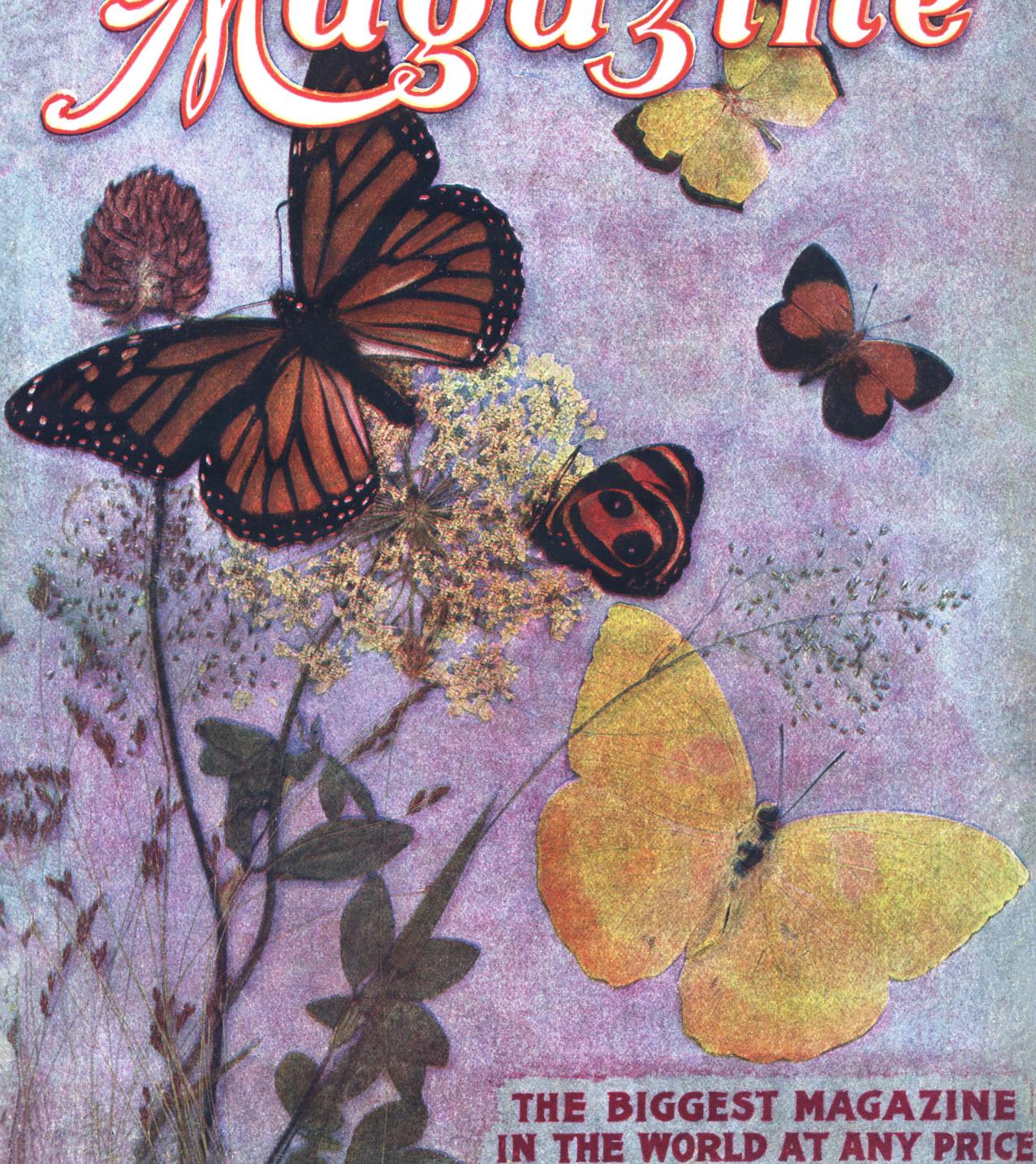


JULY, 1904

194 PAGES,
CHOICE FICTION

10 CENTS

The Popular Magazine



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IN THE WORLD AT ANY PRICE

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will cost you nothing, and my charges for a perfect cure will be

willing to pay for the benefits conferred.

\$1,500.00 IN MONTHLY PRIZES

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Why is the Popular Magazine so popular?

The above amount will be given during the six months ending December 5th to the readers who send in the best criticisms and suggestions tending to the further improvement of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. The extraordinary popularity already achieved by this publication has established a record. It is our earnest desire to increase this popularity and to make the magazine the biggest on earth in circulation as it is in size. In order to attain this result, the criticisms and suggestions of the readers are solicited. And in order to enlist your co-operation the publishers will pay liberally for suggestions which should be as practical as possible.

We want to know the individual likes and dislikes of our readers. We want them to feel that they can aid us materially, and we would like to have them understand that in aiding us they are directly aiding themselves. For the purpose of securing the opinions of our readers we have established a **Department of Criticism**. For the best answers to the following ten questions we offer

MONTHLY PRIZES AGGREGATING \$1,500.00

THE QUESTIONS FOR JULY

- 1st.—What is your opinion of The Popular Magazine?
- 2nd.—Do you prefer a change of cover every month, or do you prefer the same kind of cover on every issue?
- 3rd.—What suggestions can you offer to improve the present style of cover?
- 4th.—Do you like the complete novels as now being published.
- 5th.—Do you like serial stories?
- 6th.—What stories printed in this issue do you like the least, and why?
- 7th.—What authors writing for The Popular Magazine do you like best, and why?
- 8th.—What other authors do you think we should secure to improve the magazine?
- 9th.—What plan can you suggest to bring The Popular Magazine to the attention of new readers and increase the sales of the publication?
- 10th.—What suggestions can you make that will, in your opinion, make The Popular Magazine more popular?

CONDITIONS TO BE COMPLIED WITH

All the following conditions must be complied with or the answers will not be considered

- 1st.—Replies to each question must not exceed 100 words. *All questions must be answered.*
- 2nd.—Each answer must be marked with the number of the question that it is a reply to.
- 3rd.—Full name and address must be sent with each communication.
- 4th.—Be sure to state that the replies refer to questions in the *July* number of The Popular Magazine.

PRIZES TO BE AWARDED

Each month prizes to the value of \$250.00 will be given, the total aggregate of the prizes for the six months being \$1,500.00.

- 1st Prize—\$25.00 in Cash for the best set of answers and suggestions.
- 2nd Prize—\$15.00 in Cash for the second best set of answers and suggestions.
- 3rd Prize—\$5.00 in Cash for the third best set of answers and suggestions.
- 4th Prize—\$5.00 in Cash for the fourth best set of answers and suggestions.
- 5th Prize—Two Hundred Dollars worth of cloth bound books awarded to the 200 readers who send in the next best set of answers and suggestions.

All answers must be mailed not later than the 5th of July—any set of replies mailed later than that date will not be considered. The awards will be made on the 5th of August and the names of the winners published in the September number of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. Address all communications on this subject to

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, Department of Criticism
238 William Street, New York City

A Chat With You

Did it ever occur to you what a bully good thing success is? There is nothing like it in this little old world of ours. To succeed means pretty much everything. The happiness is the same no matter what the achievement—there's only a difference in quantity. A man may win the girl of his choice, or thousands on a stock deal; he may conquer at whist or capture an enemy's fleet; or he may establish a successful magazine. If he triumphs over the other fellow or does something a little better than his contemporaries he feels pleased with himself, and he has a right to. That is our condition to-day.

♦ ♦ ♦

many years past, and we have done our share in bringing out successful publications, so we had experience to begin with. And experience, you know, is a powerful assistant in any undertaking.

THEN there were the other magazines to study. There were all sorts and conditions, some good, paying propositions, and others simply fighting for existence. The news stands groaned under the weight of periodicals, and the news companies had them stacked to the eaves. It did not take us long to decide that we did not want to publish special articles in our new magazine for there were special article budgets literally by the score, nor did we believe that we should issue an illustrated publication. Pictures are good to look at, but so many pictures represent simply waste space—they occupy room that would better be devoted to entertaining text. By the process of elimination we got down to the plan of publishing stories—good stories and lots of them, stories that you can read without feeling a lump in the throat, stories with the blood and sinew of action, stories by authors who know how to transform our prosaic alphabet into the romance and imagery of adventure fiction.

WHEN we first conceived the plan of publishing the present magazine, we felt that we were a bit like the man who ventures "Where angels fear to tread." In fact, more than one friend advised us to think it over a while longer. But we were confident of our market. We knew that we should have to fight pretty hard for a place in the public favor, and we also realized that the magazine field had little room to offer a new publication. But there was always the belief that merit will force its way against all obstacles. We had been in a position to watch the public taste in popular literature for

THE next question was the size. We had an idea on this subject, a "great, big stupendous idea" as one of our esteemed contemporaries would put it, but the time was hardly ripe for that. We began in a small way, more for the purposes of comparison than anything else, printing only 96 pages in our first number. The following month we jumped to 128 pages, and then we were ready for the big idea—the plan that was to make a distinct record in the American periodical field. When the January, 1904, number appeared, the third issue of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, mark you, it contained 194 pages, the biggest magazine on earth at any price!



WHAT this means is made clear when you understand that the higher-priced publications, such as "Harpers," "Scribners" and the "Century" seldom exceed 160 pages, and the majority of the ten-cent periodicals, such as the "Cosmopolitan," "McClure's," "Frank Leslie's Magazine" and "Pearson's," run even less. And furthermore, our 194 pages contained nothing but fiction—no special articles of doubtful interest, and no pictures of even less value. In that same month one of the more important of the ten-cent publications, one carrying 112 pages, had 29 pages of illustrations, leaving barely 83 pages for text! And the largest of the higher-priced magazines carried 41 pages of illustrations out of its 170 pages. This comparison is even more interesting when you know that THE POP-

ULAR MAGAZINE in its third issue contained 126,000 words of engrossing fiction, or enough to make two average-sized novels that sell at \$1.50 each. And the price of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE is TEN cents!



MAKING THE POPULAR MAGAZINE the biggest magazine on earth also meant an opportunity to publish stories of greater length than is found in most publications. It meant plenty of serials with generous instalments, it meant complete stories of from fifteen to forty thousand words each, and a whole lot of short stories of a length sufficient to permit of the satisfactory working out of a plot, not mere episodical sketches which seem to represent the policy of the majority of magazines. And it meant more than anything else giving our readers their money's worth, which indeed is a popular ambition extremely pleasing to the average American.



THERE is such a thing as bigness without value. A magazine of twice 194 pages would not be worth ten cents if the material given was not worth reading. It would be worse than absurd to attempt to sell a magazine solely on its size. In making the POPULAR the biggest magazine on earth we realized that we would have to fill its pages with the very best material or miss our aim. That we have not missed our aim must be very apparent to you. Take the present

number, for instance. The list of authors represented includes such well-known names as Francis Lynde, whose book "The Grafters," bids fair to place him in the front rank of famous American authors; Max Pemberton, E. Phillips Oppenheim and Richard Marsh, a trio of brilliant English authors, whose work is eagerly sought after wherever English is read; Louis Joseph Vance, one of the most promising of the younger American authors, and a dozen others of almost equal note. These men do not write poor fiction, nor do they contribute to mediocre magazines. Their very names on a contents page is a guarantee of good material.

♦ ♦ ♦

POPULAR MAGAZINE, and have made it successful before it is a year old.

IT is in the nature of things that all this should lead to one result. The success of the POPULAR MAGAZINE was simply a foregone conclusion. But even we, naturally sanguine as we were, did not anticipate such a remarkable degree of success. To find our publication increasing in circulation during the months when magazines sell well as a rule was to be expected, but to see it climbing by tens of thousands during the dull season was unprecedented. And that is what the magazine is doing. We feel that we owe our success to one very obvious condition—your appreciation. Without that we would now be going down in circulation instead of up. It is a difficult task to induce the reading classes of this country to accept a new publication without an extended trial, but magazine readers have accepted THE

KNOWING this to be true, we are emboldened to ask you to do a little more for us. In casting about for the best way to let the great reading public know what kind of a magazine we are publishing we have found that no method can equal the spreading of the intelligence by word of mouth. All the stupendous successes in publishing and on the stage were made in that way. "Trilby" sold many hundred thousands of copies because one reader told another about the book. Probably the most successful play ever staged, "East Lynne," gained its vogue because not one woman out of a hundred who saw it, failed to tell a friend of the pleasure she had experienced. Now, we want to ask you to tell your friends of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. Don't tell them anything you don't believe. Don't tell them that it is one of the best magazines you have read if it is not. But if you really think so, and we are inclined to believe you do, just push it along.

♦ ♦ ♦

WHEN you come to look at it there isn't a person anywhere that can afford not to spend ten cents a month for a publication that will give him or her as much entertainment as THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. It is difficult for us to reach all of them, but it is comparatively easy for you to reach your immediate friends, which is

your share. If you would tell even three of them to-day just what we have to offer in exchange for ten cents, it would not be long before our circulation would be trebled. And that would be a circulation worth having. We are tremendously in earnest in this matter of widening the circle of our readers, and we are very much in earnest in asking you to help us. It is only logical to believe that by so doing, you will also help yourself. The larger our circulation, the better magazine we can make, and the more entertainment for you.

♦ ♦ ♦

WE hope you have sent in your replies to the questions asked in the June prize contest. We have received a very great number, in fact, so many that we are encouraged to believe that all of our readers are our friends. If you have not written, just try the July contest and see how much it adds to your interest in the magazine. We have tried to so arrange the questions that we can get not only an opinion of the publication in its present form, but advice that will materially aid us in making THE POPULAR MAGAZINE even more popular. It is surprising how beneficial even a simple little suggestion may prove to be.

♦ ♦ ♦

WE wish particularly to know about serials. As you will see by referring to the details given on another page, one of the questions reads, "Do you like serial stories?" This is a subject that, just at pres-

ent, is attracting considerable attention among periodical publishers. Some of the best known will tell you that they do not believe in the serial form of story, and others, equally well known and experienced will tell you that the instalment form of story is liked by their readers, and that it adds to the circulation of their particular magazine. Such publications as "McClure's" and "Harper's" do not run more than one serial story at a time, while the "Ladies' Home Journal," for instance, published all its fiction in the serial form several months ago. There is much that can be said both for and against the serial, and we are sure our readers will help us to decide the question.

♦ ♦ ♦

A FRIEND told us the other day that he thought we were setting a pretty fast pace in the present quality of our stories, and that we would find it difficult to maintain the same standard of excellence. That may be true, but we are going to try just the same. There is no greater incentive to the magazine publisher than the fear that the quality of his publication may deteriorate. It is an ever present spur goading him to renewed efforts. We do not believe that we will fail in our endeavor to improve our magazine, and if the plans we have in mind only partially succeed, you will find THE POPULAR MAGAZINE for January, 1905, as much superior to the present number as this issue is to the one we published last November, which by the way, was our first.

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, \$1.20

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THE AUGUST POPULAR MAGAZINE

"For variety, which is the spice of reading as well as life, commend us to THE POPULAR MAGAZINE," writes one of the contributors to our Prize Criticism Contest. This pleasing compliment would be particularly apropos of the AUGUST NUMBER, which is by all odds the most diversified—and the best—we have prepared.

The Complete Novel is by Louis Joseph Vance. It is entitled, "In Which O'Rourke Serves the King," and tells in this author's inimitable way another dashing adventure of this modern "D'Artagnan." If you have not yet made O'Rourke's acquaintance, this is a fine opportunity for you to do so.

The Leading Serial of the month is by Burford Delannoy, and is entitled "In Mid Atlantic." As the title indicates, the story starts in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, not on board a steamer as you might suppose, but on a bit of a raft floating derelict-wise, at the mercy of a particularly cruel sea. With this beginning you can see that we promise you an exceedingly interesting story.

The Short Stories There is an alluring breath of the Adirondack forests in H. Addington Bruce's out-door story, which he calls "The Campers at Durant's Landing," and there is rich humor too. In "The Swiftsure Stakes," Mr. Charles S. Pearson gives another entertaining romance of the race-course. Mr. Scott Campbell tells another fascinating episode in his "Below the Dead Line" series, and there are half a dozen more short stories of equal interest.

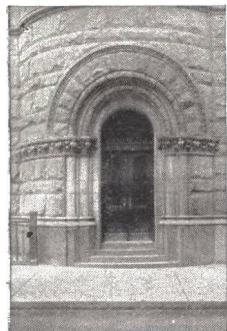
The August number of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE will be placed on sale on the ninth of July, and it can be obtained from any newsdealer throughout the length and breadth of the continent. Its price will be ten cents, and it will be, as ever

The Biggest Magazine in the World

THE HILL OF TARIK IN AMERICA

BY HERBERT S. HOUSTON.

Photographically Illustrated by Arthur Hewitt.



Old World ahead. As the land breezes caught the pennant at the masthead, the boy scanned the eastern horizon, and he kept it up for hours.

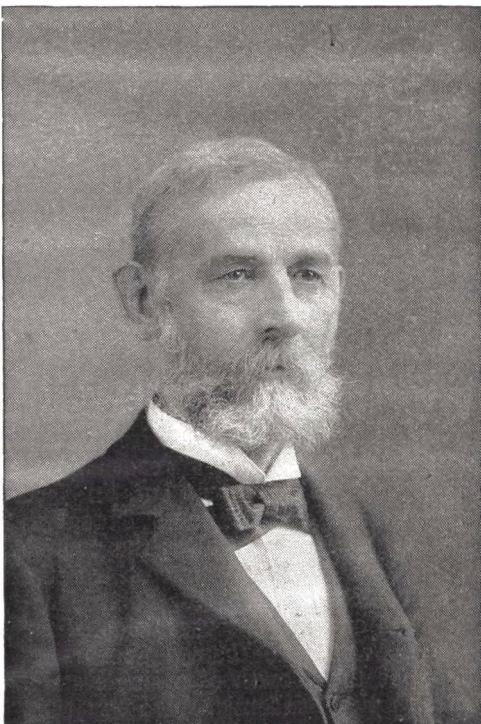
"What are you looking for so hard?" inquired the publisher.

"Oh, I want to see that big sign of the Prudential on Gibraltar," and the boy still peered into the east. When at last the great rock, the hill of Tarik the Saracen, lifted its head above the ocean the boy searched in vain for the sign he was sure he would see. For him, as for all other Americans who read the magazines, the Prudential was inseparably associated with Gibraltar. And this association has made the rock and the insurance company almost interchangeable terms, simply because each suggested strength.

Ten years after the close of the Civil War—a period so recent that its history has scarcely been written—the Prudential was established in Newark. As if foreknowing the great rock to which it would grow, it began its foundation in a basement office. It was like the beginning of the *New York Herald* by Bennett, the elder, in a basement on Ann Street. But it would be an idle play with words to make a basement office the real foundation of the Prudential.

FROM Madeira the ship's course was straight for the Mediterranean. Among those on board, bound for the Orient, were a New York publisher and a bright boy from the West, eager for all the new sights of the

It was something much deeper down than that—nothing else than the bedrock American principle of democracy. The Prudential applied the democratic principle to life insurance. As Senator Dryden, of New Jersey, the founder of the company, has said, "Life insurance is of the most value when most widely distributed. The Prudential and the companies like it are cultivating broadly



U. S. SENATOR JOHN F. DRYDEN,
PRESIDENT OF THE PRUDENTIAL INSURANCE COMPANY.

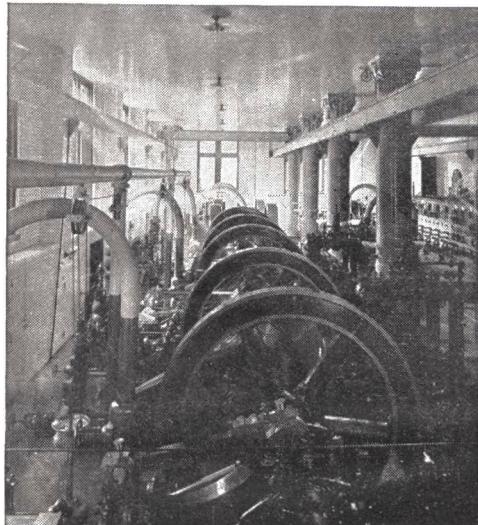
and soundly among the masses the idea of life insurance protection. To them is being carried the gospel of self-help, protection, and a higher life."

And what has been the result of the democratic American principle worked out in life insurance? In 1875 the first policy was written in the Prudential. At the end of 1903 there were 5,447,307 policies in force on the books of the company, representing nearly a billion

been based, it becomes as much a matter of course as the corn crop. There is no mystery about it; but there is in it, from the day when the principles were planted in Newark until these great harvest days, the genuine American spirit of achievement, strong, hopeful and expansive.

The Prudential Insurance Company of America is a national institution. It was founded to provide insurance for the American people on the broadest possible basis, consistent with strength and safety.

And right here is the most stirring chapter of the Prudential's rise to greatness. Just as Grant and Lee organized their armies, or as Kouropatkin and Yamagata plan their campaigns in Asia, so does the Prudential work out its national insurance propaganda. The company's organization is essentially military. It is a wonderful combination of big grasp and outlook with the most painstaking thoroughness and system in details. And, as is always the case in every organization that throbs throughout with intelligent energy, there is a man at the center of it. This man has a constructive imagination lighting up a New England brain. To business prudence there is added the large vision which sweeps the horizon for opportunity. Naturally, to such a vision the application of the democratic idea to insurance was an opportunity of the first magnitude. When seen, it was grasped and developed. The Prudential was founded. In the most careful way, its idea was tested, just as the Secretary of Agriculture tests seeds at the government's experiment farms. Here was where prudence kept the large vision in proper focus. Gradually the idea took root and grew. Year after year the Prudential added to its number of policy holders. And all the time the company was working out a more liberal basis for its democratic idea. But each time a more liberal policy was offered, it was fully tested. "Progress with strength" is the way President Dryden describes the company's principle of growth—the results, clearly, of vision and prudence. At the end of ten years of this method



THE WHIRL OF THE ENGINES.

dollars. The assets in 1876 were \$2,232, while twenty-seven years later, in 1903, they were more than 30,000 times greater, or \$72,712,435.44, the liabilities at the same time being \$62,578,410.81. This is a record of growth that is without precedent in insurance, and that is hard to match in the whole range of industry. The rise of the Prudential to greatness reads like a romance in big figures, but, in fact, it is a record of business expansion that has been as natural as the growth of an oak. The corn crop of the country seems too big for comprehension until one sees the vast fields of the Middle West, and then it appears as simple as the growth of a single stalk. So with the Prudential. To say that, in ten years, the company's income grew from something more than \$9,000,000 a year to more than \$39,000,000 last year is amazing as a general statement, but when made in relation to the broad principles on which that growth has

of growth, the company reached the point where, it was believed, insurance could be safely offered for any amount with premiums payable on any plan, either in weekly installments or at longer periods. Within the five years, 1886 to 1890, inclusive, the company's assets increased nearly five-fold, from \$1,040,816 to \$5,084,895, and the amount of insurance in force from \$40,266,445 to \$139,163,654.

The Prudential had found itself. The idea of democratic insurance had been fully tested and adjusted to the needs and conditions of the American people. Then, with a boldness which only large vision could have quickened, the plan was formed to make the Prudential's idea known in every section of the country. Gibraltar was chosen as the symbol of the company's strength, and advertising—the telling of the Prudential idea to the people—was begun. At that time insurance advertising was a sea as unknown as the Atlantic when Columbus set sail from Palos. But, with a map of the United States for chart and a live idea for compass, the Prudential took passage in nearly every important magazine in the country, and thus safely made port in millions of homes. As the insurance idea was carried broadcast in this wide publicity, it was followed up by the well-drilled army of Prudential agents.

Again it was vision and prudence and again the result was "Progress with strength." The Prudential grew into a place of foremost importance, known in every part of the world. The printed announcement—always attractive and suggestive—had never gone ahead of men bearing the insurance message until sent by the Prudential, and this conjunction marked the epoch in business in which advertising and personal endeavor should be used as complementary forces.

The Prudential publicity is accompanied by wise promotion from a field force of over 12,000, some of whom have been with the company for over a quar-

ter century, working in almost every State of the Union. They have the zeal of Crusaders and it is kept at ardent pitch through an organization that could not fail to produce a wonderful *esprit de corps*. Wise direction and constant encouragement come from the home office, and then the company's agents are grouped in districts, under superintendents and assistant superintendents, managers, general agents and special agents, and in each district a strong spirit of emulation is developed by human contact and co-operation. Weekly meetings are held, and the problems of wisely presenting insurance are discussed. Comparative records of the men are kept in many districts, and prizes are offered for those writing the largest volume of business, for those making the greatest



HOME OFFICE BUILDINGS,
THE PRUDENTIAL INSURANCE COMPANY,
Newark, N. J.

individual increase, and for many other contests. This wholesome rivalry produces an alertness and industry which are to the company an invaluable asset in human efficiency. A few weeks after this magazine appears, probably 2,000 agents of the Prudential—those who

have made the best records for the year —will be brought to Newark from all parts of the country. They will, of course, visit the home offices and come in contact with the directing center of their wonderful organization.

And, after all, there is no place where one feels the greatness of the Prudential quite so much as in the vast granite piles which have been raised for the company's home buildings. They rise above the Jersey meadows as Gibraltar does above the sea, a convincing witness, surely, to the growth and to the strength of the Prudential. But they are not a cold, gray rock, but a living organism throbbing from vital contact with millions of policy holders. There are now four of these great buildings, all occupied by the company. As indicating how vast the company's business is, the mail of the Prudential is nearly as large as for all the rest of Newark, a city with more than 250,000 population and of great industrial importance. The mailing department is really a big city post office. And in all the departments one gets the feeling of size that comes in the enormous government buildings at Washington.

To-day the Prudential is paying over 300 claims a day, or about forty each working hour. On many policies settlement is made within a few hours by the superintendent of the district; on the large policies a report is sent immediately to the home office and settlement authorized by telegraph. And on over 45

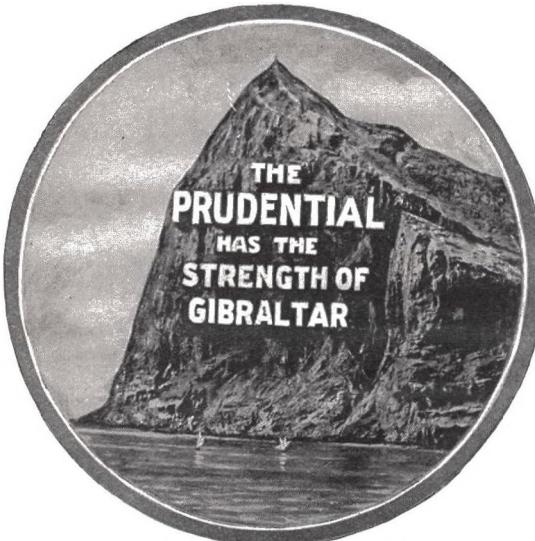
per cent. of the claims more money is paid than the policy calls for. From the beginning the Prudential has followed lines of great liberality, whether in dealing with the family where the policy is kept in the bureau drawer, or with the estate of the millionaire.

It would be interesting to describe the broad activities that hum in the great buildings at Newark, but they would more than require an entire article themselves. So, too, with the equipment and furnishings of the buildings which, in the way of complete adjustment to their particular work, are probably unequalled

in the world. For example, in the actuarial department is a card machine, invented by the actuary of the company, which can do all but think. But many of these things, in miniature, will be seen by the thousands who go to the World's Fair at St. Louis. They will find in the Prudential's exhibit in the Palace of Education

a fine model of all the buildings, and also the fullest data concerning life insurance that have ever been brought together.

But the last word about the Prudential is not told at any Exposition. It is found in the 5,500,000 policies which form a stupendous exhibit on the value of life insurance in developing thrift, safe investment, and home protection in a nation. Of course, such an exhibit could never have been possible if the Prudential had not worked out safe policies that would meet the broad needs of the American people.



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JOHN CHAMPE, TRAITOR

BY FRANCIS LYNDE

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(A Complete Novel.)

A LETTER

To Mistress Martha Merivale, of the Seven Oaks, near York Town, in Virginia, these:

Dear and Honoured Madame: Knowing that one John Champe, sometime gentleman ranker and serjeant-major in Light Horse Harry's Legion, hath, by his deserting of the colours at Tappan, earned your scorn and contempt; and having now, as I had not before, leave to speak freely of this matter; I subjoin a true and faithful account of all that befell: this in the hope that it may move you to once more plead my cause with Mistress Cicely.

Yr most obt serv & kinsman,
John Champe.

I.

TWAS a day in mid-October—a day I shall not live long enough to forget. Benedict Arnold's treason and flight were three weeks and more in the past, and the body of the brave Major André had lain for a fortnight and better in its shallow grave beside the Old Tappan road.

The army was lying as it had been, half toward the river and half to front the southward roads, like a dog watching two outways from the same war-

ren; and our legion postings were the farthest riverward in that field where poor André had looked his last upon the things of earth.

As you must know, it was a time of sore heaviness and distrust. Never greatly beloved, like his excellency, and our gallant major, and others I could name, the traitor, Arnold, had yet stood high in favour with the army.

All men remembered how he had led the forlorn-hope march to Quebec through the pathless northern wilderness, and how he had braved the wrath of General Gates to save the day at the second battle of Stillwater.

A high-stomached man, we of the rank and file called him; but never till that black day when the news of his treachery flew from lip to lip was his loyalty, or that of any of our leaders, called in question.

But now all was changed. The air was thick with flying rumors of treason and disaffection in all quarters. Some went so far as to say that his excellency could no longer trust the members of his own military family.

Will Devoe was chattering me this last

bit of devil's gossip in the afternoon which saw the beginning of my own besetment. 'Twas rainy and chill, as I well remember, and we were in our shelter hut, wringing the neck of a bottle of Dutch liquor taken off the body of one of the three Tories we had hanged the day before.

"A curse on these camp gossips!" said I, wearying, as all men did, of this living in the midst of alarms. "If they are saying this of Hamilton and Greene and Clinton, they will be besmirching our good major next. 'Tis the part of every true man to hold fast and keep his tongue behind his teeth at such a pass as this."

But Will had enough of the Dutch liquor in him to make him contentious.

"Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost, Jock Champe; that's what I say. There be never a night now but some devil's swine deserter goes galloping into the redcoat lines."

"Not from the Light Horse Legion, though, thank God!" I amended.

"Right, my buckie!" he exclaimed, in an answering flash of regimental loyalty. Then he banged his empty cup on the table and set the fat Dutch bottle a-gurgle again. "Here's a devil's health to the man who breaks our record, be it you or I, Jock Champe, and may he grill a thousand years in hell!"

We were drinking this fearsome toast when Lieutenant Middleton put his head in at the door of our dog-hole quarters.

"Serjeant-Major John Champe to report forthwith to Major Lee!" he ordered, smartly. Then, with a swift lapse into comradely good-fellowship: "You'd best bethink you of your sins, Jock. Light Horse Harry has been closeted with his excellency these three hours, and I misdoubt you are in for a wigging."

Having no worse thing to fear than a mild rebuke for my hanging of the three Tories the day before, I turned out to mount and ride to the legion headquarters, which were but a little way on the hither side of the old stone house where General Washington ate and slept.

Arriving at the major's quarters, I

was met at the door by Captain Carnes, who loves me as little as I love him, God knows.

"You move damned slowly on a peremptory order, Serjeant Champe!" he rapped out. And then: "Salute, sir! Why don't you salute?"

I stiffened in my saddle, and gave him his due, hating him the while as heartily as I hated him that day when he carried the shameful news of me to you and Mistress Cicely at the Seven Oaks. But when I made to dismount, he stopped me.

"On with you to the De Windt house; Major Lee is there, waiting you this good half hour."

I saluted again, less handsomely than before, I fear, and set my horse at the road.

The De Windt house was his excellency's headquarters, and ere I reached it the three hanged cowboys were become a millstone about my neck.

For, be it known to you, dear madame, our general hath a womanly tender heart under his waistcoat; and if my summons were only by way of my troop commander to the commander-in-chief, I might look for a more disquieting thing than a mild rebuke.

II.

Dismounting in front of the old house with its birth date curiously wrought in huge brick characters to spell out "1700" between the windows, I was met by an aide, who led the way to the great room set apart for the general's use.

Much to my relief, the only occupant of the room was my major, who was striding back and forth before the Dutch tiled fireplace, in the impatient habit of a man born to the saddle and to unresting action.

He shot me a quick glance as I entered.

"Sit down, Mr. Champe," he said, waving me to a chair. "I have sent for you to discuss a matter as between gentlemen, and we may dispense with the formalities."

I sat down, wondering; and was left to wonder for a full minute, it might be.

Then Major Lee cut to the heart of the business in a sharp-edged question.

"I have never had reason to doubt your patriotism, Mr. Champe; but let me ask this: How far would your love of country carry you on a most crooked and hazardous road to serve the cause?"

If I weighed my reply, it was only because I had little liking for that word "crooked."

"Since you have not yet found me wanting, Major Lee, so I trust you never shall, where the business comports with the honour of a gen—of a soldier."

"So? But if, for the time, that honour must seem to change places with dis-honour?"

'Twas then I thought of you, dear madame—of you and Mistress Cicely. God knows 'twas a hard pass to put me at; I whom you had set to do penance for a fault that was my father's. So I must needs seem half-hearted and feel my way.

"As how, Major Lee?" I asked.

He let me have the worst of it, bludgeon-wise.

"You will be required to desert the colors, to go over to the enemy; and it must be done so openly and boldly as to deceive both friend and foe alike."

I shook my head. 'Twas too much to ask of any man. You had told me to come back to Mistress Cicely wearing the shoulder-knot of an officer, honourably won. It was fairly within reach; I had the major's word for it that the next vacancy on the legion staff would fetch me my commission. And now to forswear the chance of it; to blacken the good name so hardly earned—

"No," said I, rising.

The major wheeled short in his pacing sentry beat, and pushed me back into the chair.

"No, no; not so fast," he protested; "think well upon it first." Then, with the kind, shrewd eyes boring me through and through: " 'Tis the chance of a lifetime for a man with the twin courages—the moral and the other."

"But my honour, Major Lee," I began; and he broke in quickly:

"Is the honour of a gentleman, Mr.

Champe; none shall gainsay that in my hearing. Yet that same gentleman is a soldier, pledged to obey—"

"Oh; if it be an order," I would say; and again he broke in, laying his hands on my shoulders.

"No, my good friend; God forbid that General Washington or your commander should ever constrain a man against his conscience. But it is a great emprise, and I have his excellency's word for it that we may say 'captain' when we speak of the man who shall carry it through."

Bethink you, dear lady, how he tempted me. Here was the guerdon which, since you had bid me win it, was become a thing to die for, to be carried off at a single bold dash. Yet that word "deserter" stuck in my throat to make me wag my head, and say "No."

"Not if the thing done would write your name beside that of those who have given their best to the cause?—if it should be a thing the mothers will tell their children after we are both dead and gone, Mr. Champe?"

"Nay," I queried; "how could that be?"

" 'Tis a fact accomplished if you will consent. Listen: the traitor, Arnold, is with Sir Henry Clinton, to whom he has sold himself. He deems himself secure and safe. Yet one brave man, and that man a deserter from the loyalest troop in our army, might bait and spring a trap for him."

I sprang up with a cry. You have done me the honour to call me a good hater, dear madame, and I am no whit behind the ferventest of those who would walk a barefoot league to see Benedict Arnold a-dangle on the gibbet he has earned.

"Lay your commands upon me, Major Lee, and by the Saviour, this Judas of ours has denied, I'll fetch him out to you, dead or alive!" I cried.

"Softly, softly, sir," he cautioned; and then he burst out a-laughing.

"God!" said he; "'tis a most awesome face you carry when you are stirred, Mr. Champe. I'd like it less than well to have you seeking me had I given you cause to avenge a wrong.

But to the business in hand; 'tis the live traitor we must have; not the dead body of him. There must be no talk of killing."

"Why not?" I demanded, bluntly. "He is naught but a poisonous reptile, to be crushed under any honest heel, when all is said."

"True," he agreed. "And yet, Mr. Champe, I have much misprized you if you would be the man to blazon it forth to the world that our general is a hirer of assassins."

"No, that I would not," I made haste to say, somewhat shamefacedly. 'Tis ever thus: the curse of sullen rage is that it will never look beyond the nearest point of blood-letting.

He laughed at my hasty retraction. "Were you as murderous as your word, I fear we should have to look for a peaceabler man, Mr. Champe. But, indeed, I know you better."

And with that, we came into the details, he reading me the insketching of a plan roughly struck out by General Washington himself; and I turning over in my mind that accursed word "deserter," and praying that I might go and return before the news of it should come to you and Mistress Cicely at the Seven Oaks.

"Your emissary," so his excellency wrote, "will use all diligence in communicating with our two friends in the town whose names you will give him by word of mouth. He will find them apprized of his coming and acquainted with his object. Confiding freely in these two, he will maintain the utmost secrecy with all others, the safety of these friends, as well as the success of the enterprise, being at stake in this. For an intermediary in communicating with you, Mr. Baldwin, of Newark, will act as the bearer of letters, for which service you are authorized to promise him one hundred guineas, five hundred acres of land and three negroes."

These were the main points in the general's instructions; and when I had them well in mind, we fell to discussing the kidnapping proper.

Word had come that the traitor was in lodgings at the house number 3 in

Broadway, next door to Sir Henry Clinton's quarters; also, that he was busied in embodying a regiment of our recreant countrymen for his own behoof and command—this because not all Sir Henry's authority could commission him in the regular line against the angry protest of the under officers.

Appearing as a deserter, 'twas not unlikely I should be assigned to this regiment, so said the major; and herein would lie my opportunity.

III.

'Twas late when we rose; and at the door the major wrung my hand most heartily, bidding me godspeed.

"Carnes and Middleton have the guard relief; give the captain a wide berth," was his last word; and so I mounted and rode away to set the enterprise afoot.

Arrived at camp, I left my horse tethered with the troop mounts at the night-rope, and stole cautiously to our dog hut—Will Devoe's and mine—to secure my portmanteau and the orderly book which should accredit me as an honest deserter—Heaven save the mark!—when I should reach the enemy's lines.

Thanks to the fat Dutch bottle, which was empty, the thing was done without my rousing of Devoe. He was asleep before the fire, tight rolled in his trooper's cloak; and when I had my thievings, I was forced to step over him to come at the door. He stirred uneasily and began to mutter in his sleep.

I listened, and went away with a heart of lead.

He was a-dream upon our drinking bout, and the word I overheard was his mumbling repetition of that cursing toast: "A devil's health to the man who breaks our legion record, be it you or I, Jock Champe; and may he grill a thousand years in hell!"

With this discomforting word for my leave-taking, it was with a heavy heart that I made my way back to the horse rope. 'Twas the hour for the guard relief, and I thonged the portmanteau to the saddle cantle with trembling fingers.

In spite of all haste, however, the

tramp of the patrol sounded in my ears before I could lead the horse aside in the darkness; and now the voice of Lieutenant Middleton came hot-foot upon his seeing of me.

"Heigh, Serjeant Champe!" he bawled, good-naturedly. "Do you turn out at midnight to groom your mount? To your quarters, man; we can ill afford to put you in arrest."

I muttered somewhat about "special duty" and the major's orders, and was in a cold sweat of terror lest he should mark the saddled beast with the portmanteau at the cantle.

But his lanthorn was a poor thing, and he saw naught amiss; so I was presently free to put a leg over the good grey which had carried me safely through three battles and unnumbered raidings; to mount and draw out stealthily, and thus to come by a wide detour to the southward road with naught but the outer vidette line to bar the way.

Now, I had had the placing of this vidette line the night before, and so made sure I would know to an ell where it would lie upon the highway. Yet, where I was looking least for him, a man leaped out of the shadows to front me in the road with his musket to his face.

