softly over the sand and stopped beside the shack. He was in deep shadow and one of those bat-ears pressed against a cracked board in the wall. Nothing between the ear and the folks inside save the muslin and paper lining.

"You bet I have," came the instant answer from Jake to Dick. "I'll jest show ye, as soon as I git this pack open. There! Take a squint at that and this and these others. Free gold in ary one of 'em. See this one. Yeller streak as thick as a dollar and two inches long. Here's one with a splash of yeller as big as a finger-nail.

"Boys, we four owns a dang big lot o' good rock. It sticks up in a fin and rounds off both ways. I hit the apex jest as sure as little apples. Dug down to the ledge the fin come out of, and the veins shows up as plain as a bull's foot. Three-foot layer o' gouge on one side and mighty nigh a foot on t'other.

"She'll mine easy, boys, and she'll pan out heavy. Walt, them there specimens is all jest average, taken right off that fin. See what they runs jest as soon as you kin git to it, will ye?"

"Tackle them first thing in the morning, Jake. Where does she lay?"

"Four days' hike almost due east from Tinaja, Walt. All paced off in proper shape and monumented. Discovery monument as tall as I be and has a ocatillo stalk with a rattlerskin on it, stickin' out up top. I call it the Rattlesnake Claim.

"My notice is rolled with a .45 shell on each end, and built in snug on the west side under the flat slab of rock. I brung in a copy and description."

"Four days east, huh? That must take ye past Camel's Hump Rock," said Forgay. "Isn't it some close to Temakawomal water-hole?"

"Only half a mile south; but Temakawomal is as dry as a bone. Passed it goin' out and it wasn't even damp. Ye-uh. You go past Camel's Hump and then bear off to pass the north end of them twin hogbacks that has so much red in 'em. Run yer line close to them ledges er ye'll go too far north and find nothin' but sand and cholla cactus.

"Ye won't see nothin' of the monuments till ye git right near, fer they're in the allfiredest tangle of sand-hills I ever see. Fine sand that drifts with every wind. Some mesquite there and rabbit brush and other stuff. Kinda —— fired and —— forsook-lookin' place, but it's got the mineral. It's what I've been huntin fer thutty year."

Outside the hatchet-faced listener moved back softly from the wall. He took each backward step with caution, slowly, feeling to make sure that it landed right. His retreat was crab-like until he had put more than twenty yards between him and the shack. Then he turned and fled swiftly. He traveled quietly in spite of speed.

THAT night Liar Louis had to get out of bed at midnight to answer his insistent telephone. He spoke into the transmitter impatiently, but a moment later he was listening eagerly.

"Fine work, Johnny," he said. "Where did you say it iss?"

"I didn't say. If you get the dope from me you'll pay for it. I don't plan to boost you into a fortune and then get left on the curb. When you come through with a right-sized roll we'll do business; but not till then; see? And you can't hang anything on me to force my hand, either. I come from N' Yawk, where they're wise to birds like you; see?" And Johnny hung up the receiver.

Liar Louis came to Hiranya by the morning train just as Johnny figured that he would. He held a heated argument with Johnny, trying to make his crooked clerk see that anything Johnny learned that might be profitable naturally belonged to his employer.

"Aw, cut it out!" exclaimed Johnny disgustedly after a time. "My time is me own after the store is closed, and it ain't any of your —— business what I do or what I hear after hours. Kick in with a roll or chase yourself. I'm through talkin'."

Louis made three attempts to force conversation after that, found Johnny dumb on mineral and gave in. He agreed to meet his clerk's demands and started to write a check, but Johnny stopped him.

"Cash. I don't spill any information for a scrap of paper with a liar's name on the end of it," he said emphatically.

With a sigh of regret Louis swallowed the insult and pulled out a long billfold. He began to count out money, but paused.

"Wait once," he said, his eyes narrowing to slits. "I'll need help. For this you give me information and you agrees to help when I need you, hey? You stands by me right through in effery way?"

"For cash in advance for each and every stunt," replied Johnny.

Again Louis sighed as he stripped off bill after bill. He laid the thin bundle of currency on the desk and Johnny picked it up. In ostentatious and insulting manner he counted the bills.

"All right. The amount is correct. Want a receipt?" he asked.

"Don't get funny," said Louis, scowling. "What you want? A row mit me? Like to get fired, eh?"

"I don't care a —— one way or the other," answered Johnny in a careless manner. "With fifteen hundred bucks in my jeans I can soon find a place I like a —— of a lot better than this."

Louis decided to let the matter drop since he might need Johnny's help later. The fact that the hatchet-faced clerk neither feared nor respected him troubled Jacobsohn not at all. He had found so little respect among his own relatives and racial associates that he had become hardened to its lack.

As for inducing fear—if he failed in that, he could always bribe a crook, and he knew Johnny for that just as Johnny knew him.

"Too bad you didn't let Jake have the grubstake once already. A grubstake it gives half, and a little smooth work it gives the rest. Too bad you let him slip through your fingers," said Louis.

"Your instructions were not to grubstake if the feller looked unlucky, and when a desert rat has prospected thirty years and then can't show fifty for his stake, I call him —— unlucky," growled the clerk. "You can't hang that on me, after what you said."

"Well, it's no use crying when the bottle is busted," Louis replied. "Can't we somehow get the description, so we can file and make a contest? He hasn't gone out to file yet, has he?"

"No. Jim Baker's kid told me this morning that the old man is on the sick list. Had a tough time and he's all in."

"Well, if we can get the description once, the law looks at the first man to file as the right owner," said Louis. "It would be up to Jake to prove his right and he ain't got no money. We can carry it up through one court after another and fight him to a standstill. Also and furthermore, if I gets possession besides, he is licked."

The crooked Jew and the crooked Gentile talked long, but no plan came to them through which they could get hold of the paper on which the old man had written that description. Then Louis decided.

"I know two fellows I can get that will go out and take possession. 'Olanche' Jack Durgin and 'Gopher' Bill Peters owes me something and I can find them easy. Make me a new copy of them directions again and I takes it to them and makes a bargain," he said to Johnny.

"Oh, them birds you kept out of stir eh? I heard about them. All right. I'll rattle the old chicken-caller and make a copy for you."

Johnny turned to the ancient typewriter and hammered out the full directions for finding the Rattlesnake Claim as he had heard them through the cracked board. Louis took this copy and the one he had bought from Johnny and stowed them in his billfold.

"How much cash you got in the safe?" he asked. "You skinned me so deep I gotta git more. Jack and Bill comes high sometimes."

He took the bills, some few hundreds that had accumulated since his last visit and placed them with the typed sheets. He did not let Johnny see the green lining of that receptacle for currency. He had concealed the bulk of his money through long habit.

LOUIS caught the train that passed Hiranya at 3:10, rode to a station forty miles north and put up for the night. In the early morning he caught a stage that carried him far back among the treeless desert ranges to a gold camp.

Olanche Jack and Gopher Bill were temporarily at work as miners, a job they thoroughly understood. Incidentally they were just as busily high-grading for Jack and Bill as they were working for the company. Louis found them just coming off shift. He met them rather effusively, but they eyed him with cold reserve.

"What's on?" demanded Gopher sourly. "You never act like that unless youse have got a ax to grind. Spill it."

"Time enough after we eat," said Louis. "Besides, this ain't no plan to be ringin' no bells about and usin' a megaphone on. After supper we hunts a quiet place where sneakers can't git close."

After supper Bill led the way to a ridge that overlooked the camp. It was as bare and naked in its rugged contour as anything Nature ever made. Here they sat down on a flat ledge that rose a few inches above its surroundings. Jack and Bill sat facing each other, cross-legged and watching the ridge over each other's shoulders.

"A blow-fly couldn't come within a hundred yards now without bein' in plain sight," said Bill. "Turn it loose, whatever it is."

Louis put the facts before them in as few words as he could pack them in, and Bill grunted. Both men looked at Louis, then at each other.

"It'll take some fat to get me out in that ——'s playground at this time o' year," said Olanche Jack in stolid decision.

"Here too," agreed Gopher Bill. "It's plenty bad right here and we ain't doin't so worse. Why take on somethin' a —— sight tougher?"

"But this is a big thing and I thought an eighth interest to each of you fellers—" began Louis, only to be halted by jeering laughter.

"Eighth interest be ——!" said Jack. "All you know about this claim is what your hired sneak heard through a crack. You haven't got one single specimen to show, haven't even seen them. How do we know there is anything there worth goin' after? We'll take the interests but you'll cough up a fat wad in cold cash besides."

Louis argued and cajoled to no purpose. Then he tried to pull the plaintive "you owe me gratitude" stunt and it failed.

"Sure, you saved us a spell in the jute-mill, but you done it for a purpose of your own. You never done anything for any one unless Louis saw his way to make a profit out of the deal," Bill answered him.

"I know you figured you could afford to tell them lies on the stand or we could have roasted in —— before you would have done a lick to help us out. We've come through twice now with help that netted you a roll and that old account is about squared."

"Bet your neck!" blurted Jack. "Don't pull any more of that stuff. We don't go into this because we love you or because we owe you any big amount of this —— thing you call gratitude. If you could get along without us you'd do it and we could lie in stir for life. You know you can't handle this alone, so you want us to take all the risk and let you gather in the profit. Now this is my idea.

"You provide the outfit complete from fry-pan to burros, includin' what tools we need, giant, fuse, caps, bed-rolls, grub, water-bags and tent. Then you pay us five hundred apiece in advance. Then if it comes to a fight in court, you give us as much more for lyin' and stickin' to it besides the interest you promised."

Louis squirmed and argued, cursed and pleaded; but the yegg high-graders were unyielding. The agreement was finally made and the trio left the ridge. Louis was dejected over having to part with so much

cash, but had learned long ago that at times a man must spend freely in order to start a backwash that would fill his pockets.

Louis began gathering his outfit the following day. Before he had it ready, he had to wait for certain things to arrive by stage. It was four days before he had finished assembling needed articles and by the end of the second day he had determined to go with the pair of rougher rascals. He explained this to Bill and Jack.

"I'll go along and when we get to the claim, I takes the complete description and hikes back to Hiranya and gets it on file right off. You fellers do the reg'lar assessment work and keeps possession for me. That possession is our strongest point after I've filed."

The three left the mining-camp on a Thursday morning, driving four burros. In the packs lay grub enough to keep two men four months. On one burro hung a double water-bag, holding ten gallons in each side. Each man carried a gallon canteen filled to the cork.

BACK at Hiranya old Jake Miller had been having a hard time with rheumatism that had attacked him right after his first day of illness from other causes. He had resigned himself to a long spell of idleness and suffering, when the attack left him as suddenly as it had begun.

Johnny saw the old man out in the sunshine that afternoon and he grinned evilly. His mind pictured the result if Jake learned that Louis was out to jump his claim.

"He packs a buster of a gat and they tell me he is —— quick on the draw," he mused. "The boss had better be careful or the old rat will cook him. He'll sure fight for his big strike. Don't blame him a mite. Thirty years prospectin' the desert gives him the right."

That afternoon a man from the camp where Louis had found his men dropped off the train at Hiranya. He had business with Walt Rannells.

"Of course I've got an assay from our camp assayer; but I always want two men to assay my stuff, men who are in different camps. Give me the result as soon as you can. I'd like to catch the night freight at 12:28," he said, and Walt began work at once.

The man from Burnt Gold Camp sat and talked in a steady drone, telling camp gossip and mining news. Walt kept at his pulverizing and made no comment until he caught the name of Louis Jacobsohn.

"What was that about Louis?" he asked, pausing.

"I said he came into camp a few days ago and left this mornin' on a desert trip. He took Jack Durgin and Bill Peters with him and they had four burros carryin' packs. Headed out Tinaja way just as I was gettin' over to the station to catch the stage."

"*Hmmm!*" grunted Walt, resuming the manipulation of the heavy steel pulverizer on its metal table. "So that's where Louis went, eh?"

He said no more, though the stranger looked at him inquiringly, but seemed all intent upon his assay work.

Walt told Jim Baker what the man had said about Louis when they met next morning, and Jim said Jake had taken his horse and gone out to file his claim.

"Do you suppose that crook has learned in any way about Jake's strike?" said Walt. "It looks bad to me."

"How could he? None of us have talked and Jake is like a clam on the subject, except in my house. The wife and the kids don't know yet where that claim lies, so they couldn't have let it leak out," said Jim.

"Jake plans to start out again tonight when the moon rises, around ten o'clock. He can beat those guys from Burnt Gold if that is where they are headin' for; but I think they are hitting it up for the new diggings at Iron Butte. That would take them past Tinaja just the same, but headin' southeast instead of east.

"No use to rumple Jake all up with a bunch of guesswork. I vote we don't tell him. We don't know for sure that Louis and his pair of yeggs are after his claim, and Jake will know how to handle 'em if they show up. He'd smell a rat the minute he sighted Louis and stand them off.

"All right; but just the same I'm going to give Jake a tip to be wide-awake against callers. We might tell him Louis has gone to the Iron Butte diggin's and that it was possible that his outfit would swing far enough east to sight Jake's monuments," said Walt.

"Yes, we might do that, but I don't believe they will. I think they will go past about five miles south, maybe ten. If I wasn't needed so bad right now that we're timberin' the tunnel, I'd offer to go with Jake, but I can't get off," Jim replied.