"Halt!" he cried; and then I saw the sparkings of the flint and the slow flash of the rain-damped powder in the pan.

'Twas good for me his piece hung fire; good for me, but ill for him. For I had no choice but to ride him down, beating him harmless with the flat of my sword in passing.

Two clock ticks after came the roar of the sluggish flintlock; then I shook the rein free, and gave the grey his head.

'Twas neck or nothing now.

Well I knew the tried and true mettle of the men who would presently mount and gallop after me; well I knew that unless a miracle came between I should never see Paulus' Hook and daylight in the flesh.

IV.

Of what followed the alarm set off by the man with the rain-wet priming

in his piece I knew nothing for many a long day; but you, dear madame, may have the tale in its proper sequence.

No sooner was the vidette's firelock a-roar and the hue and cry well raised, than Captain Carnes runs to the major's quarters to shout the news betwixt his sword-pommel batterings on the door.

"How is that you say?—a deserter?" growls my major, feigning vast incredulity. "No, no, Captain Carnes; the men of the legion fight, lie, steal—what you will—but they never desert the colours." And he made as if he would go back to his bed.

"But, damme, sir!" fumes my captain, "one of them has deserted. The vidette saw and fired upon him; a dragoon of ours, horsed and accoutred for the road!"

"Impossible!" says Light Horse Harry; and I warrant you, dear lady, there were smothered curses a-plenty for the overvigilant captain.

But now Middleton came up to verify the tale, and the major could hold off no longer.

"Let the drums beat the roll call," he ordered; and shut his door, to kill what time he might in dressing.

As you have already prefigured, the upshot of the count by names was a victory for Captain Carnes. John Champe, serjeant-major and orderly, was not present; also, his horse, arms, portmanteau and regimental book were missing.

At this discovery the major must needs give order for the pursuit; and so he did, favouring me only by shifting the command of it from Captain Carnes, who would have hung me higher than Haman to the nearest tree, to Middleton, who was my friend. None the less, my good major has confessed that he saw the squadron gallop off on the southward road with many misgivings. Delay as he would, his time killings had purchased me less than an hour's start.

You may believe I had lost no minute of the hour.

The rain had ceased at sunset and the night was clear and starlit. As if he knew the task before him, the grey took

a long, post-carrier's stride and held it bravely.

Listening momently for the hoofbeats in the rear, I spent no time in trying to mislead my followers. Once, indeed, I was tempted to take a byroad for a detour amongst the hills, but I remembered in season that my horse bore the legion farrier's mark on his shoeings, and that this, in the rain-softened road, would surely betray me.

So we held on, the grey and I, straight to the southward through the small hours; and when the dawn began to whiten in the east, I had a post rider's stirrup cup at the Three Pigeons tavern a few miles north of Bergen.

In this part the road descends by an easy slope to the bridge crossing of a stream beyond the village; and I was but a short half mile apart the Three Pigeons, when a back-flung glance showed me my pursuers spurring over the hill at top speed.

I may not conceal from you, dear lady, that the sight of them gave me a great shock. From seeing and hearing nothing of them throughout the long night ride, I had come to some growing sense of hopeful security, as a man will when a threatened danger is long in taking shape.

But now hope gasped and died. The grey was sore jaded and his wind was cut; and while the other horses had come as far, I knew there would be some amongst them to outgallop us.

The weaving part of the mind shuttles swiftly at such a pass. Should the chase hold me fair in the road, I saw there was a little chance to reach the bridge unhindered. But a backward glance showed me that I was not to have this slender chance.

At a forking of the road, the pursuit divided, half spurring hard to hold me in sight on the main-traveled way, and the others racing down a short cut through the wood to head me at the bridge.

In such a coil, there remained but a single desperate chance, and I took it.

In the bend of a turn which screened me for the moment from my following

party, I dragged the grey's head sharp around to the left, and drove straight for the great river.

But this put me unprepared upon a fresh hazard. To reach the waterside I must pass through Bergen village; and though the hour was milkmaid early, I doubted not there would be some stirring to mark the headlong flight of a legion dragoon toward the enemy's lines.

As I feared, so it befell. I was scarce beyond the houses when I heard the shouts of the two squads meeting, baffled, at the bridge. Middleton saw his error, and covered it promptly: galloped his reunited troop a steeplechase back to the village, and there found his clew ready to hand.

So it came about that I was no more than fairly at the edge of the morass, which here fringes the great river, till my would-be takers were once more at my heels.

But now hope beckoned from a new coign of vantage. Two king's galleys swung at anchor in the stream well out of musket shot; could I make shift to pass the marsh and cry a boat on to help me?

The leftenant and his men were near enough to wing me easily, when the thing was done; in good truth, I could hear their shoutings to me to stop and to save the powder and lead 'twould take to bring me down.

So I did stop, but only to slip from the saddle on the safe side; to fling away sword sheath and trooper cloak; and to sling the portmanteau to my shoulder.

Then, with a slap to send the grey on riderless, I fled across the bog, hallooing like a madman.

The sailorsmen bestirred themselves briskly, but their coming was none too soon.

Middleton and his brave fellows were afoot and splashing through the morass, when a boat was lowered from the nearest galley; and at the last I was fain to take my sword between my teeth and so to plunge and strike out in the stream, lest, after all, the help should come too late.

V.

With your good leave, dear lady, I shall pass lightly over what followed; my fishing out like a drowned rat by the boat's crew, and my reception aboard the king's ship. 'Twas all little enough to my credit; the bedraggled escape and the lies I had to tell afterward.

That which sticks fastest in my memory is the recollection of how cold the water was; and how, when the galley captain put me sharply to the question, I was full of rage lest he should take the shiverings and teeth chatterings for the afterclap of fear.

Also, I remember, I had much ado to gain credit with this captain, a bluff, honest seaman, with little love for traitors in any sort. And, indeed, when all was said, I do believe you might have covered his regard for me and my tale with one of those small patches the ladies mar their beauty with—this in spite of the hot pursuit and my showing of the orderly book.

For all that day he kept me more a prisoner than a guest; and when at nightfall I was landed at the waterway of Fort George, I had a sailor guard with drawn cutlashes to accompany me to Sir Henry Clinton's quarters.

Once afoot in the town, I began to make instant jottings in the spy's notebook.

Our landing was, as I have said, at the wharfing below the fort; and to come at the town we marched a half circuit around the outer scarp. 'Twas my first sight nearhand of this, the stoutest of the enemy's gripping places.

'Tis a spacious stronghold, well built first out of Holland brick by the Dutch when York was Amsterdam, and now well earthed by the British engineers. 'Tis doubtful if any ships or guns of ours could breach it; though our allies, the French, may have another tale to tell if ever they come within firing distance.

Apast the northwest angle of the fort we came into an open space with the Bowling Green on the right, and a row of goodly houses to front it on the left. At the first of these—the mansion built

by Captain Kennedy, of the royal navy, when he married the daughter of Colonel Peter Schuyler—we halted; and when our ensign had made his errand known, I was admitted past the sentry, and ushered into the presence of the British commander.

You must forgive me, dear madame, if once again I pass skippingly over a time and thing I would fain forget. Having by this got my lying tale well by heart, I ran it off glibly enough; and after a few curt questions—contemptuous questions they were, flung by a man of honour and a gentleman to a traitorous deserter—that which Major Lee had prognosticated came to pass.

Sir Henry tossed me a couple of guineas and I was turned over to an officer of the guard for my night's housing, with an order to report myself in the morning to one whom Sir Henry spoke of, punctiliously, as I noted, as Mr. Benedict Arnold.

I take shame, dear lady, in confessing that I spent that first night in the guardhouse, whether by Sir Henry's private order, or through the honest and most excusable ill-will of my new comrades, I never knew. But in the morning I was set at large, and was directed how to come at the house next door to Sir Henry Clinton's quarters, where the traitor, Arnold, ate and slept.

'Twill take more years than I shall ask to live to dim the picture of that first meeting with the man I had come to crimp away to his death. You have heard it said he was a handsome man; that it was for this and his grand air that our sweet Peggy Shippen gave him her hand, with her heart to company it. It may be so. 'Tis but my word against the world's report; yet, as I saw it, his face was something less than comely: it was the face of a moody demon, cornered and at bay.

He was seated at his writing table when his soldier lackey thrust me in upon him; and for a little time he drove the quill as if unconscious of my presence. So I had leisure to mark the fine-lined face, with the thin nostrils dilated; with the lips firm-set and cruel.

As he wrote on unmindful of me the

two great furrows in his forehead deepened, and the eyes, large and shapely as a woman's, gloomed down upon the written page.

At length, at his own good pleasure, he tossed the feather aside and let me have attention.

"So," said he, looking me up and down with an air of scowling fierceness that clinched my thought of the moody demon cornered; "so you are the latest of the rats to leave the sinking ship, are you? Your name and standard, if you please."

"John Champe, late serjeant-major in Major Henry Lee's Light Horse Legion," I made answer; and I do assure you, dear lady, that word "late" went nigh to choking me.

His laugh was a mere wrinkling of the cheek and a quivering dilation of the thin nostrils.

"Nay, never boggle so over the 'late,' man; 'tis never too late to turn your back upon an ungrateful master," said he.

Then he began to ask me eagerly of our affairs as I had left them; and now I gave him one lie after another with great gladness in my heart.

Upon the heels of this we came to my present wantings.

"Doubtless, you are meaning to take service for his majesty, Mr. Champe," he said, when we were come to this; and now there were some motions toward blandness and suavity.

This time I spared myself the lie direct.

"Why else should I be here?" I would ask.

"True; why else?" said he, musingly; and for a flitting instant I thought suspicion was stirring in its bed as if to awaken. But the moment passed, and he went on, with an air of blitheness which was not all real: "Well, well; we shall find employments for you, never fear. At this present we are listing a regiment of loyal Americans and those who, like yourself, are coming back to their allegiance at the eleventh hour. How would a warrant as recruiting serjeant in this new legion please you, Mr. Champe?"

"Both well and ill," I replied, boldly. "Nothing would pleasure me so greatly as an assignment which would keep me near your person, sir. But, on the other hand, my joining of your legion might prove a desperate business if our—if the rebels ever take me. 'Twould mean a short shrift and a quick rope, I fear."

He laughed again at that, mirthlessly, as before.

"You are not alone in that hazard, my good fellow, I do assure you. But I would not constrain you. Take your time to consider of it; and, meanwhile, you shall have free quarters with my men."

For this I thanked him, as I was in duty bound, and he rose and walked with me to the door, all courtesy and condescension now, so that I could scarce recall that thought of the demon cornered.

Yet when he bade me good-day, I had a glimpse of his eyes, and the baited devil was alurk in them still, despite the masque.

VI.

Being free now to do what I would, I made haste to open my line of communication with Major Lee through Mr. Baldwin, of Newark. This gentleman I found at the market place—our meeting was as by accident—and to him I entrusted a letter bringing my adventure up to date.

That done, I passed to the next item in my instructions, which was to seek out those two friends of ours mentioned in his excellency's letter, and whose names had been whispered in my ear by Major Lee at parting.

As to these two gentlemen, their names and standing, and their part in what followed, I am not free to speak at large—this for reasons concerning their present safety. Yet I may say, with no breach of trust, that I found them fully informed of me and ready and eager to supply me with the help I should require when the plot was ripe. And it was by their advice that I determined to fling all nice scruples to the wind, listing me forthwith in the traitor's legion the better to compass our design.

So now, dear madame, behold me in that last martyr ditch of self-abasement, tricked out in the uniform of the "Loyal Americans," a renegade forsown like the others, and far bitterer, though with better cause, I hope.

True to his word, Arnold named me a recruiting serjeant; but, to my great joy, the duty was rather that of uncommissioned aide and orderly to the traitor himself.

This service put me quickly in the way of determining a thing his excellency was most concerned upon: the finding out if other of our officers were entangled in the plot to trick us out of West Point and the Hudson strongholds.

Keeping an open ear on that side I was shortly able to write Major Lee most positively that Arnold's treason was all his own; that no other officer of ours was implicated, even by innuendo.

Meanwhile, the plot paramount to possess us of the body of the traitor began to shape itself upon my better knowing of the groundwork for it.

The garden of the house number three lies behind the offices, and the fencing of the lower end was but a wooden boarding, old and insecure. In this garden it was the traitor's habit to walk by times, and always when he was come in at night from supping out. Here, if anywhere, was our chance to take him unawares; and so I fixed upon the place and manner of the crimping.

But now I happed upon that difficulty which every plotter must contend with; namely, the bringing of the most diverse means to bear upon a certain stated time and place.

Simultaneously with the traitor's readiness to be surprised in the garden, seized, gagged, bound and carried off to the waterside by my confederate and me, there must be a boat in waiting to ferry us across the river; and on the farther shore a guard and horses for the flight to our camp at Tappan.

In this cocking and priming of so many pieces at once much time was lost. Twice we had all things ready for the snappin' of the trap jaws in the garden, and twice the coup was postponed be-

cause our roundabout line of communication with Major Lee through Mr. Baldwin, of Newark, would not serve us quickly enough. Whereat we cursed Mr. Baldwin, of Newark, most heartily, and prepared to try again.

But after the second failure, I was well-nigh in despair.

Our chance to carry the emprise through was now threatening to lose itself permanently between two days. For the talley sheets of the new legion were filled at length, and there were garrison rumours in the air of a coming ship expedition to the southward, with Benedict Arnold in command. Should the legion have embarking orders before our plotting wind and tide should serve, there was an end of the matter—and of one John Champe, as well, you would say.

So it was most unhopefully that I set about cocking and priming the various pieces for the third time, writing Major Lee and fixing upon a certain night when we must either do or die.

This time our answer came promptly.

On the night determined, Major Lee himself, with a small party of the Light Horse, would be concealed in the wood near Hoboken on the Jersey shore, with led horses for three of us.

My poor pen may not advertise you, dear lady, how I lived an hundred lives and died as many deaths in the few hours which lay betwixt the final hanging of our petard and its firing time.

For now the garrison rumour of the Virginian expedition was confirmed in general orders, and the morrow was to be the day of embarkation: by chance we had hit upon the last night of the traitor's stay in New York for the final attempt at his taking.

So all that day, I hung upon the coat-skirts of my master, dogging his steps where I durst, and dreading the evening when I must perforce lose sight of him. For I had heard there was to be a great supper-giving at a certain Tory house in the town, whereat all the officers of the expedition would eat and drink their leave-takings; also, I had learned that Colonel Benedict Arnold, this day brevetted brigadier-general in his majesty's army, would be amongst the guests.

VII.

Here, dear madame, I come to that happening which has laid this wearisome tale-telling burden on me to write, and upon you to read.

'Twas yet early in the evening when I had a summons from Arnold to attend him with my side arms on. I went in fear and trembling, fear lest I should be sent upon some business fatal to our design; trembling with joy in the hope that he might this night command me near his person.

Had I known the dregs of bitterness lying at the bottom of the joy cup—but you shall presently see how I was made to drink them down.

I found my master, as oft before, sitting at his writing table and driving the quill furiously. He was dressed for his outgoing, bewigged and beruffled, and in the spick-and-span uniform of his new command.

Being now but a poor soldier serving-man of his, I stood at attention till he deigned me a look.

When his writing was done, he flung me a shrewd glance that showed me once again the at-bay devil in his eyes.

"Ha! Serjeant Champe; you are prompt," said he. Then he rose and buckled on his sword and donned his hat and cloak. "I am supping out to-night, and—" he stopped abruptly, giving me a most searching eyeshot. "I wonder how far I may trust you, sir?"

I gave him back the eye challenge boldly enough.

"As between an uncommissioned dragoon who hath done in his small way what General Arnold hath done in his large, sir, there need be no question of trust," I rejoined.

His laugh was grim. "You would say that a turncoat has little choice. Be it so; 'tis the way of an ungrateful world. But, hark you; 'tis whispered about that Mr. Washington would pawn his Virginia estates to have me laid by the heels and in his power; nay, 'tis even said he has his chosen desperadoes dogging me here in these streets. I dare say you are a brave fellow, Serjeant

Champe, and as faithful to me as you have cause to be?"

I durst not let him see my eyes when I said: "As for the first, it would ill become me to boast; and to the last—you are not more faithful to your sworn oath, sir, than I shall be to you."

"Good!" said he, and I saw he had no inkling of the double meaning in that pledge of mine. "'Tis against the chance of these Washington assassins that I would have you walk with me. You could be tiger-quick and sure upon occasion, serjeant?"

I matched his grim smile. "You shall have the most convincing proof of that, sir, when the occasion serves; this very night, it may be."

"Enough," said he. "Follow me at two paces distance. Keep your hand on your pistols, and—"

"I understand," said I; and so we forthfare into the night, step and step; the traitor wrapped up to the ears in his cloak and pacing moodily, and I wondering that the man who had faced death an hundred times on the battlefield could bring himself to this: to walking the streets of a garrisoned city with an armed guard at his back.

So, pacing, we came in a little time to a house in the upper part of the town; a fair-set mansion with a high-peaked Dutch roof siding upon the street and lights agleam in all the windows.

At the door we encountered two British officers, who were before us with the knocker; and here the traitor had another rubbing-in of that contempt in which he is held even by those to whom he sold himself.

One of the officers passed the time of night with him coldly, addressing him as "Mr. Arnold," and then both turned their backs upon him.

In the entrance hall, which was a-bustle with company passing to and from the uncloaking rooms, I had my quittance for the time. At the foot of the grand stair my master dismissed me, giving me leave to wait his pleasure in the servants' quarters.

Whilst he was saying this, a lady came down the stairs, and we both drew back to let her pass; I with rank-and-file

precision and my eyes on the opposite wall, and Arnold bowing low and murmuring a name I did not overhear.

The lady dipped him a curtsey, passing some compliments of the time and place and making some enquiry in which I caught only the words, "Mistress Margaret." Arnold replied courteously, and passed on up the stair.

Throughout this bit of byplay I stood with my back to the wall, as like to a wooden man as a common soldier should be in the presence of his superiors. Until the lady moved on I could not go about my business; and she stood stock-still till Arnold was out of sight and hearing beyond the turn of the stair.

Then, quick as a flash, she turned upon me, her eyes alight and the sweet lip—she hath your very own eyes and lips, dear madame—a-curl with the most withering scorn.

"Mistress Cicely!" I gasped.

"The same," she said, icily. Then, coming a step nearer and speaking soft and low as I have heard you speak to one whom you despised: "So; what they have been saying of you is true, Mr. Champe; and you have made me lie and lie again when I denied it!"

VIII.

What could I say, dear lady? Can you, with all your woman's wit and readiness, play the prompter's part and read my lines for me?

Saying naught of my soldier-oath of secrecy, my astoundment at finding her here—she whom I had thought safe with you at the Seven Oaks—was enough to scatter a better shepherded wit than mine.

So I could only stammer out: "You? you here, Mistress Cicely—in this town? a—a guest in this house?"

"And why not I as well as another?" she whipped out. Then: "But you do not answer me, sir; you dare not answer me, you—you shameless traitor!"

'Twas the last straw, her naming me thus, when I could say never a word to clear me.

"Your pardon, Mistress Cicely; I—I

may not stay to quarrel it out with you here. Another time, perhaps; let me pass, I pray you."

She made way for me with that *grande dame* air, which, like her eyes and lips, she hath from you, dear lady.

But whilst I would be asking a lackey to point me to the servants' hall I could feel her scornful look pursuing me, and that cruel word of hers biting deeper now than when she had loosed it upon me.

With this sharp sting to goad me, you may suppose I had but a black hour of it in the deserted servants' hall.

They fetched me meat and drink, making me welcome as a soldier of the king; none the less, I did but dally with the knife and fork, being distraught by a more insistent thing than the stomach pang, to wit, the casting about in every nook and corner of my brain to hit upon some plan of seeing her again.

Never ask, dear lady, what I hoped to gain by another meeting. Heady love and heartless reason are not wont to bed together, least of all in such a coil as this I had wound about me. Being so bound up in secrecy that I durst never hint a word in explanation, I could look for naught but other lashings from the whip of scorn. Yet it came into my mind and stuck there that I would barter look for blow if I might have the joy of holding her even for some niggard moment in a loving eye caress.

The chance came on the despatching of my supper, and 'twas she who made it.

With the after cup of wine, the servingman fetched me a long-stemmed church-warden and a pouch of tobacco; and was at some pains to show me to a sort of hothouse anteroom where I could smoke at ease.

The company was still at table, as I could gather from the clatter of cutlery and the laughter, when the door opened and Mistress Cicely stood before me.

She was no whit changed or softened.

Never tell me, dear madame, that slate-blue eyes may not have a hotter fire in them than that love kindles. 'Tis a fallacy. And her beginning on me was of a piece with the eye whipping.

"Hist, sir; no word above your breath or they will hear you in the supper room. What have you to say to me?"

Again I ask, dear lady, what could I say? To give the barest hint of the truth was to tell all. Moreover, this was love's moment, and love will still ever make a mock of all barriers save that it raises for itself.

I came a step nearer and held out my arms.

"No," she said, drawing back in a way to cut me to the heart. "If you lay a finger on me whilst you wear that coat, I shall die of shame. Why will you not speak and tell me why you have turned your back on honour, on your poor country, on everything a man should hold dear and sacred?"

Being driven so fiercely to the wall, I could only hang my head and stammer out somewhat about a soldier's loyalty to his commander supplanting the nicer sense of honour, having in mind Major Lee's overpersuading of me; and to my horror she took this most desperately amiss.

"I had never thought it of you, sir," she said, and there was a heart-broken quiver of the sweet lip that went near to maddening me. "Nor had you told us you had left the Light Horse to take service under this—this unspeakable traitor, who would have sold us to Sir Henry Clinton. But had I known, I would have defended you as the last man to be swayed by the wicked example of a villain, though that villain was, as you say, your commanding officer. And this man—oh, Cousin Jack! I know him to the core! He is the least worthy of any, as our poor Peggy Shippen is finding to her bitter cost! Is it too late to draw back?"

I said it was; that I was fairly committed to what should ensue. 'Twas a most clumsy evasion, I confess, dear madame. But what other would serve?

"Think soberly of it," she went on, passionately now; "this expedition to Virginia—nay, never start so guiltily; 'tis an open secret—this design is set afoot to harry our own dear homeland. Can you, at this smooth-tongued villain's persuasion, sink all your manhood

and become a churlish wolf to fly at the hand that fed you?"

Picture my miserable besetment, if you can, dear lady, and see how it was I was driven to roughness with her for whom I would gladly have gone to the spy's gibbet.

"Peace, Mistress Cicely, I pray you!" I said, harshly. "You may drive me mad with your reproaches, but you shall not swerve me from my purpose. I have sworn to do a thing, and to keep a still tongue in my head till it be done; and, by God, I will do both!"

"And you will not tell me what has maddened you, Cousin Jack?—oh, it must have been a bitter thing to change you into what you are to-night!"

"For God's sake, let be!" I cried. "'Tis you who are driving me mad, I say! I have not yet taken ship for Virginia with this rabble, have I?"

"Oh!" said she, with a little gasp. And then, with a quick relapse into doubt: "But you said you were fairly committed."

"So I am—to the hazard of this night."

"Then you have not passed your word? You are to meet him again—to-night?"

"Ay, and come to hand grips with him, God willing," said I, letting slip this single inch of the rope of secrecy.

"He will overpersuade you."

"Nay, it may be that I shall overpersuade him. Stranger things have happened."

She shook her head, and fell into a muse; and straightway the great love in me sent a hot wave of desire tingling to my finger tips.

"He is an abstemious man, as all men know," she said, half as to herself; "yet this night he is drinking deeply with Mr. Livingston; perhaps there is yet time." Then, with a swift look at me: "Can I say nothing to send you back to your plain duty, Cousin John?"

I hesitated, wondering if I might be forgiven for deceiving her. For now it was come to this: another word from her, a quivering of an eyelash, a trembling of the sensitive lip, and I was lost.

"I—I am here at his order," I said,

flinging out the misleading word in sheer desperation. "He may require me at any moment, and if I be missing—"

"But if he should not require you?"

"Then—then mayhap I should be the freer to consider more of what you have said, dear heart of mine."

'Twas near an affront—my using of the lover's word—and I saw the angry retort flashing in her eyes and trembling on the scornful lips. But in the midst she turned away and hid her face in her hands.

'Twas then I forgot myself, dear lady; forgot what was due to her no less than to my own manhood.

Mad with shame and sullen rage, and more than mad with love long denied and fed on the husks of absence, I took her in my arms—clipt and kissed her twice, thrice, nay, I think it may have been a dozen times before she wrenched away, as quick now with maiden shame and indignation as I was with passion.

"For shame, sir!" she panted; and what more she said it matters not—I deserved it all.

And at the lesson's end she left me, renouncing all her love for me and shrinking from me as I had been in very deed and truth the vile thing my cursed fate had painted me.

"You have done that for which I could kill you, John Champe!" was her parting word. "You have said in that act that a woman's love is but a bawd's passion, to be dragged at will through any mire of perjury and dishonour!" Then she gave me my demittance. "This one night is yours; strip off that traitor's coat and go back to your allegiance—or never let me look upon your face again!"

IX.

When I durst lift my eyes she was gone, and I was alone in the perfumed heaviness of the place; and yet, dear madame, I was not alone, for I do think that all the devils in hell came to compass me about; to make me rage and curse as one too full of spleen to brook another hour's delay or false concealment.

I know not how many weary miles I had measured in my trampings up and down the narrow walk way of the forcing house, when a servingman thrust his head in at the door and accosted me in broad Loamshire.

"Be'st thou the wan they call Soorjeant Chompe?" he queried.

I nodded.

"Then thou mayst goo thy weays as th' loikes; they measter has no more need for thee."

I wondered some little at what this might mean; nevertheless, I was most joyous glad to be released. For now I could go straight to our ambush in the garden, salving my hurts in making ready for the moment which should either earn me my captain's shoulder-knot or send me in a gallows cart to a spy's ending—being so miserable, I cared not greatly which way the die should fall.

But once free of the house, with the cool, black night to baptize me in and the sharp harbour wind to wash the hot-house languors from my brain, the sullen madness passed, and by degrees I came to see with saner eyes, as thus :

So the event of the night should bear me out, I had lost nothing that I might not hope to gain again.

'Twas as it haps so often in this life: that failure is the only crime. Should we succeed, I knew my sweet Cicely's generous heart; how she would go all lengths to make amends for doubting me.

Nay, when it was come to this, the gate of the fool's paradise opened for me, and I saw myself as Sir Magnanimous, forgiving her lovingly for all her bitter words, and making the path of sweet penitence a rose-strewn lovers' walk for her.

You see, I do not spare myself, dear lady; even this last humility of showing you the braggart pride and insolent fondness of a lover's heart.

'Tis always thus, I venture, with a man in love. He knows the battles must turn, as battles do, upon an "if"; yet he would never be a man in essence did he not assume the "if," and picture out

the victory and his own return in triumph. But to my tale.

It wanted less than an hour of midnight when I felt my way through the dark alley at the back of the traitor's garden. A week before, I had loosened a panel in the plank boarding to give us egress with our captive; and through this opening I entered.

All was quiet as the grave. But for the lighted window of the room where Arnold slept, the house was dark behind tight-closed shutters.

My confederate was quickly found. He was lying flat beneath a row of English currants bordering the traitor's usual walk way, watching the lighted window. The word was passed, and he sat up to put his head with mine whilst we opened each his budget of news in cautious whispers.

"Tis a hazard if he come out to-night," said my fellow watcher, when I had told him of the supper company. "Homing so late, he will be leg weary, and will so to bed."

I would not believe it. Habit is strong, even in trivial things; a sapling that quickly grows into a sturdy tree.

"He will walk, never fear," said I. "I am more concerned for our various dovetailings. Is the boat ready?"

"Yes; a dory from the *Nancy Jane*, with Captain Elijah Sprigg and two of his men."

"Good," said I.

"But there is better behind it. The captain brings us word from the Jersey shore. Major Lee and his dragoons are in waiting."

So, whispering, we kept the vigil, with never an eye to miss a flicker of the candles in the single-lighted room on the upper floor, or an ear too dull to catch the lightest footfall in the street beyond.

'Twas master weary work, this waiting with the nerves strung to the springing pitch and every sense alert till it became a keen-edged agony; yet there will be a certain fierce joy of expectancy in such tasks as will help a man forget his pains.

Having no timepiece, we marked the passing hours as we might by the swing of the Great Dipper round the Pole Star.

'Twas now past midnight, and hope, from running lightly in advance, began to lag.

What if the fickle jade fortune had turned her back on us the third and final time?

I had a most disquieting glimpse ahead. Bold seaman as he was, Captain Sprigg could not lie off and on forever, under a sentried shore and in a stream patrolled hourly by guard boats from the frigates in the harbour.

And as for Major Lee, he would be less prudent than I had ever known him did he stay to let the breaking day catch him so far within the limits of the debatable ground.

Also, the glimpse gave me certain foreseings for myself; though on these I hope I thought as lightly as a soldier should. Failure spelt captivity for me; more double-dealing, disgrace, dishonour. If Captain Elijah should miss his freightage, I, also, would miss my final chance of escape.

As the night wore on eventless, my companion spoke of this, saying we were fairly outdone, and that I should snatch my only chance of flight.

'Twas a sore temptation, dear lady, though I confess it with shame. For well I minded me of Mistress Cicely's word, and well I knew she would keep it. Yet when my good confederate strove with me to make me go, a stubborn rage came to help me, and I said with hot soldier oaths that we would give over when the dawn should drive us out of hiding and not before.

It was in the midst of this contention that we heard footfalls in the street; the measured pacing of the traitor, homing at last from the supper rout.

We waited with the unanswered query singing shrilly in our ears. Would he come out to us? or would he be fagged enough to miss of his walk in the garden?

We saw him come into the lighted room, and fling his cloak aside. Then for a long minute or two he stood at the window, looking out upon the quiet gloom of the garden and debating within himself, as we would think, whether he would out and walk as was his custom.

'Twas the leading string of habit tugging at him, all unmarked, mayhap. It was not strong enough to draw him. For in a little space he turned away, and sat down at his writing table.

Now, you will say, the hour was surely come for flight; and so, indeed, my comrade thought and said. But I would not consent, and we crouched as we were, craning our necks to watch him whilst the suffocating minutes gripped and held us stifling.

Would he yet come out to us before our chance was gone? Or was the leading string of habit broken for the night?

'Twas a most killing time before we had our answer. Thrice he laid the quill aside, and as many times resumed it. But when at length the writing task was done he rose, stretched himself wearily, and came once more to the window.

'Twas now or never, and I could feel my companion moving his cramped limbs as to loosen them for action.

"Art ready, man?" he whispered; and for my life I could not answer; the blood was surging in my veins till I was fair agasp for breath. "Steady!" said my yoke fellow, gripping me fast; "he is coming!"

Arnold had left the window, and was taking his cloak from the bed. In the act he once again paused indeterminate. What imp of that evil one to whom the traitor had sold himself was it that came and whispered him his warning? I know not, nor ever shall; but now we saw him toss the cloak aside and begin to undress him for bed.

X.

"*Finis!*" said my comrade. "Now for the river and the boat; and we can never be too swift!"

But, alas! dear madame, he had to reckon with a madman; with a man to whom this sorry failure meant the loss of his love.

So he could tell you if he would how he had to drag me away at the last; how I made him wait till the candles were out, and how I was near coming to blows with him because he would not

consent to break into the house with me in some foolhardy essay to crimp the man we needed in his bed.

Likewise, he might tell you how, when the senseless rage fit was past, he hurried me to the waterside, only to find that Captain Sprigg was gone; and how, when this last hope was dead, he kept me from plunging in to swim me free or drown, as luck would have it.

These things I note in passing, but they are things apart. For now my tale is done.

Of the sequel: how I fared on shipboard some few hours after, wearing the hated uniform and marching step and step with Arnold's legion; how we landed in Virginia, and I was forced to look on helpless at our poor country's woundings till at last the long-delayed chance for escape came grudgingly; of these things you have had the story from a livelier pen than mine.

But I know not if Mistress Cicely has told you what she did to me on that black morning of our sailing; nor do I know if I should name it to you here; and yet I will.

'Twas whilst we were forming at the barracks.

A gaping crowd of townspeople were onlooking, and through the press came my Loamshire servingman, elbowing his way to thrust a bit of paper into my hand. It was a love letter from Cicely, and this is what she said:

SIR: You had your chance and would not take it. I give you back the love you have profaned; and since death is now the kindest thing for you, I shall pray daily for that as once I prayed you might be spared to me.

Do you wonder, dear lady, that I marched with our enemies to the ships, dead to all the passing show? Is it a marvel that for days and weeks a spiritless captive kept step mechanical in Arnold's ravaging legion, groping blindly for the thread which should lead him out of the labyrinth of despair, yet never finding it?

So ends the tale, dear madame, for it will not much concern you to hear at length how my privations in the moun-

tains of our western wilderness, and now the fever of this low-lying coast country of Carolina has made a broken man of me.

But for love of Mistress Cicely, the love that, costing me so dear, has grown more jewel-precious in the losing, I pray you choose your time and tell her all. And if, when she has heard— But this I leave to you, dear lady; to you and Mistress Cicely.

A LETTER.

From Mistress Cicely Merivale to Captain John Champe, of Colonel Henry Lee's Legion of Light Horse, encamped before Charleston:

DEAR HEART: York Town is fallen; my Lord Cornwallis has signed the articles; and the war is ended: all of which we have from his excellency, General Washington, who last night honoured Seven Oaks by sleeping here.

Ah, cousin mine, there is a great and good man, worthy of all love and reverence. For when I went on my knees to him and told him how a meddlesome, headstrong prat-a-

pace named Cicely Merivale had marred all his plans for trapping that arch traitor; had for love's sake—but you know well what I had to tell him. For, oh! Jock, dear! it was I and no other who turned the supper company into a dancing rout, and fawned and played upon that villain's all-devouring vanity till he had clean forgot the time of night, and I had spoiled your chance of taking him!

Picture me, therefore, on my two knees to our general, sobbing out all this and, more; how to fill the cup of cruel blunderings to overflowing I had broken a true man's heart into the bargain. Then conceive him, if you may, lifting me gently and kissing me on the forehead as I had been a little maid who had broken her favourite doll: doing this and bidding me gravely lose no time in writing you, and saying his own courier would carry the letter with his despatches.

The post-rider waits—by the general's own order—and I may not stay to say more. Will you pick the answer to your asking out of this? My poor, dear hero! come home to us quickly, and let us nurse you strong and fit again.

And be assured, dear love, if you will play the part of Sir Magnanimous, as once you thought to do, the welcoming doors of Seven Oaks will not open wider for you than the arms and heart of

CICELY MERIVALE.

THE END.

ON THE RIVER OF MIST

BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

A brief but stirring episode in the daily life of a Northwestern gold seeker.

PERHAPS there is not in the whole world a more melancholy and depressing region than that of the upper Stickeen River, in British Columbia—a broad, slowly-flowing stream, bordered by low mud flats a few yards in width. Beyond these flats the shore is covered with a tangled and perfectly impenetrable jungle of low scrubby evergreens, hemlock and spruce, growing out of a sort of "muskeg" soil.

Close on either side rise dark rugged

mountains, whose crests usually seem to pierce right up through the lowering sky.

And it rains every day, almost every hour, upon the Stickeen—not mere spring showers, but a chill, penetrating drizzle that saturates the thickest clothing, covers every rock and tree with a coating of green moss, and makes it absolutely impossible to keep knives and rifles from rusting.

This wild, dirty and heart-sickening

locality is frequented only by a few spruce grouse, a few half-starved wolves, and by *Ursus Horribilis*, the grizzly bear.

The grizzly flourishes among these cheerful surroundings, because the river is filled with salmon that lie and die in heaps on the muddy shores, and old "Ephraim" finds a dainty dish in these putrid morsels. He is, besides, a fisher of no mean ability, and frequently spends much of the night in wading the shallows for his finny prey.

It was down this northern Styx that we were drifting in the dead of night, my Indian and I, in our light canoe. This lightness of the canoe was due to the total absence of flour, sugar, tea, bacon, or anything else in the "grub-stake" line, while in my pocket reposed a buckskin bag containing about four ounces of gold dust, the sole reward of three months of rough-and-tumble placer mining in the mountains.

We had remained obstinately upon the creeks till almost the last particle of our supplies had been exhausted, but we had no luck. Game was not to be found, and it was necessary to move or to die in the wilderness.

So, for more than a hundred hours, we had been floating down the river, in a half-famished condition, and making no stop either by day or night in our anxiety to reach a Hudson Bay post about thirty miles below as quickly as possible. There were plenty of salmon in the stream and we fed upon them, but it was the season when they were all but uneatable, and I at least could hardly stomach enough to satisfy my hunger even temporarily.

My red man, who rejoiced in the name of "Joe Bill," was sleeping in the bow, while I occupied the stern with the steering paddle. I remember how wretchedly faint and miserable I felt. I was cramped, too, from long sitting in the canoe, and I directed our course half mechanically, half asleep myself.

There was an occasional lugubrious crying of owls over the swamps, but for the most part the wilderness was profoundly silent. The stream did not ripple; the drizzle fell noiselessly, and

when a leaping salmon splashed I was startled into sharp attention.

A heavy mist filled the air, but a moon somewhere behind the clouds showed clearly enough the pale surface of the water, the low sloping flats and the inky black tangle of undergrowth on either shore.

Suddenly as we drifted round a wide elbow we came squarely upon two great, humped, rugged forms, standing half-leg deep in the shallows. There was no mistaking the massive bulk, the clumsy pose, the low-held, hog-like head. It was undoubtedly a grizzly and his mate, perhaps spending a honeymoon in the congenial amusement of salmon-catching.

I shook the canoe sharply to warn the Indian, who started up with the alert sense of the wild man, and the bears wheeled swiftly and stood to face us.

As they caught our scent, the smaller one turned about and made for shore with a frightened grunt, splashing the water in every direction. But the male stood his ground.

I heard Joe Bill fumbling with his single-shot government Snider, and in another instant he blazed away. I do not suppose that he hit the bear, for he was the worst rifleman I ever saw, but the insult was sufficient just then. The huge animal uttered a sort of guttural roar, and charged straight at the canoe.

I whirled the craft about with the steering paddle, and snatched up my heavy Winchester.

There was meat on that brute's carcass, and we were both like famished wolves. It was the primitive condition of man, fighting for his livelihood with the beasts of the wilderness.

My first shot missed, but I heard the "third" of the second bullet.

Checked in his charge, the bear turned and began to make for shore. Just as he gained the muddy bank I fired again; he stumbled, but recovered himself, regained his legs, and spattered through the mire to a dense covert of low spruce, where, judging from the sounds, he stopped.

Cramp and weariness were forgotten now, and the idea of broiled bear steaks

was uppermost in both our minds. We drove the canoe upon the mud with a couple of strokes, leaped out into the tenacious mixture, and waded toward old "Ephraim's" retreat.

I could distinctly hear him coughing and grunting at no great distance in, but the cover was so dense that it was impossible to see through a foot of it. He certainly possessed all the advantages of the ground, and if he were unwilling to come out it would be no easy matter to compel him.

Finally Joe Bill threw a number of pebbles and clubs into his lair, which had the effect of making him move to a comparatively open spot, where we could see him.

It was clear that he would have to be treated with precaution. He was evidently violently exasperated. His head was held low, and stretched stiffly toward us; streams of bloody froth hung from his jaws, and his little eyes seemed literally to glow in the gloom.

I raised the Winchester, and, as well as the dusk would permit, I drew a bead upon his shoulder, hoping that the heavy bullet would either penetrate the vitals or shatter bones enough to prevent him from escaping or charging.

But my eyes were still dazzled by the flash when the grizzly roared hideously and sprang straight at us, smashing through the underbrush with great bounds.

My Indian uttered a wild whoop and leaped away, plunging deep in the slimy footing. I could see the form of the brute only by glimpses till he was out upon the shore, and within five yards of me. Then I let drive at his chest, and instantly sprang as far as I could to one side.

As I felt rather than saw a mighty paw whiz not six inches from my breast, I jerked another cartridge into the barrel. The impetus of his charge had carried him fully twelve feet past me, and he was just turning when I wheeled to shoot.

I pulled the trigger with a hurried aim, but only a soft click responded to the fall of the hammer. My last shot had been fired; my rifle, of the half-

magazine pattern, contained only five cartridges, and these had all been spent.

I glanced rapidly about me and seeing a huge rick of fallen and half-fallen timber not far away I made for it. The bear was hot in pursuit, but I reached it safely, swung myself up out of reach, and set about reloading.

But I had not reckoned upon the agility of the apparently clumsy animal. I had inserted one cartridge into the weapon when he made a prodigious spring, thrust his paws into a crevice, and before I was well aware of it he had raised his fierce and bloody face above the logs.

I fired blindly but must have missed, for he gained the top with a single movement, and I was struck and hurled headlong from my perch. The rifle escaped from my hands, and I went down with a loud "plunk" into about three feet of sticky, tenacious mud.

For a moment I was completely engulfed; then I succeeded in raising my head from the mess, and in clearing the mud from my eyes. I could make out the bear still standing on the logs above me, evidently amazed at my rapid disappearance.

I felt about for my Winchester, but was unable to find it. I was in deadly fear lest the bear should take it into his head to jump after me, in which case he would fall upon me and smother me in mud, so I crawled out and waded toward the canoe.

The grizzly upon his pinnacle offered a tempting mark just then, and the Indian fired at him. He jumped, but not in my direction, and Joe Bill was compelled to climb very hastily into a large dead hemlock that stood a few yards away.

Meanwhile I had reached the canoe and paddled out into the river, and was engaged in scraping some of the superfluous mud from my clothes. The grizzly was snarling and ramping at the foot of the tree, and I wondered that the Indian did not fire from his retreat.

"Why don't you shoot, Joe?" I called; and my ally answered mournfully: "No got-um cartridge!"

Here was a pretty predicament! Joe Bill had left his belt of cartridges in the canoe; my rifle was lost, and we were incapable of putting in an effective shot. However, I still had my revolver, and with this I began to bombard our foe from the river.

This had the effect of bringing him down to the shore, fairly rabid with fury. He waded far into the water, but finding it impossible to catch the canoe, he returned to the shore with hoarse moans of rage, champing his jaws viciously.

While the brute's attention was thus diverted, Joe Bill descended from his tree, and cautiously stole over to the spot where I had fallen from the logs. Here he began to poke about in the mud, and presently disinterred my Winchester, almost unrecognizable from its covering of mire.

Just then the bear caught sight of him, wheeled, and make a dash in his direction.

The Indian was compelled to climb the rick as I had done, and the bear seemed this time indisposed or unable to follow. Loss of blood had weakened him a little, but his fury was unabated.

Now the Indian had both rifles while I had all the cartridges, and it was a problem how a distribution was to be effected.

"Joe," I finally called, "drop my rifle butt first into the mud, and jump down and run for your tree again. You'll have time to climb up before he catches you."

Joe might well have hesitated to comply with this request, but in spite of his faults he was not much of a coward. He dropped the rifle carefully, and it remained standing muzzle upwards; he leaped down on the side farthest from the grizzly, and ran for the old hemlock.

As the bear pursued him I paddled ashore, landed, and managed to secure my bedaubed rifle.

Returning to the boat, five seconds sufficed to clear the mud from the barrel, inside and out, and to wipe the lock clean. The action, being closed, did not seem to have clogged, and I hastily re-filled the magazine.

The bear was sitting under the hemlock, looking up at the Indian, when I landed for the last round of the fight. When he heard my footsteps he rose, turned and charged open-mouthed upon me.

The smashing bullet entered his chest at a range of twenty feet, and, as we found afterwards, raked the whole length of his body. The impetus of his charge carried him on, and I fired again, but the first bullet had done the work, and he fell dead almost at my feet.

We were victorious, but in a pretty pickle—mud from head to foot. However, we reckoned ourselves lucky that we had not fared worse.

Joe was quite uninjured; I had only a few bruises, for the bear had not struck me with his paw, but had charged upon me bodily when I was knocked from the log-rick.

We built a huge fire upon the firmest and driest ground that we could find, and I hardly care to remember how many pounds of meat were presently roasting on forked sticks before the blaze.

A grizzly bear is not supposed to be very good eating, but I discovered then to what an extent taste is annihilated by extreme hunger.

We began to eat before the steaks were one-quarter cooked, and, tough and stringy and musk-flavored as they were, I think I never had a more thoroughly satisfactory meal in my life.

THE WHISTLE OF FATE

BY RICHARD MARSH

Author of "The House of Mystery," "In Full Cry," Etc.

This story, the fourth in the series of notable stories by well-known authors of adventure fiction now being published in this magazine, is by a man whose name is identified with the most fascinating romances in modern English literature. Mr. Marsh has never written a more interesting and attractive story than "The Whistle of Fate."

CHAPTER I.

APPOINTING AN HEIR.

"If you like you'll be able to live upon the interest—many a man who is thought well off lives on less. Or, if you prefer to aim at the big things—and you're that kind of a man—you'll have enough capital in hand to enable you to bring off successfully some of those greater villainies which make men millionaires."

The listener laughed; the situation appealed to his peculiar sense of humor. The man in the bed looked at him.

"I like to hear you laugh, lying here. If I were out of this, and we were alone together, and had had a little difference of opinion, I shouldn't like it quite so much. The devil's strongest in you when you laugh."

"You're so funny."

"I am. I've been a funny man my whole life long; an unconscious humorist. The mischief is, I've found it out too late. If I'd suspected the truth a dozen years ago I shouldn't be dying in jail."

"It's not a pretty place to die in. And

yet—I don't know; it's as good as any other."

"You didn't think so once."

"Once! Once I thought jam the concentrated essence of happiness."

"So did I. I thought it so strongly that I held it worth while to swallow a few bitters to get it. That's where it is, and why I'm here, Bruce." The other nodded. "I've a feeling you don't believe half that I've been telling you; that you regard my story about the fortune which is lying ready for your hand as a convict's fairy tale."

"My dear chap, I always believe everything I'm told. I've been the confidant of a large number of veracious histories since I've been inside this place. The silent system is not so rigidly enforced as to prevent one's being that. My powers of credulity are boundless."

"Yes, I know. If I thought you were setting down among the rest of the prison lies what I've told you, I should lie in my grave and scorch."

"Don't do that. And don't talk about it either. It presents unpleasant vistas to the imagination."

"Perhaps if I were to tell you my history you might bring yourself to be-

lieve that I am leaving you a fortune. I grant that under the circumstances the notion does want swallowing."

"My dear Edney, I give my confidence to no one."

"So I've noticed."

"But if you choose to give me yours, I am entirely at your service. I agree with you that when a man who has been sentenced to ten years' penal servitude observes that he proposes to make you his heir, you are inclined to ask yourself what to. It is easy enough to bequeath any number of castles in Spain, to anyone; but one hardly expects to have to pay legacy duty on bequests of the kind."

"You won't pay legacy duty on what I'm leaving you."

The man in the bed grinned. He lay back on his pillow and coughed. Coughed badly and long. So long that one wondered if he would stop before he was broken to pieces. Blood issued from his mouth. He was not a pleasant spectacle.

His companion rendered him such assistance as he could, showing gentleness and patience which contrasted oddly with his stalwart form.

After the paroxysms were over, the man in the bed lay motionless, scarcely seeming to breathe. Words came thinly from his lips.

"I'll go off in one of those bouts, please God."

"You mustn't talk."

"But I must talk. That's just what I must do. Perkins won't be back yet. I ought to be able to tell you all that's needful before he comes. I mayn't have another chance."

Perkins was dispenser and warden combined. Canterstone was but a small jail. There were seldom many prisoners in the infirmary. At present there were but three: George Edney, dying; Sam Swire, a "traveler," "doing a drag," the victim of too much drink and too little food; and Andrew Bruce, recovering from a sprain, a good-conduct man, whose term of two years' hard labor was nearly at an end, and who was quite capable of looking after the two sick men who were in bed.

Therefore, since the prison was not over-staffed, when Perkins went to dinner he simply locked the outer door of the infirmary and left Andrew Bruce in charge. Which explains how it was that George Edney and he were able to discuss their private affairs so freely; even proposing to enter into more delicate matters still. In Edney's opinion there was only one drawback.

"Go and see what that brute in the next room is doing."

Bruce did as he was told; passing for the purpose into the adjacent apartment, which was merely divided from its neighbor by a brief partition wall. Presently he returned.

"Swire's asleep; fast as a top."

"Good thing, too; not that I can talk loud enough to give him much chance of overhearing."

"I tell you again that you oughtn't to talk at all."

"Chuck all that! Sit as close as you can, so as to spare my breath."

Bruce drew a chair as close to the bedside as possible, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, so that his head was within a few inches of the other's face. He kept his eyes fixed upon the narrator's countenance, not only as if desirous of reading what was transpiring in his brain and behind his actual words, but also as if struck—and amused—by the singularity of his appearance.

Normally small, weak-legged, loose-limbed, blear-eyed, he now seemed nothing but skin and bone. His lips were bloodless; patches of sandy stubble concealed his cheeks and chin; every now and then he gave a gasp, recalling the sounds made by a "roaring" horse.

As he proceeded, Bruce realized more and more clearly how entirely he looked the part of chief actor in such a tale as that which he was telling.

"I'm a solicitor by profession. Never on my own account—hadn't the money to start with. I was managing clerk to a man who had. His name was Glasspoole—Frederick Glasspoole, of Birstchaster. Connect anything with the name?"

"With the name of Frederick Glasspoole? Nothing, at present."

"I thought you might have heard something of the story—read about it in the newspapers, perhaps—and so have saved me trouble."

"I'm willing to save you all trouble."

"I don't want to be saved that way. He was a good fellow—young, and a fool. His father had left him a fine practice. Not only did he act for most of the townsfolk, but he was agent for some of the chief estates in the neighborhood. But he had two faults—he wasn't fond of work, and he trusted me. The latter in particular was a grave mistake."

The grin which accompanied the words seemed to lend to the speaker's corpse-like features something of the grotesque horror which we associate with a gargoyle.

"I was not an immoral character—not, that is, in any unusual degree. But I am, and always was, non-moral. Morality, that is, didn't enter into my scheme of creation at all. I hated work; though no one could work harder than I could when I chose, and had an end in view; and I liked a good time—my notion of a good time. I realized, quite early in life, that my good time meant money. Not in small sums. I didn't want to do the prodigal for, say, six months, and then have to live on husks for an indefinite period. That wasn't my idea; not a little bit. What I wanted was fifty or sixty thousand pounds. Then I would invest it in something gilt-edged, live on the interest, and get every farthing's worth of fun out of it that could be got.

"The point was how to procure the fifty or sixty thousand pounds. It wasn't likely to be obtained out of the savings of a managing clerk. Glasspoole himself hadn't anything like that amount of ready money. His father's estate was sworn at something over ten thousand pounds. I happened to know that each year's income was spent during the same twelvemonth. So it seemed that even if, by some process of hankey-pankey, I diddled him out of his business—which I perhaps mightn't have found an impossible feat—I should still have had to work for the rest of

my life. Which was exactly what I didn't want to do. I tried betting—on horses and on the Stock Exchange. But that didn't make me appreciably richer. I dabbled in one or two other directions. Still the money wouldn't come. So, at last, I made up my mind what I would do.

"Instead of a profit, my little ventures had resulted in a pecuniary loss—which was what I hadn't intended. To meet it, I had had to make free with other people's property. Not to a large amount. Still it was more than I was ever likely to be able to replace. Worrying about it put me on the track of my great idea.

"In Glasspoole's charge there were all sorts of securities—bonds, shares, insurance policies, mortgage and title deeds; all sorts of things. Large sums of money—or money's worth—passed through his hands on behalf of his clients. And his hands meant mine. There was one estate in particular—the Dene Park estate, belonging to the Foster family—the fee-simple of which was practically inside the walls of Glasspoole's office. Nothing would be easier than to obtain the money I wanted—by turning thief.

"Why shouldn't I? I did my best to sum up the pros and cons, and give a judicial decision as to which side had the best of it. I argued in this way.

"On the one hand, I should be found out. I never deceived myself as to there being any room for doubt upon that point. On the other, I should have the money. I did not propose to spend it. My idea was to put it away in a safe place, where I alone should know of its existence, and to which I only should have access. I should be sentenced, probably, to between five and ten years' penal servitude. I doubted if I should object to prison much more than I did to Glasspoole's office. When I had served my term I should be a man of means. In other words, by doing—at the outside—ten years' imprisonment I should have earned a fortune; which I certainly never should be able to do by any other means whatever. You catch the notion?"

"I perceive that you're a pretty sort of a scoundrel."

"I'm one sort, you're another. I understand that you're here for something very much like murder."

Bruce laughed. Stretching out his hands he placed the other in a more comfortable position on his pillow. The sick man gave a little sigh of satisfaction.

"Your touch is as soft as a woman's, when you like. Well, my scheme went on rollers up to a certain point. I stripped the office bare, laying hands on everything within reach; turning things into cash as I went on—often, I am sorry to say, at a shocking loss. It's astonishing how certain kinds of property depreciate when you're in a hurry to realize. I put the money away as fast as I got it. By the time the crash came I had the satisfaction of knowing that I was comfortably off. They arrested Glasspoole and me on the same day."

"Glasspoole? Was he your accomplice?"

"Neglect, my dear sir, neglect. I should never have been able to collar everything in the way I did do if his neglect of his clients' interests had not been really culpable. However, they were able to prove nothing against him actually criminal; and he was acquitted—a ruined man. I got ten years; which was three more than I expected, because I had hoped to get off with seven. But the judge happened to be Quince, who has a special prejudice against solicitors who misappropriate."

"You deserved the ten years; every day of it."

"I fancy that most of us in this establishment do deserve all we've got—you as well as the rest."

"I'm not denying it."

"That's just as well. The mischief is that I didn't get on in prison so well as I desired. Somehow it didn't agree with me at all. I haven't done six years, yet in about six hours I'll be dead."

Bruce, noticing the difficulty he had in speaking, in breathing, in living, thought it probable that he was right.

"I always understood that before a

man got to your condition they gave him his discharge."

"So they do. They told me, a month ago, that I was a dead man. And they offered to let me out."

"Offered?—what do you mean?"

"They don't turn a man out to die in the streets, or even in a workhouse. They ask him if he has anywhere to go to; if he has any friends."

"And haven't you any?"

"After what I've been telling you, do I strike you as being the kind of man who is likely to have friends? Like you, I've none."

"How do you know I've none? You know nothing about me."

"I'll stake my fortune that there's not one creature living who'd stretch out a hand to save you from hell-fire. That's one reason why I'm making you my heir."

"One reason—what's another?"

"Just now you called me a pretty sort of a scoundrel. I attempted no contradiction. But, as a scoundrel, compared to you I'm a pygmy. In you there's the making of a criminal Colossus. You've no principles; no scruples; no attachments; nothing to cause you to stay your hand. You're handsome—you look like a Greek god; but I don't know if you're aware that those blue eyes of yours are of the shade and kind which are found in the heads of many gentlemen who finish at the end of a rope. You've nerve; courage enough for anything; for assurance, a countenance of triple brass. You're a giant in stature; you've the strength of a Hercules; and the sort of constitution which has never known what it is to be ill. You know the world; and, I fancy, you've seen—and done—a few things in it. You're a man of education; possibly a scholar; certainly a public school and university man. Given the chance, you should go far. And I'm going to give you the chance. Put these things together and you've another reason why I'm making you my heir."

"You flatter me; ascribing to me qualities which I was not aware that I possessed."

"I think that's possible. But you'll

discover their existence as occasion arises for you to use them. I imagine that the fact that you've had the temper of a fiend is responsible for your being here."

"Well, there may be something in that."

"You must get that under, or it'll land you again. A man of your type, who, when he's raging hot inside, can seem as cold as ice, is the most dangerous creature on God's earth. Go out in about a fortnight, don't you?"

"To be exact, in ten days."

"I'll be underground before then. Seems odd that I should have done it all to make you rich."

"It does—extremely. If this money exists, as you assert, why didn't you avail yourself of the discharge which was offered you, and make use of it yourself?"

"What use could I have made of it had I got it? I'm doomed to die; I may as well die here as anywhere. I've got beyond the stage when money could buy me anything which I could enjoy. Also—a big 'also'—the key to it all happens to be in a place where, in my then condition, I couldn't have got at it. I'd have had to take a partner who'd have robbed me. It'll give me more satisfaction to know that it's being used by a man like you."

"Do you seriously suggest that, masquerading as George Edney, I should lay claim to moneys which are deposited somewhere in your name? Not only would the counterfeit be detected in an instant, but, I take it, there are associations which I should find it difficult to explain away."

"I'm suggesting nothing so foolish. The money is not in any way connected with my name, or with me. It's deposited in the name of Smithers—Francis Smithers. And he is nothing but a name—and a signature. You'll have to get the signature right; but I credit you with the capacity for doing that. Unto this hour, no one has ever seen him in the flesh. When you come on the scene it will be his first appearance on any stage."

"I don't understand."

"I thought it would be better that no one with a memory for faces should be able to associate George Edney with Francis Smithers, so I took care that none of the depositing should be done by me in person."

"Then how am I to get at it?"

"You know Richmond Park, near London?"

"Very well."

"I was born at Richmond. I know every inch of it. When, down at Birs-
chester, I was casting about for a hid-
ing place which no one could suspect,
the park struck me as being just the
thing. Entering from the Richmond
Gate, do you know what they used to
call the drive towards the White
House?"

"I do."

"Going towards the house, when you
have passed the plantations, the ground
dips—with the Penn Fonds on your
right."

Bruce nodded.

"A dozen yards due west of the north-
western corner of the smaller pond—
which is the one you first approach—
among uneven ground, three feet deep,
there is a tin box, which contains every-
thing necessary to place you in imme-
diate possession of the fortune of which
I am now appointing you the heir. You
will have no difficulty in finding it; but
to further mark the spot, I broke a piece
of bamboo off the cane which I was
carrying and stuck it into the turf. So
few people penetrate into that part of
the park—partly because it is out of the
way, and partly because the uneven-
ness of the ground makes walking un-
pleasant—that, unless the deer have
trampled it under foot, I shouldn't be
surprised to find that piece of bamboo
still thrusting up its nose amid the
tussocky grass."

CHAPTER II.

IN RICHMOND PARK.

The conversation was interrupted by the return of the dispenser, Perkins. Three days afterwards George Edney lay dead.

Before the end actually arrived he was reduced to such a condition that—for him—talking was impossible.

Only once did he again mention the subject to Bruce. Then he merely mumbled the directions which he had given him as to the alleged whereabouts of the tin box.

"Remember, twelve yards due west of the northwest corner of Little Penn Pond, three feet underground."

The day before Bruce left jail, something occurred which was destined to stick in his memory.

The prisoners were walking round and round the circular path which did duty as exercise ground. The time for exercise was nearly up when he heard some one say behind him, in those low, clear tones which the jail bird uses who desires to evade the observant warder's eyes and ears, "Mind you don't forget Richmond Park."

Bruce waited for a second or two, as was the desirable etiquette on such occasions, then glanced behind. The words had not come from the man immediately at his back, but from the next but one.

Bruce recognized in him the "traveler," Swire, who had been the sole occupant of the other half of the infirmary when Edney had been relieving his mind. At Edney's request he had gone, before the tale began, to see how Mr. Swire was engaged, and had found him, to all appearance, fast asleep. He remembered that Perkins, on his entrance, had found him still sleeping. Had the ingenuous Mr. Swire been feigning slumber, for purposes of his own?

Edney had spoken in such a subdued voice—he could not have spoken loudly had he tried—that Swire could scarcely have heard much, even if he had been listening. Still, Bruce was curious.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't go and take the blooming lot; just leave a bit for some one else."

It seemed as if Mr. Swire's hearing had been at least sufficiently keen. Presently Bruce asked another question.

"When do you go out?"

"Oh, I've lots to do yet; when they

do get me into a place of this sort they like to keep me just as long as ever they can."

The warder's voice rang out.

"Now then, Number Thirty-seven, do you want to get reported for talking the day before you leave?"

Bruce was Number Thirty-seven. He did not wish to be reported. During the remainder of exercise he held his peace. But he was free to hope that for a considerable period Mr. Swire might continue an inmate of Canterstone Jail.

The following day—the great day on which he was to return to the world—was Saturday.

His sentence expired on the Sunday. Since that was a day of rest in the prison, as among men outside, those prisoners whose terms expired on a Sunday were discharged the day before.

Bruce had asked and received permission to leave at an earlier hour than was usual, as he was desirous of catching the first train up to town.

Soon after six o'clock on the Saturday morning he passed through the prison gates—for the first time for two years. He was dressed in his own clothes; carried a Gladstone bag—of somewhat attenuated appearance; and had in his pocket the gratuity of ten shillings which he had earned, and two pounds, thirteen shillings and ninepence which he had brought with him into jail.

When he reached the station he found that there was still some minutes before the ticket office would be open. Since he had the place to himself he spent the interval in examining his countenance in the looking-glass which was over the fireplace—it was two years since he had seen a mirror.

The change in his appearance amused him.

His beard had grown; he had been clean-shaven when he went in; his moustache had attained to huge dimensions. He thought of how Edney had likened him to a Greek god. It struck him that a viking would have been an apter comparison. His many inches—he was nearly six feet three; his fair hair and beard, both showing a tendency to curl;

his pink and white skin; his bright blue eyes—all these things were attributes of the old sea rovers.

He recalled Edney's association of blue eyes, like his, with murderers', and smiled; revealing, as he did so, two rows of beautiful teeth. Physically, prison regimen had had no injurious effect on him; he presented a perfect picture of bodily health.

The suggestion of a continual smile seemed to irradiate his features, conveying the impression that he had not a care in the world. Wherever he went eyes were turned to look at him—especially when the eyes were in feminine heads.

When he reached London he breakfasted at a modest Swiss-Italian restaurant, which was close to the terminus. Then, walking to Waterloo, he took train to Putney. There he started to look for lodgings.

Possibly his taste was fastidious. He called at at least a dozen houses before lighting on anything which seemed to suit him. He had seen four in the road in which he then was—Dulverton Road it was stated to be on a tablet at the corner.

At No. 25 there was again a card promising "apartments" in the window. It was a modern forty to fifty pounds a year "villa," with electric bells, tiled doorstep, and all the latest improvements. He pressed the white china knob which was at the side of the stained-glass-windowed door.

His ring was answered by a girl—a dark girl, apparently somewhere in her twenties; not a servant, but looking like a lady in her plain indigo serge dress. She appealed to him then and there; something in her appearance differentiated her from the females who had presented themselves to him at the other houses.

He was not so struck by the rooms, but they would serve.

They were on the ground floor. The girl spoke of them as the "dining rooms"—the sitting room being in the front and the bedroom at the back. The furniture was not substantial in kind, nor liberal in quantity. About everything there was

a gimcrack air, which suggested the jerry builder.

"And what is the rent you are asking?"

The girl looked at him with what he was conscious were inquiring eyes—as if she were desirous of ascertaining how much he was willing to pay.

"Is it for a permanency?"

"I'm afraid that at present I cannot say. I may be gone in a week; or I may stay"—there was a flash of laughter in his eyes—"I may stay forever."

Her countenance remained unmoved.

"Of course it makes a difference if it's for a permanency. Mother has generally had five and twenty shillings."

"Five and twenty shillings!" Twelve and sixpence was the maximum price he had proposed to himself to pay. He had seen rooms at that rent a few doors down the street. But there there was a blowsy woman, with a baby in her arms; not this girl, with the sweet, soft voice. "Is that inclusive?"

"That would be inclusive."

"Then I'll take the rooms."

Later he saw her mother, who had returned from shopping. She was a Mrs. Ludlow—a widow. A little woman, with trouble written large on her face. Bruce, whose keen, blue eyes saw everything, said to himself: "She worries."

Still later, in his bedroom, he considered the position; incidentally taking an inventory of his belongings.

"Frock coat, and waistcoat; two pairs of trousers; two shirts; two pairs of socks; one necktie; one pair of boots—except what I stand up in—that completes my wardrobe. Gold links, studs, watch and chain—these things represent my jewelry; and two pounds, fourteen shillings and ninepence, my entire fortune. Considering that the rent is twenty-five shillings a week, that won't go far." He paced up and down the tiny room. "She asked if I was going to be a permanency. It looks like it! I've about enough money to see me through the week. And then? I don't want to return to Canterstone Jail for obtaining food and lodging under false pretenses—especially from Miss Ludlow and her

mother. It'll have to be George Edney's fortune or—or something else."

He arranged his clothes in the chest of drawers, then went out into the passage.

"I'm going out, Mrs. Ludlow, and perhaps may not be back till late."

"Would you like a latchkey? Mr. Rodway, who has the drawing rooms, and who is often out late, always uses one. I have two."

Bruce went out with one of them in his waistcoat pocket.

"That woman has never been deceived, or she would scarcely be so trustful—unless it's her nature to be deceived and come again. In the atmosphere to which I have lately been accustomed, such simplicity would be regarded as suggestive either of a lunatic asylum or a fairy tale."

He strode across Barnes Common, up Clarence Lane, into Richmond Park, as one who knew the way.

It was then about three o'clock in the afternoon. Although the weather was fine, a strong breeze blowing from the northwest hinted at approaching rain.

When he got inside the park he stretched out his arms, raising himself on his toes, like a man who wakes from sleep.

"This is something like. It's worth while doing two years' hard labor if only for the sake of regaining one's capacity for enjoyment. I feel as if my school days had returned, and as if the world lay in front of me—my oyster shell, filled with priceless gems, which it only needs a touch of my knife to open. Perhaps it does!"

He took off his hat and marched across the turf, laughing as he went. It was all he could do to keep himself from breaking into a run.

As he neared the lakes his pace grew slower.

Although it was Saturday afternoon not many people were about. He scanned closely those who came within scanning distance. When he had crossed the road leading from the Sheen Gate, he seemed to have the whole park in front of him to himself. Reaching

the edge of the smaller pond he paused, observing the lie of the ground.

"How did Edney put it? A dozen yards due west of the northwestern corner—that will be the corner on the opposite side, straight ahead." He walked to the point in question. "West? As I stand here I am looking south; the west is on my right. Now for your dozen yards." He took a dozen paces, then stooped to examine the turf. "As he said, the ground's uneven enough. That precious tin box of his may be here or hereabouts, or it mayn't. Very much it mayn't. I was never on quite such a wild-goose chase since the days when I used to dream of going in search of hidden treasure. If the man was gammoning me all the time? I doubt it; and yet—perhaps I'm the only man who would— What's that?"

Something caught his eye a foot or two from where he was standing; something which might very easily have escaped his notice had not his glance been such a keenly observant one. It looked like a splinter of wood amid the coarse grasses.

"Edney's piece of bamboo, as I'm a sinner! Then, on that occasion, at any rate, the man was not a liar."

Gripping the scrap, which was all that was visible, he endeavored to drag it out of the earth. It was not an easy task. The turf had grown so close about it that it was held as in a vise. He cut away the fibrous roots with his penknife.

Presently he held it in his hand. It was part of a slender bamboo cane, about ten inches in length. A ferrule, nearly eaten away by rust, was still at one end. The wood itself was rotten.

It was only by careful handling that he had succeeded in drawing it out intact.

"To think of that having been here all this time—half a sixpenny cane! How many years is it? I suppose it must be seven. He had served six; and the presumption is that he paid his last visit here some time before what he called 'the crash' came. It shows that he chose his place with knowledge—it has even gone unmolested by the deer.

Then am I to take it that the tin box is underneath, containing the key to the fortune—my fortune? One thing's obvious, that since I've lit on this, which, in its way, is 'confirmation strong as holy writ,' it's worth while examining a little farther."

He stood up, considering; turning the piece of cane over and over in his fingers.

"Three feet deep," he said. "I can't get down to that with a penknife, not to mention that to excavate a hole that size in Richmond Park in broad daylight might attract attention. Although there are not many people about, still there's the risk. I require no audience, and I want to be asked no questions. I'll go on to Richmond; there I'll buy something to dig with; after dusk I'll return. In the meantime I'll replace this piece of cane; it'll serve as a landmark a second time. I may want it after the shadows have fallen."

He carried out his program; walked over to the town; purchased in George Street a mason's trowel and a small digging fork. As the day was drawing to a close he strolled back towards the Penn Ponds with the two tools in his jacket pockets.

He returned by the route which Edney had described—along the drive leading to the White House. This necessitated a sharp turn to the right as soon as the plantation was passed. Almost immediately afterwards the lake came into full sight.

The month was April, when the night comes quickly, especially on a gray day such as that was. It was distinctly chilly. The wind had risen still higher. Heavy clouds tore across the sky.

He had not seen a creature since entering the park—until the lake came in sight. Then he saw that some one—something—was by the water's edge. Was it a man? a deer? a bush?—what?

He stopped instantly, drawing back into the shadow of the tree which he was passing. The light was bad, as he had desired it should be. As the object he was eying was at a distance of over a hundred yards, the prevailing obscurity made it difficult to determine what it

was. However, his powers of vision happened to be unusually acute.

"It's a man; that's what it is. He's kneeling down, and is leaning so far forward that his nose almost touches the grass. Unless I err, he's very close to Edney's piece of cane. What's he doing there, at this time of day? Is it accident or intention?"

Presently from the crouching figure proceeded a sort of chuckling sound.

"He's found it. It's intention. He seems to be so wrapped up in what he's looking for, and so unsuspicuous of anyone being hereabouts, that I ought to be able to get at him before he scents my neighborhood. The wind's coming from him. I used to be a bit of a hand at a deerstalk; let's see if I've forgotten the trick."

It seemed that he had not. Aided by the configuration of the ground, by the darkness, by the noise the wind was making—it was fast blowing up a storm—by his own dexterity and deftness of movement, he came within nine or ten feet of the now nearly recumbent figure—obviously still unnoticed.

"He's digging!—the dear man!"

Leaping through the air like some huge wild creature, Bruce sprang upon the unheeding man, and, gripping him by the shoulder, swung him round upon his feet; meeting with no more resistance than might have been offered by an automaton.

The man he held helpless in front of him was Sam Swire.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOX.

Beyond doubt, Mr. Swire had, in his time, been in some curious situations. He was a man with a history, so the thing was certain. The probability is, therefore, that he was not an easy man to take by surprise.

That on that occasion he was surprised is undeniable. He had all the outward marks and signs of amazement in the superlative degree. The muscles of his face were twitching as if he were

suffering from St. Vitus' dance; his mouth seemed to be opening and shutting of its own accord.

"So you weren't asleep?"

The fact that, under the circumstances, he should have regained the faculty of speech so quickly as he did was creditable to his presence of mind, and showed how wide his experience must have been. True, his voice was a little tremulous, and he showed a tendency to stutter. Still, what he said was understandable.

"It's—it's His Highness!"

"His Highness" was the nickname by which Bruce had been known in jail, and had reference to his appearance, deportment, and such fragments of his story as were known—or—guessed at.

"And you were lying when you told me that you had still some time to serve?"

"Never said it. What I said was that I still had lots to do. So I had—pretty nearly four and twenty hours. I came away from home this morning—same as you did. Only it seems that they let you out extra early. But we aren't all persons of importance, and that's where it is."

Bruce returned to his original position.

"So you weren't asleep?"

Swire grinned. He was rapidly becoming his normal self.

"Well, I can't say I was—exactly. When the cove told you to see what I was up to, I thought that there might be going to be some interesting conversation. So when you came and had a look, of course, I was as sound as a baby. Bound to be, when I knew it would oblige."

"And you heard?"

"Not all—bits here and there—about enough."

There was silence. They looked each other in the face. Swire spoke next.

"You take your hands from off me. Perhaps you don't know your scrunching up my shoulder blades."

"What are you doing here?"

"Now, that's just the question I was going to put to you."

"You know what I am doing."

"And you know what I am doing, so we're even."

"I see—that's it. The further question arises—what shall I do with you?"

"You take your hands off—that's what you'll do with me."

Instead of answering Bruce transferred one hand to the other's throat; gripping it in such fashion that the man's jaw dropped open and continued motionless, as if suddenly paralyzed. Apparently he made an effort to remonstrate, but his utterance was choked; to struggle, but his limbs merely twitched, as if they belonged to some lay figure.

The grip became firmer and firmer, until Mr. Swire's countenance assumed a very unpleasant appearance indeed. When it was relaxed he fell backwards onto the ground like a log, remaining motionless as one.

Bruce stopped to look at him.

"He's not dead, but he's as near to death as it would be wise to bring him."

From about the neck, which he had just been holding in such a close embrace, he took a colored handkerchief. With it he tied its owner's legs together. From a jacket pocket he took a second, using it to tie his hands behind his back.

Then he turned his attention to other matters.

"So he did find the landmark, and he's started digging with a pocketknife. If Edney's box of treasures is any size, it would have taken him some time to dig it out with that. Yet with such a blade it ought to be a useful knife. He might have tried it upon me if I had given him a chance." Something touched him on the face. It was a drop of rain. "It's coming, is it? I thought it wasn't far off." All at once the rain descended with torrential violence. "It begins to occur to me that I'm going to get wet. There's one comfort—it's likely to save me from further disturbance."

He laughed beneath his breath, as if the whole business was a joke.

"In a matter of this sort method's desirable. The first thing to do is to cut out a square of turf, which can be replaced so as to show as little sign of disturbance as possible. And for that

purpose Swire's knife will come in handy."

Working rapidly, cutting out a thick slab of turf, he laid it, intact, upon one side. With his trowel he loosened the earth which its removal had made accessible, using his hands to shovel it out. The pelting rain, seeming to drain it into the hole, turned it into mud as he went on.

"I ought to have got down nearly three feet. Let's hope Edney's three didn't mean four; this is becoming awkward." The depth to which he had attained, and the nature of the tools with which he was working, necessitated his lying flat on his stomach on the soaking grass. "I'll probe for it."

Using Swire's knife as a probe, he thrust it into the ground nearly as far as it would go—until its farther ingress was prevented by some hard substance.

"That feels like metal. We will trust it is. It oughtn't to take me long to get as far as that."

As he was resuming work, Swire evinced signs of returning consciousness. He lay five or six feet from the open hole. Even at that short distance only his outline was visible in the prevailing darkness. Odd sounds came from him; then groans; then words, and with words, bad language.

"Where am I? What are you playing at? What's happened? Who the—"

Then came the torrent of bad language.

Without saying a word, with the man's own knife Bruce cut off a thick tuft of grass. Moving towards him, just as he was in the very midst of a flood of expletives, Bruce crammed the grass into his mouth. It served as an effective gag. The man might writhe and twist; and he did, but he could not rise to his feet; his own handkerchiefs bound him too adroitly; nor could he make himself heard.

Picking him up indifferently, as if he were some inanimate log, Bruce bore him back into the drive, a distance of perhaps two hundred yards. Depositing him by the fence of one of the plantations, his face against the wood-

work, he left him, still without a word.

Then he returned to his labor. A few seconds later he was lifting out of the hole which he had made what seemed to be a metal box.

"Then Edney wasn't lying—which seems to show that the ruling passion is not always strong in death—unless the point of the jest is still to come, and his treasure box contains nothing worth the finding."

He crammed back into the hole as much of the soil as he could. Replacing the slab of turf, he strode off with the box in his hand—apparently oblivious of Mr. Sam Swire, lying on the sodden ground, bound and speechless, in the darkness, the wind and the pelting rain.

He glanced at his watch.

"Nearly ten. Clarence Gate will be closed. It will have to be Sheen."

He passed through Sheen Gate unobserved. Covering the ground at the rate of a good five miles an hour, he returned to Dulverton Road. On the lonely road, at that time, in that weather, he did not meet a soul. The downpour never slackened. As he neared his destination he thought of the condition he was in.

"If they see me they'll wonder what sort of lodger they've got hold of; what I've been doing, where I've been. Which little matters I might find it difficult to explain. Perhaps Mrs. Ludlow's latchkey will enable me to get to cover before I'm scented—they won't see me."

The latchkey did him the service he desired. By its aid he slipped into the house and into his bedroom before anyone was conscious of his presence. Hardly was he in his room when some one rapped at the panel. Mrs. Ludlow's voice was heard.

"Would you like any supper, sir? You didn't say before you went out, so I left something on the table in case you might."

"Thank you, but I've had all that I require. I'm wet and rather tired, so I think I'll tumble in."

He did not "tumble in" quite so soon as his words—spoken from behind the cover of the locked door—suggested.

First of all, he placed himself before the looking-glass. The figure he presented seemed to afford him amusement—though it was probably as well that he had not been seen on his entrance, and that the road along which he had come was a lonely one. No one could have encountered him unawares without being struck by his appearance; and wondering, and asking questions.

It was not unlikely that food for cogitation would have been provided by the answers received.

He was soaked to the skin, his clothes being glued to his person as if he had just emerged from a long sojourn in the water. They were in an indescribable state of dirt. He wore a dark gray suit of Harris tweed, which served as an excellent foil to the stains of the reeking, sandy turf on which he had been lying. His hands were caked with mud; it grimed his face, matted his beard.

As he regarded himself in the mirror he laughed beneath his breath—which seemed to be a trick to which he was addicted.

“It’s eminently desirable that there should be something worth having in Edney’s treasure box; because this suit is clearly done for, and I’ve only a frocker to take its place; and with a frock coat one can hardly wear a bowler, even if this bowler can ever be worn again.”

He undressed himself; washed, scrubbed himself with towels. It was an indifferent substitute for a bath, yet luxury compared to the methods of ablution to which he had become accustomed at Canterstone. Then, in nondescript garb, he tackled his find.

It was a box, about nine inches by six, apparently made of thin sheets of rolled iron. Probably originally it was japanned; there were traces here and there of what might have been japan; but now it was so eaten by rust that, save where the metal was still obscured by fragments of dirt, it was all a dull red.

“The key would be no use even if I had it, the lock’s a wreck. And rust has riveted the lid to the body of the thing.”

He shook it. No sound proceeded from within.

“If it were empty!—that would be the crowning jest. The question is, how to prize it open?”

It was a work of time, but he did get it open at last—with the aid of Mr. Swire’s knife, his own digging fork and trowel, and, it should be added, Mrs. Ludlow’s fireirons, which served as levers.

When it was open the reason why nothing had been audible when the box was shaken became obvious; the interstices left by the contents had been packed with cotton-wool—which had become rusty, like the receptacle in which it was contained. Mr. Edney had meant that nothing should be heard.

“A thoroughgoing man, that benefactor of mine. May his dishonest bones rest in peace! He evidently did his best to keep his treasures in condition.”

The contents proved to be of a varied kind.

Turning them out upon the bed, disentangling them from the rusty cotton-wool in which they were enveloped, Bruce examined them one by one.

The first article on which he lighted had on him somewhat the effect of a cold douche. It was a portrait; a woman’s photograph; “cabinet” size; a half length. She was seemingly between thirty and forty years of age, and was in evening dress—as is the custom of a certain type of woman, who loves to attire herself in her splendors, merely for the sake of photographic reproduction.

She wore a “picture” hat; had two necklaces round her throat; ornaments in her hair; an anchor-shaped brooch in the bosom of her dress. Not a bad-looking woman; a trifle thin-lipped; and with some peculiarity in the shape of her nose which seemed almost to amount to a twist.