"It is out of the question for me to go until I finish that bunch of nine assays I promised to do for Conly. Just began them today and they are a hard bunch to negotiate," remarked Walt. "Reckon Jake will take care of himself. He's done it long enough to know how."

That night the three friends watched Jake follow his burro out on the way to his claim, every man wishing he were free to go along.

Jake found his rattlesnake-skin pennant still fluttering in the dry wind and no mark of human visitation visible. He hung his double water-bag on a mesquite, unpacked and turned Jack loose. Then he put up his little tent and stacked his supplies along its north side under the edge of the fly. The burro went philosophically away and began to search for galleta or sakaton grass, burro-weed or mesquite beans.

For two days the old man worked, building a V-shaped wall of rocks with the point of the V toward the prevailing wind. He had a definite plan to work out. In a land where the wind shifted the sand-hills as it did here, it was well to try to deflect the drift.

With his discovery monument and the rock fin beside it inside the angle, the sand might be carried away in two long, divergent streamers, instead of piling over them. He made the angle sharp to make the air-currents divide more surely and he built the wall high and strong.

Late in the forenoon of the third day he was busily working on the wing walls. The point of the angle had risen to the level of his eyes and the wings stepped down to hip-height at the back.

He had put a twenty-pound rock in place and was setting smaller rocks to make it stable when he saw the head of a burro come into view past a hill of sand. It was only forty yards away and coming nearer.

THE head of a second burro appeared at the first one's tail and an instinctive thrill of apprehension shot through Jake. He started for his tent at a hurried gait. A third burro showed his melancholy face and Jake started to run. Beside the tent he looked back and saw the fourth burro. All were pack-laden. Over the last gray rump two evil faces looked at him and their expression told him what to expect. Back of them he glimpsed a third countenance. He knew

"Louis Jacobsohn!" gasped the old man as the third face turned to look at him, then dived for his old .45 that lay on his bed.

Came a shot—a second—then two at once, and Jake Miller lay still, his old fingers just touching the butt of a worn old belt-gun.

"Cooked!" said the crooked mouth of Olanche Jack.

"—— well cooked," agreed Gopher Bill, and Louis Jacobsohn gave a shudder. Then all three came forward, the two yeggs holding the short, large-caliber "rods" of the city gunman.

Jake had been hit by the first shot in his plunge after his gun and had been thrown a little awry by the shock. His tent had been partly dragged aside by his weight and hung askew. His face was down and his old hat still stuck on the back of his head.

A smooth hole in the crown just above the band and a ragged one that divided the band in front marked the passage of the bullet that had "cooked" him.

Olanche Jack stooped and touched the rear hole, then the front one, with the muzzle of his "rod."

"Busted his skull all to ——," he remarked casually. "Put up yer barker an' grab hold. Out back o' that sand-hill will do."

He and Bill grabbed an ankle apiece and started off with the body. The poor old hands trembled and vibrated up and down over the rough places left by their feet in the sand. They left the body lying in the trail they had followed coming in, the tracks of their feet by and above those of Jake.

The gray old face hung over a deep hole where Bill had slipped in the sand as he hauled. The sand, wadded under the chest by the dragging, held the face up as if Jake had lifted it of his own will.

"Good enough!" grunted Bill. "No use in draggin' it any furder. Give the buzzards two days on him, with what help the kiotes gives at night, and he won't trouble us none."

"Sure," answered Jack. "He's down wind anyhow. C'mon. Let's get those —— jackasses unpacked and make camp. Jump in on this, you Louis. The old boy had a nice little camp started here. We'll just use his tent to store things in and pitch our own alongside."

They set up their own larger tent and packed all their supplies with Jake's in the small one. They hung their water-bag on the same mesquite and their canteens inside the tent. Jake had pitched his camp only a pace or two from his water-bag.

"Now let's see what that vein looks like," said Bill as they finished.

Louis had shuddered when Jake fell before that shot. He had turned pale and trembled while the body was being dragged away. Now his fear and tremors left him and his insatiable greed took charge.

"Hadn't we better look for his description first?" he asked.

"Naw. Find that and you'd most likely copy it and it would be a sure dead give-away. Make your own description or it won't look right. You can do that any time. Let's have a look-see," said Bill.

They clawed away the loose sand and uncovered the ledge below the fin. The pit had partially filled while Jake had been absent. Using the dead man's shovel, they threw the surplus sand out. Then Bill and Jack went on their knees, brushing the surface and blowing at it. The vein showed up plainly.

Louis tried to crowd in between them in the narrow angle, but they did not shift to give him room.

A few words in the jargon of the yegg passed between the two, and when Bill looked around at Louis he unconsciously continued the same type of conversation.

"Plumb lousy wit' gold," he said. "It'll take a peterman to git it out proper, an' that's me. You don't know nothin' about crimpin' a double-X or runnin' a string an' I do. My price has taken a jump and there'll have to be a new deal. Jack and me gets equal shares wit' you or we quits you cold. This ain't no talkfest nor no stall. Git that barrel pen o' yours inta action *pronto* and write out a statement in three copies, sayin' that you furnishes all workin' capital and we two the discovery of a mineral claim and splits even on it."

"Schwindlers!" yelped Louis. "Didn't I always been square with you? Ain't it my moneys that furnishes everything? Didn't it been me that first told you about this claim? I never see sech a gall."

"Cork up on that and write," snarled Bill, reaching for his gun. "Mebbe you'd like to go to bed with the old man. That's a wide bed where he lays and he won't snore nor nothin'. Git action, or we do in another way, right sudden too."

Miserably Louis began to write, fear in his face and every glance. He paused in a moment and looked at Bill.

"What name will we give it? We can't call the same as him."

"Call it 'The Winning Hand Mine,'" answered Bill, scratching a cheek with the muzzle of his gun in a significant manner.

Louis did not put his pen back to the paper, but pointed past the two yeggs with it and his face changed its expression.

"WHAT'S that comin' over there?" he asked and the others looked.

"Sand-storm!" yelped Bill. "Git a move on!"

They rushed to the tents and tried to make them more secure. They lowered the tucked-up walls of the larger one and drove a few stakes. They dropped the smaller tent on the piled supplies and roped it to the pile. Their fingers worked nimbly, and they cursed the blundering inefficiency of Louis as he showed himself incapable.

In their hasty run from the protective wall, Bill had brought with him the shovel. He laid it on top of the stacked supplies. Everything they had was in that pile except the beds, big tent and water-bags.

Then the storm struck and they dived for shelter. The air had been still about them with an uncanny stillness. Now it was lashed and torn into stinging streamers that carried a burden of sand particles, every one of which stung as it touched an exposed area of skin.

The blinding, whirling fury that still advanced with the speed of a racing airplane ripped their tent from its anchorage and carried it off, fluttering, rolling, flapping like a huge bat.

Bill and Jack had each gripped a blanket in their first plunge and wrapped them around their heads. When the tent broke loose Louis yelled and the others grabbed for the ripping canvas, shifting their weight off the beds to do so. They clung one-handed to their own wrappings and the tornado easily jerked the tent from their clutching hands. The rest of the blankets lifted and followed the tent.

When Bill and Jack dropped in a huddle again their bodies lay a good two yards farther from the mesquite where the water-bag hung. Twice within ten minutes they

shifted again to rid themselves of a sand burden that poured over them.

Each time they followed the wind, as any other movement was well-nigh impossible, and each time Louis, with no protection other than his coat, had kept with them and wedged his body between theirs. Then the wind ceased like the closing of a valve.

The sudden quiet, after the roaring of the storm and the rasp of flying sand, roused the crouching men. Louis, trying vainly to secure a part of Olanche Jack's blanket shelter, was the first to move. He was near stifling. His hat was gone, his hair, clothing and ears full of sand. His eyes were weeping painful tears and his mouth was dry.

"Oh, my Gott!" he croaked hoarsely. "Not fer no claim as ever was found would I go through this again. I'm blowed full mit sand and I'm chokin' fer a drink. Where's our canteens?"

Both Olanche Jack and Gopher Bill stared around them. Not a vestige of their camp appeared. The entire landscape had changed. The low sand-hill behind which they had dropped the inert body of Jake seemed to have shifted. Where it had stood was now a level stretch of sand. Forty yards down-wind a new hill of double size and height had risen.

The piled supplies, so carefully covered by the small tent, were gone and there was no sign of the water-bags. A couple of bare twigs of the mesquite stuck up in plaintive appeal from a huge sand billow that lapped the trailing ends of their dropped blankets.

The air was still filled with dust and fine sand that sifted down. This shortened their vision and clogged their lungs.

"Didn't catch a blanket?" Bill asked Louis.

"No, I got no chance," Louis answered. "You fellers got ahead of me and when I could git past, they was half-way to —— or Texas."

"You're sure out o' luck then," Bill remarked, turning away in an indifferent manner. "It ain't a-goin' to be any fun campin' without even one. Reckon you'll get tired of it right soon."

"But you fellers has each got one. Why can't we all sleep together?" Louis' voice sounded shrill with apprehension as he asked the question. Was it possible that these fellows meant to hog the two blankets and leave him to camp every night on bare sand? He was not left in doubt very long, for Bill turned to look him over sneeringly.

"Nothin' doin', sheeny! In a case like this it's every feller for himself. If you didn't get a blanket it's your lookout.

"But what is interestin' me a —— sight more is how soon we can dig out the water-bags. Them canteens don't seem to be layin' around loose no place, neither. We got to climb up to them mesquite tips and then claw sand like ——. Shut yer face and come along."

They scrambled up the new hill to the mesquite twigs and began to dig with their hands. Olanche stood at one side and worked dog-fashion, with quick, effective strokes of nimble hands. Bill faced him from across a ten-foot space and scooped with both hands held together in cupped form.

Louis started to bisect the intermediate space between the two on his knees, bracing his body weight with one hand and using the other in a futile sort of way.

"*Ar-r-rr-gh!*" snarled Bill, looking at him. "Git in and use yer paws like any other dog. You act like you was Dainty Dan and had never had yer hands dirty. You couldn't empty a bucket in an hour that way. Dig, you son of Judas! Dig if you want water."

They dug and clawed and scooped sand until they were walled about by what they had thrown out and had to push it back and widen each trench to avoid caving. They dug till the three channels came into one another and then they went back and started over, deepening them.

BY SOME strange chance it was Louis who found the first bag. He caught a finger in the strap that connected the two bags and hurt his nail. He cursed, then brushed away the sand to see what had made the nail bend back and break into the quick. At the sight of the fabric he yelled like a madman and fastened on it like a bulldog.

The others came and found him lifting hard on an immovable load and Bill cuffed him across the mouth with brutal hand, damning him for an infernal fool. Jack stopped Bill's second blow.

"Let be, you fool! He found it. No wonder he went kinda loco. He must be as dry as I am, and I'd cut a throat for a quart of cold water. Turn to and dig down all around the bags. Come, Louis, you too."

They clawed hard and fast, yet with judgment, and in a few minutes the double bags were clear. With fingers that trembled somewhat Bill undertook to get a flap up so they could get a drink all around. His gasp of dismay and torrent of wild blasphemy shocked even Jack.

"Sanded, by ——! Sanded plumb up to the flap on one side and not more than a third full on t'other. Only a little more'n three gallons fer three men and we four days' hike from Tinaja. A gallon apiece fer four days," Bill howled. "We gotta put this where it'll be safe and git after t'other bag quicker'n —— can scorch a feather."

They clawed away more sand and rehung the bags where they had found them. Then Bill, who had subsided to a rumble of occasional profanity, looked at the bag, estimated a distance and dug a heel into the sand.

"That's the old man's bag and we hung ourn about five feet to the right and a little lower. We'll dig right here fer that."

They dug till the desert darkness dropped on them like a black robe, and they went on digging until Orion had traveled nearly half-way across the sky. Then they gave it up and stopped.

"No use," said Olanche, sitting back on his heels at last. "It must have busted the limb and fell during the big wind. It ain't here and by now the sand would've sucked it dry if it was here."

Bill agreed and they came down off the little hill and prepared to get a little sleep. Louis begged for a share in the blankets, but he got no satisfaction. Bill rolled in his blanket and lay down, growling. Louis looked at him and then at Jack.

"Fellers, I got all sweated up at that diggin' and the nights are cold yet out here," he said plaintively. "Just let me lie between you fellers. That won't take nothin' from you and it may help me."

"All right," snapped Bill. "Shut up and lie down ag'in' my back. You want to lie quiet though er I'll lambaste the liver out'n ye."

Louis lay down and Olanche rolled in at his back. Tired to the bone, they all slept.

All went well till about three in the morning, when a chill crept over Louis that woke him with its tremor. Then for an hour he lay there, holding that chill back as long as he could, only to rack with its violent tremors after all.

At last his shivering roused Bill, who swore viciously. Louis held himself against the next shake till Bill had drowsed again, but had to yield to it at last. It was the hardest shake he had experienced and it incensed Bill. He rolled over to face Louis and cursed him.

"Now I'm tellin' ye fer yer own good that if you can't keep still and let me sleep you'd better beat it while the goin's good," he said. "Git out and sleep with them burros, if you can find 'em, er keep still."

"I wish to Moses I could find them burros," chattered Louis. "I'd git more consideration and decent treatment than I git here."