“Who is it, I wonder?—wife or sweetheart? or somebody else’s sweetheart? It’s an unexpected find, and unwelcome—suggesting complications. From what I saw of him, one would hardly have associated Edney with a woman—

but one never knows. I hope, for your sake, madame, and for mine, that we shall never meet, or there may be trouble. More trouble. What's this at the back? The photographer's name—"Rayner, Birchester"—Birchester? That's where it all took place. So it would seem that if I want to know something about you, madame, I have only to inquire at that address. But, as it chances, I do not want to know anything. I prefer to know nothing. Still, I'll keep your photograph, lest, some day, it may be required for reference. And yet—all sorts of unexpected disagreeables might arise from a trifle of this sort. Anyhow, for the present we'll put you by."

He next picked up a check book, containing a hundred blank checks—"to order"—drawn on the Strand branch of the National Bank.

"Checks are all very well, given a balance; but without a balance, dangerous—in certain hands. As one or two gentlemen in Canterstone Jail seem to have found. Is there a balance in our favor at the Strand branch of the National Bank?"

It appeared that there was, if one might judge from the evidence of a pass book, which was his third discovery. It was indorsed, on the plain parchment cover, in a bold, round hand—"Francis Smithers, Esq."

"Smithers?—Francis Smithers?—I don't care for the name myself; but, still, if there is a solid balance at the back of it—a balance, if you're credited with it under any name, is sweet, especially when it finds you with a fortune of less than three pounds sterling."

The pass book contained but a single entry. That was on the credit side—"By cash, one thousand pounds." It was attached to a date nearly seven years old. Bruce stared. After such a preface the blank pages seemed to have a singular eloquence.

"Mr. Edney was really not such a liar as one might have supposed—one thousand pounds, bearing no interest, not drawn upon for seven years—the National Bank must feel that it has got rather a good thing. That's the sort of

account that any bank would like to have. What have we here?"

In the flap were two papers. One was a printed form on which the same institution acknowledged the receipt of five thousand pounds on deposit, to bear interest at the rate of two and three-quarters per cent. until further notice. The date was the same as that on which the drawing account had been opened. The second was a half sheet of note paper, on which was written, in a crabbed legal hand: "Address given, Cosmopolitan Hotel, Charing Cross."

"I see. So at the Strand branch of the National Bank, Francis Smithers, Esquire, has a thousand pounds, on which he can draw at sight; and five thousand pounds, on which he can draw at seven days' notice. The latter sum has been bearing interest. I presume the rate has varied with the bank rate. Assuming it to have averaged two and a half per cent., then there should be standing to his credit, in the shape of interest, something like another thousand pounds. Very pretty, indeed. And at the time these two accounts were opened he was residing at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. A highly respectable address. I had his word for it that he did not put in a personal appearance in the matter—yet it seems unnatural to have arranged a transaction of this sort through the post. I wonder. The bank people must have imagined that they had an oddity in the way of a client. So they had. One hears a good deal about bankers' unclaimed balances. Do they fancy they've got a haul in this little lot? If so, they'll be disillusioned when I appear upon the scene. And yet—it's not all plain sailing. Next, please."

The next was a blank envelope. In it was a document issued by the Shoe Lane Safe Deposit Company, by which, in consideration of a certain sum of money received on a date this time nearly eight years old, they conveyed to Francis Smithers, Esquire, for a term of ninety-nine years, one of their safes, to wit, number two hundred and twenty-six.

Accompanying this document was a tiny key of ingenious construction, to

which was attached a tag inscribed, "Key of safe." There was also another half sheet of note paper on which was written, in a plain, flowing hand: "Francis Smithers." Above it was the superscription: "My signature."

"The key at last; the open sesame which is, or is not, to unlock the door to all these riches. As the dear man correctly said, the signature's the essential thing. With it, one's sufficiently in the dark. Without it, where would one be? He vowed that I should find it easy; it doesn't look difficult, the sort of running hand they teach at school. As he was good enough to hint, I'm tolerably deft with a pen. Its presence here suggests that this is not his usual calligraphy; and that it was, therefore, the part of wisdom to keep a copy, to jog his memory, in case he himself should forget how he wrote his name. He seems to have had an eye for all eventualities, save one—a prison death-bed. I wonder what's in safe number two hundred and twenty-six. That, at any rate, I should have no difficulty in learning. I've the receipt—the key; they can hardly refuse me access to my very own safe, mine own for ninety-nine years. He was a far-sighted man; did he expect to live to enjoy his possession for the whole of his term? Now what remains?"

There remained a letter case, in which there were twenty five-pound notes, not numbered consecutively, and many of them well worn, and a wash-leather bag containing fifty sovereigns.

"Something tangible at last. It is highly possible that this may be worth more to me than all the rest put together. I have this. I haven't that, and never may have. A man may keep himself alive for some time on one hundred and fifty pounds; while, although open sesame does open the door, it may be that it is only to find destruction awaiting one on the other side."

Collecting the various articles, he contemplated them in the mass. Then, taking up the woman's photograph, he subjected it to a further examination.

"I like this least of Mr. Edney's treasures. I should have been obliged

to him if he hadn't put it in the box. It's too suggestive. Who is she? What's she doing in this galley? Has she a right to be here? He said he had no friends, and preferred to die in prison rather than trust himself to their tender mercies if he had any; that's a fact. She mightn't have been his friend—although—theoretically—'a nearer one still, and a dearer one.' That sort of thing depends upon circumstances, and upon one's point of view. But in that case, where do I come in? I think I should like to know something about the lady; and yet—perhaps not. Confound the woman! I've a mind to burn her. But before I proceed to that extremity I'll sleep on it. Anyhow, don't let me blink at the situation. Let me look it straight in the face. These are the fruits of felony; the spoils of a sneaking swindler and a constitutional thief. If I avail myself of them, I sink to his level. I've been in trouble, but am I prepared to do that?"

Picking up the wash-leather bag, he jingled its contents.

"That's eloquent music to a man who has less than three sovereigns between him and a return to jail. I'm afraid that I may not prove altogether impervious to temptation. Men refuse to act as trustees; but I'm not sure that I shall refuse to act as heir, even to a swindler of the very first water. But I'll sleep upon it all."

And he did, soundly, as if conscience did not trouble him. He was asleep almost as soon as he was between the sheets. But possibly that was because such a bed as Mrs. Ludlow's was a luxury to which he had been strange for a considerable space of time.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST CHECK.

The following day was Sunday. It rained unceasingly. For that reason and others—some of them connected with the condition of his wardrobe—he remained indoors, considering.

On Monday the sun shone. When he had finished breakfast, Mrs. Ludlow

appeared in person to clear the table, and to receive his orders for the day. Then she lingered, having evidently something on her mind.

Presently it appeared that she was not quite so trustful as he had supposed. Possibly an inspection of his luggage had not inspired her with confidence.

"I am sure that you will understand, Mr. Smithers"—he had given the name of Smithers on his arrival, and so had taken at least a preliminary step—"that no offense is intended, but might I ask if you're in business?"

"In business? I'm afraid not."

"Are you—are you looking for a situation?"

"I wasn't thinking of doing so, just at present."

"Because, sir, you're a perfect stranger to me, and—and—"

"You'd like your rent in advance?"

"Perhaps you would give me a reference."

"I'd sooner pay you; it will save us both trouble."

"I hope that no offense will be taken where none is meant; but the truth is, money is an object to me just now, and I dare not take any risks."

"Money is an object to most of us, and only foolish people do take unnecessary risks. I assure you, Mrs. Ludlow, I am not in the least offended, and am quite willing to pay you weekly in advance."

He gave her two sovereigns; his own. When she had gone he turned the change she had given him over and over in his hand.

"That almost settles it. Less than a pound represents my all. What's a pound to a man of my pretensions? I fear I shall have to trench upon that fortune."

Arrayed in his frock coat and incongruous headgear in the shape of that relic of a bowler, he sallied forth to take the air.

In the High Street he bought another bowler and a silk hat.

Glorified by the latter, he journeyed on top of a 'bus to town. He had never enjoyed a ride so much in his life. It is some distance from Putney to Regent

Circus. But it was not one whit too far for him. The whole thing was a continuous delight. Given fine weather and no need for haste, one could hardly choose a pleasanter method of progression through the London streets than the top of an omnibus.

And in his case there were special circumstances which made the occasion memorable—it was so much better to be there than in Canterstone Jail.

In Regent Street he was measured for two or three suits, and made sundry other purchases, for which he paid with Mr. Edney's bank notes.

Then he strolled along the Strand, where he surveyed the outside of the National Bank. Thence to Shoe Lane, to inspect the safe deposit company. He was impressed by the idea of solidity conveyed by the plain stone frontage.

"If a man has a safe in a place like that it must have something in it; it's bound to. It can't be empty." He twiddled a tiny key which he took from his waistcoat pocket. "I wonder what's in my safe, number two hundred and twenty-six. I'm half disposed to investigate it right away. But perhaps I'd better postpone that pleasure till—till I'm in a more settled state of mind."

He lunched at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, an idea having occurred to him.

Mr. Smithers had opened his two banking accounts while a resident of that palatial hostelry. If he were to draw his first check at the same address it might tend to allay any tendency to unhealthy suspicion. Suppose he were to enter his name in the books, and make it his headquarters? There was something in the notion; a good deal, perhaps. But Miss Ludlow lived at Putney. There was plenty of time to turn the matter over in his mind.

At Dulverton Road that evening his coal scuttle happened to be empty. He rang for it to be refilled. Miss Ludlow appeared. The idea that that graceful, dainty-looking girl should perform for him offices of that sort did not appeal to him at all.

"Allow me to take the scuttle. If you'll show me where the coals are, I'll fill it in no time."

But the girl showed so plainly by her manner that she would rather he did not, that he had to yield. She went out with the scuttle in her hand—leaving him to fume upon the hearthrug.

"I can't stand this. I'm not going to have a girl like that wait upon me hand and foot as if she were some dirty drudge. Don't they keep a servant? Then who cleans the boots?"

The question suggested disagreeable possibilities—especially when he reflected on how much his boots had stood in need of cleaning the preceding Saturday night, and how beautifully polished he had found them in the morning.

On her return—with the refilled scuttle—she answered the inquiry which he had addressed to himself.

"We don't keep a servant. Mother and I do the work between us."

"But isn't that hard on you?"

"Oh, I don't know. Things are hard. Not that it matters. One gets used to them."

She showed a disposition to linger—with which he was entirely in sympathy, very much preferring her company, just then, to his own.

"If you will allow me, I shall be happy to engage a boy to do the rougher work—boots, and that sort of thing."

"It's very good of you, but I'm afraid we couldn't afford it."

"I'd pay him."

"But we should have to deduct the amount from your rent—we should have to charge you less—and that's what we couldn't afford."

"You need do nothing of the kind."

"But attendance is included in what you are paying mother; we couldn't allow you to pay for what you don't have."

"That's rubbish. If I choose to supply myself with a myrmidon in the form of a boy, I don't see what that has to do with you. Am I a slave that I should not be suffered to provide myself with a dozen grown-up servingmen?"

"There's that way of putting it, no doubt. You are not a slave."

She looked at him with dancing eyes. He noticed what pleasant eyes they were; big—brown—open—sunny. She

stood observing him—with apparent unconsciousness of the fact—as if something in his personality struck her and gave her courage.

"I hope you didn't mind what mother said to you this morning?"

"Do you mean about my being a stranger?"

"Yes. She has a good many troubles just now, and she's anxious."

"She's quite right; I am a stranger—and not one to inspire confidence, either."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"I am—or if I do it's confidence misplaced."

"Mother didn't mean anything."

"Then she ought to have meant something. But I believe she did. I do her more justice than her daughter. I came here with an ancient Gladstone and two suits of old clothes—one on and t'other off; there wouldn't have been much there to fall back upon in case of unpaid rent."

"Believe me, Mr. Smithers, neither mother nor I had any fear that there would be that."

She spoke with sudden gravity, as if fearful that his lightness of tone was on the surface only. But he laughed at her.

"Then you ought to have had; always suspect everyone. That's business. By the way—question for question—I'll put to you the inquiry your mother put to me, so you mustn't take offense; aren't you in business?"

"I've tried all sorts of things. Type-writing was the last; but there doesn't seem much money in that. So I'm looking for something else in which there is some money. If I find it, mother will have to get a servant. She can't do everything herself."

Mr. Smithers, recently Bruce, immediately began to cast about in his mind as to whether he could not find for her something more congenial than—horrid notion!—cleaning a strong man's dirty boots. But he did not put this fact into words.

"You have another lodger?"

"Oh, yes; Mr. Rodway has the drawing rooms. He's been here ever since we

came. Not that we've been here very long, but perhaps we shouldn't have come at all if it hadn't been for him. He's in my brother's bank."

"Your brother's bank?"

"Well, the bank in which he is employed. He's in the Strand branch of the National Bank."

"In the Strand branch of the National Bank? How very odd!"

He felt that it was odd; so odd that it nearly took his breath away.

"He's much older than I am—he has a wife and family—he's been there for years—he's one of the cashiers. Why is it odd?"

"Its oddity consists in the fact that I have an account at that particular bank."

Whether or not he had intended to utter the words, he could not, at the moment, have said. But they were uttered—beyond recall. She spoke with a little air of malice.

"I believe that several people have accounts there. Where's the oddity of your having one?"

He turned his side face to her, resting a foot on the curb, and an elbow on the mantel. Should he answer? And if so, what? He had no time to think—it seemed easier to answer.

"There is something peculiar about the matter, and it's this. Seven years ago I opened two accounts there—a drawing and a deposit account. Up to the present I have not drawn a check upon one or the interest from the other. I am thinking of doing so now."

"Seven years! I wish that mother or I could afford to open an account at a bank and leave it untouched for seven years! I'm going to see my brother at the bank to-morrow morning."

"Are you? Then perhaps you wouldn't mind taking a check for me and cashing it."

"I shall be delighted."

When she had left him he was not in two, but a dozen minds. In the first place, what had he done? He had certainly done one thing—he had burned his boats. He had taken a step which would lead him—where? Could it be called an open question? If so, time alone could supply the answer—he

might have to wait for it till the end of his life.

Even if he did not intrust her with the check of which he had spoken, she would tell her brother what he had said. Unless he forbade her. On what grounds could he do that? It would be to arouse suspicion there and then.

If she told him, the probability was that inquiries would be immediately made.

Suppose he allowed her to present the check, and there was trouble—a consequence which he esteemed extremely possible. Would he not be in the position of the cowardly scamp who, lacking courage to offer his own forgery across the bank counter, passes on the risk to any unconscious substitute? How would she be placed in case anything did happen?

At the very least, she would have to bear witness against him.

The notion tickled him. He laughed.

The result of his cogitations was that he took out of a brand-new dispatch box, which had been one of the day's purchases, Mr. Smithers' pass and check books and his signature. Producing also pens, ink and paper, he set himself to imitate the latter.

"Let me see how close I can get to it. I'm out of practice. It's some time since I wrote anything—even a copy." Before he set to work he scrutinized the deposit note and the entry in the pass book. "I suppose it is all right—that nothing has been drawn—that there's no hankey-pankey about it anywhere. I'm in such a curious position that my naturally unsuspecting nature sees deception everywhere. Like a child who has to find its way about a strange room in pitch darkness, I'm a little timid—and awkward. The whole thing seems to be so pat that I'm convinced there's a flaw somewhere—and that it will floor me."

He covered a sheet of paper with the two words—"Francis 'Smithers'"—written in a hand which was so exactly like the original that it would have needed an expert to detect the difference. For a man who was "out of practice," he did it with surprising ease.

"I haven't lost the knack—fortunately. Or is it unfortunately? I wonder. If only a man standing where I stand could see into the future! It's a convenient but a dangerous gift, that of penmanship—on these lines. We can only trust that, on this occasion, the danger is reduced to a vanishing point. For how much shall I draw my first check? It should not be for too much—at the same time it ought to be enough to make it worth while."

He wrote a check for fifty pounds, signing and indorsing it "Francis Smithers." Then he went to bed—in thoughtful mood.

In the morning repentance came. His rest had been broken—for him an unwanted experience. Visions of a girl's face and a pair of big, brown eyes had disturbed his slumbers. When he rose he had changed his mind.

"She shan't take the check, and cover me. I shouldn't forgive myself if anything happened to her. Whatever risk's about, I fancy I'm equal to taking it. I'll not screen myself behind a woman's petticoats—I'm not such a cur. I've not got down to that level yet—though I'm promising fair. I'll take the check to the bank myself."

But in so deciding he was reckoning without the lady. While he was at breakfast she came in in her hat and jacket.

"Will you give me the check of which you spoke last night, Mr. Smithers?"

"Check?"

He looked up at her—as if feigning forgetfulness.

"You said you would like me to change a check for you at the National Bank."

"So I did—yes—just so. But I don't think I'll trouble you, Miss Ludlow. There may be some formalities, which you might find a nuisance."

"I'm sure I shouldn't; it will be a

pleasure. In fact, by letting me change it you'll be doing me a service."

"Doing you a service? How so?"

"I want to see my brother, but I'm not so sure that he will want to see me—and your check will serve as an excuse."

"I see." He did not see; but that was by the way. "If, by getting you to do me a service I shall be doing you one—if you put it in that way—I will trespass on your kindness." He passed her the check, which he took from his pocket. "It's for fifty pounds—tell them to make it three tens and four fives. You understand that you're responsible for whatever happens—in the way of worry."

She smiled and nodded.

"I'm used to responsibility; in this case, I'll take all there is about."

"Will you?" he said to himself, grimly, when she had gone. "If you only knew the peculiar nature of the responsibility you are incurring, your eagerness would be less. After all, I am a cur; I've let her do it. Now, I shall be on tenterhooks till she returns, imagining all sorts of delightful possibilities. If any of them do come off, I'll—I'll what? What can I do if any trouble comes to her because of her connection with a blackguard of my type? Cut my throat? Hang myself? Much benefit she would receive from that. I can do nothing. So, at this point, let me arrive at one decision, and stick to it. I'll do all that has to be done myself; I'll drag no one with me into the mire in which I choose to run the risk of drowning. How long ought it to take her to get to the Strand and back? Goodness alone can tell. She may have to do a dozen errands of which I know nothing—there may be a hundred and one delays. Suppose—oh, confound supposing! One thing's sure—I'm a haunted man until she does return. Why on earth did I let her take that check!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE FLIGHT OF THE “SEA LARK”

BY T. JENKINS HAINS

Author of “Windjamers,” “The Cruise of the Petrel,” Etc.

In which the skipper of a coasting schooner finds himself in a legal predicament and is compelled to take strenuous action to escape.

“WELL, what will you do the job for?” inquired the mate of the *Sea Lark*. “There’s the wood, the work, and the time. Figure it out, quick!”

Chiculini scowled. Should a Yankee sailor hurry him? He, the dauntless son of a line of brigands who had held many better men for ransom in the sunny hills of Italy.

It was rather ridiculous, and a smile followed the scowl. A broken rudder-stock was not much of a job to figure on—honestly. Vessels frequently came in with them broken, for nothing save live oak or iron will stand the twist of the reaching ships running off before a heavy sea for long.

But there were other considerations to meet. There was the probable wealth of the captain or owners to look into. It was absurd to suppose a rich captain or owner should be charged the same amount for a piece of work as a poor one.

That was not “business” from a Chiculini’s standpoint.

“To each according to his needs. From each according to his ability”—to pay, he had cut from the front page of an American magazine, and if that was the American motto he was adverse to try anything foreign.

Then there was the possible friendship of the captain for the custom house official and commissioner. It would never do to “soak” a friend of the commissioner, and then apply to that commissioner for a libel upon that friend’s vessel for non-payment.

A fool moves in haste and repents at leisure, in the warm South especially, and Chiculini would look into this lucky accident before committing himself definitely.

“I reckon it’ll just be the cost of time and labor,” said he, “the wood I believe I have. I cutta down a tree only las’ week. It’s soft enough to work if used righta way. No use live oak when dry. Breaka all tool. Too tough.”

“Well, how much will it cost,” argued the mate. “Give me an idea. I don’t want the exact amount”—here the Italian smiled—“but give me an idea.”

“How canna give idea. Maybe twenty, maybe t’irty dollar. Maybe more. Not less than twenty,” and he shrugged his strong shoulders and spread forth his hands as though the matter were settled.

Buck, the mate of the little coasting vessel, gazed at the big Italian sadly. He was the only ship carpenter to be had on the river front for at least a week to come.

The rudder-stock had cracked during a heavy nor’easter while running down from New York, and it would never do to put to sea in the winter time with it unmended. To carry it away might mean the loss of the vessel and all hands.

There was nothing to do but accept the inevitable, and Buck, gazing sadly at the “dago,” told him to go ahead.

“I will have it ready in three day,” said Chiculini, and nodding, smiling and thinking how cleverly he had fixed the Yankee, he went his way.

"'Tis a bad job," said Buck to me as I came on deck. "It's a bad job, cap'n, an' that's a fact. I don't trust the Eye-talian, but he's a good ship carpenter an' he'll do the job better'n anyone in the crick."

"Knock out the wood locks when she goes dry at low water," I said. "We're drawing six feet two now and the spring tide will leave us bare. Get a purchase on the masthead and heave her on her keel, and then drop the rudder clear. Our charter's due on the tenth, this is the sixth."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Buck, and he went slowly forward and down the scuttle into the forecastle.

As captain of the little vessel, I had much to contend with.

Having heard Chiculini I knew there was trouble ahead. I had also heard of the Mafia and had read of the riots in the city of New Orleans. The commissioner was not my friend.

There was no denying it. The ship was hard up. There was nothing coming in and much going out. If I could but get the first charter money things might come out all right, but I could not go to sea without a rudder.

The next day at low water the vessel lay dry on the bank beside the levee, resting easily upon the sand and gravel of the river bed. The rudder was hoisted in the well, and then the wood locks knocked out, allowing it to be lifted clear of the pintles.

Chiculini came for it with a dray, and with the aid of Buck and two bystanders he hoisted it aboard his wagon and drove off.

Buck lounged listlessly about the vessel all the rest of the day, only working around the waterline, touching up paint here and there as if something weighed upon his mind, and he wanted merely to make a feint at being busy.

John and Arthur he hazed into awed silence, keeping them hard at work scowling paint.

In the evening the tide rose again and the vessel floated.

We sprang her clear of the bank and while doing so noticed a fine little schooner with the line of yellow paint

that distinguished the Italian fruiter. She was drifting down the river and upon her decks were a rough crew.

"It's Chiculini," said Buck. "He's drunk and going on a little fishing trip for a day or so with them dago friends. Good luck's too much for him."

"He won't get far," said John. "There's not enough wind to give him steering way."

The schooner drifted nearer, and Chiculini could be distinguished easily upon the deck. He was very drunk and swaggered fore and aft holding a rifle in his hands.

Suddenly he saw us.

"Hi! Yankee dog," he cried, swinging his rifle. "What for you lay there, hey? Ha! ha! Come race the *Gari-baldi*. No canna steer? You lie! You afraid to race. Give us wind, 'Tonia,' give us wind, I say," and he leveled his rifle at the helmsman. Then he let it down again.

"Giva wind, giva wind," he shrieked.

He raised the rifle and fired shot after shot straight up in the air.

"The Lord no giva wind, I shoot Him," he screamed.

Buck's face was a study while this frenzied Italian howled and swore. Contempt, utter contempt, was written in every line of it. But he said not a word.

The spectacle was not pretty, and I had some unpleasant foreboding concerning that rudder, being as it was in the hands of the brave and desperate Chiculini, who apparently feared neither God, man or devil.

"He sho' is a bad man," said Arthur. "I don't want no dealin's with him."

For a lad of fifteen Arthur was rather well developed and strong, and feared very little indeed.

Day after day passed and finally one sunny morning Chiculini announced the rudder ready to ship. He had it sent down on his dray, and as the water was low at the time there was little difficulty in getting it placed and the steering gear connected in perfect order.

The job was a bad one, for two of the heavy brass castings were cracked in taking them off and the live oak stock was anything but smoothly finished.

However, it turned easily in the metal well, and when all was in order Chiculini came with his bill.

"Wood work very hard, b'reak chisel an' slicer one, two, three times. Much worka, much time. Cost more. Price one hundred dollars," said he, handing Buck the bill.

"D'y'e call that honest?" asked Buck.

"What you say?" hissed Chiculini, reddening through his tan, and drawing close to the sailor.

Arthur with wide eyes, edged forward and John found some work below.

"Here," I said, sharply, "give me the bill."

It was time to interfere, for the Italian was not alone, and he was very large and powerful. His hand seemed to feel for his knife.

"Give me the bill," I repeated, "or I'll throw it overboard. It's not a question of your honesty, Chiculini, it's a question of cost."

Chiculini turned.

"He aska me if I'm honest. Do I looka honest, cap'n? Have I nota donea good job? I aska you pay me at once," he said.

"Do you think this little vessel is a savings bank to turn out hundreds of dollars on demand?" I asked to gain time.

"No, no! No bank. Give me the munna."

"I haven't got it," I said, bluntly. "There isn't that much money due the vessel this week."

"Verra well. I say no more. If you no pay I make you. I say no more," and he sprang ashore and started up the levee to the city.

We knew he would have the summons issued as soon as the commissioner could sign it, and we knew a United States marshal would serve it without delay. He might tie up the vessel and have her sold at auction, and then by proper bribery bid her in at one-quarter her value.

It was an easy way to capture the craft, and we knew it had been done often before. It was better than the old piratical way of boarding her at the head of a crew of armed cutthroats.

Something had to be done at once. Our charter would be due within three days.

Buck watched the rising water thoughtfully. We were almost afloat, now, and the breeze was light but fair. I saw what was in his mind and tried to figure how long it would take Chiculini to reach the custom house.

There was at least fifteen minutes yet to wait for the rising water. The vessel even now rolled a little on her keel and the masthead tackle had begun to slacken.

"Suppose you get that tackle stowed and the line cast off," I said. "It's a mile and a half to the custom house."

Without a word Buck jumped ashore, bawling for John and Arthur to bear a hand. The tackle was cast adrift and the line coiled aboard. Then the gaskets were cast off the mainsail.

But we were still hard and fast, and a heave on the anchor leading out into the stream proved futile.

Buck swore softly and finally gave it up. Arthur and John leaped onto the levee and waited.

There were few people about, as it was the dinner hour.

Chiculini's men had gone off with the dray, and only a few negroes loafed along the neighboring wharf picking cotton from the scraps that escaped the bales.

One of these was a girl of sixteen, black as our galley stovepipe. She seemed to be always on the end of the wharf nearest us, and Arthur now loitered in her neighborhood. Finally I saw he was talking to her.

The minutes were flying, and I sat and gazed hopelessly up the levee, expecting to see the marshal with Chiculini and the summons appear at any moment.

To have the little ship seized for an unjust debt was pretty hard, especially as she would be paying well within a month.

The water rose slowly, but it appeared to stop before it reached our water line, and every ripple seemed a laugh at us. I was angry clear through and gazed at it in dumb rage.

"Cap'n, I'd like to go ashore on 'special business,'" said a voice.

I turned, and saw Arthur standing by, looking sheepishly at his big black feet. As his pay was six dollars per month of thirty days of daylight, and often a dozen nights thrown in free, I wondered what his 'special business' might be.

"What is it?" I snapped.

"Jest business, cap'n. You know how it is yo'self when a man's got business."

"What kind of business? Out with it. Don't you see we're about to get under way?"

"Jest impo'tant business, cap'n. Yo' know's how it is yo'—"

"No," I growled. "No, you can't go ashore. I know what you want. You want to see that black girl, there. Isn't that it?"

"Yas, sir; that's—it's hit, but yo' know—"

"I've got no money for you, get out," I interrupted.

"I don't want no money, cap'n. I ain't no fool nigger spendin' my money on gals, buyin' soda water an' cigarettes for 'em. No, indeed. Cap'n, I only want's to go ashore a bit. I done know dat nigger gal eber since we came here —gwine on two weeks. I doan want no money."

"That girl don't want to go around with a nigger without a cent to treat her to a bit of candy. She wouldn't waste her time on you."

"Deed, cap'n, I makes 'em spend money on me. I don't go w'y no gals what don't spend dere money on me. I ain't spent more'n nine cents since I come here—an' five of that was fer terbacc'r. I makes *them* pay for smokes."

"Well, you ought to be ashamed to own it," I growled. "I always thought you a black rascal, and a man who'll make a woman pay for the treats is the meanest kind. That girl don't make *big* pay like you, and I suppose if I let you go ashore you'd ask her to hire bicycles and go riding like all these niggers do when they get a half dollar—and then make her pay. You are a scoundrel, and you'll stay aboard."

"Yo' knows I ain't no scoundrel,

cap'n. I'se jest a *plain* nigger. Yas, sir; I'se jest a plain nigger. Niggers' ways ain't like white ways, cap'n—an' I ain't no scoundrel, sir."

"Get aboard," I said, decisively, and Arthur went dejectedly on deck. When he reached the mast where he thought I couldn't see him he waved a dirty rag at his sweetheart and she showed a row of white teeth and waved back.

"I think we'll make her go now, sir, with a good heave," said Buck, coming up. "He's been gone a good quarter of an hour an' 'll be showin' up ag'in with that marshal soon."

John and Arthur took the starboard brakes and Buck took the port.

"Heave heavy," roared the mate, and down went the windless brake. A few inches of chain came aboard. The vessel trembled slightly.

"Oh—ho—ay—bar!" bawled John, and the chain came another three inches.

The little vessel remained motionless.

"Put the mainsail on her," I said, and in a few minutes the broad stretch of white canvas was feeling the light breeze and listing us a trifle.

"Loose the jib and stand by to hoist it. Heave away!"

Once, twice, three times the bars went up and down. I gazed up the levee and saw two figures coming on a run. One was Chiculini and the other I doubted not was the United States marshal, with a summons to appear before the commissioner, and explain why the bill for the rudder should not be paid.

"Heave! heave!" I roared.

Buck saw the figures and needed no urging. All threw their weight upon the brakes while I rolled the wheel hard up and hauled our boat close under the counter.

Suddenly the little vessel moved ahead slightly. Chiculini was within fifty feet of the vessel and in ten seconds would spring aboard.

Then without the slightest tremor she glided away while the sudden slack chain almost threw John overboard as the windlass rolled it in hand over fist with a rattle and bang.

"Hoist the jib," I bawled, for I knew

we would run over the anchor and pick it up under way, and Arthur cast off the down haul and sprang to the halyards as Chiculini dashed up.

"Coma back!" cried the Italian, breathlessly.

"I am the United States marshal, suh. Send a boat—I'll come aboard," panted the other, a stern-faced fellow with black mustache.

"Aw, go chase yerself," said Buck, calmly wiping his streaming face.

I discreetly said nothing, but held our course out into the stream, the little vessel gathering headway rapidly.

"Coma back," roared Chiculini, drawing and flourishing a revolver.

But Buck had dived below and now appeared with a Winchester, which usually hung upon the cabin bulkhead. He threw the magazine open and shut in plain view, and Chiculini's zeal abated. It was certain death at that range.

In a few minutes we were out of reach, and Buck went below smiling. When he appeared again he was in high good humor.

"Shall we put the topsail on her, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, put the staysail, gaff topsail, jib topsail and any other rag you can find aboard," I laughed. "We've got a good sixty miles before we get to sea—and we'll need them all."

Arthur came aft grinning, he understood the game.

"Shall we have dinner, cap'n?" said he.

"Yes, and let it be a good one. John will stand your watch this afternoon."

"Coma back!" bawled Chiculini, in the distance. "Coma back, or we'll come an' take you! Why you runna away?"

"Why is a hen?" roared Buck, hoisting away the staysail. Then aloft he went to loose the topsail.

The little ship heeled slightly, and shot down the river as the topsail was mastheaded.

Chiculini saw we were off in earnest, and lost no more time. Both he and the marshal started up the levee where his schooner was moored.

As they went, Arthur waved to the

girl, who had stood looking on, and she unfortunately waved an adieu just as the Italian came past her.

His clinched fist shot out, and she fell head over heels and lay motionless.

"My Gawd!" came from the companion, and there stood Arthur with fear and hatred expressed on every line of his black face. Then he went below as though in a trance.

The wind fell and the flood tide was against us. In half an hour we had the pleasure of seeing the little black schooner with the yellow stripe coming around the first bend we had left behind.

Chiculini had hoisted everything he had aboard, and he was coming along handsomely. The marshal could be seen distinctly upon his forecastle.

The wind freshened and we drew ahead again, Buck climbing the weather ratlines, and flinging water over the mainsail to make it tighter.

The sloop was going a full five knots, and the race was on. Our towing boat was hoisted in the davits astern, and all the sheets trimmed in the best possible manner.

The breeze freshened more, and a thick haze came creeping in from the gulf. Could we but keep it until dark we might yet go clear.

The *Garibaldi* was laying her rail awash and going through it handsomely. She was only a mile astern.

Our sloop, with her mainsail well aft, dipped her lee scuppers beneath the dirty brown water, and poked her long-pointed horn ahead of the muddy foam of her bobstay at the rate of nine knots. The smoke from the galley pipe blew merrily to leeward with the draft under the staysail and dinner was soon ready.

In the late afternoon the breeze increased to a spiteful squally gale, and we had to take in the jib topsail.

Chiculini still held on, although sometimes the flaws laid his vessel almost on end. Buck bent a deck swab to the signal halyards and hoisted it to the masthead in derision.

At night we were well down the channel and heading for the eastern slue to get into the Sound.

Not a stitch had been started since

the jib topsail came in, although it was now blowing harder and a fine rain had set in, making the darkness doubly black.

A steamer swung around the bend ahead, all aglow with lights, but we showed nothing and flashed past her so close the spray from her paddles blew in our faces.

We were getting into the narrow entrance to the slue, and we were going very fast. There was little water to spare and the tide was falling.

Suddenly our speed began to slacken.

"Luff! Let her luff!" bawled Buck, from forward. "Luff or we'll be ashore!" he bellowed.

It was too late. Our keel was already deep in the soft mud. The sloop slid gently upon the bar, and keeling over on her side until the water was almost into the cockpit, came to a dead standstill. We had missed the channel.

All hands sprang to the halyards. Headsails came down with a rush, and then we handed in that mainsail as it had never been handed in before.

In less than five minutes everything from the gaff topsail down had been either clewed up or secured, and the light of Chiculini's craft drew close aboard. A quarter of a mile away the lights of Wind River landing showed where we were.

Silent as ghosts we stood as the schooner tore past. She was so close the rush of her side wash and the hum of her straining rigging sounded loud in our ears. Then she disappeared into the blackness ahead.

"Give her ten fathoms, slack on the port anchor and turn in," was the whispered order, and we soon were resting peacefully.

She could not possibly float before next high water, and the laugh was on the Italian tearing away into the night. He would have some weary hours before daylight.

"Ahoy there! Sloop ahoy!" came a fierce hail on the night wind.

We had hardly been asleep an hour, and we started up.

"Sounds like Chiculini," said Buck.

We had no riding light up, for we

were not in any danger of being run into, unless the craft were out of the channel like ourselves.

"Go on deck, Arthur, and see what that fellow wants," said Buck. "No one is allowed aboard, see? Cap'n won't see anyone, understand?"

Arthur understood all right, and went on deck.

"Whatcher want?" he answered, surlily.

"What sloop is that?" the hail was now close aboard, and we recognized Chiculini's voice.

"Yo'll see in a minute when yo' run foul of her," said Arthur.

An exclamation of satisfaction came from the boat.

"Ho! ho! ha! ha! Why for you run away?" said Chiculini. "This is the sloop, marshal; let the boat come alongside."

"Cap'n ain't aboa'd," said Arthur, decisively. "Nef he was he wouldn't see no one. Them's his orders."

The boat bumped alongside. It was a schooner dinghy.

"Keep off that paint," said Arthur. "Yo' cain't come on deck."

"You tell the captain I wish to see him. I'm the United States deputy marshal," said a stern voice.

"Cap'n won't see no one. Ain't I done tole you he ain't aboa'd— No, yo' don't—help! help!"

I gained the companion way in time to see Chiculini spring aboard, and make a pass at the nigger.

But Arthur was quick.

He sprang aside and ran forward, the Italian at his heels. A bight of the stay-stail sheet lying on deck caught the pursuer's foot, and down he went.

Quick as lightning the black boy turned upon him. He had a brake bar in his hand, and he brought it down with all his might upon the head of the fallen man. He lay motionless.

The next instant Buck had the bar, and had flung the boy into the bight of the fore staysail.

John and Buck carried Chiculini aft, while I produced a lantern and whisky. The big Italian was quite unconscious, and his head looked bad.

The blow, however, was found to have fallen partly upon his shoulder. He was not much hurt.

We tied him up, and brought him into a semi-conscious condition with the whisky, and then finding that his skull was sound we put him back into his own boat.

The deputy marshal aided us, and now he turned to me.

"I have a paper here, suh——"

"Come, come," I said, "here is half a bottle of whisky. Let's have a drink and talk afterwards."

"Well, the night is ruther damp, suh—thanks!" And he drained off a good half tumbler of the worst liquor I had ever encountered.

"As I were just saying, suh——"

"Hold on, man; give me a chance to swallow my liquor," I said, snappishly.

"I am in no hurry, suh; but I think, suh, I had better get the poor fellow to a doctor. The night is rather wet—no more, thankee, suh—well, I s'pose another won't hurt on such a night."

We each tried it again.

"As I were sayin', suh, I've a little paper here, suh, I hope, suh, yo' will pardon my presenting, but yo' know, suh——"

"Hold on!" I cried, "I know you've got a summons to serve on me, and you know I didn't have to let you come aboard my boat to serve it. Now, let me tell you how the thing occurred."

Fifteen valuable minutes were spent explaining how twenty dollars was all Chiculini had asked Buck for fixing the rudder. Buck here told his story, consuming ten more minutes, and then we called upon John and Arthur to corroborate us.

During this time we had had several nips to stave off the damp, and the deputy marshal had gotten the best part of half a quart.

"Yo' see, suh," said he, drawing himself up very straight. "Yo' see, suh, befo' you a gentleman who was brought up for the pulpit. Yes, suh; I was intended for a minister, suh, and I don't mind saying, suh, that, as I cannot doubt yo' word, suh, I'll be damned, suh. Yes, suh; yo' may pardon my saying so,

suh, but I'll be damned, suh, ef I serve this paper on you, suh—though it would be of convenience to me, suh, to have yo' accept it, suh."

"I hope you will pardon me," I said, gravely, "but it would be of great inconvenience to me to take it to-night. I shall ask you, as a personal favor, sir, which I know you will not refuse me as a gentleman, not to request me to accept the paper at present."

"As I said befo', suh, I'll be damned if I do, suh—another—the last, suh. I must be going—here's your very good health, suh, and, of course, if yo' do not want that paper, suh, I'll be damned if you get it. Good-night."

He was helped unsteadily into Chiculini's boat, where that worthy lay moaning. Then he somehow got out his oars and started off into the darkness in the direction of Wind River landing.

"We'll get under way as soon as the tide raises her," I said. "Stand by for an early call."

"Cap'n, you s'pose I'se killed him," said Arthur's frightened voice near me.

"No, you scoundrel! Why did you hit him when he was down? It was a coward's blow. You ought to be whaled."

"I sho is sorry, sir; I sho is sorry, cap'n."

"You ought to be," I growled, "I never thought you would strike a man while he was down."

"I means I'se sorry he ain't daid——"

"What?" I snapped, starting up.

"Yas, sir; I'se sho sorry he ain't daid —fo' now he'll kill me, sho."

"Get below! You are a villain—a black villain!"

"Ah, no, now cap'n; yo' know I'se only a plain black nigger," said he, starting off. "Cap'n, yo' know niggers' ways ain't like white folks'. I'se sho sorry I ain't killed dat man, fer I seen him strike—dat—dat—dat lil' black gal —an' now he'll kill me, sho—yas, sir; he strook dat po' black gal—yo' seen him, cap'n—dat po' lil' gal—I'se sho sorry," and his voice, half sobbing, died away in the depths of the forecastle.

Before daylight the little ship was standing out to sea.

Romances of the Race Course

BY CHARLES STEINFORT PEARSON

III.—THE GREATER CITY HANDICAP

“I AM not in the habit of disposing of wild beasts, gentlemen, but as a special favor I consented to try to sell one to-day,” said the auctioneer, with the good-natured, English face behind the gray mustache.

He adjusted his eyeglasses and looked about him quizzically.

“Horses are in my line, but when it comes to man-eaters, I would much prefer to turn over the job to somebody like Hagenbeck,” he continued.

There was a hush of expectation in the sales paddock of a horse firm just across the boulevard from a famous race course. The time was about half an hour or so before the races were scheduled to commence. The paddock itself was a roofed inclosure partly open at the sides, furnished with three or four hundred chairs set on the tanbark floor.

The seats were occupied by the prospective purchasers of the yearling thoroughbreds. The men, of “horsy” appearance, sat and fingered their thick-volumed sales catalogues, and made their bids for the racers, sometimes running up into the thousands of dollars, in quite unassuming tones. The auctioneer occupied a pulpit-like platform above a roped-in arena something like a prize ring, facing the buyers.

One by one the man on the stand had auctioned off the thoroughbred colts of varied colors and conformations, curious, frightened, nervous, agile-limbed, some snorting with apprehension and viewing the men things closer

than ever before, with dilated, wondering eyes.

They were led into the ring by a gigantic negro who restrained their restiveness simply by the strength of his arm on the halter. Instinctively they seemed to realize that he at least would not harm them.

They made pretty pictures, these highly bred creatures of the equine kingdom, with their sleek coats, plaited manes and “clubbed” tails.

On their backs were pasted the numbers corresponding with those in the catalogues, and they were duly inspected, criticised and discussed as to their pedigrees by the men whose names were as well known in the turf world as the Wall Street magnates in that of finance.

The last bid on the future kings and queens of the turf had been recorded by the clerks when the auctioneer made the announcement as to the “man-eater.”

“I would advise you not to remain too close to the ring, gentlemen,” he said, gravely. “The animal I am about to put up for sale is that royally bred but vicious-tempered thoroughbred, the property of Mr. Joshua C. Wyndham, The Black Peril.”

He paused a moment. The inner circle of spectators rose as one man and found places as far away from the ring as possible. A subdued murmur of excitement arose.

“Every precaution has been taken,” continued the auctioneer, “but accidents may occur at any time. I need not tell

you what the danger is, for when the name of the horse is known that is sufficient. You all know him by reputation if not by close acquaintance. All ready?" he called, turning towards the opening through which the animals were brought into the paddock.

An affirmative reply was heard outside, and after a second's wait during which intense silence reigned, a big, black devil of a horse, red sparks in his eyes, his coal-black coat in a lather of foam, teeth champing fiercely under his muzzle, four men hanging on to his head, plunged into the ring on two legs, the embodiment of a dangerous thoroughbred.

Again a murmur of surprise and astonishment, with not a little amount of admiration from the circle of horsemen. They called the horse "crazy brute"—he looked the part. "Equine devil," "man-eater," "human hater," were a few of the terms which they used concerning him.

The auctioneer waited for the buzz of voices to die down, then began :

"I make no misrepresentations whatever regarding this animal, gentlemen. His owner, who is well known to everyone of you as a sportsman through and through, as well as a gentleman, expressly stipulated that I should tell the whole truth about him, and you yourselves know full well I would do nothing else in any event. This horse is being sold simply because his stable people can do nothing with him. Apparently he is untamable. He has savaged a number of stablemen. You can see for yourselves what he is like. He killed the fine two-year-old colt by Sunny-weather-Irene. Anyone that has him in charge is apt to be injured, if not killed, by him.

"Possibly there may be some way to render him tractable, but his stable people have despaired of it. They did get him to the post once at great risk, at the express wish of that nervy little jockey, George Loudon, and the manner in which he disposed of his field showed that he must possess a rare turn of speed. It was only by a course of starvation that it was accomplished—that he

was made ready to race, and by the splendid horsemanship of Loudon alone that he was kept in bounds. Loudon will frankly tell you that he would not undertake the task again for ten thousand dollars.

"He is of the finest strain, a long line of winners, a blue-blooded aristocrat of his kind in whom all the viciousness of his ancestors seems to be centered. A magnificent horse to look at, by imp. Hidalgo-Lalla Rookh."

As if looking upon the whole human race as his enemy, the colt was rearing, lashing out behind, and dancing about in an ecstasy of rage and fury. Not for a second since his entry had the lips hidden the gleaming teeth through which the foam dribbled on the tanbark in a steady stream. The men holding him were panting and sweating, their anxious faces pallid as they exerted all their combined strength to hold him, calling to one another with hoarse voices.

"How much am I offered for this brute, this fiend in the form of a horse, fitly named 'The Black Peril'?" queried the auctioneer, half mockingly, looking around. "What am I bid for this ladies' pet, this plaything of the children, this sleepy cow masqueraded as a promising racer? Don't all speak at once, I beg of you."

"Four hundred." The bidder was a young man of about thirty years of age, who was leaning carelessly against a post almost directly in front of the auctioneer. The latter gave a slight start, and, as if hardly able to believe his own ears, looked at the speaker, hammer half raised.

"I said four hundred," the young man repeated, nodding his head as if to emphasize.

He was a tall, athletic-looking chap, smooth of face, strong-featured, steady-eyed. His eyes never faltered or wavered as the astonished gaze of the auctioneer and the glances of the others rested upon him. He smiled a little as if amused at the sensation he had aroused. His face was partly shaded by a hat of a sombrero-like pattern, which stamped him as a Westerner or

Southerner. That he was a gentleman was plainly evident.

"I am bid four hundred dollars for this royally bred animal and a treasure if not of such a fiery disposition," said the auctioneer briskly, returning to his business-like manner. "Mr. Robert Farquhar bids four hundred—how much more am I offered? Four hundred, four hundred—am I offered fifty? Who will make it fifty? Twenty-five, then? Four hundred am I offered"—he paused expectantly—"four hundred—going at four hundred—sold!"

The hammer fell with a sharp thump, and he motioned to the men tugging at the horse's head to take him away. Leaning over he beckoned to the pur-chaser.

"Do you know fully the risks you are running, Mr. Farquhar?" he asked, dropping his voice, in a kind, fatherly manner. "Are you sure?"

The young man nodded his head.

"I knew you were something of a wizard with horse flesh, but I didn't know you could tackle such a thing as The Black Peril. What are you going to do with him?"

This same question was propounded to Farquhar many times that afternoon at the races. He was popular, and the horsemen not only took an interest in the youngest owner-trainer among them, but were alike curious to know what plan he would pursue.

They knew that the young Southerner—he was from Kentucky—had accomplished some marvelous results in turning out winners from apparently hopeless material. What he would do with "The Peril" they could not guess.

To all inquiries he simply replied, smilingly, that he had a plan which he would attempt to put into execution, but as he was not altogether certain of its success he would not reveal it.

Farquhar in person directed the transfer of his purchase from the sales pad-dock to his training quarters at another track a short distance away. It was accom-plished with no small degree of danger involved.

Wyndham was well acquainted with Farquhar, in fact, on a most friendly

footing just at the time. Mary Wynd-ham and Farquhar were more than on simply a friendly footing.

For several days after his removal the stable people had great trouble in giving the newcomer his oats and drink-ing water. It had to be done by saw-ing off the bottom part of the door of his stall and pushing the things through. It was a regular five o'clock pink tea, feed-the-lions-in-the-circus business.

Farquhar greatly needed a trainer. He had essayed to do the work of get-ting his animals into condition himself, but his "string" had been increased so materially by the purchase of good can-didates with the proceeds of purses won he realized he could no longer do the work alone.

Sandy Williams, who was Wynd-ham's foreman, had been a jockey and was well known to Farquhar as a cap-able fellow. Farquhar had great respect for the other's knowledge of training methods, and as Sandy long had been pressing him for the place, he was enga-gaged, and Farquhar secured a license from the Jockey Club for the new trainer.

They were both from the same State, and old acquaintances, so there was nothing strange in the fact that Sandy left Wyndham's employ to accept a position with much greater pay with Far-quhar. The deal whereby The Black Peril changed hands had nothing what-ever to do with it.

"I only wish we could get the black devil fit to go to the post, Mr. Robert," the young trainer remarked, to his em-ployer, in the latter's unpretentious two-roomed bungalow, consisting of front office and sleeping room back, where Farquhar slept during the busy season at the race courses. The two had been going over the prospects of the different racers in the stable.

"He's just eatin' his head off, an' not bringin' in a cent to help keep down ex-penses," growled the trainer. "I be-grudge him every oat he eats."

The young owner laughed outright.

"I expect to see The Peril prove the most valuable asset I now possess, Sandy," he answered, confidently. "You

didn't know I got him with the expectation of winning the Greater City Handicap, did you?"

The trainer looked at his employer in astonishment.

"I've been so busy that I haven't had time to try my plan for improving the temper of *The Peril*. I'm glad you mentioned it. To-morrow is as good a time as any. I'll give you a practical example of my idea on the subject."

This "Greater City Handicap," for which entries had not yet closed, was to be run the following year as the opening event of a new race course expected to be the finest in the country as regarded size and completeness.

The handicap was intended to be its classic event, and likewise the greatest race in the turf world. It would be worth, it was estimated, fully fifty thousand dollars, and the honor of capturing the initial event was an inspiration which had set to talking horsemen from every section.

The "cracks" of the country, three-year olds and upward, would contend. The honor of winning it, without taking into consideration its monetary value, would be well worth while.

Next morning after the two had breakfasted together, Farquhar went back to his office, making some offhand remark about getting down to business, and after a few minutes appeared stamping along in a pair of heavy, thick-soled shoes.

"I wore these when I was center rush on the 'Varsity eleven," he said, smiling at the mystified look of the trainer. "I don't want to run any risk of slipping and falling down to-day," he added, significantly. He was bare-headed, and on his hands was a pair of long, driving gauntlets.

"Now, I want a stout stick of some kind," he continued, "and then I'll be ready. Ah, there's the thing."

He pointed to a brush broom used for sweeping out the litter around the stables. The handle was of hickory. At his direction about a foot of this was sawed off, and he took it in his hand, balancing it up and down. "Just the trick," he said. "Now we'll go over and

get on speaking terms with his satanic majesty in the stable."

"I wouldn't advise you to go too close to his stall, Mr. Robert," said the trainer, warningly. "He's been showin' more of his hell of a temper than ever. He leaned over the stall door yesterday, and all but had Billy Barlow by the scruff of the neck."

Billy Barlow was the goat mascot of the stable, the pet of the other thoroughbreds, and a privileged character.

"I'm not only going near the stall, Sandy," said Farquhar, coolly, "but I'll land inside with him, and I'll eternally knock all this foolishness out of him."

The trainer's face whitened. "Surely you're not going to run any such chances as that, Mr. Robert," was his amazed reply. "You don't know him as well as I do. He'll kill you, sir."

"Not a bit of it, my boy," was the confident answer. "I'll not only come out very much alive, but, if I'm not mistaken, I'll leave a horse in there that anybody would be glad to call his own."

Sandy raised a protesting hand. "I don't pretend to dictate to you, sir, but I don't believe you realize the danger you would run. He's a devil. If you will venture in with him, let me go with you. Maybe both of us can stand him off."

Farquhar smiled, and looked at the trainer before replying.

"That's just what I don't want—to do the double-team act with him," he said. "He'd know all right we were taking advantage of him, and even if we did lick him, it wouldn't do any good. My purpose is to show him that a single two-legged animal he recognizes as man is more than a match for any four-legged brute playing a bluff game that ever was foaled or wore hide or hair. I'm going to conquer him, and I intend to do it so well that in the future he'll have a wholesome fear of everything that looks like a man, if it's a scarecrow or a store dummy."

"When I was in college I was regarded as one of the best boxers in my class. If I can't duck, sidestep and dodge that horse's rushes, and put him down and out with this club, I'll give

him up as a hopeless case, and know he's more the devil than just plain, fractious horse."

When the two approached the stall, "The Peril" was in a far corner, ears flat against his head, teeth showing viciously—a tiger waiting to spring.

Putting his hands on the top of the door, eyes on the horse, club gripped firmly in the right hand, Farquhar vaulted into the stall. Sandy, pale-faced and panting, without a word, in a trice had secured a pitchfork and had it over the door ready for emergency.

He saw the horse, surprised a second by the bold move, dash with a squeal of fury at the intruder. Farquhar side-stepped, and as the infuriated stallion's head, with gleaming eyes and grinning teeth, shot past, narrowly missing him, the club fell on the horse's poll with a resounding thwack.

"The Peril" dropped in his tracks like a shot. With the quickness of a cat he regained his feet, undismayed and shaking his head, as if trying to dislodge some insect that had stung him.

This was surprise number one. Another fierce charge. Farquhar had his back against the side of the stall, ready for it, confident and calculating. Again the club descended on the horse's head, evoking a squeal of agony and fury.

No retreat this time and no fall.

It was well for Farquhar that he had learned his footwork on the boxing-school floor, for, in spite of the hail of blows rained on his forehead, nose, neck and jaw, the big, black brute kept after him. His lips were dripping, he reared and snapped, struck with fore feet, half blinded, but still feeling for his opponent.

Around and around the brief confines of that stall the two circled, a whirlwind of man and beast.

To the scared trainer watching outside, Farquhar seemed a man with a charmed life. No matter how swiftly the horse would whirl, he could not get a chance to use his heels on his two-legged opponent. Once there was a sharp exclamation of pain from the man, a clash of the horse's jaws. He had taken hold of the sleeve of Farquhar's

coat with his teeth, and was shaking it as a dog shakes a rat.

The trainer, with a startled cry of dismay, pushed over the pitchfork, and would have used it had not his action been forestalled by Farquhar, who saw it.

"No need for that, put that down, Sandy," came the order, peremptorily. "I'll tell you when I need it. I'm going to win this battle, and do it alone." The weapon was reluctantly withdrawn.

A break away, a separation of the man from the beast. Another mad rush. A confused swirl, out of which the horse reared straight up in the air, with Farquhar's grip on his nose, miraculously dodging the pawing hoofs, raining blows on the animal's head with the swings of the club in his right hand. Sandy watched as if fascinated.

This was the real test of supremacy. Either Farquhar released his hold, or "The Peril" broke it. In another second the horse was on all fours, and the man backed away, alert and strong as ever, with the light of victory already on his dripping face.

An impetuous rush. The Black Peril had a reputation to sustain. Once more the club fell with a sharp crack, fair and square, on the most vulnerable part of the head. The blows began to have effect. Now the horse was groggy. He had met his master.

Sandy swore it ever afterward—he saw tears come out of the colt's eyes and course down his cheeks.

But the horse was already tasting the pangs of defeat. His head dropped and was turned to one side. The long, glossy tail was agitated violently, his legs wabbled. Farquhar, keenly watchful, noted every action.

Suddenly the big black sank to the floor of the stall with a deep groan. For a brief space he attempted to rise, groaning heavily. His head flopped over. He was quiet. The battle was won.

Farquhar cautiously stepped up to the side of the prone animal. The horse never stirred. His conqueror looked at him a moment, then, stooping down, ran his hand caressingly along the thoroughbred's shining flank.

"I'm sorry I had to do it, old fellow," he said, softly; "you'll thank me for it in the future. It was either the billet for you or a bullet, and that would have been a pity." Still no sign of life from the stallion. "I've saved you, and I want you to show your thankfulness by winning a lot of races for me in the future."

It might have been a father talking to a child which had needed correction. Except for slightly heaving flanks, "The Peril" might have been an ebony statue of a horse.

Farquhar turned and left the stall. Once outside Sandy took him by the hand and blubbered, tears in his eyes.

"I don't believe there's anybody else could have done it, Mr. Robert. If some one had told me of it, I wouldn't have believed it. The Lord knows I'm glad you got out of it alive."

"I had no misgiving on that score, but it was pretty warm work," Farquhar responded cheerfully. "It was a regular touch-and-go business. He did pinch my arm a bit."

"Do you think you've killed him?" whispered the trainer as they turned to look at the horse again.

"I'm certain I haven't even badly injured him. It only bears out the opinion I have always had of thoroughbreds. Some of them are mighty nearly human. This horse started out wrong and had nobody to make him know it. He's not hurt. He's simply grieving that he was licked and that he made such a fool of himself before! He'll be all right now, you mark my words."

With this horse philosophy Farquhar went to his room to dress his bruised arm.

For a couple of days The Black Peril would neither eat nor drink, although water and oats were taken him by Farquhar, who would allow no one else to do it. The horse stood dejectedly in his stall, head hanging.

On the morning of the third day Farquhar went into the stall, and rubbed the horse's head where the club had fallen the hardest. The erstwhile Peril made no protest. At the end he lay down. Farquhar pressed the side of

his shoe against him, with a commanding, "Get up, there!" The order was obeyed. His submission was almost pitiful. Farquhar then brought oats and a bucket of water. "The Peril" ate and drank heartily.

From that time on, the horse experienced a change of disposition which was marvelous. It was a wonderful redemption, and the colt ever afterward seemed to regard Farquhar in the light of a rescuer.

As the owner had predicted, the thoroughbred lived up to his pedigree, and before the season was over, had a record of nine straight victories.

Farquhar declared it was a shame for the horse to carry his old name with his new nature, and paid one hundred dollars to the Jockey Club for the privilege of changing it to the "Black Pearl," almost the same in sound, but entirely different in the sense.

As the "Black Pearl" he was known in future.

Farquhar spent his days in the care of his racers; his nights, when he was not with her in person, in dreaming of Mary Wyndham.

It was agreed by all their friends that the two would become man and wife. She was a remarkably pretty, sweet-faced little blond, with a disposition just as sunny as her face and her golden hair. It was evident to outsiders that she was very, very fond of Farquhar—perhaps almost as fond of him as he was of her.

Farquhar had accompanied Miss Wyndham home from the theater one night when they chanced to meet with the father.

It was only a day or so after the old man's favorite thoroughbred had had been made to look like a cheap selling plater by "The Pearl" in a handicap race when Farquhar's horse, too, was giving away pounds of weight.

Mr. Wyndham was a Wall Street operator for business purposes; racing was his pastime.

It was hard to have pain mingled with his pleasure, or perhaps things in the Street had not been going on just to his liking that day. He was certainly

in an ugly humor, and as Farquhar lingered a moment in the drawing room before taking his leave of Mary, the father appeared and called out in his disagreeable high-pitched voice:

"Oh, by the way, Farquhar, I've been wanting to speak to you about a certain transaction in which you engaged some time ago."

He was a large, fine-looking old chap, with gray hair and a red face, with mutton chop whiskers. His manner was pompous, though generally he assumed an air of easy condescension. Those who knew him intimately laughed at his assumption of the English style.

"Yes, I should have spoken to you long ago," the old man sputtered. "I regard the way in which you secured The Black Pearl, as you now call him, as little short of sharp practice. The horse cost you practically nothing, under the circumstances, and has been developed into a racing marvel," he sneered. "It's strange how vicious he was when I owned him, how quickly he changed when you secured him."

Farquhar's face expressed the astonishment he felt.

"Surely you will give me credit for the way in which I cured the horse of his only failing—which was a fatal one if it had not been corrected," he replied.

"All poppycock, sir," fumed the old man. "Mere stable talk—a nothing magnified into a deed of great daring in which you are made a hero very cheaply," he snapped out. "A good tale, but it didn't impress me."

"But you would hardly doubt my own word, Mr. Wyndham?" Farquhar's eyes were becoming dark, with red centers in them.

"That's all very well, that's all very well, at times," said Wyndham. "We are not discussing theories now but cold, practical facts. It's a very strange thing that your present trainer left my employ at almost the identical time you secured the horse from me, and the startling transformation was accomplished. Now I can put two and two together as well as anyone."

"Father, you certainly don't mean to insult Mr. Farquhar in your own house,

and for something about which I am sure he is as incapable as—as—you yourself would be," and Mary, who had been overhearing the conversation from the drawing room, confronted her parent with a face tearful though defiant, two bright spots of color blazing in each cheek as she defended her lover.

"Mary, go to your room immediately," stormed the old man. "How dare you interrupt me in something about which I know I am right?"

"Oh, father, please—please—" she began, but the old fellow, stamping his foot and pointing to the stairway showed such signs of apoplexy she dared not delay, but with a low, "God-night, Mr. Farquhar," slowly ascended the stairway.

"As for you, sir," continued Wyndham, turning his glance on the young man, "I must ask you not to enter my house again, and not have further association with—with any member of my household."

Farquhar controlled himself admirably.

"I certainly shall not enter your home, Mr. Wyndham," he answered, coldly, "until you yourself clear me of the accusation which you have made against me and make full acknowledgment of your error. As you are an older man than I and the father of"—he hesitated—"Miss Mary, I must say no more."

He opened the door and passed out, leaving Wyndham raging like a mad bull.

That was the beginning of the war of Wyndham against Farquhar. In every possible way by which the rich owner could hamper Farquhar and prevent him from succeeding in racing affairs Wyndham interested himself. By some means he would learn what horse Farquhar had in any race and would generally manage it so that he would have a better one in the same race, which would prevent the other from winning. As his stable of thoroughbreds was much larger and of better class with two or three exceptions he could make his enemy suffer.

The culmination of his fight against

Farquhar came just before the end of the racing season.

The young owner, as is not at all uncommon, had entered one of his best two-year-olds in a "selling race." In a race of this description all the horses entered must be sold at a stipulated price, the lower the price at which one is entered the less weight it being required to be carried by that individual animal.

Farquhar had entered his horse to be sold at two thousand dollars, expecting to "bid it in" at that price. The horse had won. The owner had no idea that Wyndham would enact the rôle of "the man with the halter," and outbid him for his own animal. He did not even know that his persecutor was at the track that day.

The horses had returned to the judges' stand, panting and sweat-covered from the race, the winner standing apart from the others in front of the auctioneer, who went over the conditions of the race and asked for bids. There was one of two thousand two hundred dollars.

Farquhar, present to protect the animal, bid the necessary five dollars over that amount, and expected to have the horse returned to him. In that case he would have been out only the five dollars, but having gained the amount of the purse, which was several hundred dollars. By the provisions of selling races any given bid over and above the amount at which the horse is entered to be sold, does not go to the owner.

He was surprised to hear some one behind him say: "I bid three thousand dollars and am prepared to go as high as necessary."

It was Wyndham. Farquhar at that time needed money very badly. He endeavored to "protect" his horse to the extent of four thousand five hundred dollars, but Wyndham seemed so determined to do him out of the animal he was forced to let it go at that price.

Red-faced and wrathful Farquhar turned to Wyndham with the heated words: "I don't believe you want the horse. I'm convinced it's only your causeless persecution of me."

Wyndham seemed to enjoy his discomfiture. "You see I haven't forgotten that black horse coup of yours, young man," he chuckled.

Farquhar's eyes blazed. He raised his clinched hand with the passionate reply, "If you insinuate that again, I——"

Mary's sweet, innocent face, with appealing eyes, seemed to rise before his vision. His arm fell, he gulped hard, striving to repress his anger, and a friend, taking him by the shoulders, led him away. The loss of Capt. Jinks, the colt, of which Farquhar had held great expectations, filled his soul with bitterness.

A short while later Wyndham and Mary went abroad, remaining during the winter, and returning with the Hon. Cyril Landis.

The father took no pains to conceal the fact that he favored the Hon. Cyril, heir to an earldom, as the suitor of Mary. Farquhar, eating his heart out, heard that they were engaged.

All communication between him and Mary had ceased, and Farquhar guessed that the girl's promise not to write him had been given. He would not urge her in the matter. He saw the monocled Britisher at the track once or twice. He was a man at least twice Mary's age, with a *blasé*, washed-out appearance.

Things had been going badly with Farquhar. Perhaps it was recklessness—the fact that he did not care any longer. Most of his thoroughbreds had proven failures from one reason or another. Expenses had piled up on him.

As a creature of his own making he still set great store by "The Pearl." And the horse had fulfilled every trust reposed in him.

As the time for the running of the Greater City Handicap drew near it was apparent that, with good luck, but one other horse would stand a chance of capturing the coveted prize. That one was Wyndham's Capt. Jinks.

A young millionaire, new to the racing game, a bright, enthusiastic chap, who had no love for Wyndham, but who both liked and pitied Farquhar, made a conditional offer for the Black Pearl.

If the horse should win the Greater City Handicap he would give fifty thousand dollars for the animal. He would keep the horse for racing purpose only and return him to Farquhar, when his career of usefulness as a racer was over, for the stud. He was anxious to see his colors borne by the horse Farquhar had developed. With this sum and the purse itself it would make one hundred thousand dollars. This would put the young horseman again on his feet.

Seated in his little room the night before the race Farquhar read and re-read a note which had just been delivered to him by a messenger in the Wyndham livery. The missive said simply:

"I hope you win. MARY."

It put heart in him. At least she still thought of him! He mused a little, smoking his pipe.

"I wish I could tame the old man as I did 'The Pearl,'" he thought, smiling grimly. "But that is beyond the bounds of possibility."

It happened next morning that Farquhar had occasion to have his horses, including his handicap candidate, transferred from their training quarters to the track where the race was to be run. It was not business-like to have delayed, for although the distance was short, it might be bad for the horse which was "on edge" for the big race. One who is unacquainted with the delicate mechanism of a thoroughbred viewed as a racing machine can hardly understand how sometimes the slightest thing may have a deterrent effect.

Part of the way to the new track to which the horses were to be moved led down a much-frequented suburban boulevard. The racers were led down it by their stable boys, "The Pearl" slightly behind the rest, with Farquhar at the tail end of the procession in a buckboard.

As the cavalcade moved down the road Wyndham came from behind in his automobile with the Hon. Cyril Landis. The old fellow recognized the outfit at a glance, and unknown to Farquhar followed behind, making a minute if somewhat distant observation of the big black.

As the horses were passing a cottage by the roadside a boy of ten or twelve years came running around the house with a big collie dog, calling to the latter in sheer wantonness. Running up to the hindmost horse, in spite of Farquhar's warning cry, he struck at "The Pearl" with a piercing "Get up there!" The dog snapped at the horse's heels.

The racer stood up straight on his hind legs, and pitched to one side, breaking loose from his attendant who stood stupidly, caromed against the boy's head as he came down, knocking him unconscious.

Head up, snorting like a steam engine, the horse stopped for a second so close to Farquhar that the latter could easily have caught the end of the dangling halter and stopped him.

The owner paid no attention to the horse, but leaped from the buckboard and hurried to the apparently lifeless boy.

Old Wyndham had witnessed the whole affair, as his automobile was within a few feet of the scene of the accident.

He looked hard at Farquhar for a space, and then at the horse disappearing down the road.

"You go after your horse," he called out. "I'll look after the boy."

Farquhar gave him one roving look just as if his glance might have rested accidentally on an inanimate object and as if the words were entirely wasted. He did not even look at the horse disappearing down the road, and with him probably the hope of a one hundred thousand dollar prize. His gaze rested on the pale face of the unconscious boy.

"That horse has been the cause of all my troubles," he muttered, savagely. "I don't care if he breaks his d——d neck! I trust this little lad isn't hurt much," he continued, without paying the slightest attention to the bystanders.

He undid the boy's shirt, lifted the little figure tenderly and carried it up the steps to the cottage door. Pushing open the door he entered and closed it without glancing behind him.

The Hon. Cyril Landis put a hand

on Wyndham's shoulder with a hearty "haw! haw!"

"Let the beggar run," he suggested. "'Pon honor, now it will be playing in your hands, you know. The more he tires now the slower he will go in the race. By Jove! old chap, don't you grasp the idea? We can place several thousands on the other with certainty."

Wyndham was a man of quick action if of choleric temper. He shook off the hand of the Englishman.

"Here, you boys," he yelled. "A hundred dollars to the one who catches that horse and does it before he injures himself."

Several started away down the road in the direction taken by the horse. A negro boy slipped through the fence and sped like a whirlwind down the field away from the fence. Wyndham watched this move with satisfaction.

"That fellow has some brains under his woolly pate," he said, as if to himself.

Then as if recollecting, he turned to the chauffeur and without appearing to notice the presence of the other, he said with no attempt to conceal his contempt:

"You will take the Hon. Cyril back to his hotel. He is not sportsman enough to want to see such a contest between the best thoroughbreds in training as the Greater City Handicap is going to furnish. Doubtless he can be directed to a poolroom in the city." The Hon. Cyril's face flushed. "And don't forget to call after the races for Miss Mary, who will be there, and Mr. Farquhar and myself. That's all," continued Wyndham, relentlessly.

"It's beastly bad form this," remarked the Hon. Cyril, indefinitely.

Wyndham turned on him in an instant and snapped out like the crack of a whip: "I suppose you refer to the suggestion you made as to letting Farquhar's horse run just now. I fully agree with you. Play fair or not at all is my motto. However, I could have hardly expected more from a man who uses violet-scented note paper."

He turned his back on the departing automobile and the squelched scion of nobility. In a few minutes he saw a

group of stable hands approaching, the advance guard of another group surrounding the runaway, led by the negro.

"Hold that horse a minute," commanded the old man. He surveyed the sleek sides of the black with apparent delight. "I guess his breakaway didn't hurt his chances," he declared jubilantly. The horse was not even blown.

"You caught the horse, didn't you?" Wyndham asked the colored lad standing at the animal's head.

"Yas, sah, I done cotched him."

"Well, here's your hundred." Wyndham beckoned the boy over and held the greenback temptingly aloft.

"Am I going to wait all day here for you?" the old fellow demanded as the boy hesitated. "What's wrong with you? Why don't you come and get it? D——n your impudence, do you think it's a counterfeit?"

The youth shifted from one foot to another, and rolled his eyes.

"I don't want nothin' fer cotchin' Marse Robert's hoss," he said, finally. "I belongs ter de stable. I come from Kaintucky wid him."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" asked the old man, smilingly. "Well, take this money and bet it on 'The Pearl' to win."

Then the lad leading the horse came over and took the money with a "Thank you, marster, it'll all go on de Pearl ter win, sho nuff."

"Yes, and if you don't get the horse over to the track safe this time you'll never have another chance to be near a racer again. Clear out, the whole lot of you."

Farquhar hurried out of the cottage just then, saying that he was going for a physician, but that he did not believe the boy was really much hurt.

"You take the buckboard and get back as quickly as you can," Wyndham ordered, with an air of proprietorship which made Farquhar smile. "Yes, I want you to take me over to the track, Farquhar. I have something I want to tell you."

The physician soon arrived, pronounced the lad's injuries superficial, and Wyndham got in the buckboard with his erstwhile foe.

"I think I can trust you not to break my neck, in the light of what I'm going to say to you, Farquhar," he chuckled. "We are going over to the track, and we won't find the Hon. Cyril there, but you and I will see Mary there later on. I know she'll be glad to see you. I don't believe she's been just the same since we had that quarrel.

"I've given the Hon. Cyril his sailing papers—and—I'm going to tell Mary that I have concluded to withdraw my objection to you. I expect I've been a bullheaded old fool anyway. But Mary will tell you I'm not such a bad father, after all. I've come to learn that a Southern gentleman, or just a plain American gentleman, is head and shoulders above the rest. Now that I've seen your conduct, I'll be frank with you and say to you that if I had had as much at stake as you did, I might have hesitated, which you didn't, to let the horse go for the sake of seeing after the boy."

"That showed you know me very little, Mr. Wyndham."

"It showed enough. I don't need fieldglasses to see much further about a man. Down in 'the Street' they will tell you that I have done up more than one man just because he opposed me, and put him on his feet again. I didn't believe that story about your tanning that horse—at the time. I do now. I've wronged you, but I'm going to right the wrong the best way I know how. I'm going to take 'The Black Pearl' at your own price, win or lose, and you can be my racing partner. When a man cares for a thoroughbred and a good woman the way you do, he's all right, I know."

So the old man babbled on.

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Wherever horsemen congregate, they still talk about the first Greater City Handicap. The finish, which was caught by the alert press photographers, has been transferred to the front cover

of the programs, so that all who peruse them may remember the most exciting running of a classic event seen on any track at any time.

Before the breathless thousands, who watched the race that day, The Black Pearl and Capt. Jinks, when the home-stretch was reached, drew away from the other high-class thoroughbreds as if the latter had been common cart horses and together fiercely fought their famous battle for turf supremacy.

Down the stretch neck and neck, nose and nose, they ran, skimming along over the track almost like swallows on the wing.

It is always said, and seldom contradicted, that if, in the lust of contest the black horse had not so far forgotten his meek and lowly nature for a brief space as to shorten his stride when the chestnut drew up to him, and attempt to savage his rival, he would have been the winner. But be as it may the chestnut and the black, which had again gotten into his stride again, passed the finish post so close together that the judges could not decide which was the victor.

What was stranger, the adherents of both who had backed their faith in the one or the other with good hard dollars made no claims for their favorites, but were satisfied to have it declared "a dead heat."

But the strangest thing of all to the minds of the turfites was that the race should not be "run off"—both horses go over the route again to decide which was best. They did not know that Wyndham and Farquhar had healed their differences, and had consented to "split" the purse, each take half, which was the amicable way of settling the affair.

Farquhar may have only half won the Greater City Handicap, but he wholly won a bride. And also he gained a partnership through the race and that which preceded it, which was known thereafter as one of the most notable in the annals of the racing world.

THE BETRAYAL

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Author of "The Yellow Crayon," "A Prince of Sinners," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Guy Ducaine, a young Oxford graduate and the narrator of the story, has come to a small place on the coast of England, hoping to obtain pupils. In this he has failed and is desperately poor, almost on the point of starvation. Colonel Mostyn Ray, a famous soldier and diplomat, and Lady Angela, the daughter of the Duke of Rochester, by accident discover the situation, and, despite his protests, relieve his immediate wants. While Colonel Ray is in Ducaine's room, Ducaine sees a strange face peering in at the window. Ray goes out and returns breathless and muddy. The next morning Ducaine discovers a dead body upon the sands. He also finds a peculiar signet ring. A young lady, Blanche Moyat, comes up at this moment, and says that she saw the man the night before and that he was asking for Ducaine. The latter enjoins her to secrecy. The duke offers Ducaine employment, which Lady Angela, in a strange manner, warns him against accepting.

CHAPTER VII.

COL. RAY'S RING.

THE ring lay on the table between us. Col. Ray had not yet taken it up. In grim silence he listened to my faltering words. When I finished he smiled upon me as one might upon a child that needed humoring.

"So," he said, slipping the ring upon his finger, "you have saved me from the hangman. What remains? Your reward, eh?"

"It may seem to you," I answered, hotly, "a fitting subject for jokes. I am sorry that my sense of humor is not in touch with yours. You are a great traveler, and you have shaken death by the hand before. For me it is a new thing. The man's face haunts me! I cannot sleep or rest for thinking of it—as I have seen it dead, and as I saw it alive pressed against my window—that night. Who was he? What did he want with me?"

"How do you know," Ray asked, "that he wanted anything from you?"

"He looked in at my window."

"He might have seen me enter."

Then I told him what I had meant to keep secret.

"He asked for me in the village. He was directed to my cottage."

Ray had been filling his pipe. His fingers paused in their task. He looked at me steadily.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"The person to whom he spoke in the village told me so."

"Then why did that person not appear at the inquest?"

"Because I asked her not to," I told him. "If she had given evidence the verdict must have been a different one."

"It seems to me," he said, quietly, "that you have acted foolishly. If that young woman, whoever she may be, chooses to tell the truth later on you will be in an awkward position."

"If she had told the truth yesterday," I answered, "the position would have

been quite awkward enough. Let that go! I want to know who that man was, what he wanted with me."

Col. Ray shrugged his shoulders.

"My young friend," he said, "have you come from Braster to ask that question?"

"To give you the ring and to ask you that question."

"How do you know that the ring is mine?"

"I saw it on your finger when you were giving me wine."

"Then you believe," he said, "that I killed him?"

"It is no concern of mine," I cried, hoarsely. "I do not want to know. I do not want to hear. But I tell you that the man's face haunts me. He asked for me in the village. I feel that he came to Rowchester to see me. And he is dead. Whatever he came to say or to tell me will be buried with him. Who was he? Tell me that."

Ray smoked on for a few moments reflectively.

"Sit down, sit down!" he said, gruffly, "and do abandon that tragical aspect. The creature was not worth all this agitation. He lived like a dog, and he died like one."

"It is true, then?" I murmured.

"If you insist upon knowing," Ray said, coolly, "I killed him! There are insects upon which one's foot falls, reptiles which one removes from the earth without a vestige of a qualm, with a certain sense of relief. He was of this order."

"He was a human being," I answered.

"He was none the better for that," Ray declared. "I have known animals of finer disposition."

"You at least," I said, fiercely, "were not his judge. You struck him in the dark, too. It was a cowardly action."

Ray turned his head. Then I saw that around his neck was a circular bandage.

"If it interests you to know it," he remarked, dryly, "I was not the assailant. But for the fact that I was warned it might have been my body which you came across on the sands. I started a

second too soon for our friend—and our exchange of compliments sent him to eternity."

"It was in self-defense, then?"

"Scarcely that. He would have run away if he could. I decided otherwise."

"Tell me who he was," I insisted.

Ray shook his head.

"Better for you not to know," he remarked, reflectively. "Much better."

My cheeks grew hot with anger.

"Col. Ray," I said, "this may yet be a serious affair for you. Why you should assume that I am willing to be a silent accessory to your crime I cannot imagine. I insist upon knowing who this man was."

"You have come to London," Ray answered, quietly, "to ask me this?"

"I have told you before why I am here," I answered. "I will not be put off any longer. Who was that man, and what did he want with me?"

For a period of time which I could not measure, but which seemed to me of great duration, there was silence between us. Then Ray leaned over towards me.

"I think," he said, "that it is my turn to talk. You have come to me like a hysterical schoolboy; you seem ignorant of the primeval elements of justice. After all, it is not wonderful. As yet you have only looked in upon life. You look in, but you do not understand. You have called me a coward. It is only a year or so since his majesty pinned a little cross upon my coat—for valor. I won that for saving a man's life. Mind you, he was a man. He was a man and a comrade. To save him I rode through a hell of bullets. It ought to have meant death. As a matter of fact it didn't. That was my luck. But you mustn't call me a coward, Ducaine. It is an insult to my decoration."

"Oh, I know that you are brave enough," I answered, "but this man was a poor, weak creature, a baby in your hands."

"So are the snakes we stamp beneath our feet," he answered, coolly. "Yet we kill them. In Egypt I have been in more than one hot corner where we fought hand to hand. I have killed men more

than once. I have watched them galloping up with waving swords, and their fine faces ablaze with the joy of battle, and all the time one's revolver went spit, and the saddles were empty. Yet never once have I sent a brave man to his last account without regret, enemy and fanatic though he was. I am not a bloodthirsty man. When I kill, it is because necessity demands it. As for that creature whom you found in the marshes, well, if there were a dozen such in this room now, I would do my best to rid the earth of them. Take my advice. Dismiss the whole subject from your mind. Go back to Braster and wait. Something may happen within the next twenty-four hours which will be very much to your benefit. Go back to Braster and wait."

"You will tell me nothing, then?" I asked. "It is treating me like a child. I am not a sentimentalist. If the man deserved death the matter is between you and your conscience. But he came to Rowchester to see me. I want to know why."

"Go back to Rowchester and wait," Ray said. "I shall tell you nothing. Depend upon it that his business with you, if he had any, was evil business. He and his whole brood left their mark for evil wherever they crawled."

"His name?" I asked.

"Were there no papers upon him?" Ray demanded.

"None."

"So much the better," Ray declared, grimly. "Now, my young friend, I have given you all the time I can spare. Beyond what I have said I shall say nothing. If you had known me better —you would not be here still."