"Git then, —— ye!" said Bill in a fury, striking him in the mouth. "I've stood enough. Git, and git fast er I croak ye."

In the dim light Louis saw the glint of the short revolver with the wide mouth. He gasped, choked and backed out from between the men. The gun covered him till he faded out in the distance, running. Bill gave a short, ugly laugh and drew his blanket closer.

THE SUN was rising when Olanche Jack opened his eyes. He called to Bill at once as he arose. Bill threw the blanket-corner back from his face and blinked at the red rays of the sun.

"We gotta hike out early, Bill, but we better see if we can bore in and get some grub first," said Jack. "We gotta do it quick or the water will run shy. Not much left now for two men on that hike."

"If we could strike that grub-pile there's canned tomaters enough to last us a week," said Bill. "C'mon! Let's try it."

They dug for an hour and then gave it up. The sun had come out hot and they knew that it was better to go hungry than to thirst very long.

They cut the sanded bag loose and dropped it. They cut the mesquite branch on which the bag had hung and slung the bag in the middle.

Then, with each man carrying an end of the crooked stick, they struck out for the water-hole, with the merciless sun driving off the last cool breath of air for the day. As they went they watched for the burros.

"They'd drift with the wind," said Jack. "Keep looking' fer tracks. They might come siftin' back toward Tinaja water-hole. If they didn't we're sure up against it; for

that wind would lead 'em a long way south of our trail. D'ye reckon that fool sheeny found 'em?"

"I wouldn't be s'sprized," answered Bill. "If he did, he'd crawl one and lead the whole —— bunch off from us."

Bill gave another lurid exhibition of his invective power.

"Aw, cut it out!" exclaimed Jack disgustedly. "I don't blame him none after the way you run him out last night."

This drew Bill's wrath on Olanche and they plodded wearily on in the ever-increasing heat, abusing each other.

"Look-a-here, you crazy mutt," said Jack at last. "You're so busy snarlin' at me you ain't watchin' fer them burros a mite. We're both wastin' wind and dryin' out our blood by gittin' mad. Shut up."

Bill recognized the common sense of this statement and stopped his angry ravings, though he still ground his teeth together. So, walking in silence, they reached a little hill about two miles west of the claim. From its crest they scanned the desert for any sign of a burro.

"Not a livin' thing in sight," said Jack. "Not even the sheeny. I wonder where he is now. D'ye suppose he's croaked?"

"I don't know nothin' about it and I don't care half as much. Let up talkin' about the sheeny," grunted Bill in surly tones. "Let's go."

Late that afternoon they sweated up the steep side of the taller twin hogback and again scanned the plain. No luck this time, just as before, as far as sighting a burro was concerned; but Bill located a clump of mesquite half a mile off their line of travel.

"Jack, there's mesquite, and that means beans to chaw on," he said. "Raw mesquite beans is better'n nothin' by a —— of a ways."

They came down from the hogback and slanted off to the southwest. The clump proved to be the scanty verdured tornillo, giving no shade worth mentioning, but producing vegetable screws rich in food values. With no means of cooking them, these screw-shaped bean-pods proved a hard morsel, but they managed to eat enough to reduce the stomach-craving to a lesser feeling of gaunt discomfort.

They hung the water-bag from the mesquite and spread their single blankets for a few hours' rest. With careful fingers they placed the bag where nothing could touch the canvas opposite the water, for just as touching the underside of a tent roof during a rain will start a leak, so will touching the side of a bag rob it of its contents.

They were up again at midnight, chewing on dry beans and stuffing their pockets with more. Forcing the poorly moistened pulp down dry throats with the smallest possible amount of water, they struck out. The heat of the day had changed to the chill of night, the temperature having dropped as it often does on the desert more than sixty degrees since sunset. By noon it would be back again to a hundred degrees.

Neither man was now giving a thought to the fate of Louis, driven off into the chill night, subject to the scorching heat of day with no water, wandering without food or companionship. If either had given him any thought he would have reflected that this expedition was of Louis' own planning and he was getting only what he deserved.

They plodded through loose sand that made every step heavy. They clattered across turtlebacks of clay conglomerate filled with close-packed pebbles that were worn smooth by scouring wind-blown sand. They dodged the deadly cholla and the scarcely less annoying deerhorn cactus. They saw the tall, whip-like stalks of ocotillos with their flame-colored flowers for snappers at the ends. But they saw no sign of animal life other than a cactus wren and a sidewinder under the shade of a saltbush until mid-forenoon.

"Jack, take a look," said Bill, halting then and pointing. "Ain't that a burro off yon way, near the saguaro?"

Jack shaded his eyes and looked. Something certainly moved near the great cactus that towered forty feet into the shimmering air, a huge trident with fluted, spine-covered surfaces.

"It sure is, Bill," he decided. "If we can get him we'll eat. I got matches and so have you. We can roast meat, if we can't beans."

They had been traveling parallel with their old trail toward the water-hole and were still nearly half a mile too far south. Now they struck off on a line that carried them a mile farther off the direct route. They walked as fast as they could and the heat grew more intense with every moment. The desert was warming up.

They went down into a low pan and lost sight of the object. They climbed out five

hundred yards beyond and glimpsed it again. It was just passing behind a little dune and was visible only for a second.

A quarter of a mile more and Jack sighted it again. He spoke to Bill, panting as he did so, almost exhausted from their haste.

"There it is beyond the Joshua tree. I can see his hind legs and rump. Slant off more so we can head him off."

They hastened still more and the sun took toll of their bodies. They thirsted terribly, but could not pause to drink lest the burro escape them.

They entered a long, narrow depression that took them below further observations, but they hurried on, sure that they were right. They came up to the higher ground within a hundred yards of the line followed by the animal they were after.

Out from a little cluster of quail bushes staggered their quarry. On through the woody stems of galleta grass, hip-high and wire-stiff, swaying, stumbling body held horizontal, came Louis Jacobsohn.

"My ——! Is that what we've been chasin'?" gasped Bill.

"Run into trouble head-first!" said Jack. "Now we gotta have that critter a-dragging on us."

"Come on," said Bill. "Let's hit it up again."

The strange figure of Louis, the upper clothing gone, partly lifted and he stared toward the pair. Then with a wordless, inarticulate cry he broke into a wabbling, erratic run. Bill jerked his hat off and dashed it on the sand. Both men raved.

Louis reached them and began to claw at the water-bag. From his naked right arm, just below the elbow, dangled a joint from a cholla, its spines driven to the bone. His tongue had swelled till it filled his mouth and stuck out beyond his lips, black, cracked and dried.

The bag, lighter by quarts than at first, swayed before the frantic fingers and the pole slipped from Bill's shoulder. With the entire weight of Louis across its full end the bag fell to the ground.

Bill kicked with all his force just as Jack made a wild plunge to save the scanty supply of water. Louis rose before that heavy boot and dropped across Jack's shins. Jack went to hands and knees beyond him, Louis under his knees, both flattening the bag.

Out on the thirsty sand poured the water. With a quick roll to the right Jack cleared Louis and came to his feet, lifting the upper end of the bag.

At the instant of his rise Bill jerked his gun from his pocket, and two heavy shots broke the desert silence. Louis sank forward on his face and Jack jerked the bag clear, caught the bottom and doubled it up toward the top. His face was gray and ghastly.

"Bill! Bill!" he screamed. "Let up, you idiot! You've throwed away more water than Louis would have lapped up in all day. Look!"

He showed where one of the heavy bullets had cut a long slit in the bag near the bottom where it had emerged. This, in conjunction with the round hole of entrance, had discharged more of the water, much more than they could well afford to spare. This loss, added to what had been squeezed out past the flap, had left them little more than a quart. They were far south of the known trail to Tinaja, two days out.

The gravity of the situation stilled the foul mouth of Bill. He worked silently, fastening the bottom of the bag far up above the water-level, that no more might run to waste. He cut a string from his own wide leather belt, strung it through the bullet-holes and tied it to the strap above. When he had finished he looked at the body of Louis.

From the hip pocket an inch of black leather showed and Bill bent to grip it. He drew it out, a long pocketbook, opened it, counted the contents, divided them in half and handed one portion to Jack. The rest he shoved in his own pockets and threw the empty leather away.

Still silent, he took his end of the crooked branch and started on.

AT JUST about the time of the sand-storm that robbed Louis and his thugs of all supplies, Jim Baker dropped in on Johnny to buy a pipe.

Johnny was alone, leaning on his elbows over a bolt of cloth that he had been rewinding, reading in a small note-book. As Jim came up the steps he closed the book and slipped it under the edge of the bolt, turning to face his customer. He became at once the alert salesman.

"Gimme a brier pipe, straight stem, and a can of Virginia Perfection. I'll take two cans, I guess," said Jim, "and some o' them matches."

As Johnny waited on Jim, Dick entered and greeted the big foreman.

"How are ye, Jim? I'm dog-tired myself. Shod sixteen mules fer old Steve Richie without havin' a minute's rest between," said Dick as he backed up to the counter, shoving the partly unwound bolt of cloth aside and hopping up to sit where it had been lying.

As he shoved the bolt along the counter he turned it part-way round and the little notebook fell to the floor at Jim's feet. Jim picked it up to replace it, but paused a moment with it in his hand.

The book had fallen open in a way that showed it had been opened at the same place. The cover lay back limply and the two sections of paper hugged the covers. The dingy leaves proved why.

A phrase had caught Jim's eye and he calmly read the entire page. Then he passed the book to Dick to read and faced Johnny across the counter. The good-nature that ordinarily colored Jim's manner was all gone and it had been replaced by a granite look.

"Johnny, where did you get the description of Jake's claim, complete and full, like that?" he demanded.

For a fleeting moment Johnny looked startled and his gaze took in the book in the hands of Dick Forgay. Then he mustered his nerve.

"I dunno as it's any of your —— business where I got it," he said. "Hand over that book, Dick Forgay. You got no right with it."

"Ain't, eh?" answered Dick, calmly reading. "Well, I got it, though."

Johnny ran his hand under the counter and brought out a long Colt .38, speaking again as he did so.

"I'll take that book *now* or something busts," he said.

Dick still sat on the counter, his left side toward Jim and Johnny, standing behind half-way between the pair. His left hand swung back and over in a lightning-quick grab that closed on the barrel of the gun.

At the same instant Jim sent his left over in a straight jab to the eye. Then the friends hauled Johnny over the counter endwise and set him up against the wall. Dick threw the gun back on the counter.

"Now, you low-down kiote, you'll tell or you'll get the lickin' of your life," Jim informed him. "My boy said some one was listenin' at the side of my shack the night Jake told his story and I saw the tracks, but I didn't hardly believe that was it. You stood there and heard Jake give that description, didn't you?"

"Go to ——!" said Johnny. "I don't admit anything."

Jim pulled his punches a trifle lest they result in a charge of manslaughter against him; but Johnny will never believe it. He was a wreck when Jimp propped him up in the corner a little later.

"Now talk and talk straight or there'll be another session," Jim informed him. "Did you get that description by listening outside my shack that night Jake came? Did you send for Louis and give it to him? Did Louis go to Burnt Gold to get Olanche Jack and Gopher Bill?"

At each interrogation Johnny nodded and mumbled an affirmative.

Jim looked at Dick and the big blacksmith nodded slowly.

"Poor ol' Jake," he murmured. "Out there in the desert hunted by killer wolves! Jim, don't it look like Hiranya is about through with a hellion like this yere Johnny? Kinda as though he'd better move?"

"It does," answered Jim, very stern and grim. "Ludlow, how much did Louis pay you for betrayin' the old man?"

Here Johnny stuck, refusing to answer until Dick lost patience and gripped him. The powerful hands closed on Johnny Ludlow's arms, and he found himself being shaken as he had never supposed one man could shake another. When the shaking ceased he was wabbly and limp.

"You ——! I've a good notion to take you apart and see what kind of machinery a dirty —— sneak like you carries inside," said Dick. "The next time I shake you I'll have a grip on your hair with one hand and you'll need a wig when I'm through. Talk, —— ye! How much?"

"Fifteen hundred," gasped Johnny weakly.

"Hand it over. It goes to Jake to help pay for whatever Louis has done to him. You take it, Jim," as Ludlow drew the thin packet from a pocket. "Count it and give him a receipt for so much payable to Jake as damages for injuries received. Now, Jim, what shall we do with him?"

"Give him till train-time to get ready to move, with us watchin'."

"Keerect. Jim, whistle up your kid and send him for Walt."

Jim stepped to the door, put two fingers in his mouth and sent out a shrill, piercing summons on three notes. A little after

that his son came running to learn what was wanted. He stared in at Johnny, then raced across to find Rannells, who came quickly.

"There's a freight at 10:50," said Rannells. "He's got plenty of money to take him away from here. Give him a start and tell him that he will ornament a cottonwood-tree or a telegraph-pole if he ever comes back. Wonder what the men who work in the mine would do with him if they got hold of him before 10:50."

Terror came into the eyes of the beaten clerk. He had a vivid and accurate idea of what the miners would be likely to do. He gave at the knees and began to beg for protection.

When the 10:50 freight came in every male human in Hiranya was at the station, except the small boys and babies. The three, who always stuck together on any proposition, stood between a limp, scared young clerk and talked moderation to the miners.

"Now, Ludlow, you take it from me straight that you are never to be seen here again," Jim said to Johnny as the train stopped. "Go as far away as you can and stay there; for just as sure as you return, you'll hang to one of these poles or trees."

"Yah!" shouted a miner. "More'n that, you'll find a bunch of us will shoot at the first glimpse we get of your —— face, anywhere."

A roar of approval went up from the other miners and Johnny winced. The freight conductor listened, looked, but said nothing. He had seen justice rendered before in the mining regions and understood.

"Well, that's done," said Jim as the freight pulled out. "Now we had better get some sleep; for we must pull out at daybreak. Jake's partners can't leave him to buck things alone."

THE smithy forge lost its last spark, the assay-office door was closed and another man took Jim's place in the mine next day. The three friends were far out on the desert at sunrise, heading for the Tinaja water-hole, driving two packed burros.

They reached the spring, refilled their water-bags and headed on toward Camel's Hump. Over the rocky waste, crossing hard-packed sand and loose, shifting sand, climbing little hills to take observations, shifting and twisting among newly built dunes, they came to the twin hogbacks. They had seen nothing of Jake or any one else.

They found tracks here at the hogbacks and noted that they had slanted off at an angle from the real trail to Tinaja. Two men and traveling close as if connected in some manner.

"Packin' somethin', I reckon," said Dick. "I wonder who they be."

"Shall we follow their trail or go on to the claim?" asked Walt.

"Find the claim," voted Jim. "Then we can come back if we like an' pick up the trail. It won't fade out unless they's a wind."

They moved on for two hours, backtracking the two. Then they saw the sand-hill with its marks of hasty digging, and wondered. A little way beyond they saw the tip of Jake's discovery monument, sticking up above a sand-drift that had spilled over his wall.

The wall had worked to some extent, building the end of the new hill to more than double the width a little farther back, but some had spilled over.

At the hill where Bill and his mate had dug with Louis they found the sanded bag, saw the cut straps and interpreted the story. There were no signs to show the fate of Jake or his whereabouts.

Jim cut a mesquite and stuck it up beside the discovery monument, with a rag tied securely to its topmost branch. Then they made camp for the night and proceeded to investigate the partly made excavation.

On one burro was packed a shovel with a short handle. This used alternately by the three men soon uncovered the tip of the wall of lost supplies. They shoveled away the sand and laid the entire lot bare; grub, little tent, tools, explosives and sacks of barley for the missing burros. In the clear starlight they could make out the whole array. They had been working from sunset till after ten.

"Them claim-jumpers struck a poor run o' luck," remarked Jim Baker. "I wonder where they buried Jake. They wouldn't leave him here."

"No tellin'," answered Dick. "Most likely they drug him out and dropped him for the buzzards and kiotes to clean up."

"Sure. That kind wouldn't trouble to bury a man," said Walt.

"Let's bunk and get up around three to have a look at the lode," suggested Jim. "Then we can hike out early while it's cool."

"Pick up that trail at the hogbacks and foller it?" asked Dick.

"Plumb into the middle of ——, if we don't get those fellows this side of there," said Walt, and Jim nodded.

In the first faint gleams of dawn they shoveled the sand out of the angle of the protecting wall, cleaned out the hole Jake had dug and examined the rich lode. Then they drew sand back in the hole and made ready for the early start.

"Rich as cream," declared Walt. "It took Jake a long time to find it, but he landed a good one when he did have luck."

"Poor old Jake," said Jim, sighing, and the others nodded soberly.

"He was such a harmless old coot. Never had a mean word for any man. Would split his last loaf or last dollar with a fellow who was down on his luck," said Walt in a quiet voice. "I don't reckon the Almighty has failed to keep watch of Jake. He knows what the old man was and He'll make allowances, better than we would."

The little group filed out, every man with his gallon canteen on his hip, his body inclined a little forward, silent, plodding, yet keenly alert and observant. They picked up the double trail at the hogback and followed it off to the southwest.

Walt was taking his turn next the burros, whacking them into line and keeping them on the move, when they reached that spot beyond the low pan where Louis had run to join Gopher Bill and Olanche Jack.

The lead burro shied and pointed his ears sharply forward.

"What now, you rabbits?" said Walt, running forward.

Then he turned away and whacked the burros on past a huddled, shapeless figure on the sand. He returned to where Jim and Dick had halted after getting the burros into a patch of that bluestem or galleta grass that is the salvation of desert burros, wild or tame.

"Louis paid all right," he remarked, looking at a ring of buzzards that had flapped, running to a safe distance and now facing their feast. "Nothing here that we want, is there? Let's go."

"Wait a bit," said Jim. "There's something sticking up beyond the body that I want to investigate. Looks like leather."

Walking around the gruesome object, he stopped and pulled at a black triangle. It came up easily and proved to be the long leather pocketbook that Louis always carried in his hip pocket.

"We'll take this in. It may be worth attaching to an inventory of his property. I only wish his thugs had bumped him off before he left Burnt Gold. It might have saved Jake; for then they would have been lynched most likely. Those Burnt Gold miners are some prompt."

Jim slipped the pocketbook in a safe place as he finished speaking and took the lead. He hazed the burros away from the stiff bluestem and followed the tracks of the fleeing thugs.

Before the three had gone two miles they knew that the pair were quarreling. Within five miles it was apparent that they were heading too far south to strike the water-hole. They would pass far south of Tinaja.

They finished the third day and made dry camp where the alkali lay on the desert grass like a heavy frost. Every forward step kicked glistening white particles into the air like thin snow.

Dick cut the top off a huge biznaga cactus and, with the handle of the shovel, made pulp of its contents. Letting it settle and clear a little, he led the two burros up and divided the resultant water between them.

The fourth day, which should bring them to Tinaja or in line with it, was a day of hard travel. The trail ran crooked, zigzagging, and no common sense had been used in picking the road.

The two they were pursuing no longer walked linked together after the first few miles. It was evident that one man was now carrying what had made the connection before. Jim hazarded a shrewd guess that a water-bag might be the link.

A little farther and they found the bag, its bullet-ripped bottom telling part of the story.

Then they noticed black serrations on the sky-line of a ridge half a mile ahead, and the points moved, grew long or shortened. Walt glanced at the others.

"Buzzards again," he said. "More evidence."

They stood well over to windward and looked at what was left of Olanche Jack, then passed on, following a single track.

"Loco," was the sententious remark of

Jim, pointing at the snaky, wavering trail that showed on another alkali flat.

Two miles south and five miles east of Tinaja they found the grimy flannel shirt of Gopher Bill. A little farther on his hat, then his undershirt. His stained corduroys rested in a Joshua tree two miles beyond the sleeveless undershirt, and his shoes were flung into the thick of a broad cactus patch where they lodged in plain sight.

Walt hauled the trousers out of the Joshua tree, held them by the legs and shook them. Out on the sand fell the greenbacks that Louis had given both men, a jack-knife, a bunch of skeleton keys and the short gun that had killed Louis and Olanche Jack.

"Every shell fired," said Walt, examining the gun. "They fought it out. These corduroys are stiff with dried blood all down the left leg. Bullet went in three inches from the center in front and came out over the left hip pocket. Any use in following farther?"

"Not a mite," answered Jim Baker. "He's just like his mate by now. Let's head for Tinaja as straight as we can."

Walt picked up the salvage from the old trousers and they turned north. They cut their own trail, turned and followed it till they came to the bended knee of rock that shades Tinaja water-hole. The lead burro started to turn the corner, snorted, shied, and braced back with his ears flopping forward in alarm.

"WHAT now? A snake?" said Jim, whipping out his gun and running up.

"Good ——! Jake Miller! Why—what how in blazes——"

A weak hand waved a welcome and a head that wore a bloody kerchief bandage turned to look. A weak voice hailed with a note of gladness.

"H'lo, boys. I knowed you'd come," it said and the three men came close to the shaggy burro-skin bed.

"Hurt bad, Jake?" asked Jim anxiously.

"Not half as bad as Louis and his danged hired murderers hoped I was. Creased me," the old man replied. "Hit me low in the back of my head with one o' these —— cheap short guns and the soft bullet slid up over my skull and come out on top. That put me out; but they got me just afore that in the right thigh, but not deep.

"If they'd give me ten seconds longer I'd 'a' fed them buzzards the best they've been fed fer many a day. My fingers was jest touchin' the old gun when the bullet hit me that put me out. Jest a few seconds more and she would have talked to them skunks.

"The bullet never knocked my hat off. It was on my head when I come to; but s'pose it looked like it had bored me all right. So they jest drug me off behind a sand-hill.

"I come to and see a whale of a big sandstorm comin'. I was up and staggerin' round when it struck. I figgered them devils would hole up, so I crope in and snagged my water-bag and a slab of bacon and they never knowed it.

"If I'd 'a' had the old gun on me them dirty claim-jumpin' skunks would 'a' laid right there till I buried them or drug them off, but it was gone. So I drug the bag and met old Jack afore I'd went a hundred yards. He thinks he's gotta hunt me when things go wrong and he was headin' right into camp.

"Well, I got the bags over his neck, spilled a lot doin' it, clumb on and he lit out downwind. Funny thing, but right soon I found four other burros trailin' with us and they never let us get beyond sight.

"I et raw bacon and mesquite beans and split the water with Jack and we made it here all right. Then I caught the youngest burro while he was drinkin', led him off a bit and kilt him with my knife. I made jerky out'n his meat and a bed out'n his hide.

"I been washin' out the wound with water from the hole ever' hour I'm awake and it's doin' fine. The one in my thigh is gettin' on even better. In three weeks I'll be ready to hike out and shoot nine kinds o' —— out'n them claim-jumpers."

"No shootin' to do, Jake," said Jim, and told him what they had seen when following that trail off at the south.

"Is that right, Jim? Sure pop? Of course I know it is, or you'd never say so. Well, fellers, they's on'y two things left to do; lick Billy McCann and find the feller that give Louis a tip how to find my claim."

"Oh, we found him afore we came out here," said Walt, and told of the enforced flitting of Johnny Ludlow.

"I'll be danged!" said Jake. "Then Billy's the on'y skunk left to skin. All right, boys. I'll enjoy meditatin' on the best way to skin Billy. Make camp now and I'll watch ye cook me a meal. Seems like I'm sorta fed up on burro jerky."

The Camp-Fire

A Meeting-place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

HOOP-SNAKES—and a new one, the pilot-snake. Comrade Gundy doesn't need to introduce himself, though we shall be glad to hear from him again. And he is already a member of Camp-Fire. The only necessary ceremony is to want to belong:

Monsey, New York.

Mr. Quimby speaks of the hoop-snake. I have been trying to get some facts on the subject, as I lived near where they are said to be. That is, in the Haverstraw Mountains in the State of New York. I have also heard of them in Pennsylvania. I have never seen one, and do not care to. Hearing is enough.

This is what I have been told by two old gentlemen, and I have not much cause to doubt their word. I am sorry I can not ask them now, as one has gone West and the other is sick in bed.

THE snake when seen coming after you looks like a large barrel-hoop, rolling down hill, its tail in its mouth. It strikes with its tail. If the snake hits a tree it kills the tree, and also itself, because it gets such force by rolling that the snake, on striking a tree, sticks fast. You should run zig-zag down hill, as the snake can not follow you so well or fast. It can roll faster up-hill than down. I think it must be the horn-snake or a relative of the horn-snake.

A friend of mine has a book on natural history. It speaks of the horn-snake but I am not sure of the hoop-snake. He is away from home now, but when he returns I will try and find out if there is anything on the subject in the book he has. If the hoop-snake is mentioned there, why that will settle the doubting as far as I am concerned.

NOW there is a snake in the same mountains called a pilot, said to be very deadly. More so than the rattlesnake. Does any of the readers know anything about this snake? I saw one lying dead in the road, and on describing it I was told it was a pilot. The snake looks like a black snake, but is only two feet long, has a flat arrow-shaped head, about one inch to an inch and a half in the widest part of the head, just back of the eyes about three-eighths of an inch to a half-inch thick, from under the jaw to the top of the head is not more than

three-quarters of an inch thick. Its mouth is a bright scarlet. I would like to hear something about this snake. I have only seen the one. I know the black snake has no scarlet mouth—that is the ones I have seen.

If you think this letter of interest enough to print for the Camp-Fire, will follow the custom and introduce myself later, as I should like to become a member of the Camp-Fire, or in other words come in out of the rain.—A. C. GUNDY.

A WORD from E. E. Harriman about desert matters in connection with his story in this issue:

Los Angeles.

In writing "The Judgment of the Desert" I have used many things which I have learned from personal observation and some that I have known to happen to others. The sanding up of a water-bag came to one man when he had just finished making camp. The sand built a hill over supplies that cost him nearly two hundred dollars and he had to hike for two days to reach water, with a scant six quarts on hand at starting.

THEN he reached a water-hole where the two legged skunk who had filed on it refused to let his burro drink and charged him a dollar for one gallon. He hiked for two more days and came to a shack. He pounded on its wall and a voice hailed him.

"Wait a minute! Be right with ye, pard, as soon as I git my pants on."

A man came to the door, led him in, handed him a dipper of water, rustled a chair and told him to "set and rest your feet." Then his host went out, cared for the burro and unpacked it, while his wife called from her bed "There's a pie on the shelf and bread in the tin box. The butter is just outside in the cooler. Bill will cook some eggs and bacon when he gets in."