So I left him. His words gave me no loophole of hope. His silence was the silence of a strong man, and I had no weapons with which to assail it. I had wasted the money which I could ill afford on this journey to London. Certainly Ray's advice was good. The sooner I was back in Braster the better.

From the station I had walked straight to Ray's house, and from Ray's house I returned, without any deviation, direct to the great terminus. For a

man with less than fifty pounds in the world London is scarcely a hospitable city. I caught a slow train, and after four hours of jolting, cold, and the usual third-class miseries, alighted at Rowchester Junction. Already I had started on the three mile tramp home, my coat collar turned up as some slight protection against the drizzling rain, when a two-wheeled trap overtook me, and Mr. Moyat shouted out a gruff greeting. He raised the waterproof apron, and I clambered in by his side.

"Been to Sunbridge?" he inquired, cheerfully.

"I have been to London," I answered.

"You haven't been long about it," he remarked. "I saw you on the eight-twenty, didn't I?"

I nodded.

"My business was soon over," I said.

"I've been to Sunbridge," he told me. "Went over with his grace. My girl was talking about you the other night, Mr. Ducaine."

I started.

"Indeed?" I answered.

"Seemed to think," he continued, "that things had been going a bit rough for you, losing those pupils after you'd been at the expense of taking the Grange, and all that, you know."

"It was rather bad luck," I admitted, quietly.

"I've been wondering," he continued, with some diffidence, "whether you'd care for a bit of work in my office, just to carry you along till things looked up: Blanche, she was set upon it that I should ask you anyway. Of course, you being a college young gentleman might not care about it, but there's times when any sort of a job is better than none, eh?"

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Moyat," I answered, "and very kind of Miss Blanche to have thought of it. A week ago I shouldn't have hesitated. But within the last few days I have had a sort of offer. I don't know whether it will come to anything, but it may. Might I leave it open for the present?"

I think that Mr. Moyat was a little disappointed. He flicked the cob with

the whip, and looked straight ahead into the driving mist.

"Just as you say," he declared. "I ain't particular in want of anyone, but I'm getting to find my own bookkeeping a bit hard, especially now that my eyes ain't what they were. Of course it would only be a thirty bob a week job, but I suppose you'd live on that all right, unless you were thinking of getting married, eh?"

I laughed derisively.

"Married, Mr. Moyat!" I exclaimed. "Why, I'm next door to a pauper."

"There's such a thing," he remarked, thoughtfully, "if one's a steady sort of chap, and means work, as picking up a girl with a bit of brass now and then."

"I can assure you, Mr. Moyat," I said as coolly as possible, "that anything of that sort is out of the question so far as I am concerned. I should never dream of even thinking of getting married till I had a home of my own and an income."

He seemed about to say something, but checked himself. We drove on in silence till we came to a dark pile of buildings standing a little way back from the road. He moved his head towards it.

"They tell me Braster Grange is took, after all," he remarked. "Mr. Hulshaw told me so this morning."

I was very little interested, but was prepared to welcome any change in the conversation.

"Do you know who is coming there?" I asked.

"An American lady, I believe, name of Morson. I don't know what strangers want coming to such a place, I'm sure."

I glanced involuntarily over my shoulder. Braster Grange was a long, grim pile of buildings, which had been unoccupied for many years. Between it and the sea was nothing but empty marshland. It was one of the bleakest spots along the coast—to the casual observer nothing but an arid waste of sands in the summer, a wilderness of desolation in the winter. Only those who have dwelt in those parts are able to feel the fascination of that great,

empty land, a fascination potent enough, but of slow growth. Mr. Moyat's remark was justified.

We drove into his stable yard and clambered down.

"You'll come in and have a bit of supper," Mr. Moyat insisted.

I hesitated. I felt that it would be wiser to refuse, but I was cold and wet, and the thought of my fireless room depressed me. So I was ushered into the long, low dining room, with its old hunting prints and black oak furniture, and, best of all, with its huge log fire. Mrs. Moyat greeted me with her usual negative courtesy. I do not think that I was a favorite of hers, but whatever her welcome lacked in impressiveness Blanche's made up for. She kept looking at me as though anxious that I should remember our common secret. More than once I was sorry that I had not let her speak.

"You've had swell callers again," she remarked, as we sat side by side at supper time. "A carriage from Rowchester was outside your door when I passed."

"Ah, he's a good sort, is the duke," Mr. Moyat declared, appreciatively. "A clever chap, too. He's AI in politics, and a first-class business man, chairman of the Great Southern Railway Company, and on the board of several other city companies."

"I can't see what the gentry want to meddle with such things at all for," Mrs. Moyat said. "There's some as says as the duke's lost more than he can afford by speculations."

"The duke's a shrewd man," Mr. Moyat declared. "It's easy to talk."

"If he hasn't lost money," Mrs. Moyat demanded, "why is Rowchester Castle let to that American millionaire? Why doesn't he live there himself?"

"Prefers the East Coast," Mr. Moyat declared, cheerfully. "More bracing, and suits his constitution better."

"That is all very well," Mrs. Moyat said, "but I can't see that Rowchester is a fit country house for a nobleman. What do you think, Mr. Ducaine?"

I was more interested in the discussion than anxious to be drawn into it, so I returned an evasive reply. Mrs. Moyat nodded sympathetically.

"Of course," she said, "you haven't seen the house except from the road, but I've been over it many a time when Mrs. Felton was housekeeper and the duke didn't come down so often, and I say that it's a poor place for a duke."

"Well, well, mother, we won't quarrel about it," Mr. Moyat declared, rising from the table. "I must just have a look at the mare. Do you look after Mr. Ducaine, Blanche?"

To my annoyance the retreat of Mr. and Mrs. Moyat was evidently planned, and accelerated by a frown from their daughter. Blanche and I were left alone —whereupon I, too, rose to my feet.

"I must be going," I said, looking at the clock.

Blanche only laughed, and bade me sit down by her side.

"I'm so glad dad brought you in tonight," she said. "Did he say anything to you?"

"What about?"

"Never mind," she answered, archly. "Did he say anything at all?"

"He remarked once or twice that it was a wet night," I said.

"Stupid!" she exclaimed. "You know what I mean."

"He did make me a very kind offer," I admitted.

She looked at me eagerly.

"Well?"

"I told him that I am expecting an offer of work of some sort from the duke. Of course it may not come. In any case, it was very kind of Mr. Moyat."

She drew a little closer to me.

"It was my idea," she whispered. "I put it into his head."

"Then it was very kind of you, too," I answered.

She was apparently disappointed. We sat for several moments in silence. Then she looked around with an air of mystery, and whispered still more softly into my ear:

"I haven't said a word about that—to anybody."

"Thank you very much," I answered. "I was quite sure that you wouldn't, as you had promised."

Again there was silence. She looked at me with some return of that half fearsome curiosity which had first come into her eyes when I made my request.

"Wasn't the inquest horrid?" she said. "Father says they were five hours deciding—and there's old Joe Hassell; even now he won't believe that—that—he came from the sea."

"It isn't a pleasant subject," I said, quietly. "Let us talk of something else."

She was swinging a very much beaded slipper backwards and forwards, and gazing at it thoughtfully.

"I don't know," she said. "I can't help thinking of it sometimes. I suppose it is terribly wicked to keep anything back like that, isn't it?"

"If you feel that," I answered, "you had better go and tell your father everything."

She looked at me quickly.

"Now you're cross," she exclaimed. "I'm sure I don't know why."

"I am not cross," I said, "but I do not wish you to feel unhappy about it."

"I don't mind that," she answered, lifting her eyes to mine, "if it is better for you."

The door opened, and Mr. Moyat appeared. Blanche was obviously annoyed, I was correspondingly relieved. I rose at once, and took my leave.

"Blanche got you to change your mind?" he said, looking at me closely.

"Miss Moyat hasn't tried," I answered, shaking him by the hand. "We were talking about something else."

Blanche pushed past her father and came to let me out. We stood for a moment at the open door. She pointed down the street.

"It was just there he stopped me," she said in a low tone. "He was very pale, and he had such a slow, strange voice, just like a foreigner. It was in the shadow of the market hall there. I wish I'd never seen him."

A note of real fear seemed to have crept into her voice. Her eyes were straining through the darkness. I forced a laugh as I lit my cigarette.

"You mustn't get fanciful," I declared. "Men die every day, you know,

and I fancy that this one was on his last legs. Good-night."

Her lips parted as though in an answering greeting, but it was inaudible. As I looked round at the top of the street I saw her still standing there in the little flood of yellow light, gazing across towards the old market hall.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WONDERFUL OFFER.

On my little table lay the letter I expected, large, square and white. I tore it open with trembling fingers. The handwriting was firm and yet delicate. I knew at once whose it was.

"ROWCHESTER, Tuesday.

"DEAR MR. DUCAIN: My father wishes me to say that he and Lord Chelsford will call upon you to-morrow morning, between ten and eleven o'clock. With best regards, I am,

"Yours sincerely,
"ANGELA HARBERLY."

The letter slipped from my hands onto the table. Lord Chelsford was a cabinet minister and a famous man. What could he have to do with any appointment which the duke might offer me? I read the few words over and over again.

The handwriting, the very faint perfume which seemed to steal out of the envelope, a moment's swift retrospective thought, and my fancy had conjured her into actual life. She was there in the room with me, slim and shadowy, with her quiet voice and movements, and with that haunting, doubtful look in her dark eyes. What had she meant by that curious warning? What was the knowledge or the fear which inspired it? If one could only understand!

I sat down in my chair and tried to read, but the effort was useless. Directly opposite to me was that black uncircled window. Every time I looked up it seemed to become once more the frame for a white evil face.

At last I could bear it no longer. I rose and left the house.

I wandered capless across the marshes to where the wet seaweed lay strewn

about, and the long waves came rolling shorewards; a wilderness now indeed of gray mists, of dark, silent tongues of sea-water cleaving the land. There was no wind—no other sound than the steadfast, monotonous lapping of the waves upon the sands.

Along that road he had come; the faintly burning light upon my table showed where he had pressed his face against the window. Then he had wandered on, past the storm-bent tree at the turn of the road pointing landwards. A few yards farther was the creek from which we had dragged him.

The events of the night struggled to reconstruct themselves in my mind, and I fought against their slow coalescence. I did not wish to remember—to believe.

In my heart I felt that for some hidden reason Ray was my friend. This visit of the duke's, with whatever it might portend, was without doubt inspired by him. And, on the other hand, there was the warning of Lady Angela, so earnestly expressed, so solemn, almost sad. How could I see light through all these things? How could I hope to understand?

The duke came punctually, spruce and debonair, a small rose in his buttonhole, his wizened cheeks aglow with the smart of the stinging east wind.

With him came Lord Chelsford, whose face and figure were familiar enough to me from the pages of the illustrated papers. Dark, spare and tall, he spoke seldom, but I felt all the while the merciless investigation of his searching eyes.

The duke, on the other hand, seemed to have thrown aside some part of his customary reserve. He spoke at greater length and with more freedom than I had heard him.

"You see, Mr. Ducaine," he began, "I am not a man who makes idle promises. I am here to offer you employment, if you are open to accept a post of some importance, and also, to be frank with you, of some danger."

"If I am qualified for the post, your grace," I answered, "I shall be only too willing to do my best. But you must

excuse me if I express exactly what is in my mind. I am almost a stranger to you. I am a complete stranger to Lord Chelsford. How can you rely upon my trustworthiness? You must have so many young men to choose from who are personally known to you. Why do you come to me?"

The duke smiled grimly.

"In the first place," he said, "we are only strangers from the personal point of view, which is possibly an advantage. I have in my pocket a close record of your days since you entered the university. I know those who have been your friends, your tastes, how you have spent your time. Don't be foolish, young sir," he added, sharply, as he saw the color rise in my cheeks; "you will have a trust reposed in you such as few men have ever borne before. This prying into your life is from no motives of private curiosity. Wait until you hear the importance of the things which I am going to say to you."

I was impressed into silence.

The duke continued:

"You have heard, my young friend," he said, "of the committee of national defense?"

"I have read of it," I answered.

"Good! This committee has been formed and sanctioned by the war office in consequence of the shocking revelations of inefficiency which came to light during the recent war. It occurred to the prime minister, as I dare say it did to most of the thinking men in the country, that if our unreadiness to take the offensive was so obvious, it was possible that our defensive precautions had also been neglected. A board was therefore formed to act independently of all existing institutions, and composed chiefly of military and naval men. The commander-in-chief, Lord Chelsford, Col. Ray and myself are among the members. Our mandate is to keep our attention solely fixed upon the defenses of the country, to elaborate different schemes for repelling different methods of attack, and, in short, to make ourselves responsible to the country for the safety of the empire. Every harbor on the south and east coast is supposed

to be known to us, every yard of railway feeding the seaports from London, all the secret fortifications and places, south of London, capable of being held by inferior forces. The mobilization of troops to any one point has been gone thoroughly into, and every possible movement and combination of the fleet. These are only a few of the things which have become our care, but they are sufficient for the purpose of illustration. The importance of this board must be apparent to you; also the importance of absolute secrecy as regards its doings and movements."

I was fascinated by the greatness of the subject. However, I answered him as quickly as possible, and emphatically.

"The board," the duke continued, "has been meeting in London. For the last few months we have had business of the utmost importance on hand. But on January 10th; that is, just six weeks ago, we came to a full stop. The commander-in-chief had no alternative but temporarily to dissolve the assembly. We found ourselves in a terrible and disastrous position. Lord Ronald Matheson had been acting as secretary for us. We met always with locked doors, and the names of the twelve members of the board are the most honored in England. Yet twenty-four hours after our meetings a verbatim report of them, with full particulars of all our schemes, was in the hands of the French secret service."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, startled for the moment out of my respectful silence.

The duke himself seemed affected by the revelation which he had made. He sat forward in his chair with pucker'd brows and bent head. His voice, which had been growing lower and lower, had sunk almost to a whisper. It seemed to me that he made a sign to Lord Chelsford to continue. Almost for the first time the man who had done little since his entrance save watch me, spoke.

"My own political career, Mr. Ducaine," he said, "has been a long one, but I have never before found myself confronted with such a situation. Even you can doubtless realize its effect. The whole good of our work is undone. If

we cannot recommence, and with different results, I am afraid, as an Englishman, to say what may happen. War between England and France to-day would be like a great game of chess between two masters of equal strength—one having a secret knowledge of his opponent's each ensuing move. You can guess what the end of that would be. Our only hope is at once to reconstruct our plans. We are hard at it now by day and by night, but the time has arrived when we can go no further without a meeting, and the actual committal to paper and diagram of our new schemes. We have discussed the whole matter most carefully, and we have come to the following decision: We have reduced the number of the board by half, those who have resigned, with certain exceptions, having done so by ballot. We have decided that instead of holding our meetings at the war office they shall take place down here at the duke's house, and, so far as possible, secretly. Then, as regards the secretaryship. No shadow of suspicion rests upon Lord Ronald any more than upon his predecessors; but, as you may have read in the newspapers, he has temporarily lost his reason owing to the shock, and has been obliged to go to a private home. We have decided to engage some one absolutely without political connections, and whose detachment from political life must be complete. You have had a warm advocate in Col. Mostyn Ray, and, subject to some stringent and absolute conditions, I may say that we have decided to offer you the post."

I looked from one to the other. I have no doubt that I looked as bewildered as I felt.

"I am a complete stranger to all of you," I murmured. "I am not deserving in any way of such a position."

Lord Chelsford smiled.

"You underrate yourself, young man," he said, dryly; "or your college professors have wandered from the truth. Still, your surprise is natural, I admit. I will explain a little further. Our choice is more limited than you might think. At least fifty names were

proposed, all of them of young men of the highest character. Each one, however, had some possibly doubtful relative or association or custom in life. It is evident that there is treachery somewhere in the very highest quarters. These young men were sure to be brought into contact with it. Now it was Ray's idea to seek for some one wholly outside the diplomatic world, living in a spot remote from London, with as few friends as possible, who would have no sentimental objections to the surveillance of detectives. You appear to us to be suitable."

"It is a wonderful offer!" I exclaimed.

"In a sense it is," Lord Chelsford continued. "The remuneration, of course, will be high, but the post itself may not be a permanency, and you will live all the time at high pressure. The duke will place a small house at your disposal, and it will be required that you form no new acquaintances without reference to him, nor must you leave this place on any account without permission. You will virtually be a prisoner, and if certain of my suspicions are correct you may even find the post one of great physical danger. On the other hand, you will have a thousand a year salary, and a sum of five thousand pounds in two years' time if all is well."

Excitement seemed to have steadied my nerves. I forgot all the minor tragedies which had been real enough things to face only a few hours ago. I spoke calmly and decisively.

"I accept, Lord Chelsford," I said. "I shall count my life a small thing, indeed, against my fidelity."

He drummed idly with his forefinger upon the table. His eyes were wandering around the room absently. His face was calm and expressionless.

"Very well, then," he said, "my business here is settled. I shall leave it with the duke to acquaint you with the practical details of your work and our arrangement."

He rose to his feet. The duke glanced at his watch.

"You have only just time for the train," he remarked. "The car shall take you there. I prefer to walk back,

and I have something further to say to Mr. Ducaine."

Lord Chelsford took leave of me briefly, and the duke, after accompanying him outside, returned to his former seat. I ventured upon an incoherent attempt to express my gratitude, which he at once waved aside. He leaned over the table, and he fixed his eyes steadfastly upon me.

"I am able now," he said, "to ask you a question postponed from the other day. It is concerning the man who was found dead in the creek."

His merciless eyes noted my start.

"Ah!" he continued. "I can see that you know something. I have my suspicions about this man. You can now understand my interest when I hear of strangers in the neighborhood. I do not believe that he was a derelict from the sea. Do you?"

"No," I answered.

"Am I right," he said, "in presuming that you know he was not."

"I know that he was not," I admitted.

His fingers ceased their beating upon the table. His face became white and masklike.

"Go on," he said.

"I know that he came through Brasster, and he asked for me. He looked in through the window of my cottage when Col. Ray was with me. I saw him no more after that until I found him dead."

"Ray left you after you had seen this man's face at the window?"

"Yes."

"The wounds about the man's head and body. If he was not thrown up by the sea, can you explain them?"

"No," I answered, with a shudder.

"At the inquest it was not mentioned, I think, that he had been seen in the village?"

"It was not," I admitted. "Most of the people were at Col. Ray's lecture. He spoke to one girl, a Miss Moyat."

"She did not give evidence."

"I thought," I said, in a low tone, "that she had better not."

"Did you hear anything after Ray left?" he asked, suddenly.

I could have cried out, but my tongue seemed dry in my throat.

"There was a sound," I muttered, "I fancied that it was a cry. But I could not tell. The wind was blowing, and the sea and rain! No, I could not tell."

He rose up.

"You appear," he said, dryly, "to have discretion. Cultivate it! It is a great gift. I shall look for you at eleven o'clock in the morning. I am having a large house party this week, and among them will be our friends."

He left me without any further farewell, and turned slowly homewards. When he reached the bend in the road he paused, and remained there for several moments motionless. His eyes were fixed upon the small creek. He seemed to be measuring the distance between it and the road. He was still lingering there when I closed the door.

CHAPTER IX.

TREACHERY.

The sunlight was streaming through the window when at last my pen ceased to move. I rubbed my eyes and looked out in momentary amazement. Morning had already broken across the sea. My green-shaded lamp was burning with a sickly light. The moon had turned pale and colorless while I sat at my desk.

I stretched myself, and, lighting a cigarette, commenced to collect my papers. Immediately a dark figure rose from a couch in the farther corner of the room and approached me.

"Can I get you anything, sir?"

I turned in my chair. The manservant whom the duke had put in charge of the "Brand," my present habitation, and who remained with me always in the room while I worked, stood at my elbow.

"I would like some coffee, Grooton," I said. "I am going to walk up to the house with these papers, and I shall want a bath and some breakfast directly I get back."

"Very good, sir. It shall be ready."

I folded up the sheets and maps, and placing them in an oilskin case, tied them round my body under my waist-

coat. Then I withdrew all the cartridges save one from the revolver which had lain all night within easy reach of my right hand, and slipped it into my pocket.

"Coffee ready, Grooton?"

"In one moment, sir."

I watched him bending over the stove, pale, dark-visaged, with the subdued manners and voice which mark the aristocracy of servitude. My employer's confidence in him must be immense, for while he watched over me I was practically in his power.

"Have you been long with the duke, Grooton?" I asked him.

"Twenty-one years, sir. I left his grace to go to Lord Chelsford, who found me some work in London."

"Secret service work, wasn't it, Grooton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Interesting?"

"Some parts of it very interesting, sir."

I nodded, and drank my coffee. Grooton was watching me with an air of respectful interest.

"You will pardon my remarking it, sir, but I hope you will try and get some sleep during the day. You are very pale this morning, sir."

I looked at the glass, and was startled at my own reflection. This was only my third day, and the responsibilities of my work were heavy upon me. My cheeks were sunken and there were black rings around my eyes.

"I will lie down when I come back, Grooton," I answered.

Outside, the fresh morning wind came like a sudden sweet tonic to my jaded nerves. I paused for a moment to face bareheaded the rush of it from the sea. As I stood there, drinking it in, I became suddenly aware of light, approaching footsteps. Some one was coming towards the cottage from the park.

I did not immediately turn my head, but every nerve in my body seemed to stiffen into quivering curiosity. The pathway was a private one leading from the house only to the "Brand," and down the cliff to Braster. It was barely

seven o'clock, and the footsteps were no laboring man's. I think that I knew very well who it was that came so softly down the cone-strewn path.

We faced one another with little of the mask of surprise. She came like a shadow, flitting between the slender tree trunks out into the sunshine, where for a moment she seemed wan and white. Her dark eyes flashed a greeting at me. I stood, cap in hand, before her. It was the first time we had met since I had taken up my abode at the "Brand."

"Good-morning, Mr. Ducaine," she said: "You need not look at me as though I were a ghost. I always walk before breakfast in the country."

"There is no better time," I answered.

"You look as though you had been up all night," she remarked.

"I had work to finish," I told her.

She nodded.

"So you would have none of my advice, Mr. Secretary," she said, softly, coming a little nearer to me. "You are already installed."

"Already at work," I asserted.

She glanced towards the "Brand."

"I hope that you are comfortable," she said. "A couple of hours is short notice in which to make a place habitable."

"Grooton is a magician," I told her. "He has arranged everything."

"He is a wonderful servant," she said, thoughtfully.

A white-winged bird floated over our heads, and drifted away skywards. She followed it with her eyes.

"You wonder at seeing me so early," she murmured. "Don't you think that it is worth while? Nothing ever seems so sweet as this first morning breeze."

I bowed gravely. She was standing bareheaded now at the edge of the cliff, watching the flight of the bird. It was delightful to see the faint pink come back to her cheeks with the sting of the salt wind. Nevertheless, I had an idea in my mind that it was not wholly for her health's sake that Lady Angela walked abroad so early.

"Tell me," she said, presently, "have you had a visitor this morning?"

"What, at this hour?" I exclaimed.

"There are other early risers besides you and me," she said. "The spinney gate was open, so some one has passed through."

I shook my head.

"I have not seen or heard a soul," I told her. "I have just finished some work, and I am on my way up to the house with it."

"You really mean it?" she persisted.

"Of course I do," I answered her. "Grooton is the only person I have spoken to for at least nine hours. Why do you ask?"

She hesitated.

"My window looks this way," she said, "and I fancied that I saw some one cross the park while I was dressing. The spinney gate was certainly open."

"Then I fancy that it has been open all night," I declared, "for, to the best of my belief, no one has passed through it save yourself. May I walk with you back to the house, Lady Angela? There is something which I should very much like to ask you."

She replaced her hat, which she had been carrying in her hand. I stood watching her deft white fingers flashing among the thick, silky coils of her hair. The extreme slimness of her figure seemed accentuated by her backward poise. Yet perhaps I had never before properly appreciated its perfect gracefulness.

"I was going farther along the cliffs," she said, "but I will walk some of the way back with you. One minute."

She stood on the extreme edge, and, shading her eyes with her hand, she looked up and down the broad expanse of sand—a great, untenanted wilderness. I wondered for whom or what she was looking, but I asked no question. In a few moments she rejoined me, and we turned inland.

"Well," she said, "what is it that you wish to say?"

"Lady Angela," I began, "a few weeks ago there was no one whose prospects were less hopeful than mine. Thanks to your father and Col. Ray all that is changed. To-day I have a position I am proud of, and important work. Yet I cannot help always remembering

this: I am holding a post which you warned me against accepting."

"Well?"

"I am very curious," I said. "I have never understood your warning. I believe that you were in earnest. Was it that you believed me incapable or untruthworthy, or—"

"You appear to me," she murmured, "to be rather a curious person."

I bent forward and looked into her face. There was in her wonderful eyes a glint of laughter which became her well. She walked with slow, graceful ease, her hands behind her, her head almost on a level with my own. I found myself studying her with a new pleasure.

Then our eyes met, and I looked away, momentarily confused. Was it my fancy, or was there a certain measure of rebuke in her cool surprise, a faint indication of her desire that I should remember that she was the Lady Angela Harberly, and I her father's secretary?

I bit my lip. She should not catch me offending again, I determined.

"You must forgive me," I said, stiffly, "but your warning seemed a little singular. If you do not choose to gratify my curiosity, it is of no consequence."

"Since you disregarded it," she remarked, lifting her dress from the dew-laden grass onto which we had emerged, "it does not matter, does it? Only you are very young, and you know little of the world. Lord Ronald was your predecessor, and he is in a lunatic asylum. No one knows what lies behind certain unfortunate things which have happened during the last months. There is a mystery which is as yet unsolved."

I smiled.

"In your heart you are thinking," I said, "that such an unsophisticated person as myself will be an easy prey to whatever snares may be laid for me. Is it not so?"

She looked at me with uplifted eyebrows.

"Others of more experience have

been worsted," she remarked, calmly. "Why not you?"

"If that is a serious question," I said, "I will answer it. Perhaps my very inexperience will be my best friend."

"Yes?"

"Those before me," I continued, "have thought that they knew whom to trust. I, knowing no one, shall trust no one."

"Not even me?" she asked, half turning her head towards me.

"Not even you," I answered, firmly.

A man's figure suddenly appeared on the left. I looked at him puzzled, wondering whence he had come.

"Here is your good friend, Col. Mostyn Ray," she remarked, with a note of banter in her tone. "What about him?"

"Not even Col. Mostyn Ray," I answered. "The notes which I take with me from each meeting are to be read over from my elaboration at the next. Nobody is permitted to hold a pen or to make a note while they are being read. Afterwards, I have your father's promise, that not even he will ask for even a cursory glance at them. I deliver them sealed to Lord Chelsford."

Ray came up to us. His dark eyebrows were drawn close together, and I noticed that his boots were clogged with sand. He had the appearance of a man who had been walking far and fast.

"You keep up your good habits, Lady Angela," he said, raising his cap.

"It is my only good one, so I am loath to let it go," she answered. "If you were as gallant as you appear to be energetic," she added, glancing at his boots, "you would have stopped when I called after you, and taken me for a walk."

His eyes shot dark lightnings at her.

"I did not hear you call," he said.

"You had the appearance of a man who intended to hear nothing and see nothing," she remarked, coolly. "Never mind! There will be no breakfast for an hour yet. You shall take me on to Braster Hill. Come!"

They left me at a turn in the path. I saw their heads close together in earnest conversation. I went on towards the house.

I entered by the back, and made my

way across the great hall, which was still invaded by domestics with brushes and brooms. Taking a small key from my watch chain, I unfastened the door of a room almost behind the staircase, and pushed it open. The curtains were drawn, and the room itself, therefore, almost in darkness. I carefully locked myself in, and turned up the electric light.

The apartment was a small one, and contained only a few pieces of heavy, antique furniture. Behind the curtains were iron shutters. In one corner was a strong safe. I walked to it, and for the first time I permitted myself to think of the combination word. Slowly I fitted it together, and the great door swung open.

There were several padlocked dispatch boxes, and, on a shelf above, a bundle of folded papers. I took this bundle carefully out, and laid it on the table before me. I was on the point of undoing the red tape with which it was tied, when my fingers became suddenly rigid. I stared at the packet with wide-open eyes. I felt my breath come short and my brain reeling. The papers were there sure enough, but it was not at them that I was looking. It was the double knot in the pink tape which fascinated me.

CHAPTER X.

AN EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE.

I have no exact recollection of how long I spent in that little room. After a while I closed the door of the safe, and reset the combination lock with trembling fingers. Then I searched all round, but could find no traces of any recent intruder. I undid the heavy shutters, and let in a stream of sunshine.

Outside, Ray and Lady Angela were strolling up and down the terrace. I watched the latter with fascinated eyes. It was from her that this strange warning had come to me, this warning which as yet was only imperfectly explained. What did she know? Whom did she suspect? Was it possible that she, a

mere child, had even the glimmering of a suspicion as to the truth?

My eyes followed her every movement. She walked with all the light-some grace to which her young limbs and breeding entitled her, her head elegantly poised on her slender neck, her face mostly turned towards her companion, to whom she was talking earnestly.

Even at this distance I seemed to catch the inspiring flash of her dark eyes, to follow the words which fell from her lips so gravely.

And as I watched a new idea came to me. I turned slowly away, and went in search of the duke.

I found him sitting fully dressed in an anteroom leading from his bedroom, with a great pile of letters before him, and an empty post bag. He was leaning forward, his elbow upon the table, his head resting upon his right hand.

Engrossed as I was with my own terrible discovery, I was yet powerfully impressed by his unfamiliar appearance.

In the clear light which came flooding in through the north window he seemed to me older, and his face more deeply lined, than any of my previous impressions of him had suggested. His eyes were fixed upon the mass of correspondence before him, most of which was as yet unopened, and his expression was one of absolute aversion.

At my entrance he looked up inquiringly.

"What do you want, Ducaine?" he asked.

"I am sorry to have disturbed your grace," I answered. "I have come to place my resignation in your hands."

His face was expressive enough in its frowning contempt, but he said nothing for a moment, during which his eyes met mine mercilessly.

"So you find the work too hard, eh?" he asked.

"The work is just what I should have chosen, your grace," I answered. "I like hard work, and I expected it. The trouble is that I have succeeded no better than Lord Ronald."

My words were evidently a shock to him. He half opened his lips, but closed

them again. I saw the hand which he raised to his forehead shake.

"What do you mean, Ducaine? Speak out, man."

"The safe in the study has been opened during the night," I said. "Our map of the secret fortifications on the Surrey downs and plans for a camp at Guildford have been examined."

"How do you know this?"

"I tied the red tape round them in a peculiar way. It has been undone and retied. The papers have been put back in a different order."

The duke was without doubt agitated. He rose from his chair and paced the room restlessly.

"You are sure of what you say, Ducaine?" he demanded, turning, and facing me suddenly.

"Absolutely sure, your grace," I answered.

He turned away from me.

"In my own house, under my own roof," I heard him mutter. "Good God!"

I had scarcely believed him capable of so much feeling. When he resumed his seat and former attitude I could see that his face was almost gray.

"This is terrible news," he said. "I am not at all sure, though, Mr. Ducaine, that any blame can attach itself to you."

"Your grace," I answered, "there were three men only who knew the secret of that combination. One is yourself, another Col. Ray, the third myself. I set the lock last night. I opened it this morning. I ask you, in the name of common sense, upon whom the blame is likely to fall? If I remain this will happen again. I cannot escape suspicion. It is not reasonable."

"The word was a common one," the duke said, half to himself. "Some one may have guessed it."

"Your grace," I said, "is it likely that anyone would admit the possibility of such a thing?"

"It may have been overheard."

"It has never been spoken," I reminded him. "It was written down, glanced at by all of us, and destroyed."

The duke nodded.

"You are right," he admitted. "The

inference is positive enough. The safe has been opened between the hours of ten at night and seven o'clock this morning by—”

“By either myself, Col. Ray, or your grace,” I said.

“I am not sure that I am prepared to admit that,” the duke objected, quietly.

“It is inevitable!” I declared.

“Only the very young use that word,” the duke said, dryly.

“I spoke only of what others must say,” I answered.

“It is a *cul de sac*, I admit,” the duke said. “Nevertheless, Mr. Ducaine, I am not prepared without consideration to accept your resignation. I cannot see that our position would be improved in any way, and in my own mind I may add that I hold you absolved from suspicion.”

I held myself a little more upright. The duke spoke without enthusiasm, but with conviction.

“Your grace is very kind,” I answered, gratefully, “but there are the others. They know nothing of me. It is inevitable that I should become an object of suspicion to them.”

The duke looked thoughtfully for several moments at the table before him. Then he looked up at me.

“Ducaine,” he said, “I will tell you what I propose. You have done your duty in reporting this thing to me. Your duty ends there—mine begins. The responsibility, therefore, for our future course of action remains with me. You, I presume, are prepared to admit this.”

“Certainly, your grace,” I answered.

“I see no useful purpose to be gained,” the duke continued, “in spreading this thing about. I believe that we shall do better by keeping our own counsel. You and I can work secretly in the matter. I may have some suggestions to make when I have considered it more fully; but for the present I propose that we treat the matter as a hallucination of yours. We shall hear in due course if this stolen information goes across the water. If it does—well, we shall know how to act.”

“You mean this?” I asked, breathlessly. “Forgive me, your grace, but it

means so much to me. You believe that we are justified?”

“Why not?” the duke asked, coldly. “It is I who am your employer. It is I who am responsible to the country for these things. You are responsible only to me. I choose that you remain. I choose that you speak of this matter only when I bid you speak.”

To me it was relief immeasurable. The duke's manner was precise, even cold. Yet I felt that he believed in me. I scarcely doubted but that he had suspicions of his own. I, at any rate, was not involved in them. I could have wrung him by the hand but for the inappropriateness of such a proceeding.

So far as he was concerned, I could see that the matter was already done with. His attention was beginning to wander to the mass of letters before him.

“Would you allow me to help your grace with your correspondence,” I suggested. “I have no work at present.”

The duke shook his head impatiently.

“I thank you,” he said. “My man of business will be here this morning, and he will attend to them. I will not detain you, Mr. Ducaine.”

I turned to leave the room, but found myself face to face with a young man in the act of entering it.

“Blenavon!” the duke exclaimed.

“How are you, sir?” the newcomer answered. “Sorry I didn't arrive in time to see you last night. We motored from King's Lynn, and the whole of this respectable household was in bed.”

I knew at once who he was. The duke looked towards me.

“Ducaine,” he said, “this is my son, Lord Blenavon.”

Lord Blenavon's smile was evidently meant to be friendly, but his expression belied it. He was slightly taller than his father, and his cast of features was altogether different. His cheeks were pale, almost sunken, his eyes were too close together, and they had the dimness of the *roué* or the habitual dyspeptic. His lips were too full, his chin too receding, and he was almost bald.

“How are you, Mr. Ducaine?” he said. “Awful hour to be out of bed,

isn't it? and all for the slaying of a few fat and innocent birds. Let me see, wasn't I at Magdalen with you?"

"I came up in your last year," I reminded him.

"Ah, yes, I remember," he drawled. "Terrible close worker you were, too. Are you breakfasting downstairs, sir?"

"I think that I had better," the duke said. "I suppose you brought some men with you?"

"Half a dozen," Lord Blenavon answered, "including his royal highness."

The duke thrust all his letters into his drawer, and locked them up with a little exclamation of relief.

"I will come down with you," he said. "Mr. Ducaine, you will join us."

I would have excused myself, for indeed I was weary, and the thought of a bath and rest at home was more attractive. But the duke had a way of expressing his wishes in a manner which it was scarcely possible to mistake, and I gathered that he desired me to accept his invitation. We all descended the stairs together.

CHAPTER XI.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS.

The long dining room was almost filled with a troop of guests who had arrived on the previous day. Most of the men were gathered round the huge sideboard, on which was a formidable array of silver-covered hot-water dishes. Places were laid along the flower-decked table for thirty or forty. I stood apart for a few moments while the duke was greeting some of his guests. Ray, who was sitting alone, motioned me to a place by him.

"Come and sit here, Ducaine," he said; "that is," he added, with a sudden sarcastic gleam in his dark eyes, "unless you still have what the novelists call an unconquerable antipathy to me. I don't want to rob you of your appetite."

"I did not expect to see you down here again so soon, Col. Ray," I answered, gravely. "I congratulate you upon your nerves."

Ray laughed softly to himself.

"You would have me go shuddering past the fatal spot, I suppose, with shaking knees and averted head, eh? On the contrary, I have been down on the sands for more than an hour this morning, and have returned with an excellent appetite."

I looked at him curiously.

"I saw you returning," I said. "Your boots looked as though you had been wading in the wet sand. You were not there without a purpose."

"I was not," he admitted. "I seldom do anything without a purpose."

For a moment he abandoned the subject. He proceeded calmly with his breakfast, and addressed a few remarks to a man across the table, a man with short cropped hair and beard, and a shooting dress of somber black.

"You are quite right," he said, turning towards me suddenly. "I had a purpose in going there. I thought that the gentleman whose untimely fate has enlisted your sympathies might have dropped something which would have been useful to me."

For the moment I forgot this man's kindness to me. I looked at him with a shudder.

"If you are in earnest," I said, "I trust that you were unsuccessful."

I fancied there was that in his glance which suggested the St. Bernard looking down on the terrier, and I chafed at it.

"It would have been better for you," he said, grimly, "had my search met with better result."

"For me?" I repeated.

"For you! Yes! The man came to see you. If he had been alive you might have been in his toils by now. He was a very cunning person, and those who sent him were devils."

"How do you know these things?" I asked, amazed.

"From the letters which I ripped from his coat," he answered.

"He came to Braster to see me, then?" I exclaimed.

"Precisely."

"And the letters which you took from him—were they addressed to me?"

"They were."

I was getting angry.

"I think," I said, "you will admit that I have a right to them."

"Not a shadow of a doubt of it," he answered. "In fact, it was so obvious that I destroyed them."

"Destroyed my letters!"

"Precisely! I chose that course rather than allow them to fall into your hands."

"You admit, then," I said, "that I had a right to them?"

"Indubitably. But they do not exist."

"You read them, without doubt. You can acquaint me with their contents."

"Some day," he said, "I probably shall. But not yet. Believe me or not, as you choose, but there are certain positions in which ignorance is the only possible safe state. You are in such a position at the present moment."

"Are you," I asked, "my moral guardian?"

"I have, at least," he said, "incurred certain responsibilities on your behalf. You could no longer hold your present post and be in communication with the sender of those letters."

My anger died away despite myself. The man's strength and honesty of purpose were things which I could not bring myself to doubt. I continued my breakfast in silence.

"By the by," he remarked, presently, "you, too, my young friend, were out early this morning."

"I was writing all night," I answered. "I had documents to put in the safe."

He shot a quick, searching glance at me.

"You have been to the safe this morning, then?"

I answered him with a composure at which I inwardly marveled.

"Certainly! It was the object of my coming here."

"You entered the room with the duke. Was he in the study at that hour?"

"No, I went upstairs to him. I had a question to ask."

"And you have met Lord Blenavon? What do you think of him?"

"We were at Magdalen together for a term," I answered. "He was good enough to remember me."

Ray smiled, but he did not speak another word to me all the breakfast time. Once I made a remark to him, and his reply was curt, almost rude. I left the room a few minutes afterwards, and came face to face in the hall with Lady Angela.

"I am glad, Mr. Ducaine," she remarked, "that your early morning labors have given you an appetite. You have been in to breakfast, have you not?"

"Your father was good enough to insist upon it," I answered.

"You have seen him already this morning, then?"

"For a few minutes only," I explained. "I went up to his room."

"I trust so far that everything is going on satisfactorily?" she inquired, raising her eyes to mine.

I did not answer her at once. I was engaged in marveling at the wonderful pallor of her cheeks.

"So far as I am concerned, I think so," I said. "Forgive me, Lady Angela," I added, "but I think that you must have walked too far this morning. You are very pale."

"I am tired," she admitted.