They kept him there for three days and tried to make it a week. Then they acted insulted when he tried to pay for what he and the burro had received. "My God, man! Do you think we ranks with that —— lowdown sneak-thief at the other water-hole?"

FOR the benefit of those who may wonder what a burro can find to eat on the desert, let me say that he finds burro-weed, galleta grass, zacaton grass, mesquite beans, salt grass, sand grass and a few kinds of shrubs and trees that furnish browse in the cañons.

Burro-weed is stiff, woody and of small value, though burros eat it. The zacaton mentioned is not the zacaton sometimes called basket grass, but a coarse, stiff bunch-grass, two or three feet tall, *Sporobolus airoides*, and makes fairly good forage.

The mesquite, both the *Prosopis glandulosa* and the *P. pubescens*, furnish beans that are high in food value and are eaten by both man and beast—mighty thankfully at times. The *pubescens* is called by the Mexicans tornillo-screw, as the long pods twist into screw form. The beans of the tornillo are even better food than those of the *glandulosa*.

The shutting off of the wind in my sand-storm scene is exactly what happened in the storm mentioned above. There was no gradual dying down or fading out—just a chopping off of the supply.

THE discovery through a shot fired at a snake is only partly true. An acquaintance once discovered mineral through throwing a stone at a cottontail and chipping a sliver off a ledge. Unfortunately for the stone-thrower, the lead proved such low grade ore that it would not pay to mine it. The sliver held two colors, but the assay of some dozen specimens showed only a fraction of a dollar average per ton.

As to the desert temperatures, the story is correct in that matter as the Spring often shows a variation of from forty to sixty degrees between noon and four in the morning. In Summer the nights warm up.

More than one prospector has existed for a time on burro jerky. There are numbers of wild burros inhabiting the deserts of the Southwest and no sensible man will starve when he can kill a burro. The summer sun will jerk the meat in one day out there.

Too often the water-holes will be foul with rotting animals and with alkali, Glauber salts and Epsom salts. The salts are so strong in many that they are fatal to the drinker—hence the false idea of arsenic springs. No arsenic there; just the sulphate of soda and the sulphate of magnesia.—E. E. H.

ALL of us of Camp-Fire I know share Comrade Frisbie's respect for the "old-timers." There are a good many of them among us—far more than speak up and tell us about the things we are particularly interested in. We know it isn't always easy to stand up and talk even to a bunch of friends, but on the other hand these old-timers are the kind who believe in give-and-take and I think that sooner or later nearly all of them will sort of say to themselves, "Well, I've sat and listened while others—old-timers as well as young fellows—talked and entertained me and I reckon it's up to me to do my share and come across with something in return." Be sure you'll have interested listeners when you do.

Incidentally, I hope it's clear to all by this time, comrades as well as old-timers, that what the Camp-Fire crowd is looking for is the substance, not the way in which it is worded. Probably no gathering of people cares less about the frills of language than we do. No one can get away with the excuse that he "can't write" or "can't talk well enough." We aren't looking for silver-tongued orators or literary productions. What we want is dope about any of the things in which all of us are interested—and it's a long list that we're always ready to have made longer. As to excuses like "I can't spell right," nothing doing. I have a dictionary here in the office and it's part of my job to use it. (If I didn't, I'd be getting hundreds of letters asking me what

in —— I was trying to be an editor for when I didn't even know how to spell.)

Hartford, Conn.

Am not much of an adventurer myself although I have knocked around the States a little bit, also France and the British Isles. Was a captain in the A. E. F. Didn't win any medals or do anything out of the ordinary.

Notice in the August 18, 1920, issue an interesting letter from an "old-timer" that claimed to have served with Quantrell in the Civil War. Can some "old-timer" give us an account of the life of Quantrell from start to finish? Also a true account of how the James boys, Jesse and Frank, came to enlist under Quantrell's banner? Have heard several different stories about it.

When I mention the name "old-timers" I mean it with the greatest respect to the few of the old school of real red-blooded men that are traveling toward the setting sun. God bless them and may their last days be full of happiness. Now let us hear from some of them and, if they are not able to write a story themselves, some of you young bucks spill a little ink for them or pound it out on a typewriter.

Wishing you all the best of success, I beg to remain—One whose hat is off to the "Old-Timers."—FRANK HENRY FRISBIE.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue L. Patrick Greene gives us some interesting information about crocodiles:

Cliff Island, Maine.

The following facts regarding the habits of the crocodile may prove interesting to the Camp-Fire folk and will help to prove that the manner of *Cenambo's*—and also the *Major's*—escape from the pool is not far fetched; that truth is stranger than fiction.

THE croc's favorate method is to lie immersed close to a drinking pool. The moment anything is heard approaching, two eyes, barely showing above the surface, are cautiously protruded. They disappear and the croc, completely concealed, floats a little nearer. Arrived within striking distance, he waits until his victim lowers its head to drink, when, with a swift rush, he seizes the nose or leg. Having once got their hold, the jaws never relax. Then gradually the croc backs into the water until its victim's head is under water. Since the crocodile chooses his own ground the combat is always an unequal one. Probably the only two species which are immune are the hippopotamus and the elephant. One might have considered the rhinoceros large enough to escape, but Mr. Selous relates in his "African Notes" how one was pulled down and drowned by crocs.

HAVING drowned his victim, the crocodile selects some convenient ledge or cavity below water-level, where his food may be stowed until "ripe" enough to satisfy his taste. The banks of most African rivers are undercut by the current, thus providing convenient storehouses. Having no proper means for mastication, the crocodile bolts his food whole, and it is for this reason that it is eaten as high as possible. Pebbles are swallowed to aid digestion, and the gastric juices are unusually powerful.

The crocodile's dental arrangement is a matter for envy. Each one of the formidable pointed teeth is merely a shell, and under it, when removed, will be found a new tooth growing up to replace the old one when discarded. This replacement has, apparently, no limit.

Terrible as are the jaws of a croc, he does not use them to mangle and tear in pieces live prey, but only to hold it fast; therefore, the less resistance offered, the less is the resulting injury from the teeth. Antelopes have been found drowned under the river bank, apparently uninjured. Only a close examination brought to light the tell-tale punctures about the nose.

Major Hamilton, an authority an African "Big Game," tells of a native, who, having been seized by a crocodile and half drowned, returned to consciousness to find himself in a cavern under the bank, but just above the water-line. Immediately above his head was a hole through which daylight was visible. He sprang for this and scrambled out in safety, little the worse for his adventure.

HERE'S another fact that is not, perhaps, generally known. The lower jaws of crocodiles are stationary, and it is the upper ones which move up and down. This enables them to lie quite flat upon rocks or sand by the water's edge, with their mouths wide open.

As to the size to which crocodiles attain. One hears wild stories of twenty-four-foot monsters with a girth as big as an elephant. The largest I saw—and shot—was a little over nine feet. Major Hamilton bagged one a little over fourteen feet with a girth measurement of seven feet at the shoulders. They don't come much larger.—L. PATRICK GREENE.

ONE of you—and I'm ashamed to say his name slips me and I therefore can't get his letter out of our files in order to give him credit—wrote in suggesting that Camp-Fire would be interested in the account of Bowie given in "The Life of Colonel David Crockett," by Edward S. Ellis, published by The John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia. The publishers have courteously given us permission to reprint from the book and the first half of it follows, the remainder being held for our next Camp-Fire so that there may be room at this one for other subjects:

Rezin P. and Colonel James Bowie

ANOTHER name associated with the stirring memories of the Texan war of independence is that of Colonel James Bowie, whose history is singularly romantic and eventful.

His name is attached to that of the terrible weapon, so popular in the Southwest a generation ago, although it was his brother Rezin P. who caused the weapon first to be made.

Rezin P. and James Bowie were natives of Tennessee, and became residents of Opelousas Parish, Louisiana, when they were very young. Their father was in good circumstances and at his death

left the family independent. The mother of these remarkable brothers was a woman of Roman sternness and heroism, well fitted to bring forth children whose personal bravery was probably never excelled by that of any man living or dead.

It is said that when the news reached her of the death of James at the Alamo, she only remarked that she was sure of one thing—Jim had not died from a wound in the back; after which she went about her household duties as usual.

The following sketch is by William H. Sparks, of Atlanta, Georgia, who was personally intimate with the famous brothers, and is very accurate in his statements:

"REZIN P. BOWIE was a man of most exalted genius, wonderful originality and high attainments; was better educated, perhaps, in the French and Spanish languages than the English. Eminently social and genial in his nature, fond of adventure, as careless of the present as indifferent to the future, quick to serve a friend as to punish an enemy, but never pursuing a quailing foe; always ready to forgive, as ready to do justice to an enemy as to a friend—little in nothing, but noble even in his vices.

"James Bowie was equally brave, equally generous. There was no malice in his nature. Cool, determined and enterprising, he sought adventure for its hazards and courted danger as he would the girl he loved. Tolerant of opposing opinions and always respectful to an adversary, slow to anger, but when aroused as fierce as the hunted tiger, he wanted the social qualities of his brother and was without a particle of his genius.

"Whenever it was possible without dishonor, Rezin P. Bowie avoided difficulties with his fellowman. James was quicker, but never took offense where he did not feel it was intended, but was always belligerent in the presence of his enemies. In this he differed materially from his brother. No one would ever suppose from the manner or emotion of Rezin P. Bowie that he was in the presence of an enemy, though every man about him was such—always cool, always courteous, never the first to give offense.

"WITH James the deeper ardor of his nature forbade this equanimity. The flash of his eye, the compression of his thin lips, told in a moment the presence of an enemy. This presence he would not bear. It was his habit promptly to settle all difficulties without regard to time or place, and it was the same whether he met one or many. At the same time he was self-possessed and conspicuously cool. An unyielding enemy, he pursued unrelentingly, but was always willing to forgive his worst foe when properly approached. He was sincere in all he said. No man was ever deceived as his nature was instantly subdued into a cool caution in the immediate presence of real danger. His power of will on such occasions was remarkable, and sometimes subjected him to the imputation of fear, so instantaneous was the change from the fervor of passion to the quiet coolness of apparent trepidation. It was then that he was terribly dangerous to an overconfident foe.

"TO THIS imperturbable coolness, in the memorable conflict upon the sand-bar at Natchez on the 19th of September, 1827, he owed his life. A feud had existed for years between two parties of the parish of Rapides, on Red River. The principals in these parties were Dr. Maddox, Major Wright and the Blanchards on the one part, the Curreys, the Wells and Bowies on the other.

"A challenge had passed between Dr. Maddox and Samuel Wells, and a meeting arranged to take place near Natchez, in the State of Mississippi. Hither the parties repaired with their friends. It was agreed that no person should be present but the combatants, their seconds and surgeons. The place of meeting was a large sand-bar, immediately below the upper bluff, near the city of Natchez. The sand-bar, at low water, is of considerable width, bordered above and below with forest growth; on the opposite side of this bar were stationed the friends of each party; one of these parties was something nearer the combatants than the other. Colonel Crane was the second of Maddox. Between him and James Bowie and General Currey, there had long existed a deadly feud, and some months before this affair General Currey shot Colonel Crane with a shotgun, on Bayou Rapides, disabling one of his arms.

"THE parties to the duel approached the spot selected for the combat from different directions. The preliminaries were soon arranged. The combatants took their positions and exchanged two shots without effect, and the difficult was amicably adjusted.

"Bowie was just in the edge of the woods with General Wells and Currey, armed with pistols, Bowie carrying a huge knife. As the dueling party started to leave the grounds, Bowie and party started to meet them. The friends of Maddox and Crane on the opposite side of the sand-bar seeing this and being furthest from the party started on a run to meet them as soon as they should reach the retiring combatants. General Currey was the first on the ground, closely followed by Bowie. Currey immediately advanced upon Colonel Crane and remarked, 'Colonel Crane, this is a good time to settle our difficulty,' and commenced drawing his pistol. Bowie did the same. Crane was armed with a brace of dueling pistols, and, standing, awaited the attack of Currey.

"AT THIS moment Currey was seized by his brother and begged to desist. Bowie and Crane fired at each other, it was said without effect. There were those who said Bowie was wounded. This latter statement I think the most probable, for Bowie stopped, felt of his hip, and then drawing his knife limped toward Crane, who was watching General Currey. Released from the hold of his brother, Currey was advancing. At this moment Crane leaped across a small ravine, cut through the sand by the rain-water flowing from the acclivities above, and, resting his pistol upon his crippled arm, fired at Currey, wounding him fatally. He fell. Crane was now disarmed, and Bowie advanced cautiously upon him. Clubbing his pistol he struck Bowie over the head, as he avoided his knife adroitly, and felled him to the ground. Crane retreated a step as his friend Major Wright approached. Bowie, in the meantime, had risen and was sustaining himself by holding on to a snag which the river when at flood had left sticking firmly in the sand. Major Wright advanced upon him and with a long, slender spear, drawn from a walking-cane which he carried, and seeing Crane's danger, attacked Bowie, who made a pass to parry the spear

with his knife, in which he failed. The spear was of cold iron, and striking the breast-bone bent and went round upon the rib. Bowie at this moment seized Wright and fell, pulling Wright down with and on top of him, and holding him strongly to his person. Wright was a slender and by no means a strong man and was powerless in the hands of Bowie, who coolly said to him: 'Now, Major, you die!' and plunging the knife into his heart killed him instantly.

"THE 'Bowie Knife' was made by Rezin P. Bowie out of a blacksmith's rasp, or large file, and was the original of the famous Bowie knife. When James Bowie received this knife from his brother he was told by him that it was 'strong and of admirable temper. It is more trustworthy in the hands of a strong man than a pistol, for it will not snap. Crane and Wright are both your enemies; they are from Maryland, the birth-place of our ancestors, and are as brave as you are, but not so cool. They are both inferior in strength to yourself and therefore not your equal in a close fight. They are both dangerous, but Wright the most so. Keep this knife always with you. It will be your friend in a last resort and may save your life.' After this conflict Rezin P. Bowie carried this knife to Philadelphia, where it was fashioned by a cutler into the form of a model made by him, and I presume the knife is yet in the possession of some member of the family.

"THERE was no reconciliation between Crane and Bowie after the conflict, though Crane aided personally in carrying Bowie from the ground, and Bowie thanked him and said: 'Colonel Crane, I do not think under the circumstances you ought to have shot me.' Almost immediately upon the attack of Currey upon Crane the fight between their friends became general, in which there were several wounded, but Wright and Currey were the only persons killed. All the men engaged in this terrible affair were men of wealth and high social position, and the two parties included almost every man of fortune in the extensive and wealthy parish of Rapides. All are gone save Maddox and General Wells, both very old and still residing in the same parish. Between these two there has never been any reconciliation. Wells is the brother of J. Madison, of Louisiana. These brothers are hostile politically and personally to each other, and have not spoken with each other for more than twenty years. Upon a recent occasion the writer met in the same hotel in New Orleans, General Mumford Wells and Dr. Maddox, who is now, at the age of eighty-four years, a vigorous and active man. Wells is nearly as old and equally vigorous. We had not met in many years, and both being personal friends of fifty years' standing, I attempted to effect a reconciliation between them. This was promptly declined by both, and, in all probability, they will die enemies.

"IT WAS thought such would be the same with Bowie and Crane. But some years after their conflict on the sand-bar Colonel Crane, happening in New York, discovered a runaway slave belonging to his father, who resided in Maryland, and had him arrested. The negro was brought into court by writ of *habeas corpus*. It was necessary that he should be identified and proven to be a slave and the property of Crane. Colonel Crane was the only witness present who could prove this. The lawyer of the negro asked the witness if he could swear the negro was born a slave, and being answered in the affirmative, asked Crane 'if he could swear he himself was born a free man.'

"Indignant at the insulting impertinence, Crane threw down his glove at the feet of the attorney, and in words further insulted him. This caused some commotion in court from those who crowded the lobby. It happened that James Bowie was among that crowd. He had witnessed the entire proceedings, and coolly remarked:

"'Be quiet, gentlemen. The court-room is no place for a mob. This business will soon be over, and then is your opportunity if you desire a fight.'

"He then deliberately walked within the bar, and approaching Colonel Crane, said:

"'Colonel, you are threatened by a mob, now in the court-room. I am here, sir, and will stand by you.'

"Crane bowed with the ease and dignity of a knight of chivalry, saying:

"'I thank you, Colonel Bowie. I could not have more reliable aid than from your gallant hand.'

"Bowie bowed respectfully to the presiding judge, turned, and gave the attorney a look and a smile he will remember while he lives, and returned to the lobby.

"Ten days subsequently they met at Niagara. Crane advanced, tendered his hand to Bowie, which was accepted politely, and without explanation; amicable relations were restored, which were never after disturbed.

"JAMES BOWIE always dressed with good taste; his extreme politeness and fascinating manners were captivating, and he was much esteemed by his friends, and those who knew him best. His name, however, was a terror to those who only knew him from public report. The many daring and perilous adventures of his early life heralded his name to the whole country, and made him the observed of all, wherever he was seen. This had caused his name to be a synonym for desperate daring and bloody deeds, and the theme of many an imaginary and ridiculous story of doubtful morality.

"If there ever lived a man who never felt the sensation of fear, it was James Bowie. He was by nature fond of adventure—the more hazardous, the most courted. A thousand stories might be told truthfully of these adventures where his life was periled; of conflicts where the odds against him were so great as to seem overwhelming, and where his coolness, courage and daring triumphed. His bare presence was sufficient to allay anger and quiet the most excited crowd. The same was equally true of his brother, Rezin P. They were much attached to each other, and held all property in common, and there never was any disagreement between them. They were equally enterprising, equally brave. Here the resemblance ceased.

"REZIN P. was careless in dress and equally so about his associates. He could adapt himself to any society, but in all he was the most prominent figure, leading always in conversation, and always suiting this and his manners to his company. No man ever remained in his society one hour that did not carry away something said or done by Bowie that was original or startling. Both brothers were

truthful to the extreme. Devoid of dissimulation, frank in manner, sincere in conduct and expression, they held in contempt all little men and all little meannesses. They despised a petty thief, but admired Lafitte; despised a man who would defraud a neighbor or deceive a friend, but would without hesitation cooperate with a man or party who or which aspired to any stupendous scheme or daring enterprise without inquiring as to its morality. Their minds, their souls and aspirations were all grand, and they rarely failed to achieve whatever they undertook.

YOU will remember that some time ago Talbot Mundy offered an autographed copy of "The Ivory Trail" (which first appeared in our magazine under another title) and a year's subscription to *Adventure* to any one who could furnish him with a sound excuse for his use of dynamite in one of his stories. Deane C. Taylor, of Corpus Christi, Texas, wrote me the following letter which I passed on to Mr. Mundy. To-day Mr. Mundy came in with the autographed book, with a photo of himself pasted in it for good measure, and sat down and wrote his little check for the subscription.

I don't think he feels himself justified even yet in making dynamite act as it did in the story, for it was like making an exception the rule, but he has no doubts at all as to Mr. Taylor's having fully and fairly earned the prize and is writing him to that effect. See whether you don't agree with him:

Corpus Christi, Texas.

In the first place, Merry Christmas to you and to *Adventure*, and to its many friends and readers, and Happy New Year as well. . . . Talbot Mundy, I note in "Camp-Fire," offers a year's subscription and a copy of "The Ivory Trail," autographed, to a reader who can give a plausible excuse for the action of dynamite in his story "The Shriek of Dûm."

I BELIEVE I can. Anyway the prize is worth the effort. In the first place any excuse is plausible in dealing with dynamite. A. Gray is absolutely correct in stating what may be done to dynamite without harm resulting. I'll go farther and say I've seen frozen dynamite thawed in an oven and on top of a stove. I saw the jaws of a steam-shovel crunch through an unexploded charge in the solid (almost) rock and then dump it on the dump-car on to other rock. I've seen the grease paper slit through with a sharp knife to get the stuff in bulk—*but*—to say it won't explode by concussion is not so.

Under certain conditions it will explode every time and there is no means without carefulexamination of knowing whether or not those conditions exist in each stick. One stick in a bunch, exploding, explodes the whole. A man would be a blamed idiot to play with it in any of the ways mentioned by Mr. Gray or myself.

I'LL explain. Oftentimes the nitro-glycerin in the stuff faultily gathers in small blisters on the side of a stick, between the paper and body of the stick. These may be as small as a pin-head, or somewhat larger. Any blow that hits a blister explodes the dynamite. Don't care what causes the blow. I saw a "hunky" on railroad construction work blown to atoms while slitting the paper on a dynamite cartridge. When an apparently unexplained explosion of dynamite occurs you can bet your bottom dollar the cause was as I've stated—a blistery stick and a blow of some kind.

I unfortunately did not happen to get the copy of *Adventure* this story was in, though it's seldom I miss a copy, so I don't know the cause of contention, but judge his dynamite was thrown or dropped and went off. Any way, why should a good story be spoiled just because a few of us who are wise happen to spot a little mistake?—DEANE C. TAYLOR.

P. S.—Since the above was written and sent to the printer other "excuses" have been coming in and I add this by way of credit. I know Mr. Mundy's impulse will be to send the "prize" to each one who provides the alibi, but it seems to me that this would be riding his sporting offer pretty hard and that having paid in full to the first claimant, he is honorably excused from continuing to send out prizes indefinitely.

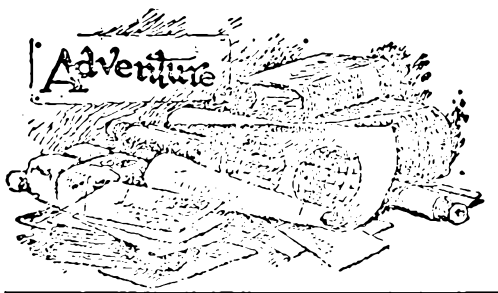
He may differ from me, but at least I'm going to insist that the subscriptions to *Adventure* be omitted. I like to have our circulation increased, but not in just this way.

I think you'll agree with me, but if you don't and if I can have my way against any further payments by him, you must cuss me, not Talbot Mundy. Being an editor, I'm comparatively used to being cussed.

Here are the other comrades whose letters have come in, and there will probably be others:

Alfred H. Rose, Mass.; Samuel Lewis, New Brunswick, Can.; John G. Story, New York; William G. Daig, New York; H. R. Hummel, Ky.; H. H. Thompson, S. Car.; "Engineer"; E. F. Brady, Ohio; S. P. Barker, New York; W. C. Tuttle, Calif.; R. B. Rady, Wash.; Ernest S. Safford, Colo.; "D." Pa.

Maybe we can have some of these letters at a later Camp-Fire.—A. S. H.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Dec. 1916 to Mid-Feb., 1918 inclusive, $3.00 for lot, not including postage. Thirteen odd copies of 1918 and 1919 ten cents each, not including postage.—Address R. R. SMITH, 775 Broadway, Lowell, Mass.

WILL SELL: 1918, 1919, $2.50 per volume. Dec., 1915. Jan., Feb., April, 1916. March, April, May, June, Aug., Mid-Sept., Nov., 1918. Ten cents each. Complete with exception of a few covers. Postage collect.—MORRILL, Box 172, Sumter, S. C.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 7;—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 515 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for Ask *Adventure*, but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. Ask *Adventure* covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1305 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.: seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAFSBURG LIEBE, 6 West Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

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JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Covering southeastern Ontario and the Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minnesota. Covering Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel. *The shortest, quickest and cheapest way to get into this north country.*

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Carmel, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. North American Snow Countries Part 8
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

26. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan; commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

30. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

32. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Building, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. Africa Part 5. Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, The Adventurers' Club, 8 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Climatic conditions, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, mines and minerals, opportunities for employment, direct shipping routes from United States of America, general information covering living conditions, travel and opportunities.

34. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
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CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E Street, San Rafael, California. Covering Tahiti and the Society Islands, the Paumotu or Pearl Islands, and the Marquesas. Geography, natives, history, language, customs, travel, equipment, climate, produce, trading, pearl-diving, living conditions and expenses; sports, vanilla and coconut culture.

36. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the Ask *Adventure* editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg, Chicago., Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

Japanese Curios

AGAIN, a word of caution to inquirers: Please do not allow your questions to cover too much territory; and do not ask for what can be found in the encyclopedia or in reference books:

Question:—"I would like to get some information on the people of Japan, their customs, geography, commerce, etc., but especially am I interested in curios. I am contemplating joining the merchant marine and including Japan in a trip."—J. F. ARCHER, Sparta, Ga.

Answer, by Grace P. T. Knudson:—The best I can do for you is to refer you to some of the excellent books written about Japan, for if I should attempt to cover adequately the customs, geography, commerce, etc., in one letter it would need to lengthen to a volume. Even the one subject of "curios" has so many divisions. However, as you write you are most interested in that subject, I will try to touch some of the high-lights for you.

The real curios of the country you will find now mostly in the temples, the old palaces, the art museums, and the commercial museums—do not overlook the last. And these are the places for you to visit when there.

It is a rare thing nowadays to find anything of *real* value in the ordinary shops. You will find in the shops, of course, many articles of a curious and attractive nature—and everywhere for that matter will you find curious and interesting things—but I am writing about curios of value by reason of material, workmanship and age.

Generally speaking, in every city some specialty is produced, and you will learn of this specialty very quickly, after you land within its environs, from the obliging rickshaw boys—most of whom in the coast towns speak enough English so that they make very desirable and inexpensive guides if you treat them square. The shops of Yokohama have always contained a conglomerate collection from all parts of the empire to attract fleeting tourists.

In Tokyo see its temples and parks; visit the big department store on its main street—one of the largest stores in the world; it is thoroughly up to date with both European and Japanese merchandise, and curios in plenty you will find—modern ones and maybe a few older ones. This city is also the home of the "cultured pearl."

Go north to Nikko, see its wonder temples and wood-carving shops. If you go still farther north you may run across something of real value. The farther one gets into the interior the more apt one is to run across art treasures and high-class curios.

In Kyoto an interesting establishment to visit is that of Yamanaka; the same firm as of that name in this country in New York. There you will find a great commercial collection of curios from all parts of the Orient, and the company is very reliable in its information. About Kyoto centers much of the porcelain and china manufacturing.