There was a lounge close at hand. She moved slowly towards it, and sat down. There was no spoken invitation, but I understood that I was permitted to remain with her.

"Do you know," she said, looking round to make sure that we were alone, "I dread these meetings of the council. I have always the feeling that something terrible will happen. I knew Lord Ronald very well, and his mother was one of my dearest friends. I am sure that he was perfectly innocent. And to-day he is in a madhouse. They say that he will never recover."

I did not wish to speak about these things, even with Lady Angela. I tried to lead the conversation into other channels, but she absolutely ignored my attempt.

"There is something about it all so grimly mysterious," she said. "It seems almost as though there must be a traitor, if not in the council itself, in some special and privileged position."

She looked up at me as though asking for confirmation of her views. I shook my head.

"Lady Angela," I said, "would you mind if I abstained from expressing any opinion at all? It is a subject which I feel it is scarcely right for me to discuss."

She looked at me with wide-open eyes, a dash of insolence mingled with her surprise. I do not know what she was about to say, for at that moment the young man with the somber shooting suit and closely cropped hair paused for a moment on his way out of the breakfast room. He glanced at me, and I received a brief impression of an unwholesome-looking person with protuberant eyeballs, thin lashes and supercilious mouth.

"I trust that the day's entertainment will include something more than a glimpse of Lady Angela," he said, with a low bow.

She raised her eyes. It seemed to me, who was watching her closely, that she shrank a little back in her seat. I was sure that she shared my instinctive dislike of the man.

"I think not," she said. "Perhaps you are expecting me to come down with the lunch and compliment you all upon your prowess."

"It would be delightful!" he murmured.

She shook her head.

"There are too many of you, and I am too few," she said, lightly. "Besides, shooting is one of the few sports with which I have no sympathy at all. I shall try and get somewhere away from the sound of your guns."

"I myself," he said, "am not what you call a devotee of the sport. I wonder if part of the day one might play truant. Would Lady Angela take pity upon an unentertained guest?"

"I should find it a shocking nuisance," she said, coolly. "Besides, it would not be allowed. You will find that when my father has once marshalled you, escape is a thing not to be dreamed of. Everyone says that he is a perfect martinet where a day's shooting is concerned."

He smiled enigmatically.

"We shall see," he remarked, as he turned away.

Lady Angela watched him disappear.

"Do you know who that is?" she asked me.

I shook my head.

"Some one French, very French," I remarked.

"He should be," she remarked. "That is Prince Henri de Malors. He represents the hopes of the Royalists in France."

"It is very interesting," I murmured. "May I ask is he an old family friend?"

"Our families have been connected by marriage," she answered. "He and Blenavon saw a great deal of one another in Paris, very much to the disadvantage of my brother, I should think. I believe that there was some trouble at the foreign office about it."

"It is very interesting," I repeated.

"Blenavon was very foolish," she declared. "It was obviously a most indiscreet friendship for him, and Paris was his first appointment. But I must go and speak to some of these people."

She rose and left me a little abruptly. I escaped by one of the side entrances, and hurried back to my cottage.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ACCIDENT.

The prince accepted my most comfortable easy-chair with an air of graceful condescension. Lady Angela had already seated herself. It was late in the afternoon, and Grooton was busy in the room behind, preparing my tea.

"The prince did not care to shoot to-day," Lady Angela explained, "and I have been showing him the neighborhood. Incidentally, I am dying for some tea, and the prince has smoked all his cigarettes."

The prince raised his hand in polite expostulation, but he accepted a cigarette with a little sigh of relief.

"You have found a very lonely spot for your dwelling house, Mr. Ducaine," he said. "You English are so fond of solitude."

"It suits me very well," I answered, "for just now I have a great deal of work to do. I am safely away from all distractions here."

Lady Angela smiled at me.

"Not quite so safe, perhaps, Mr. Ducaine, as you fondly imagined," she remarked. "I am afraid that we disturbed you. You look awfully busy."

She glanced towards my writing table. It was covered with papers, and a map of the southern counties leaned up against the wall. The prince also was glancing curiously in the same direction.

"I have finished my work for the day," I said, rising. "If you will permit me, I will put it away."

Grooton brought in tea. The prince was politely curious as to the subject-matter of those closely written sheets of paper.

"You are perhaps interested in literature, Mr. Ducaine," he remarked.

"Immensely," I answered, waving my hand towards my bookshelves.

"But you yourself—you no doubt write?"

"Oh, one tries," I answered, pouring out the tea.

"It may be permitted, then, to wish you success," he remarked, dryly.

"You are very good," I answered.

Lady Angela calmly interposed. The prince ate buttered toast and drank tea with a bland affectation of enjoyment. They rose almost immediately afterwards.

"You are coming up to the house this evening, Mr. Ducaine?" Lady Angela asked.

"I am due there now," I answered. "If you will allow me, I will walk back with you."

The prince touched my arm as Lady Angela passed out before us.

"I am anxious, Mr. Ducaine," he said, looking me in the face, "for a few minutes' private conversation with you. I shall perhaps be fortunate enough to find you at home to-morrow."

He did not wait for my answer, for Lady Angela looked back, and he hastened to her side. He seemed in no hurry, however, to leave the place. The

evening was cloudy and unusually dark. A north wind was tearing through the grove of stunted firs, and the roar of the incoming sea filled the air with muffled thunder. The prince looked about him with a little grimace.

"It is indeed a lonely spot," he remarked. "One can imagine anything happening here. Did I not hear of a tragedy only the other day—a man found dead?"

"If you have a taste for horrors, prince," I remarked, "you can see the spot from the edge of the cliff here."

The prince moved eagerly forward.

"I disclaim all such weakness," he said, "but the little account which I read, or did some one tell me of it?—ah, I forget; but it interested me."

I pointed downwards to where the creek-ritten marshes merged into the sands.

"It was there—a little to the left of the white palings," I said. "The man was supposed to have been cast up from the sea."

He measured the distance with his eye. I anticipated his remark.

"The tide is only halfway up now," I said, "and on that particular night there was a terrible gale."

"Nevertheless," he murmured, half to himself, "it is a long way? Was the man what you call identified, Mr. Ducaine?"

"No!"

"There were no letters or papers found upon him?"

"None."

The prince looked at me sharply.

"That," he said, softly, "was strange. Does it not suggest to you that he may have been robbed?"

"I had not thought of it," I answered. "The verdict, I believe, was simply found drowned."

"Found drowned," the prince repeated. "Ah! found drowned. By the by," he added, suddenly, "who did find him?"

"I did," I said, coolly.

"You?" The prince peered at me closely through the dim light. "That," he said, reflectively, "is interesting."

"You find it so interesting," I re-

marked, "that perhaps you could help to solve the question of the man's identity."

He seemed startled.

"I?" he exclaimed. "But, no. Why should you think that?"

I turned to join Lady Angela. He did not immediately follow.

"Why did you bring him?" I asked her, softly. "You had some reason."

"He was making inquiries about you," she answered, "secretly and openly. I thought you ought to know, and I could think of no other way of putting you on your guard."

"The Prince of Malors!" I murmured. "He surely would not stoop to play the spy."

She was silent, and moved a step or two farther away from the spot where he still stood as though absorbed. His angular figure was clearly defined through the twilight against the empty background of space. He was on the very verge of the cliff, almost looking over.

"I know very little about him myself," she said, hurriedly, "but I have heard the others talk, Lord Chelsford especially. He is a man, they say, with a twofold reputation. He has played a great part in the world of pleasure, almost a theatrical part; but, you know, the French people like that."

"It is true," I murmured. "They love their heroes decked in tinsel."

She nodded.

"They say that it is part of a pose, and that he has serious political ambitions. He contemplates always some great scheme which shall make him the idol, if only for a day, of the French mob. A day would be sufficient, for he would strike while—prince, be careful," she called out. "Ah!"

We heard a shrill cry, and we saw the prince sway on the verge of the cliff. He threw up his arms and clutched wildly at the air, but he was too late to save himself. We saw the ground crumble beneath his feet, and with a second cry of despair he disappeared.

Grooton, Lady Angela and I reached the edge of the cliff at about the same moment. We peered over in breathless

anxiety. Lady Angela clutched my arm, and for a moment I did not in the least care what had happened to the prince.

"Don't be frightened," I whispered. "The descent is not by any means sheer. He can't possibly have got to the bottom. I will clamber down and look for him."

She shuddered.

"Oh, you mustn't," she exclaimed. "It is not safe. How terrible it looks down there!"

I raised my voice and shouted. Almost immediately there came an answer.

"I am here, my friends, in the middle of a bush. I dare not move. It is so dark I cannot see where to put my foot. Can you lower me a lantern, and I will see if I can climb up?"

Grooton hastened back to the cottage.

"I think you will be all right," I cried out. "It is not half as steep as it looks."

"I believe," he answered, "that I can see a path up. But I will wait until the lantern comes."

The lantern arrived almost immediately. We lowered it to him by a rope, and he examined the face of the cliff.

"I think that I can get up," he cried out. "but I should like to help myself with the rope. Can you both hold it tightly?"

"All right," I answered. "we've got it."

He clambered up with surprising agility. But as he reached the edge of the cliff he groaned heavily.

"Are you hurt?" Lady Angela asked.

"It is my foot," he muttered, "my left foot. I twisted it in falling."

Grooton and I helped him to the cottage. He hobbled painfully along with tightly clinched lips.

"I shall have to ask for a pony cart to get up to the house, I am afraid," he said. "I am very sorry to give you so much trouble, Mr. Ducaine."

"The trouble is nothing," I answered, "but I am wondering how on earth you managed to fall over the cliff."

"I myself, I scarcely know," he answered, as he sipped the brandy which Grooton had produced. "I am subject to fits of giddiness, and one came over

me as I stood there looking down. I felt the ground sway, and remember no more. I am very sorry to give you all this trouble, but indeed I fear that I cannot walk."

"We will send you down a cart," I declared. "You will have rather a rough drive across the grass, but there is no other way."

"You are very kind," he declared. "I am in despair at my clumsiness."

I gave him my box of cigarettes. Lady Angela hesitated.

"I think," she said, "that I ought to stay with you, prince, while Mr. Ducaine goes up for the cart."

"Indeed, Lady Angela, you are very kind," he answered, "but I could not permit it. I regret to say that I am in some pain, and I have a weakness for being alone when I suffer. If I desire anything, Mr. Ducaine's servant will be at hand."

So we left him there. At any other time the prospect of that walk with Lady Angela would have filled me with joy. But from the first moment of leaving the cottage I was uneasy.

"What do you think of that man?" I asked her, abruptly. "I mean personally?"

"I hate him," she answered, coolly. "He is one of those creatures whose eyes and mouth, and something underneath his most respectful words, seem always to suggest offensive things. I find it very hard indeed to be civil to him."

"Do you happen to know what Col. Ray thinks of him?" I asked her.

"I have no special knowledge of Col. Ray's likes or dislikes," she answered.

"Forgive me," I said. "I thought that you and he were very intimate, and that you might know. I wonder whether he takes the prince seriously."

"Col. Ray is one of my best friends," she said, "but I am not in his confidence."

A slight reserve had crept into her tone. I stole a glance at her face; paler and more delicate than ever it seemed in the gathering darkness. Her lips were

firmly set, but her eyes were kind. A sudden desire for her sympathy weakened me.

"Lady Angela," I said, "I must talk to some one. I do not know whom to trust. I do not know who is honest. You are the only person whom I dare speak to at all."

She looked round cautiously. We were out of the plantation now, in the open park, where eavesdropping was impossible.

"You have a difficult post, Mr. Ducaine," she said, "and you will remember—"

"Oh, I remember," I interrupted. "You warned me not to take it. But think in what a position I was. I had no career, I was penniless. How could I throw away such a chance?"

"Something has happened—this morning, has it not?" she asked.

I nodded.

"Yes."

She waited for me to go on. She was deeply interested. I could hear her breath coming fast, though we were walking at a snail's pace. I longed to confide in her absolutely, but I dared not.

"Do not ask me to tell you what it was," I said. "The knowledge would only perplex and be a burden to you. It is all the time like poison in my brain."

We were walking very close together. I felt her fingers suddenly upon my arm and her soft breath upon my cheek.

"But if you do not tell me everything—how can you expect my sympathy, perhaps my help?"

"I may not ask you for either," I answered, sadly. "The knowledge of some things must remain between your father and myself."

"Between my father—and yourself!" she repeated.

I was silent, and then we both started apart. Behind us we could hear the sound of footsteps rapidly approaching, soft, quick footsteps, muffled and almost noiseless upon the spongy turf. We stood still.

BILTER'S BARGAIN

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

Author of "Winners, Knight-Errant," Etc.

The dispute that arose over the sale of a farm and the unexpected result of the controversy.

SI BILTER sat on the unpainted back stoop of his cottage with his head resting in his two hands.

The dejected expression on his face would have made the gloom of a stormy night seem sunshine by comparison.

A woman passing him with a pail of water stopped. Resting the pail on the ground, she said:

"Cheer up, father, it may not be as had as we think. There may be a living on the place."

"Livin'!" snorted the thin-faced farmer, without changing his attitude, "ef ther was a livin' do ye think I'd be settin' here? Kin we eat sand and clay? Kin we sell stones? I'll bet that agent down at the Forks is a laughin' at me fur a fool. Well, he kin. It's his turn now. But wait, Mandy! I've ben swindled out of all the savin's of a hard life. An' now, thinkin' to better us, I buy a place that won't raise snake grass. I'll kill him yit!"

Fired by the idea that he had been wrongly dealt with, the man rose. His six feet of roughly clad form unbent, and there was a determination in his eye that boded ill to that one who had won by unfair means his only possessions.

"Father, you won't. Just sit down and think it out. Anyhow it is ours, and no mortgage on it. We may be able to raise the creek and irrigate. At least once before we did that."

"Irrigate! Irrigate a sand heap? Well, Mandy!"

"I've thought about it, and while I

know we have been swindled, there may be a way out of it after all."

"But think of it, Mandy! If I can't make the first year pay, how'll I keep Lizzie where she is? The gal can't finish at school, an' that'll break her heart an' yours."

"Oh, hearts don't break so easy. Come, cheer up. I'll get supper now, and you'll feel better."

It was not long before the savory odor of bacon came floating out to him, and corn wafers were good, as he admitted to himself. They wouldn't starve, if it came to that.

The sound of a slowly traveling horse came from the side of the cottage. A well-groomed black mare came into sight, mounted by a tall and cheerful-looking young man.

"Stranger," he said, "may I ask for a bite to eat?"

"Stranger," replied Silas, "ye kin have anything in sight."

"You are welcome, sir," called out Mrs. Bilter. "Father is rather blue tonight. We've just moved here, you see, and things are not quite what they ought to be."

Before he dismounted the young man surveyed the place. He could see acres of land that his practiced eye told him was almost unsalable. Afar there was a scrubby growth of trees, and small fruit might do well on the sandy soil. But the work of preparing the farm would be stupendous.

"What under the sun the man wanted to buy this place for, I can't see," he said

to himself. Then he swung down at the stoop and tied the mare.

"My name is Tom Danket," he said, cheerily. "I think I can see that you have been caught. Came from farther East, eh?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bilter, laconically. "Wish I was back East ag'in."

"Supper's ready," called Mrs. Bilter, and Mr. Bilter stumped in, leading the more modernly clad guest.

"Make yourself at home," said Mrs. Bilter, kindly. "We haven't much—yet, but we'll do all right. But it was a mean trick."

"Had you seen the place?" asked Danket.

"No."

"Do you mean to say you bought a piece of land without examining it?"

"It was too fur to come. I seen a good advertisement, and wrote the agent at Twin Creeks Forks, an' he answered saying it was one o' the best farms in Missouri. How was I to know? He's got my money, an' I've got the farm. I've got to put up with it."

"It was a mean trick. I think you could do something in law."

"No, I ain't got no money to spend in law. Gosh! They'd git away the farm."

Mr. Danket laughed.

"There are some honest lawyers," he said. "But I know that some are rogues."

"Ye see, it ain't so much fur the old woman an' me I care, as fur Lizzie. Lizzie's proud, she is, an' wanted to be a teacher. I sent her to Jefferson City to school, an' now if this don't pay she can't finish. Lord! Think of Lizzie comin' back here to live!"

Mr. Danket rather drew in his breath quickly.

"Do you mean to say you are the parents of Lizzie Bilter at Mrs. Simms' school in Jefferson City!"

"Ther same."

"Do you know our Lizzie?" asked the anxious mother, taking stock of Mr. Danket's handsome face and stylish clothes. A look of doubt came into her eyes.

"I have met Miss Bilter," he an-

swered, and the look of doubt deepened. "I think she is a very charming girl."

"Hope you've made out," said Bilter, as Danket drew away from the table. "Ain't none the best, but plenty of it."

"Oh, I think it is good, and am glad there is plenty. Will you smoke a cigar, Mr. Bilter?"

The two men sat on the porch and smoked. The cigar was a luxury Mr. Bilter was not accustomed to and he soon had it chewed to a pulp, and sought his pipe for comfort.

"How far is it to the nearest village—that way?" asked Mr. Danket, pointing south.

"'Bout ten mile, I should say."

"My mare is pretty well played out. If you will permit me, I would like to remain. I will pay you fairly."

"Sir," and the horny hand came down with a slap on the jeans. "I'm a ignorant man, sir, an' a poor. But I ain't that kind. There's a bed upstairs, an' you are welcome. I'll take care o' the horse."

The mare was soon in a comfortable stall, and by the time the two men returned to the house, Mrs. Bilter had finished her evening work and gone to bed.

"I reckon you ought to be tired, too," said Mr. Bilter. "Like to go up?"

"Yes, I think I will," said Danket, with a yawn.

Mr. Bilter, whenever anything delayed him in his evening chores, usually found his amiable spouse asleep. But this night she was sitting waiting for him, with a shawl around her.

"Has he gone to bed?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Father, I've been thinking. I don't like such men knowing Lizzie. A young man that smokes cigars and wears fine clothes."

"Pshaw! Lizzie ain't no fool! She kin take care of herself. Don't be worryin' about them things. Anyhow, he's down here, an' she is way up in Jefferson City."

"Well—I don't know," said Mrs. Bilter, and she lay awake longer than usual that night.

The following morning Mr. Danket arose as early as Mr. Bilter and strolled outside. He walked some distance from the house, then took a small map from his pocket, which he studied carefully.

"This is the right neighborhood," he said, kicking the gravel with the toe of his riding boot. "I'll take a look after breakfast."

"Are you going to be busy for an hour or two?" he asked the farmer. "If not, I would like to stroll about and examine this purchase of yours. If it is bad as it looks I may help you some."

"I'll go as far as East Twin Creek," said Bilter, and they went.

Mr. Danket seemed to be more interested than a stranger should. He carefully examined the ground, and, when they reached the creek, actually got down on his knees and kneaded some of the wet clay that formed the bed. He rolled it between his hands, and then between his thumb and finger.

"Think that stuff could keep my Lizzie in school?" asked Mr. Bilter.

Mr. Danket stood looking along the creek.

"How far does your land run?" he asked.

"Well, about a thousand feet the way you are lookin', an' mebbe five hundred the other."

Mr. Danket grunted.

"You asked me if this stuff would keep your daughter in school. In reply permit me to say that it will. Mr. Bilter, I will deal fairly with you. I know Miss Bilter very well. Had it not been for that I might not feel so generous. This is not generosity, either, but I could do worse. And now I will explain. My father and myself are in the business of manufacturing fancy tiling for expensive work in fine residences or public buildings. We have rivals which are sometimes difficult to defeat. Some time ago a stranger came to us with some clay. He said he knew where there were lots of it, but in his ignorant description there were flaws that made it impossible for us to understand. We found that this clay was the best for fancy tiling that we had ever seen. What we used of it was liked, and when

we wanted more, we could not find the man. I heard he had been shot in a row. The next thing was to find the clay. It is my belief that this is the very clay. I will send some to my father and see what he has to say."

Mr. Bilter seemed dazed. He stood blinking his eyes a few minutes, and then managed to blurt out a few jerky sentences.

"That stuff! Ye use that to make things! An' it's worth money? How much is a barrel worth?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," he answered. "But tons and tons of it would be. That is if it is what I think it is."

Mr. Danket returned to the house, got a spade and pail, and returned to dig some of the clay. He made arrangements to leave his horse behind, and have Mr. Bilter drive him to the station. The clay was too heavy to carry on horseback.

On his return Mr. Bilter stopped at the post office and found a letter from Lizzie.

"Dear father and mother," it ran. "I am so sorry to learn how you have been tricked. But never mind, I graduate in a week and will help all I can."

"Where in God's name kin she teach? An' how did she graduate so soon?" the bewildered farmer asked himself.

The week passed, and nothing was heard from Mr. Danket. The first days had been passed in wonderful visions—pictures of the future happiness, and no further want, between the plodding farmer and his cheerful wife. But as the days wore on these visions were not so bright, and at last they decided that Mr. Danket had not been satisfied with the clay.

Then came the day that Lizzie was to come, and Mr. Bilter drove to meet her. It was a happy meeting, full of explanations and questions and plans.

"An' so you know Mr. Danket. Well! well! Mother didn't like it at first, but now he seems so good—so willin' to tell the truth, I guess she likes it better."

Lizzie blushed.

"I know Mr. Danket," she said. "I've met him at parties."

The old farmer's eyes did not fail to catch the blush, and something down in his weather-beaten old heart tickled.

At home there were more greetings, and more plans. Lizzie was a tall, handsome girl, just the one to command the respect of her scholars. She surveyed the farm.

"Well," she said, "it is all right now; but if it wasn't for the clay!"

The day after Lizzie came home, a team drove rapidly up the road. It stopped at Bilter's and a man stepped from the dust-covered carriage.

"There's that damn agent Harper again!" said Mr. Bilter. "I'll kill him! I'll——"

"Why, father!" laughed Lizzie. "You must remember he has sold you a fortune."

Mr. Harper was a brusque and not over-polite man. He merely nodded to Mrs. Bilter and Lizzie, and turned to Mr. Bilter.

"See here, Bilter," he said, "I've heard you were dissatisfied with your bargain here. Not that it would make any difference to me, but it just happens I find there's a flaw in the title, so the sale is off. I will pay you your money back at my office to-morrow."

"Flaw!" gasped Mr. Bilter, rising, and shaking like a leaf. "Ye sold me a farm without a title! Is that true?"

"Well, I thought it was good. But there's something about a missing heir. I want to close up the matter because I've got an offer for the clay on East Twin Creek."

"Say it ag'in! A offer fur the clay? The only good thing on it? My God! What rascals in this world! An' we so good to young Danket!"

Lizzie sat white and cold. Her eyes were riveted on Harper's face.

"I don't believe a word about that title," said Mrs. Bilter. "I just think that Danket wants to buy the farm."

"But he could buy from me," said Bilter.

"Yes, but he told you that it was worth money."

"I'll see you to-morrow about noon in my office, Bilter," said Harper, as he turned to leave.

"No, you hound!" cried the exasperated man. "You fooled me twice. You'd take the bread from the mouths of my women folks! Take that from me!"

His heavy hand smote Harper under the chin, and the agent rolled backward to the ground. In an instant his driver, seeing what had happened, ran in.

"I'll kill you," shouted Mr. Bilter, in his wrath.

"I'll send you to jail for this!" said Harper, wiping the blood from his face.

Mr. Bilter made an attempt to repeat his attack, but the wife and daughter rushed in between.

"Father! Have you lost your senses?" asked Mrs. Bilter, striving heroically to be calm.

Harper got into his carriage, and Lizzie went to her room.

Here, throwing herself on the bed, she burst into a desperate fit of sobbing.

"Oh, that he would use me so!" she cried. "Oh, that he could do this after telling me he loved me! He knew I was a poor girl and helpless! Oh, Tom! Tom! Tom! my heart is breaking!"

Days passed. Nothing was heard from Harper, nor from Danket. Then one day as they were all sitting in the shade before the cottage, two men came riding from Twin Creeks Forks.

"That's the sheriff," said Mr. Bilter. A tremor of terror and apprehension ran through both wife and daughter.

The sheriff dismounted and strode toward them.

"I've come for you, Bilter," he said. "I'm sorry fur the ladies, but I've got to do my duty."

"Fur what?" faltered Bilter, thinking the old blow had been overlooked.

"Fur the murder of Jim Harper. He was found dead near Sidwell's Junction on West Twin Creek yesterday. Don't make a fuss. Better come along."

"He never killed him!" screamed Mrs. Bilter. The sheriff bowed.

"I ain't said he did, ma'am. I ain't judge or jury. I'm only the sheriff, sworn to do my duty. It has been sworn that Bilter was heard to threaten Harper, and the law must do the rest."

Lizzie sprang to her mother's side

as she saw her eyes closing, and Bilter, with a face like a dead man's, rose.

"I'll git my horse," he said, and after kissing his wife and Lizzie, in ten minutes was on his way to Twin Creek Forks.

The murder of Harper caused a sensation. Men rode in from all directions, and women drove past the Bilter home and pointed out the place where the murderer lived. Mrs. Bilter was confined to her bed, and Lizzie, with her heart torn with anguish for her father, and bitter with grief over the actions of Danket, courageously held down her own feelings and administered to her mother's wants.

The day came for the examination of Bilter. Mrs. Bilter could not go, but Lizzie insisted upon being with him in his bitter hour of trial.

Coroner Ulmer presided. He picked his jury from among the men haphazard, for he knew they were a sturdy race of justice-loving people. He was one of these himself.

"Now, Bilter," he said, "this is an inquest on the body of Jim Harper. By the decision of this jury you will either be set free or held for trial on the charge of murder. I warn you that anything you say may be used against you at the trial. Are you ready?"

"Yes," almost whispered Bilter. Lizzie sat by his side, white and frightened. The jury seemed to watch her more than they did the man whom they might indict.

"Now, Bilter," continued the coroner, "you were heard to say you would kill Harper. Is that so, Burton?"

A young man stood up.

"Swear the witness."

Burton, being sworn, testified:

"Mr. Harper knew that Bilter was dissatisfied with a place we sold him. We drove out there one day to offer to take back the place. We had a chance to sell at a better price. I didn't hear what was said, but I saw Bilter knock Harper down. I ran to him, and heard Bilter say he would kill Harper. The women prevented another attack."

"And was that all there was in the nature of the business that took you out

there—simply to take back what Bilter did not want?"

"That was all, sir."

"May I say something, Coroner Ulmer," asked Lizzie, pleadingly.

A man, covered with dust, with pieces of plaster almost obliterating his face, limped in and stood for a moment as if about to fall. He sank into a chair unnoticed, for all eyes were forward on the girl who wanted to speak.

"My father is not a business man," she went on, after having been sworn regularly as a witness. "He is uneducated, as many here are, but none the less honorable and worthy. We lived in Illinois, and he thought we could better our chances out here. I had gone to Jefferson City to Mrs. Simms, whom we knew, to study. Father wished to be near me. He saw an advertisement of this place on East Twin Creek and answered it. The reply brought such a flattering description of the farm and the price was so little that he bought it, using all he had in the world. When he reached it he found it worthless.

"A gentleman from Jefferson City came there looking for a certain kind of clay. He found it on my father's farm. He promised to let father know more about it, but we have not heard from him since. Mr. Harper said it was this gentleman who wished to buy the farm."

The man in the rear stood up and Lizzie saw him.

"Is that true, Mr. Burton?" asked the coroner.

"It is true," said Burton. "The firm of Danket & Son, of Jefferson City."

"That's a damned lie!" came from the man in the rear of the room. Lizzie knew the voice.

"Tom! Tom! Tom!" she cried, and every man in the room stood up.

Danket came limping forward. He shook Bilter's hand and kissed Lizzie.

"Little girl, did you really think I'd do it?" he asked, and then to the coroner:

"I am the man who killed Jim Harper."

Lizzie trembled.

"How and why?" asked the coroner.

Danket was sworn.

"It takes some time to decide whether clay used for fine tiling is the right kind, and our experiments are carefully made. We discovered that this clay was just what we wanted. I thought it would be a good scheme to locate another bed of it before its quality became known. I tried West Twin Creek, and found a farm there on which no one had lived for years, it being about as barren as Mr. Bilter's. But there was clay there, and plenty of it. I followed West Twin Creek to the Forks, and offered Harper a price for it. He was amazed at the offer, because he had had the thing on his hands so long. He asked me what I wanted of such a place, and told him there was value in it to me. I thought he was an honorable man, and explained about the clay. He said he would take the offer provided I would take others he could find with the clay on at the same price. I said I would. Yesterday I was riding along West Twin Creek again, and met Harper looking over some poor farms there. He had a contract with him he had brought along for me to sign. It was for the purchase of Mr. Bilter's farm. I knew Mr. Bilter had no idea of selling, and said so. Harper said I knew nothing about it, and we quarreled. I left him, and rode on. On my return toward the farmhouse where I was stopping, I was shot from ambush. The bullet pierced my leg and killed my horse. I fell, and probably under the impression that I was dead, Harper

came toward me. I drew my revolver and shot him. He was not killed that time, and fired, his bullet cutting through my cheek. I fired the second time and he dropped dead. That is my testimony, I had no witnesses. I dragged myself to the nearest house, where they patched me up. I knew there would be an inquest and came to offer myself up."

A hard breath came from everybody in the room.

"It seems that the value of this inquest depends on the validity of Bilter's title," said the coroner. "If Harper was rascal enough to work that game, he would do almost anything. Burton, is that title good or not?"

Burton was young. He shuffled and showed his disinclination to answer.

"You may answer safely," said the coroner. "You are not interested in this. You were Harper's clerk and in no way responsible for his acts. There can be no trial, for Harper is dead."

"Well, then, all I can say is that the title to the Bilter place dates back to a very old territorial grant, and is probably as good as any in the Louisiana purchase."

A howl went up from the crowd, and Danket was a hero.

That night there was a meeting and a greeting in Bilter's home such as few have ever seen. And now—well everybody knew it would come to that, of course, but it may as well be told—Lizzie is the happy wife of Danket, and the clay has made them rich.

LITTLE STORIES OF THE STAGE

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES BY

CLARA BLANDICK, KYRLE BELLEW, DUSTIN FARNUM, GRACE GEORGE,
ELEANOR ROBSON, WILTON LACKAYE, EFFIE SHANNON

UNDERSTUDIES seem to be a topic for many stories and anecdotes. My first appearance as an understudy was one week and a half after

I made my débüt. I was really understudy for the soubrette, but was all eyes and ears to learn everyone's part.

In Middletown, Conn., the young woman playing a character old maid was taken very ill with tonsilitis. My roommate and I called to see her, and to do what we might, and while there the stage manager called to inquire for her, and found that she could not play that evening.

During the ensuing conversation, it was suggested that I take the part. I said "No," but upon being dared to do so, I consented. The young woman whispered the cues, I stumbled through the lines from hearing her say them night after night, returned to the hotel where I was staying, wrote down the part as best I could remember it, and without part, manuscript or rehearsal, appeared at seven-thirty to be "made up."

The leading comedian was at the stage door. He said: "Well?" I replied: "Well, I'll do the best I can." He said: "Go ahead, we'll pull you through."

With a man's checked golf suit, striped hose, congress shoes and gray corkscrew curls, and a make-up—well, I often think the stage manager lined me lots more than was necessary, for no

worse-looking valentine was ever presented to the public, I went down on the stage before the curtain rose, to let the girls have their laugh out, and though I played the part several times, I proudly bore the title conferred on me by the manager, "The girl that saved the play."

CLARA BLANDICK.

SAVING THE
PLAY

AS LEADING
LADY

HAVE you ever heard of my first experience on the stage? No? Well, it is a story I haven't told very often, for several reasons. It was amusing enough, though, or rather, it seems so to me now as I look back, although when it happened it was far from being amusing to me.

I was a cadet in a British naval training ship then, and with several hundred more youngsters who hoped some day to rival Nelson, I was on board H. M. S. Conway in the Sloyne at Liverpool. For some reason—what I don't recall now—an entertainment had been gotten up on board the ship, and one of the features of the program was a play in which the cadets appeared as actors. The play we had selected to present was "Time Tries All," and I was cast for the rôle of the leading lady. Yes, and some of my friends have been good enough to say I made a very handsome girl, too. I was only fourteen then, you know.

The chief difficulty was the costume. I had to appear first in a riding habit,

and where to get one I did not know. At last one of my fellow cadets, a chap of the name of Beswick, who was afterward drowned at sea, came to my assistance. He belonged to a well-known county family, and his sister, who was probably about eighteen, rode to hounds. He agreed to borrow her habit for me and he did, but even then I found my difficulties weren't nearly over, for when I tried the dress on it hung about me in loops and folds that made it positively impossible for anything but the wildest burlesque, and, of course, we didn't intend our play to be that. Then a brilliant idea struck some one. You know how, in the navy, the cadets have to fold their clothes and roll up their socks just so?

"Well," suggested the chap with the idea, "let's use the rolled-up socks for stuffing." Just the thing. And I'll warrant you have seldom seen a finer female figure than I presented when I was made up and stuffed and ready to make my first entrance.

It was a gala day on board ship, and the audience was a distinguished one, including the Duke of Edinburgh, the mayors of Liverpool and Manchester, and many other public officials from the surrounding country. The entertainment was a great success, and there wasn't a single mishap of any kind until the scene in the play came where I, as the leading lady, had to have love made to me by two men. The lovemakers were Fred Passow, now the captain of the *St. Paul*, and "Bobbie" Knowles. Knowles, I remember, was down on his knees pouring out his passion for me when some mischievous cadet down in front yelled "Socks!"

That was enough. Every cadet on the ship took up the cry, and the distinguished visitors couldn't imagine what it all meant. They didn't have long to wait, though, for I very soon lost my temper, and, ripping open my bosom where most of the socks were stored, I began to pelt my tormentors with the tightly rolled footwear.

The play came to an untimely end amidst the roars of laughter of the audience, in which the duke heartily joined.

My début as an actor must have made an impression on Prince Alfred, however, for several years afterward when he made his first visit to India I was stationed at Bombay. The duke, who was only a captain then, had to come to Bombay to report himself to the commodore on the *Forte Frigate*, and when he came down to the bunder, or landing place, to go on board, I was the midshipman in charge of one of the boats drawn up to receive him. As he passed my boat he glanced at me and then beckoned me to come to him.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Where?"

"On board the *Conway*, sir, in the Sloyne."

"Oh, yes. I remember now—Socks!" and he burst into a roar of laughter.

KYRLE BELLEV.



JUST before "The Virginian" opened its engagement at the Manhattan Theater, in this city, a friend asked me: "What is this play—a melodrama?" My response was such a one as my New England origin made logical, for it was another question: "What is a melodrama?"

THE MODERN
MELODRAMA

Seldom has so innocent a question proved so puzzling. My friend, a man of education and a lover of the stage, could not say offhand what he considered a melodrama to be; but hazarded the opinion that it was a play wherein violent actions followed violent speeches, and that it usually had a murder or two in it, an abduction possibly, and a big sensational scene in the third or fourth act.

Now this was not such a bad definition of the commonly-accepted idea of melodrama. The only criticism I have to make of it is that it is absolutely wrong. Setting aside the dictionary explanation that melodrama is a drama with melody, or music, I maintain that

it is the most cogent form of stage narrative which can be offered to a thinking people. Most playgoers must be appealed to to-day through their intellectual faculties, as well as by high-sounding speeches and epigrammatic truisms. They want an interesting tale, lucidly told. They abhor the ranting that is vulgarly referred to as "chewing the scenery." They do not object to a pistol being carried by the hero, nor to his firing it off, so long as there is a natural reason for it. But they will not accept even a hand-to-hand struggle without weapons merely for the sake of forcing so-called stage "action."

By the way, this term "action" is one of the most abused in all theatrical nomenclature. It does not mean running about the stage, knocking men down, opening and shutting doors, and creating a disturbance generally. There must be movement on the stage, necessarily. Otherwise, you might as well read the play at home. But it must always be part of the story. Aside from this necessary movement, the modern school of melodrama is all for repression. Reticence that makes the audience thoughtful is the most powerful agent at the actor's command. He must suggest a great deal more than he tells. It is not essential to kill a man before the footlights. The audience can easily understand that he is dead. The greatest effects that can be procured are acquired in this way.

Take Mrs. Fiske, William Gillette, Mme. Duse, or any of the most prominent exponents of the modern school of natural acting, and you will find that they make you see even more off the stage than is offered to your material vision. Forty years ago that would have been thought impossible. Stage pictures in Macready's time were drawn with a broad brush. To-day they are limned with the finest lines. The impressionist of to-day is successful just in proportion to the skill he exerts along that line. If Macready were to reappear in these days and play some of his old repertoire in a Broadway playhouse, he would be laughed into the wings. The world has progressed since his time, and

in no particular more than on the stage. I have been asked whether my slow, drawling speech and deliberate manner as the Virginian is natural to me in private life. I regard that as the greatest compliment that could be paid to me as an artist. It proves that the Virginian is himself in the play, and that he could not be anything else. What would become of "The Virginian" as a stage work if the Virginian were a ranter? I will close this with a question, as I began it. To my mind, the answer is obvious.

DUSTIN FARNUM.



TWO large, kindly eyes, set in a very gentle, smiling face, looking indulgently at me from a stage box, brought confusion, despair, and so lifted me out of the scene, turning all my outward calm topsy-turvy, and sending my thoughts rioting away from the scene and the sea of faces in the theater, that I was reduced to a state of collapse, and only saw hopelessness spelt in great big letters.

A CRITICAL
ORDEAL

It was in the New Amsterdam Theater on the first night of the revival of "The Two Orphans," and the face that stood so clearly forward in that great audience was the face of Kate Claxton, the original *Louise*, whose genius has been identified for the past thirty years with the wonderful old play and with the character I was called upon to represent.

It was with great trepidation that I entered the galaxy of stars that made up the cast. Very industriously and quite frequently I had made the most searching inquiries as to Miss Claxton's whereabouts, and always the answer had been "Out West." On the first night of the revival of "The Two Orphans" the nervousness that I always feel before a performance was intensified a thousand fold by the unusual circumstances surrounding the occasion. I loved *Louise* and felt that she belonged

entirely to me—with Miss Claxton a thousand miles or so away.

At my first entrance there was some applause, and I had time to look over the theater. The genial spirit of the audience set my pulses leaping, and my spirits, which seemed to have fallen somewhere below my knee joints, began to rise, until I caught the enthusiasm of the hour. Then it was that, looking over to the box on the stage left, I saw the sweet and genial face of Kate Claxton; *Louise* deserted me. She seemed to slip through my grasp, away to that box occupied by Miss Claxton, and to look at me, very kindly, very kindly, but very far away through those same soft eyes. My feelings and thoughts were indescribable. Back fell my hopes and ambitions to the level that left my knees without support. I had expected comparisons and criticism, but had never dreamed that I should have to play *Louise* before *Louise* herself.

They say that in supreme moments one lives in a few seconds through the hopes, ambitions, failures and experiences of a lifetime. In those few moments on the stage of the New Amsterdam I saw ambition totter and hopes fail. But the eyes were such encouraging eyes, and the face was so inspiring and so eager and so expectant, that *Louise* came back to me, and I knew that I had passed through the greatest crisis of my career.

GRACE GEORGE.



VERY few persons who sit in comfortable orchestra stalls and enjoy an interesting theatrical performance, I sometimes think, have any idea of the pains that are taken to afford them amusement. Not to go into too much detail, there is to be considered the playwright

who, maybe, has suffered disappointments innumerable before the play upon which he has expended so much of his time and energy has even obtained a hearing. Then there is the manager

**HARDSHIPS OF
REHEARSALS**

who has thought out the scenes and the "stage business" and who has had all the worry of getting up the production—dealing with dilatory scene painters and costume makers and such things as that—besides the anxiety and uncertainty of having invested his money in what, after all, may prove an absolute failure.