In other cities you will be shown cloisonné, damascene, lacquer, pewter, bronze, and brass work—each contributing to the curios of the country. A lot of cheap, modern articles are made for trade of antimony. It looks like silver, but does not tarnish, so is profitable to purchase for cheap souvenirs.

Now for general information. Go to your public library and read all the books you can find on Japan. If the library has no books on the country suggest to your purchasing-committee that they buy one or some of the following. No library should be without good books on the Oriental countries now—in and about the Pacific is beginning great commercial development, and both Japan and China are bound to figure largely in such development.

"The Spell of Japan," Anderson; Page Co., Publishers: "A B C of Japanese Art," Blacker; Stanley Paul & Co.: "The Mystery of the Far East," Brown; Scribner's: "The Awakening of Asia," Hyndman; "Samurai Trails," Kirtland; G. H. Doran Co.: "Rising Japan," Sunderland; G. P. Putnams.

Let me congratulate you on any decision to join the merchant marine of this country of ours. I believe great opportunities lie in that service for the right sort of young men.

What a Cow-Ranch Really Is

IT'S not what it was once, nor what it's sometimes cracked up to be now:

Question:—"Please tell me how I could get into the Government Forest Service. Tell me about the duties of a ranger. I would also like to know what chance one would have to begin in the cattle business in the Southwest, preferably Arizona and New Mexico, on a small scale, by purchasing a few sections of land on easy terms, cultivating a small part for Winter forage, leaving the rest for Winter range and running the cattle on the National Forests during the Summer months, etc.

What model and make of revolver is the most popular among the border stockmen of today? How does the old frontier single action stack up? Please describe the present-day cattle ranch in a general way."—JOHN M. HIGGINS, New Brunswick, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—You can only get into the Forest Service through taking a severe examination and only when a vacancy occurs. You must know how to recognize any tree by leaf, bark or chip, how to build cabins, lookout huts, telephone lines, bridges, roads and trails, how to tally stock coming in or going out, how to survey land, cruise timber, scale cut logs and sawed lumber, how to fight ground fire and crown fire, how to ride, how to pack an animal with a mixed cargo so it will not come off in rough going, how to shoot, how to handle men and be able to endure great hardships and do heavy work.

You must have good judgment and great self-control, with a firm and courageous mind. You must be ready to climb difficult peaks and carry heavy packs on your back. You must have all the qualities of a general handy man and look out for all the people in your territory, arrest criminals, act as game warden.

It is hard to purchase a few sections of land on easy terms for the cattle business. In Arizona the business has reached a point where all the feed the country affords will allow little expansion.

It is that way all over the West. I heard complaints in Arizona this month that any more stock on the ranges woul mean short commons for all.

I visited a young stockman in Arizona recently.

He has taken a homestead—got it ten years ago—and he has just 34 head of cattle.

I think the best place to begin is in southwestern Utah. I could buy good land—raw—for $6 an acre and improved at $12, in 1911.

The State law prohibits an Arizona cowboy from packing a sixgun. When Mex bandits were making trouble on the border the law was asleep. I have just returned from a three weeks' trip there and saw only one man packing a sixgun and he was in the Geological Survey Service. Here's a description of

AN ARIZONA COW-RANCH

A cottage—adobe or wood—a big corral made of poles—a snubbing-post in the center or at one side. Post may be set, or a growing mesquite tree. A water-trough somewhere in corral.

Hills all around corral, covered with more or less cactus—cholla, which is the invention of the devil and the worst in creation—buckhorn, big leaf, Indian fig and other kinds. Little valleys between hills full of catclaw, mesquite and Sangre de Cristo trees and brush. Everything that grows, except Mormon tea, covered with thorns. Cattle hiding in brush here and there—about one cow or steer to the square mile. Cowboy wearing smooth, heavy leather chaps, leather-sleeved jacket or heavy denim. Necessary precaution against getting undressed by thorns. Chases cattle to get them headed right. No running except to head cattle off from going wrong way. Horses walk—walk—walk!

Cattle break back to escape—cowboy wheels—breaks through catclaw and leaves threads of cloth on a thousand hooked thorns—slams into heart of a mesquite clump and comes out bleeding—finds a cholla-cactus clump before he knows it and races on with a lot of its joints or balls fast on legs of horse and gouging him at every jump.

Gets critter turned—jogs slowly after it—gets out to open—breaks a twig that forks, sets fork above cholla and jabs down to clear it. Then takes knife and thumb to pick out the spines it left.

Finds steer with screw worms infesting every place where the skin has been cut or broken. Has to rope and hogtie him, then dope places to kill worms. Takes rope off horns, loosens legs and jumps for horse or fence. Can't tell when he will get up wildly on the prod.

Cowboy pounds saddle leather all day and spends an hour in getting thorns out of his own skin. All in the day's work.

Gets bronco colts in corral—picks one, and undertakes to "bust him." Perhaps cowboy gets busted instead. Oh, it's the life!

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask *Adventure* editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Hindi

THE ground-plan of this language is the same as that of English, only scrambled. Hindustani, it may be mentioned in passing, is one of several Hindi dialects:

Question:—"I am a civil engineer, have had considerable experience in the Central-American countries, and am anxious to get some kind of a construction job in the Orient—location immaterial as long as it is not in the mountains. It has occurred to me that if I have a smattering of one of the Oriental languages I may find it easier to get work in those countries than otherwise.

I wonder if you can give me any pointers as to the relative value and simplicity of the various languages? I realize that it would be almost impossible for an American to get anything but a most rudimentary knowledge of such a language while in this country, and that is all I hope to get.

Any information you may be able to give me will be greatly appreciated, and in the event that this letter should find its way into *Adventure* may I ask you to use my initials as a signature?"—C. P. D.

Answer, by Mr. MacCreagh:—Let me set your mind at rest at the outset. If you have any means of making a connection with firms doing construction work in the East you don't have to worry for a minute about acquiring an Oriental language. Nobody who goes out ever comes with a knowledge of the local language; and a great many never acquire any knowledge either.

It is to be admitted, of course, that if you apply for a job and other things being equal you would get the preference over the other fellow if you knew something of an Oriental language—for the pertinacity indicated more than for any working knowledge that you might have; and for this reason perhaps you would be anxious to pursue your plan of picking up some sort of nigger man's "*bat*."

As you say, it will be difficult. I can suggest only that you get a grammar and then try to dig up some Oriental in your city and get him to give you the hang of the pronunciation.

As to relative simplicity: There is no doubt whatsoever that Hindustani is by far the simplest of all the Oriental languages to acquire—except perhaps Bengali; but you would never need Bengali in a thousand years because every Bengali speaks Hindustani. The latter language, on the other hand, would carry you, handling coolie labor, all the way round by Singapore to Borneo.

Once you get the hang of the peculiar position of the words in Hindi, which are twisted around in the most extraordinary manner, you will find no difficulty beyond learning a vocabulary; for the Hindi language has no moods or tenses or cases or conjugations or declensions other than in English; they say, of a man, to a man, from, by or with a man, just as we do; only they twist a sentence to say, the dog my grandmother of upon its hide fleas has, meaning that Fido is lousy. Once get the hang of that and there is nothing to it.

Methuen & Co., Publishers, London, got out a very satisfactory Hindustani grammar. Perhaps your local library might be able to help you with a list at least of such works.

More about Newfoundland

A CRITIC once remarked that the ideal letter of correction not only good-manneredly called attention to an error of statement, but also at the same time supplied new information. And this is what Mr. Wills has done in the following letter. The article in question appeared in Ask *Adventure* of the Mid-November, 1929, issue:

In a recent issue of our magazine you have an account of our little island by Mr. Belford which is, in the main, very good for an outsider.

He states that "it is a British crown colony," which is not correct. It is, and has been since 1832, a self-governing colony, having complete charge of revenue, etc., etc., and electing its own representatives.

It will interest many to know that a British crown colony is controlled completely by the crown—*i. e.*, England—and the inhabitants have no local government, and have no say in local affairs. The revenue derived from the country goes to the crown. Since the war we have raised to the status of a dominion, and are now sending trade commissioners all over the world.

I trust that you will see fit to correct the false impression your correspondent has made in this article.

With thanks for publication, I remain—FRANK F. WILLS, St. John's, Newfoundland.

To this letter of Mr. Wills, the Ask *Adventure* editor in charge of the territory writes:

My hat is off to Mr. Wills. He is quite right. I knew perfectly well that Newfoundland was a self-governing colony, but by one of those unexplainable freaks of the mind I put her down as a crown colony.

However, she was the first of Britain's colonies, and she has maintained a splendid standing in that sisterhood. Her sons upheld the honor of our flag in the late war on land and sea.

Long may she flourish, and soon may she join her destinies with Canada in one grand confederation.

I thank Mr. Wills for his correction.—JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ontario, Canada.

Dutch Guiana

HERE'S an interesting handful of facts:

Question:—"Referring to Dutch Guiana: Please describe and explain the following:

What mangroves are; also cacao. The meaning of "indentured." What *obeah* is.

Describe Paramaribo and pronounce it correctly.

Describe the Surinam River. Tell a little about the exchange of cities.

Tell what nationality the Javanese are; something about the Arawak tribe of Indians and something about the home for lepers."—MRS. C. B. DAYTON, Packwaukee, Wis.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—I am pleased to reply to your letter of September fourteenth, although I admit that you offer me a very considerable task. I suggest, as a source of information, that you secure the following work from the nearest considerable library: "Guiana, British, Dutch and French," by James Rodway. This work has a great deal of information that would supply you with a good background.

The mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) is a low tree with an abundance of adventitious roots that abounds near the mouths of the rivers. It is peculiar in that its seed germinates in the fruit. The bark is used in tanning, and for this purpose it is very superior because of the large quantity of tannin which it contains.

Cacao seems to have been a native tree of the Guianas, and it was cultivated there for many centuries before the arrival of Europeans. Surinam or Dutch Guiana exports a considerable quantity of cacao.

The cacao or chocolate-tree (*Theobroma cacao*) is a small evergreen that varies in height from sixteen to forty feet and grows wild; it is a native of tropical America, and it is widely cultivated from Mexico to Paraguay, in the lower ranges of the different countries. The fruit is a pointed pod that varies from five to ten inches in length, and it contains many small seeds embedded in a sweet pulp.

The seeds are highly nutritive, containing fifty per cent. of fat. They are of an agreeable flavor, and they are used for food in both their fresh and in their dried state. They are usually roasted and freed of their husks, and when ground and mixed with sugar and flavoring-materials they produce chocolate, which is the most important product of cacao.

The "indenture" of servants or employees was resorted to by the Dutch as a means of holding those who were brought over to work, the period usually being for ten years. In order to understand the significance and social and legal bearing of "indenture" as applied to both British and Dutch Guiana, a considerable knowledge of local history is necessary. Slavery in one form or another was early resorted to, but the tendency was all against compulsory service, and it was abandoned about the time of the conclusion of our Civil War.

Obi, obea or *obeah* is the name applied to the magic art of sorcery as practised by the negroes in Africa and brought by them to the West Indies. Traces of it are to be found in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Jamaica, southern United States and along the shores of the Caribbean and in the Guianas wherever negroes have been introduced. The charms are bones, feathers, rags and other trash. The chief effect seems to have been wrought by the use of poison to spread terror.

The negroes had recourse to *obi* as a cure of diseases, the conciliation of enemies, the gratification of revenge, fortune-telling, the discovery of theft, etc. Variations occurred when African superstition was brought into contact with Oriental superstition, introduced by the coolies brought to the Guianas as laborers; and with that of the American Indians.

Paramaribo is pronounced Pah-rah-mah'-ree-bo. It is sometimes called Surinam. It is the capital of Dutch Guiana, with a population of about forty thousand and a very important commerce.

It was founded by the French in 1600, and it suffered many vicissitudes during the early years of its existence. It and the rest of Dutch Guiana received

a great impulse in 1685, when the revocation of the Edict of Nantes drove many deserving and industrious people to flight. A fair number of them came to Surinam.

Surinam or Paramaribo is located on the left bank of the Surinam River. The Surinam River is about 300 miles long, and it is navigable for some 50 or 60 miles inland.

The administrative and executive authority of Dutch Guiana or Surinam—for the country itself is also called Surinam—is in the hands of a governor, assisted by a council, which consists of the governor as president, a vice-president and three other members, all nominated by the Queen of Holland. The representative body consists of the colonial States, and the members are chosen for six years by electors, in the proportion of one for every 200 electors. The country is divided into 13 districts; the area is 46,060 square miles; the population on January 1, 1919, was 107,827, not including the negroes and Indians that live in the forests.

I have no knowledge of a special house for lepers.

I do not know what you mean by "an exchange of cities."

There are somewhat more than 10,000 Javanese in Surinam, and they are useful laborers, although they are not so strong as the East Indians. They are esteemed as gatherers of rubber. They were brought from the island of Java, along with the Chinese coolies and the East Indians about the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Arawak Indians were often mentioned in the early writings of the settlers of the Guianas. John Scott, who wrote in 1685, discussed them, along with the Caribs. He estimated the Arawaks at 80,000 families. This, however, was probably an exaggeration.

The Arawaks told the Spaniards that the Caribs were the original inhabitants of the land, that they themselves had come along the coast and that they were friendly with the Caribs at first. When they found the Caribs to be so fierce they quarreled with them, and upon the discovery of the country by the Spaniards they sought their aid.

The Arawaks lived at first upon the rivers and creeks, depending upon hunting and fishing and the cassava for their sustenance. Later they were driven inland by their enemies.

The warlike Caribs are now almost extinct, and the less warlike Arawaks form the bulk of the Indian population of today.

Men Who Run Down Deer

ABOUT the Tarahumare Indians and their home, Chihuahua. May they enjoy the peace and plenty which have been so long in coming to them:

Question:—"Please give me any information in regard to agricultural and grazing lands of Chihuahua, Mexico. I would appreciate description of topography, climate, natives and their customs.

What is average price of grazing and agricultural lands and what is necessary in securing title to same? Where can I get reliable maps of Chihuahua?"—H. E. MUENDER, Mayer, Ariz.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—Chihuahua is the largest and richest of the northern Mexican States, sparsely settled; about 330,000 inhabitants, of whom about 9,000 are Indians, chiefly Tarahumares. Four-fifths of the State is a beautiful upland plain of from 4,000 to 8,000 feet above sea-level.

An immense arid depression is in the eastern section, crossed by the National Railways of Mexico. Sand and alkali are characteristics of the plains.

About half of the State is under cultivation, irrigated from artesian wells in some places.

Climate is temperate and fine on the uplands. In the lowlands the Summers are apt to be extreme. Frost in the mountains in the Fall—sometimes snow. Rainfall is ample. Indians live to be a century and more old.

A great variety of fruits, vegetables, cereals, cotton, tobacco, sugar-cane, etc., is raised. Stock-raising is one of the principal industries. The Chihuahua hairless dogs are a peculiar product.

The Indians are fine specimens of humanity. Their name (Tarahumare) is taken from a game that they play which requires a great deal of endurance in running. Sometimes the game (pushing a large ball from morning to night) lasts for two or three days. At night torches are carried over their heads if the moonlight is not sufficient to see by, and the ball is kept moving. The women as well as the men are engaged in the sport.

The men are fast runners, often carrying dispatches for hundreds of miles in a few days' time. The Mexicans often employ the men to run down wild horses. They do a great deal of their hunting game by running the deer or other animals down. On their running journeys of dispatch-carrying the runners carry their food (*pinale*—a cake made of maize and water) in a pouch and eat their meals without stopping to rest.

You can get a glimpse of the Indians in Chihuahua City, where they do their bartering. The pure-blooded are truthful, honest and industrious.

The men and women wear their hair long; not a bald head to be seen. Beard is plucked out of their faces. Chastity is a noteworthy characteristic.

A young man can carry 100 or more pounds on his head for hundreds of miles without showing signs of fatigue. They love heat and often lie naked in the hot sands which would shrivel a white man. They go barefoot through snow without flinching. They kill rabbits and turkeys with boomerangs, at which mode of hunting they are experts. For larger animals they dress in the skins of animals and stalk their prey.

Their range is from Temosachic at the north to the southern edge of the State of Chihuahua. The tribe is scattered all over Mexico now.

There are in all about 25,000 members of this tribe, which was a powerful nation in possession of the vast region known now as Chihuahua, at the time of the Spanish *conquistadores*. The numerous towns and villages in the State with names terminating in *chic* pertain to, or were formerly inhabited by, these Indians.

Americans are not allowed to possess land within 50 miles of the United States border. Land is cheap. It is easier to obtain land from one of the large land-owners than it is through official channels; so much "red tape" has to be gone through that it requires months to get a concession.

Write to the Secretary of Agriculture and Promotion, Mexico City, and he will furnish you all the data you need. The maps are unreliable as no two made by different persons are alike. Write to the Sonora News Co., Nogales, Ariz., about the maps.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

MEN and Officers of 2nd Canadian Construction Battalion, please write to J. N. WARD, 920 Evangeline Rd., Cleveland, Ohio.

SULLIVAN, THOMAS. Formerly of the Yankee Division, A. E. F. (26th Div.), and later of the Medical Dept. Base Hospital, Bazoilles, France. Age about nineteen or twenty. Believed to have lived in or near Boston, Mass., before division went overseas. Have news from a friend of his.—Address THOMAS L. SULLIVAN, V. D. Club, Boston, Mass.

STANLEY, FRANCIS. Enlisted in U. S. Navy October 2, 1884, aboard U. S. S. *Vermont.* Any information as to the whereabouts of his relatives will be appreciated by his son.—Address FRANCIS F. STANLEY, 5 Markham Park, Shanghai, China.

PHILLIPS, BRYAN. Last heard of at Camp Travis, San Antonio, Texas, during the summer of 1917. Was a civil engineer before entering the service. Would like to hear from him or his father, who lives in Joplin, Mo.—Address C. A. WILLIAMS, 516 W. Oak St., Denton, Texas.

SULLIVAN, DAVE D. Was in Co. L, First Louisiana Infantry, on Mexican Border. Then at Camp Nicholls, New Orleans, Camp Beauregard, transferred to 142-M. G. B. Co. B. Not heard from since close of war. Any information will be appreciated.—Address J. E. BROUSSARD, Box 485, Key West, Fla.

BROWN, WALTER R. Was chief steward on S. S. *Nelson* in 1913-14. Last heard from sailing from Italian ports. Sailed in Morgan line and Gulf Refining with me. Please write your old radio friend.—JOSEPH E. BROUSSARD, Box 485, Key West, Fla.

LARSON, FRANKLIN S. An old friend would like to know your present address.—Address P. O. Box 805, Phœnix, Arizona.

LA PINE, ANDREW J. Was a soldier in the machine gun troop, 8th U. S. Cavalry. Please write to your old pal Jack.—Address JOHN H. VENKER, Page, Nebr.

COLTON, JAMES M. Enlisted in the balloon school at Fort Omaha in May, 1918, and last heard from with the 59th Balloon Co., Langley Field, Hampton, Va., where he was discharged about March, 1920. Supposed to be now living in Akron, Ohio. All his old pals, "Shorty," "Bus" and "Bill" wish to hear from him. Especially myself.—Address CURTISS J. PETERSON, 2219 Maple St., Omaha, Nebraska.

CLARKE, GILBERT VAN ANTWERPT (BERT). Last heard from in Montreal, Canada, in 1921. Was working for Montreal Light, Heat & Power Co. Age about twenty-five, black hair, dark-brown eyes, five feet ten inches tall. Lived in Des Moines, Iowa. Write your old buddy on the *Barbadian* and *Cambrian* at Rosedale, Miss.

GARDINER, EX-P'TE. Of the Canadian Railway Troops, C. E. F. Last heard of him in Coburg Military Hospital, Ontario. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address F. ENDERSLEY, Ste. Anne's Hospital, Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

MACK or MARVIN, ROBERT. Five feet, eleven inches tall, blond hair, blue eyes. Last heard from in Chicago in Spring of 1920. Was a Great Lakes seaman. Generally works as fireman. Any information will be appreciated by his old friend.—L. M. B., Hdqs. Co., 7th F. A., Camp Dix, N. J.

THOMAS, HENRY. With me at El Paso Military School at Fort Bliss, Texas. Last known address, 1312 Montana St., El Paso, Texas, in 1913. Write to your old school chum. Have enlisted in the Marine Corps.—Address PVT. JOSEPH L. MCLAUGHLIN, Guard Co., No. 1, care of U. S. N. Hospital, Marine Barracks, Mare Island, Cal.

BROOME, OSCAR. (Colored.) Moved from 1721 Lombard St., Phila., Pa., on May 15th. His wife would like to see and hear from him very much at her parents' home, 1631 Ogden St., Phila., Pa. Also some mail for you there. Let bygones be bygones.—Address VIOLET BROOME, 1631 Ogden St., Phila., Pa.

PALMER, JAMES. Last heard of in El Reno, Okla. Any information will be appreciated by his niece.—MRS. JAMES NUDD, 32 Howland Place, Long Branch, N. J.

STANFIELD, ROSS. Please write to your old friend and schoolmate at his home address.—L. A. WAGNER, La Fayette, Ind.

SOHN, SOLLIE. Your brother Martin wants to know where you are.—Address MARTIN SOHN, 623 N. Hamlet St., Columbus, Ohio.

HOFFMAN, JOHN. Last heard of in 1909. Was then a baker in New York. Any information will be appreciated by his niece.—Address MARIE RESZEK, Y. W. C. A., 60 South Third St., Columbus, Ohio.

WARNER, GEORGE (HOOK). Last heard of in Rochester, N. Y., April 12, 1916. Bound for Chicago to enter ring-game. Has fought eight years in Rochester prize ring under name of Kid Hamilton. Is five feet ten inches tall, has dark features and weighs about 175 pounds. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his former manager.—Address SGT. ELMER C. FINKBEINER, 15 Albow Place, Rochester, N. Y.

CLEMS, THORNTON. Formerly of Toronto, Canada. Last heard of was in Edmonton, Alberta. Write to your old friend, HARRY FINCH, 64 Oak St., Toronto, Canada.

ORTEGA, FRANCIS CLIFFORD, and men who served in the late war and were at Halifax during the time of the explosion, awaiting transportation at the armory under the command of Major Walkely, please communicate with CHAS. F. WHORISKEY, JR., Box 88, Carlstrom Field, Arcadia, Fla.

GEORGE. Write to your old pal "Chris." Am now in the Navy, and would like to hear from you. The old trail isn't the same when you're gone. Write, care of Yeoman School, Naval Operating Base, Norfolk, Va.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BURKS, THOMAS SHAFTER. Last heard from in Beaumont, Texas. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MISS CLARA BURKS, 856 Wood St., Houma, La.

BURKS, JOHN STERLING. Last heard from in Denver, Colo. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MISS CLARA BURKS, 856 Wood St., Houma, La.

G. H. Send me a route sketch. I have been home since June and trying to locate you everywhere.—C. G.

DAVOREN, JACK. Medium height and build, slightly red curly hair. Educated in Ireland. Probably living in New York; age about twenty-five. Any information will be appreciated.—Address GEORGE C. SMITH, 221 S. Robey St., Chicago, Ill.

WESTMAN, ANDREW AUGUST. Formerly a private in 4th S. Welsh Borderers, H. B. M. A. Was wounded at battle of the Somme, 1917. Last heard of in Prince of Wales Hospital—B Ward—Montreal, Canada. Andy, please write to your friend Jim.—Address JAS. JEWELL, 848 Broadway, Albany, N. Y.

MC BAIN, C. HUTSON. Five feet eight inches tall, light complexion. Last heard of in Albany, N. Y. Believed to have gone West or joined the Navy. Your grandmother is much worried over your disappearance and might be dangerously ill. Please write to your cousin. —JIM JEWELL, 848 Broadway, Albany, N. Y.

JACK. Come home; I need you. Nothing to worry you. Your wife, NELLIE.

KING, JIM. Write to me. Everything O. K. Address A. N. SHELDON, 113 S. Division St., Buffalo, N. Y.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieutenant Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Bennett; Byron Chisholm; A. B. Paradis; E. E. S. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord, E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. E. Warner; L. E. Patten; L. T. Bennett; Sinn Cardie; James Mosse; C. E. Wilson; R. W. Kimsen; C. H. Huntington; D. Polowe.

The following have been inquired for in either the First March or Mid-March issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine.

ASKINS, IRA V.; Berner, Cart; Blanchard, Fred Joseph; Bonie, Luis Terea; Brett, Patrick; Carlew, George Stephenson; Clark, Joe; Cullinan, Michael; Dorpema, Jack; Erickson, Carl J.; Evans, Welconie Lafayette; Flynn, Peter Paul; Farrell, Bartholomew; Fowle, Dr. Fairfax T.; Gaugh, Charles; Gibson, Capt. Percy B.; Gordon, J. C.; Gunter, James; Harold, J. S.; Heigelmann, Edward, H.; Kindling, Louis; Lenz, Charley; Magnus, Alf; Maynard, Cecil D.; McCafferty, Frank; McCauley, George W.; McCawley, Walter F.; McFarland, Harry; McKnight, Robert; McLaura, E. J.; McWilliams, Walter; Meager, Thomas F.; Morris, William E.; Mullins, Roy; Noden, William M.; Pechin, Miss Camille; Richards, Jack C.; Riddell, Edward (Alias Eddie Sweeney); Rodigan, Tobius; Sandberg, William; Smith, Charley; Starr, Ted; Study; Taylor, Charles W. Sr.; Thomas, R. S.; Walsh, Michael and Mathew; West, J. P.; Will, Collis; Wilson, Robert E.; Worner, Henry.

MISCELLANEOUS—Friends and relatives of Fred J. Noonan; Leonard, Mrs. Louise; Van Camp, Mrs. Gertrude.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity:

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Beaton, Sgt. Major G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Chisholm, D. F. R.; Cleve, Jim; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Curtiss, D. A.; Eager, Paul Roman; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Irving, Thos. L.; Jackson, Robert R.; Klug, Chas. C.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett C.; Pigeon, A. H.; Raphaelson, Sampson; Rich, Wagoner, Bob; Rinkenback, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Saloway, Jack M.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Williams, W. P.; J. C. H.; W. W. T.; L. T. 348; S. 177284; 439; WS-XV.

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