And last but not at all least, in my opinion, there are the actors and actresses who have had the work of memorizing parts, of learning queer dialects, of rehearsing "business," and of getting up in the thousand and one details in which the players must be perfect before ever the curtain rises—so perfect, in fact, that they are not even noticeable to the audience.

"Why," said a friend to me not long ago, "here you have just had one part all this season, and it must be second nature by this time." Now really, do you know, I think it would be much easier to play a dozen rôles a season than just one. If you have only one it does become second nature after a while, but still there is always the dread that you are missing points, that you are growing mechanical, that you are forgetting small details—and that dread is an awful drain on one's nerves. If one changed rôles frequently, of course there would be the labor of memorizing new parts and going through tiresome rehearsals, but it seems to me that would be a relief in a way. The stock company actor who learns a new part every week and rehearses one play every morning, and performs in another every afternoon and every evening, hasn't an easy time of it by any means, I know from several years' experience, and it is no wonder that some women and men, too, have broken down under the constant strain.

Still I maintain, and that, too, from experience, that other actors and actresses who have only one or two parts a season, or even only one part, have plenty to do to keep them busy. I admit that my own work this season in "Merely Mary Ann" has been a real pleasure to me, because I am in love myself with the pathetic little slavey, but still it has required a constant effort to

avoid becoming mechanical, to keep myself up to the mark, as it were. But one of the hardest tasks I ever had set me was the preparations for the "Romeo and Juliet" tour last spring, and the tour itself which followed.

I was playing in "Audrey" down through the South, where the play was popular, and we were covering all the territory possible. I was not very well to begin with, and soon after I began to study the part of *Juliet* I became positively ill with that most ridiculous of all diseases, but by no means the least painful—the mumps. I had to stop playing for a while, I was so ill, and even when I was able to resume my performances of "Audrey" I didn't feel very much like studying *Juliet*. There was no time to be lost, though, and so I studied whether I felt like it or not. Then we got into the Mississippi floods, and that added to my discomfort. But at last we reached New Orleans—the first place we had stopped at for more than a single night for many a week—and there I found Mr. Eben Plympton waiting for me to rehearse "Romeo and Juliet" with me. I tried to be cheerful about it, but really I wasn't. Still I rehearsed every day, and played "Audrey" in the evening. Then came a long tour through Texas—all one night stands—and then a tiresome journey of many miles back to New York, where I had to begin rehearsals with the company at once, without even a day's rest.

Those rehearsals—and oh, how I did hate them! dragged on through two long, weary weeks, and then we went to Albany to give the opening performance.

Naturally I was ill when it was all over, but the route had been booked and advertised, and all that, and I wouldn't give in. For weeks we played one night stands, always one performance a day, and sometimes two. We stayed a week in Chicago and that was a relief. And finally we got to New York, and there my doctor told me I must positively rest, or "he wouldn't be accountable," and all those other pleasant things a doctor can tell you. So I consented to rest after the week in New York for three days,

and then finished the season which, fortunately, had only three more nights to run. And, my! how glad I was when it was all over!

Do you wonder now that I don't agree with persons who say the actor's life is an easy one?

ELEANOR ROBSON.



THREE is good reason for a vivid recollection on my part of one of my first professional engagements, more than twenty years ago. I was a member of the summer stock company at the Soldiers' Home, at Dayton, Ohio, and, strangely enough, Gen. Rosencranz, who was an intimate friend of my father's, was a member of the board of governors of that institution. Gen. Rosencranz had always been anxious to relegate me to the musty atmosphere of a law office, and seemed never to tire of building castles in the air as to my future eminence as a legal luminary. I sat down on those plans, and went on the stage.

I had only been an actor for a few years when I rounded up at Dayton, Ohio, and I had never played any good parts. During the summer stock season it was announced that the board of governors would meet to inspect the Soldiers' Home, and a special gala performance by the stock company was planned in honor of the occasion. Gen. Rosencranz was, of course, coming, and my delight was unbounded when I was cast for *Hawkshaw*, the detective, in "The Ticket of Leave Man," my first considerable part. Everyone knows, who knows anything about plays, that the great opportunity for *Hawkshaw* comes after he has been pretending to be a drunken rowdy, when *Bob Brierly*, anxious to warn the *Gibsons* of the plot to rob their home, writes a letter and asks: "Who will take it?"

"I will," says *Hawkshaw*.

"Who are you?" asks *Brierly*.

"*Hawkshaw*, the detective!" says *Hawkshaw*, tearing off the false beard

AN EFFECT
SPOILED

and wig with which he has been disguised.

The leading man of the stock company, who would hardly have dared to attempt a practical joke at such a time, got loaded that afternoon in honor of the occasion, and determined to play a practical joke on me. I had sent to New York for a brand new combination wig and beard, that I could remove with a single movement at the crucial time. The performance went along swimmingly. The cue came at last.

"Who will take it?"

"I will!" I shouted, springing to my feet, ready for the dramatic climax.

"Ah," said *Briarly*, "you are Mr. *Hawkshaw*; thank you, thank you," handing me a letter. The curtain came down with *Hawkshaw* heavily disguised from the audience, *Briarly* thus intimating that I was no more heavily disguised than is usually the case with detectives.

WILTON LACKAYE.



IN looking back through the vista of years that covers the period of my stage experience, I am inclined to think that the most interesting situation

arose when I presented myself before the late Augustin Daly, seeking a position in his famous company. I had heard so many stories

in regard to what was termed his eccentricities, that when I was ushered into his presence, it was with considerable trepidation that I raised my voice just audible enough for him to hear me say, "My name is Effie Shannon, and I should like very much to belong to your company. I have been"—and here I was interrupted by his quick and strident tone, saying, "It is not necessary for you to tell me whom you've been

with. I can find a place for you," and after scanning me over for a minute, he said: "The only thing that I can see wherein you are at fault, and it will be necessary to coach you, is in regard to color schemes as applied to dress." I thanked him for his kindness, and asked when I should call again, and was told to report for rehearsal at noon the following Monday. It was not until after I had regained the street that I fully understood what he meant by his allusion to my dress, and now, after a lapse of years, when I think of how I was "toggied out" in order to find favor in the eyes of the autocrat of the drama, I am moved to laughter.

I had for several seasons previous, being a budding aspirant for histrionic honors, been compelled to travel on the road, and, like many others, looked forward to the day when I could display my talent on Broadway. Hearing that Mr. Daly had a position open in his company, I was encouraged by a number of my friends to present myself before his august majesty as an applicant for the position. Each and every one had a different idea as to how I should dress for the occasion, until finally I became so flustered that I determined to take the advice of them all and make a composite attire. One girl loaned me her best hat, another her boa, another a bit of jewelry, and so on, until I must have looked like a shopkeeper's dummy, or a newly arrived Fijian endeavoring to put on as much female finery as could be comfortably carried. At any rate, I obtained the position and was so lightened up with my great joy that I did not wait to take a car home, but ran all the way, so as to inform my friends who awaited my return, with abated breath. The news was soon told, and a banquet was tendered to me of which the *chef d'autre* consisted of cheese, crackers and soda water.

EFFIE SHANNON.

IN BORROWED PLUMAGE

The Further Adventures of O'Rourke

BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Author of "O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer," "The Moccasin Lode," Etc.

L—IN WHICH O'ROURKE RETURNS TO THE SWORD

(*A Complete Story.*)

CHAPTER I.

THE CAFE DE LA PAIX.

AT ten in the evening of a certain day in the early spring the stout m'sieur was sitting sedately sipping his bock, at a sidewalk table on the Boulevard Capucines side of the Café de la Paix.

So he had been sitting—a gentleman of medium height, heavily builded, with active, searching eyes, a rounded breadth of forehead and a closely clipped beard of the Van Dyck persuasion—for seven consecutive nights; of which this was the seventh.

At one minute past ten of the clock, the stout m'sieur was on his feet, showing evidences of mental excitement, as he peered out into the boulevard parade, apparently endeavoring to satisfy himself as to the identity of a certain passing individual.

And François, the waiter, who had attended the stout m'sieur for a full week, put his hand discreetly to his mouth, and observed to Jean, who stood near him:

"At last, m'sieur has found his friend!" Adding, to himself alone: "Now I shall have word for M. le Prince!"

A second later, the stout m'sieur's voice was to be heard.

"O'Rourke!" he cried, and again: "O'Rourke, *mon ami!*"

Curious glances were turned upon him, not only by the moving throng upon the sidewalk, but also by the other patrons of the café. The stout m'sieur heeded them not. Rather, he gesticulated violently with his cane, and called again.

To his infinite satisfaction, his hail carried to the ears for which it was intended.

Out of the mob a man came, uncertainly shouldering his way through the press; a tall man, noticeable for a length of limb which seemed great yet was strictly proportioned to the remainder of his huge bulk, moving with the unstudied grace that appertains unto great strength and bodily vigor.

He caught sight of the stout m'sieur and a broad, glad grin overspread his countenance—a face clean-shaven and burned darkly by tropic suns, with a nose and a slightly lengthened upper lip that spoke for Celtic parentage; a face in all attractive, broadly modeled, mobile and made luminous by eyes of gray, steadfast, yet alert.

"Chambret, be all that's lucky!" he cried. "Faith, 'twas no more than the

minute gone that I was wishing I might see ye!"

He came up to Chambret's table, and the two shook hands, gravely, after the English fashion, eying each the other to see what change a year might have wrought in his personal appearance.

"I, too," said Chambret, "was wishing that I might see you. My friend, I give you my word that I have waited here, watching for one O'Rourke for a solid week."

"Is it so, indeed?" O'Rourke sat down, favoring the Frenchman with a sharply inquiring glance. "And for why did ye not come to me lodgings? Such as they are," he added, with a transient thought of how little he should care to have another intrude upon the bare, mean room he called home.

"Where was I to find you, *mon ami*? I knew not, and so came here."

"A sure gamble," commented O'Rourke, looking out upon the ever-changing, kaleidoscopic pageant upon the sidewalks, where, it seemed, all Paris was promenading itself. "If one sits here long enough," explained the Irishman, "sure he'll see every wan in the wide world that's worth the seeing—as a better man nor I said long ago."

"It is so," agreed Chambret.

He summoned a waiter for O'Rourke's order; and that important duty being attended to, turned to find the Irishman's eyes fixed upon him soberly, the while he caressed his clean, firm chin.

Chambret returned the other's regard, with interest; smiling, they considered one another. Knowing each other well, these two had little need for evasiveness of word or deed; there will be slight constraint between men who have, as had Chambret and O'Rourke, fought back to back, shoulder to shoulder, and—for the matter of that—face to face.

The Frenchman voiced the common conclusion. "Unchanged, I see," said he, with a light laugh.

"Unchanged—even as yourself, Chambret."

"The same wild Irishman?"

"Faith, yes!" returned O'Rourke. He

continued to smile, but there was in his tone a note of bitterness—an echo of his thoughts, which were darksome enough.

"The same!" he told himself. "Ay—there's truth for ye, O'Rourke!—the same wild Irishman, the same improvident ne'er-do-well, good for nought in all the world but a fight—and growing rusty, like an old sword, for want of exercise!"

"And you, *mon ami*?" he asked aloud. "How wags the world with you?"

"As ever—indifferently well. I am fortunate in a way."

"Ye may well say that."

Was there envy in the man's tone, or discontent? Chambret remarked, and was quick to divine what had evoked it. He had a comprehending eye that had not been slow to note the contrast between them. For it was great: Chambret, the sleek, faultlessly groomed gentleman of Paris, contented in his knowledge of an assured income from the *rentes*; O'Rourke, light of heart, but lean from a precarious living, at ease and courteous, but shabby, with a threadbare collar to his carefully brushed coat, and a roughly trimmed fringe, sawlike, edging his spotless cuff.

"You are—what do you say?—hard up?" queried Chambret, bluntly.

O'Rourke caught his eye, with a glimmer of humorous deprecation. What need to ask? he seemed to say. Gravely he inspected the end of the commendable panetela, which he was enjoying by the grace of Chambret; and he puffed upon it furiously, twinkling upon his friend through a pillar of smoke.

"'Tis nothing new, at all, at all," he sighed.

Chambret frowned. "How long?" he demanded. "Why have you not called upon me, *mon ami*, if you were in need?"

"Sure, 'twas nothing as bad as that. I—I am worrying along. There'll be a war soon, I'm hoping, and then the world will remember O'Rourke."

"Who will give the world additional cause to remember him," said Chambret, in the accents of firm conviction.

"But why?" he cried, abruptly, changing to puzzled protest. "*Mon ami*, you

are an incomprehensible. If you would, you might be living the life of ease, husband to one of the richest and most charming women in France; Beatrice, Princesse——”

“*Sssh!*” O’Rourke warned him.

“Ah, m’sieur, but I am sorry to have hurt you!” said Chambret, contritely; for he had at once recognized the pain that sprang to new life in the Irishman’s eyes.

“No matter, Chambret—it is always with me,” O’Rourke laughed, but hollowly. “I cannot forget madame—nor do I wish to. Faith!—” He forgot to finish his sentence; his face was turned away, for the moment, but one imagined that he saw again the eyes of Madame la Princesse.

“But why, then——” began Chambret.

“Have ye not yourself stated it—the reason why the thing’s impossible? The wealthiest woman in all France, since her brother’s, M. Lemercier’s, death—is she to mate with a penniless Irish adventurer, a—a fortune hunter? Faith, then, ’twill not be with the O’Rourke that she does it! My word for that.”

He shook his head, decidedly. “No more,” he said; “’tis over and done with. Please God, some day the O’Rourke will be going to her with a pocketful of money—if she’ll wait so long. I misdoubt the day will be a while in coming. But till then——” He dismissed the subject, abruptly, with a gesture of finality.

“Ye were saying,” he asked, “that ye had been seeking me? For why? Can the O’Rourke be serving a friend in any way?”

“You are unemployed?”

“True for ye, Chambret. Ye have said it.”

“Will you accept——”

“*Mon ami*,” O’Rourke stated, explicitly, “I’ll do anything—anything in the whole world that’s clean and honorable, saving it’s handling a pen. That I will not do for any living man; upon me worrd, sor, niver!”

Chambret joined his laugh to O’Rourke’s. “I suspected as much,” he

said. “But—this is no clerical work, I promise you.”

“Then I’m your man. Proceed.”

“Let us presume a hypothetical case.” O’Rourke bent forward, the better to lose no word of the Frenchman’s.

“Be all means,” he encouraged him.

“But,” Chambret paused to stipulate, “it is a thing understood between us, as friends, that should I make use of the actual name of a person or place, it will be considered as purely part of the hypothesis?”

“Most assuredly!”

“Good, m’sieur. I proceed. Let us suppose, then, that there is, within one thousand miles of our Paris, a grand duchy called Lützelburg——”

“The name sounds familiar,” interrupted O’Rourke.

“Purely a supposititious duchy,” corrected Chambret, gravely.

“Sure, yes,” as solemnly.

“That being understood, let us imagine that the late Duke Henri, of Lützelburg, is survived by a widow, the dowager duchess, and a son, heir to the ducal throne—*petit* Duke Jehan, a child of seven years. You follow me? Also, by his younger brother, Prince Georges, of Lützelburg, a—a most damnably conscienceless scoundrel!” Chambret exploded, bringing his fist down upon the table with force sufficient to cause the glass to dance.

“Softly, *mon ami!*” cautioned O’Rourke. “I gather ye are not liking M. le Prince?”

“I—I do not like him, as you say. But, to get on; Lützelburg lies—you know where.” Abandoning all pretense of imagining the duchy, Chambret waved his hand definitely to the northwest. O’Rourke nodded assent.

“The capital city, of course, centers about the Castle of Lützelburg. The duchy is an independent State maintaining its own army—one regiment—its customs house, sending its representatives to the Powers. You know all that?”

“It is a rich little State; a comfortable living for its ruler. Duke Henri preserved its integrity, added to its resources, leaving it a fat legacy to his

little son. Had he died without issue, Georges would have succeeded to the ducal throne—and to the control of the treasury. Naturally the dog covets what is not his, now. He goes further. He has gone—far, very far, *mon ami.*"

O'Rourke moved his chair nearer, becoming interested. "Gone far, ye say? And what has the black-hearted divyle been up to, bad cess to him?" he asked, with a chuckle.

"He has kidnaped little Duke Jehan, *mon ami.*"

"Kidnaped!" The Irishman sat back gasping. "Faith, what does he think he is, now—a robber baron?" he demanded, indignantly—this man of strong emotions, easily afire in the cause of a friend. "Tell me how he has gone about it, and what ye want me to do."

"There is but little to tell, O'Rourke. This is the most that we know for a certainty: that Duke Jehan has disappeared. Georges—the blackguard!—even dares offer a reward to the man who furnishes a clew to the child's whereabouts.

"In the nature of things, the reward will never be claimed by a Lützelburger; for Georges, now, is the head and forefront of the government, holding, practically, power of life and death over every soul in the duchy.

"It is this that we fear: that he will do a hurt to the child."

"Why," interposed O'Rourke, "has he not already done it—put him out of his way?"

"Because, my friend, he values him too highly, as an asset toward his purposes. M. le Prince wishes to marry Madame la Duchesse, the child's mother—a woman wealthy in her own right. He has suggested to her that, should she consent to marry him, his own interests would then be more involved, that he would perhaps take a greater interest in the pursuit of the malefactors. You see?"

"Faith, an' I do." O'Rourke tipped back in his chair, grinning impartially at Chambret. "And he would marry the duchess? And ye hate the bold blackguard, is it?" he jeered, softly.

Chambret flushed under his challeng-

ing gaze. He hesitated. "To be plain," he faltered, "to be frank with you, I—I love madame."

"And she?" persisted O'Rourke.

Chambret shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say?" he deprecated. "Madame will not. Yet would I serve her. Already have I made myself so obnoxious to the powers that be in Lützelburg that I have been requested to absent myself from the duchy. Wherefore I come to you."

But O'Rourke pursued his fancy. "I've heard she is beautiful?" he asked.

Again Chambret hesitated; but the eyes of the man glowed warm at the mental picture O'Rourke's suggestion conjured within his brain. "She is—indeed beautiful!" he said, at length; and simultaneously took from his pocket a leather wallet, which, opening, he laid upon the table between them.

O'Rourke bent over it curiously. A woman's photograph stared up at him; the portrait of a most wonderful woman, looking out from the picture fearlessly, regally, under level brows; a woman young, full-lipped, with heavy-lidded eyes that were dark and large, brimming with the wine of life: which is love.

It was such a portrait as can be bought by the thousand for a few francs each; O'Rourke had seen it frequently before, but now he began to appreciate this great beauty with a more intimate interest.

"Faith!" he sighed, looking up. "I'm more than a little minded to envy you, Chambret. She is beautiful, me word!" He paused; then: "Ye would have me go to get back the boy, if I can?" he asked.

"That is what little I ask," assented Chambret. "You will be amply rewarded—"

"I'll go, *mon ami.* Rest easy, there; I'll do what you call my 'possible,' m'sieur, and a little more, and the hell of a lot more atop of that. If a man can scale the insurmountable—I'll be the man."

He offered his hand, and, Chambret accepting, put his five fingers around the Frenchman's with a grip that made the other wince.

"As to the reward—" Chambret began again.

"Faith, man, can I do nought for a friend without having gold showered over me? Damn your reward! Tell me your plans, give me the lay of the land, and I'm off by sunrise. But, as for reward—"

He rose, taking Chambret's arm in his.

"Come," he suggested, "let us go and sup—at your expense. And then, maybe, I'll be asking ye for the loan av a franc or two to refurbish me wardrobe. 'Tis the divvle av a winter it has been, I'll niver deny. Come—let us to a quiet place."

CHAPTER II.

THE INN OF THE WINGED GOD.

It was drawing toward the evening of the third day following, when Col. O'Rourke rounded an elbow in the road and came, simultaneously, into view of the Inn of the Winged God, and to a stop.

He was weary and footsore. He was, moreover, thirsty. Behind him the road stretched long, and white, and hot, and straight as any string across the department of the Meurthe-et-Moselle, back to Longwy, whence he had come afoot.

For, in consideration of the temper of M. le Prince, Georges de Lützelburg, Chambret and O'Rourke had agreed that it would be the part of prudence for the Irishman to enter the duchy as unobtrusively as possible; and in his light tweeds, with the dust of the road white upon his shoes and a film upon his clothes, O'Rourke might well have passed for an English milord upon a walking tour.

To the seeing eye, perhaps, there was about the Irishman a devil-may-care swing, a free carelessness in the way he put his best foot forward, a fine spirit in the twirl of his walking stick, that was hardly to be considered characteristic of that solemn person, the Englishman, plugging stolidly forward upon his walking tour, as upon a penance self-imposed. But the similitude was suffi-

cient to impose upon the peasantry of Lützelburg; and should suffice, barring accidents.

O'Rourke paused, I say, looking forward to the inn, and then about him, considering the lay of the land.

To the north, he knew, ran the French-Belgian frontier—how far away he might not exactly state; to the west, also, was the line that divides Lützelburg from French territory—again at an indeterminate distance, according to the Irishman's knowledge.

"But it will not be far, now, I'm thinking," he said aloud; "come sundown, 'tis meself that will be out av France—and thin, I'm telling ye, may the devil keep watch for the soul of his familiar, M. le Prince."

But for all his boastfulness, the Irishman was by no means easy in his mind as to how he was to accomplish what he had set his hand to. The plan of action agreed upon between O'Rourke and his friend was distinguished by a considerable latitude as to detail.

O'Rourke was, in short, to do what he could. If he succeeded in setting free the young duke, well and good. If not—and at this consideration Chambret had elevated expressive shoulders. "One does one's possible," he had suggested; "one can do no more, *mon ami*."

Now, the Irishman was thinking that it behooved him to be on his way without delay, if he cared to reach the city of Lützelburg before nightfall. And yet, this inn before him was one of possibilities interesting to a thirsty man. He stood still, jingling in his pockets the scant store of francs that remained to him out of the modest loan which he had accepted of all which Chambret had tried to press upon him.

It stood unobtrusively back from the road, this inn; a gabled building, weather-beaten and ancient-seeming, draped lavishly with green growing vines. Above the lintel of its wide, hospitably yawning doorway swung, creaking in the perfumed airs of the spring afternoon, a battered signboard, whereon a long-dead artist had limned the figure of a little, laughing, naked

boy, with a bow and quiver full of arrows, and with two downy wings sprouting somewhere in the immediate neighborhood of his chubby shoulder blades.

Col. O'Rourke grinned at the childish god, deciphering the stilted French inscription beneath its feet.

"The Inn of the Winged God," he read aloud. "Sure, 'tis meself that's the supherstitious wan—a rank believer in signs. I'm taking ye, ye shameless urchin," he apostrophized the god of love, "for a sign that there's—drink within!"

He chuckled, thinking: "'Tis here that I'm to meet Chambret, if need be, for consultation. I mind me he said the inn was but a little this side av the frontier. Be that token, 'tis himself that should be coming down the road, ere long, galumphing in that red devil-wagon av his."

But the question remained: Was he to pause for refreshment, or to push on despite his great thirst—for it seemed as though all the dust in the road that had not found lodgment upon his body had settled in the throat of the man?

The fluttering of a woman's skirts put a period to his hesitancy; for a girl appeared and stood for a moment in the doorway of the Inn of the Winged God, gazing upon the newcomer with steady eyes that were bright beneath level brows. A tall girl, seemingly the taller since slight and supple she was, and astonishingly good to look upon; slender and darkly beautiful.

Even at a distance O'Rourke could see much and imagine the rest; and, more, he saw that she wore the peasant dress peculiar to that department—wore it with an entrancing grace, adorning it herself rather than relying upon it to enhance her charms.

A crimson headdress of some fashion confined her hair; and that same was dark—nay, black. And there was a kerchief about her throat, like snow above the black of a velvet bodice, which, together with her spreading skirt of crimson cloth, was half hidden by a bright expanse of apron.

Moreover, that skirt—in keeping with the custom of the neighborhood—was

sensibly short; whereby it was made evident that mademoiselle might, if so she willed, boast a foot of quality, and an ankle—

Promptly O'Rourke's thirst became unbearable, and he advanced a step or two, purposefully.

Mademoiselle as promptly disappeared in the gloom of the inner room.

O'Rourke followed her example, finding it cool within and clean, inviting and tempting to dalliance. There was a great, cold fireplace; and broad, spotless tables, and chairs were ranged about upon a floor of earth hard-packed and neatly sanded. Also, from a farther room came odors of cookery, filling first his nose and then all the hungry man that was O'Rourke.

His eyes following his nose as he stalked to the center of the room, half blinded by his sudden transition from the sun glare to the comfortable gloom, he discovered the girl standing with one foot on the threshold of that adjoining apartment, watching him over her shoulder.

O'Rourke cleared his throat harshly; and—"What would m'sieur?" she desired to know.

"That, me dear," said O'Rourke. With his walking stick he indicated one of the row of steins that decorated the chimneypiece. "And, mind ye, full to the brim," he stipulated.

The girl murmured some reply, and went about his bidding. Slowly, with a suggestion of great weariness in his manner, O'Rourke went to the back of the room, where he found a little compartment, partitioned off, containing benches and a small table.

On the table he seated himself, sighing with content. A window, open, faced him, giving upon the garden of the inn. Without there was a vista of nodding scarlet hollyhocks, of sunflowers, of hyacinths, and of many homely, old-fashioned blooms that grew in ordered luxuriance. A light breeze swept across them, bearing their fragrance in through the window.

O'Rourke bared his head to it gratefully, and fumbled in his pocket for his pipe and tobacco.

"Upon me word," he sighed, "'twill be hard to tear meself away, now." Nor was he thinking of the girl just then, nor of aught save the homely comfort of the Inn of the Winged God.

He began to smoke, thankfully; and, smoking, his thoughts wandered into a reverie; so that he sat lost to his surroundings, staring at the hollyhocks and hyacinths—and seeing nought but the eyes of Beatrice, Princess de Grandlieu.

The girl's light step failed to rouse him; he stared on, out of the window, giving her no heed as she waited by his side with the foaming stein.

For her part, she seemed patient enough. He made a gallant figure—this O'Rourke—sitting easily upon the table. And some such thought may have been in her mind—that his was a figure to fill the eyes of a woman; for her own gaze never left him for many minutes.

She remarked the signs of travel: the dust that lay thick upon his shoulders, that whitened his shoes, the drawn look about the man's eyes, and the firm lines about his mouth that told of steadfastness and determination. And she sighed, but very softly.

But an inn maid may not be eying a stranger for hours together; she has her duties to be performed. Presently the girl put the stein down with a crash.

"M'sieur is served," she announced, loudly.

O'Rourke came to with a little start. "Thank you, me dear," he said, and buried his nose in the froth. "Faith," he added, lowering the vessel, "'tis like wine—or your eyes, darlint." So he smiled engagingly into her eyes.

She did not appear to resent the compliment, nor his manner.

"M'sieur has traveled far this day?" she would know, with lowered lashes, her slender fingers playing diffidently with a fold of her apron.

"Not so far that I'm blinded to your sweet face," he averred. "But 'tis truth for you that I've covered many a mile since sunrise."

"M'sieur does not come from these parts?"

"From Paris."

Although she stood with her back to the light, and though O'Rourke could distinguish her features but dimly, yet he saw that her eyes widened; and he smiled secretly at her simplicity.

"From Paris, m'sieur? But *that* is far?"

"Quite far, darlint. But, faith, I've no cause for complaint."

"M'sieur means—" she queried, with pretty bewilderment.

"M'sieur," he assured her, gallantly, "means that no journey is long that has mam'selle at the end av it."

"Oh, m'sieur!" protesting.

"Truth—my word for it." And the magnificent O'Rourke put a franc into her hand. "The change," he proclaimed, largely, "ye may keep for yourself, little one. And this—ye may keep for me, if ye will."

"M'sieur!"

And though they were deeply shadowed, he could see her cheeks flaming as she backed away, rubbing the caressed spot with the corner of her apron. For he had kissed her. O'Rourke laughed softly, without moving.

"Don't be angry with me," he pleaded, but with no evident contrition. "What's in a kiss, me dear? Sure, 'tis no harm at all, at all! And how was I to hold meself back, now, with you before me, pretty as a picture?"

It pleased her—his ready tongue. That became apparent, though she sought to hide it with a pretense of indignation.

"One would think—" she tried to storm.

"What, now, darlint?"

"One would almost believe m'sieur the Irishman!"

"An Irishman I am, praises be!" cried O'Rourke, forgetting his rôle. "But"—he remembered again—"the Irishman; who might he be?"

"M'sieur le Col. O'Rourke!"

"What!"

And M'sieur le Col. O'Rourke got down from the table hastily.

"Ye know me?" he demanded.

The girl's astonishment was too plain to be ignored.

"It is not that m'sieur is himself

M'sieur le Colonel?" she cried, putting a discreet distance between them.

"Tis just that. And how would ye be knowing me name, if you please?"

"Why, surely, all know that m'sieur is coming to Lützelburg!" cried the ingenuous mam'selle. "Else why should a guard be stationed at every road crossing the frontier?"

"For what, will ye tell me?"

"For what but to keep m'sieur from entering."

"As ye say, for what else?" O'Rourke stroked his chin, puzzled, staring at this girl with such an astonishing fund of information.

How came she to know so much?

"Am I so unpopular, then!" he would know.

"Non, m'sieur;" it is not that. It is that m'sieur is a friend of M'sieur Chambret, and—"

"Yes, yes, darlint. Go on."

He spoke soothingly, for he desired to know more. But he found it rather annoying that the girl should persist in keeping her back to the light; it was difficult to read her face, through the shadows. He maneuvered to exchange positions with mam'selle, but she seemed intuitively to divine his purpose, and outwitted the man.

"And," she resumed, under encouragement, "M'sieur Chambret is known to love Madame la Duchesse, whom Prince Georges wishes to marry. It is known to all that M'sieur Chambret was requested to leave Lützelburg. What is more natural than that he should send his friend, the Irish adventurer, to avenge him—to take his place?"

"Yes. That's all very well, me dear; but what bewilders me—more than your own bright eyes, darlint—is: how did ye find out that I was coming here?"

O'Rourke endeavored to speak lightly, but he was biting the lip of him over that epithet, "Irish adventurer;" in which there lurked a flavor that he found distasteful. "A sweet-smelling reputation that I bear in these parts," he thought, ruefully.

"What"—the girl leaned toward O'Rourke, almost whispering; whereby she riveted his attention upon her

charms, as well as upon her words—"is more natural, m'sieur, than that Prince Georges should set a watch upon M'sieur Chambret?"

"Oh, ho!" said the Irishman. "Tis meself that begins to see a light. And, me dear," he added, sharply, "you fill me with curiosity. How comes it that ye know so much?"

"It is not unnatural, m'sieur." Her shrug was indescribably significant and altogether delightful. "Have I not a brother in Lützelburg castle, valet to M'sieur le Prince? If a brother drops a word or two, to his sister, now and then, is she to be blamed for his indiscretions?"

"Sure, not!" cried the Irishman, emphatically. "Ye are to be thanked, I'm thinking. And where did ye say this precious frontier lay?"

"The line crosses the highway not the quarter of a mile to the south, m'sieur. You will know it when you are stopped by the outpost."

"Very likely, me dear—if so be it I'm stopped."

And as she watched his face, the girl may have thought that possibly he would not be stopped; for there was an expression thereon which boded ill to whomsoever should attempt to hinder an O'Rourke from attending to the business to which he had set his hand.

"Mam'selle!" he bowed. "I'm infinitely obliged to ye. Faith, 'tis yourself that has done a great service this day to the O'Rourke—and be that same token 'tis the O'Rourke that hardly knows how to reward ye!"

"But—" she suggested, timidly, yet with mirth lurking in her tone, "does not M'sieur le Colonel consider that he has amply rewarded me, in advance?" and upon the heel of her words she began to scrub vigorously her cheek with the apron.

He threw back his head and laughed; and was still laughing—for she had been too quick for him—when she rose, with a warning finger upon her lips.

"M'sieur!"—earnestly. "Silence, if you please—for your life's sake!"

"Eh!" cried O'Rourke, startled. And then the laugh died in his throat. The

girl had turned, and now her profile was black against the sunny window; and it was most marvelously perfect. O'Rourke's breath came fast as he looked; for she was surprisingly fair and good to look upon. It was the first time he had seen her close enough to fully comprehend her perfection, and he stood for a moment, without stirring, or, indeed, coherently thinking. It was not the nature of this man to neglect a beautiful woman, at any time; he grudged this girl no meed of the admiration that was her due.

In a moment he felt her fingers soft and warm about his own; his heart leaped—an Irishman's heart, not fickle, but inflammable; and then repressed an exclamation as his fingers were crushed in a grip so strong and commanding that it fairly amazed him.

And, "Silence; ah, silence, m'sieur!" the girl besought him, in a whisper.

Were they observed, then? He turned toward the outer door, but saw no one. But from the highway there came a clatter of hoofs.

"Soldiers!" the girl breathed. "Soldiers, m'sieur, from the frontier post. Let me go. I—"

Almost violently she wrested her hand from his, darting toward the door with a gesture that warned him back to his partitioned corner as he valued his incognito.

Halfway across the floor, she shrank back with a little cry of dismay, as the entrance to the Inn of the Winged God was darkened by two new arrivals.

They swung into the room, laughing together; tall men both, long and strong of limb, with the bearing of men confident of their place and prowess. O'Rourke, peering guardedly out from his corner, saw that they were both in uniform; green and gold tunics above closely fitting breeches of white, with riding boots of patent leather—the officers' uniform of the standing army of Lützelburg.

Now, since his coming, the taproom of the Winged God had been gradually darkening as evening drew nigh. Already—O'Rourke was surprised to observe—it was twilight without; and

now suddenly the sun sank behind the purple ridge of the distant mountains, and at once gloom shrouded the room. In it the figures of the two soldiers loomed large and vaguely.

One raised his voice, calling: "Lights!"

The girl murmured something, moving away.

"Lights, girl; lights!"

"I will send some one, messieurs," O'Rourke heard her say.

"Unnecessary, my dear," returned the first speaker. "Come hither, little one. Here is the lamp, and here a match."

Unwillingly, it seemed to the Irishman, the inn maid obeyed, stepping upon a bench and raising her arm to light the single lamp that depended from the ceiling. A match flared in her fingers, illuminating the upturned, intent face.

And O'Rourke caught at his breath again. "Faith!" he said, softly, "she is that wonderful!"

Some such thought seemed to cross the minds of both the others, at the same moment. One swore delicately—presumably in admiration; his fellow shifted to a killing pose, twirling his mustache—the elder of the pair, evidently, and a man of striking distinction of carriage.

The girl jumped lightly from the bench and turned away; but she was not yet to be permitted to retire, it seemed.

"Here, girl!" called he who had mouthed the oath.

She turned, reluctantly; the glow of the brightening lamp fell about her like a golden aureole.

"Messieurs?" she asked, with a certain dignity.

"So," drawled the elder officer, "you are a new maid, I presume?"

"Yes, messieurs," she replied, courtesying low—to hide her confusion perhaps; for she was crimson under their bold appraisal of her charms.

"Ah! Name, little one?"

"Delphine, messieurs."

"Delphine, eh? A most charming name, for a most charming girl!"

"Merci, messieurs!"

She dropped a second, humble courtesy. And O'Rourke caught himself

fancying that she did so in mockery—though, indeed, that would have assorted strangely with her lowly station.

But as she rose and confronted the men again, the elder took her chin between his thumb and forefinger, roughly twisting her face to the light.

"Strange—" he started to say; but the girl jerked away, angrily.

"Pardon, messieurs," she said, "but I would—"

Nor did she finish what was on the tip of her tongue for utterance. For she was turning away, making as though to go about her business, when this younger man clipped her suddenly about the waist, and before, perhaps, she realized what was coming, he had kissed her squarely.

O'Rourke slid from his table seat, with a little, low-toned oath. But for the moment he held himself back. It seemed as though Mademoiselle Delphine was demonstrating her ability to take care of herself.

Her white and rounded arm shot out like lightning, and her five fingers impinged upon the cheek of the younger man with a crack like a pistol shot. He jumped away, with a laughing cry of protest.

"A shrew!" he cried; "a very termagant, Prince Georges!"

In another moment she would have been gone, but the elder officer was not to be denied.

"Nay, but a woman!" he said. "A tempestuous maid, to be tamed, Charles! Not so fast, little one!" And caught her by the arm.

She wheeled upon him furiously, with a threatening hand; but his own closed about her wrist, holding her helpless the while he drew her steadily toward him.

"But one!" he pretended to beg. "But one little kiss, Mistress Delphine!"

"This has gone about far enough, messieurs," O'Rourke interposed, judging it time.

For it is one thing to kiss a pretty girl yourself, and quite another to stand by and watch a stranger kiss her regardless of her will.

So he came down toward the group slowly, with an outstretched palm.

But the prince gave him hardly a glance; he was intent upon the business of the moment.

"Kick this fellow out, Charles," he cried, contemptuously, relaxing nothing of his hold upon the girl. And then, to her: "Come, Mam'selle Delphine, but a single kiss—"

"No!" she cried. "No, messieurs!"

There was that in her tone that set O'Rourke's blood to boiling. He forgot himself, forgot the danger of his position—that danger of which he had been so lately apprised by the girl herself. He laid a hand upon the fellow's collar, with no attempt at gentleness, and another upon his wrist. A second later the prince was sprawling in the sand upon the floor.

And O'Rourke promptly found himself engaged in defending himself, to the best of his slight ability, from a downward sweep of the younger officer's broadsword.

"You damned coward!" the Irishman cried, ablaze with rage.

His walking stick—a stout blackthorn relic of the old country—deflected the blade. The young officer spat an oath at him and struck again, using neither judgment nor skill. O'Rourke caught the blow a second time upon the stick, twisted the blackthorn through the other's guard and rapped him sharply across the knuckles.

"You infernal poltroon!" he said, furiously. "To attack an unarmed man!"

The sword swept up through the air in a glittering arc, to fall clattering in a far corner. O'Rourke gave it slight heed. There was much to be accomplished ere that sword should strike the earth.

He leaped in upon the younger officer, whirling the blackthorn above his head; the man stepped back, raising his arms as though dazed. The stick descended with force enough to beat down this guard and crash dully upon his skull. He fell—like a log, in fact; and so lay still for a space.

And O'Rourke jumped back upon the instant, and just in time to knock a revolver from the hand of the elder man.

"You, too—a coward!" he cried. "Are there no men in this land?"

Simultaneously the revolver was discharged. The shot rang loudly in the confines of the taproom walls, but the bullet harmlessly buried itself in the wainscoting. O'Rourke jumped for it and kicked the pistol through the open doorway.

"So much for that!" he cried, darting toward the corner where the sword of the unconscious man had fallen. "Come, Prince Georges of Lützelburg—princely coward!" he taunted the elder man. "Come—'tis one to one, now—sword to sword, m'sieur! Are ye afraid, or will ye fight—ye scum of the earth?"

He need hardly have asked. Already the prince was upon his feet, and had drawn. O'Rourke's fingers closed upon the hilt of the saber. Instantly a thrill ran through him; this was his life to him, to face odds, to have a sword in his hand.

"Good!" he cried, joyfully. "Now, M'sieur le Prince!"

He met the onslaught with a hasty parry. A cluster of sparks flew from the blades. O'Rourke stepped in boldly to close quarters, his right arm swinging the heavy saber like a feather, his left ending in a clinched hand held tightly to the small of his back.

The room filled with the ringing clangor of the clashing steel. Prince Georges at least was not afraid of personal hurt; he engaged the Irishman closely, cutting and parrying with splendid skill—a wonderful swordsman, a *beau sabreur*, master of his weapon and—master of O'Rourke.

The Irishman was quick to realize this. He had met more than his match; the man who opposed him was his equal in weight and length of arm, his equal in defense, his superior in attack. He fought at arm's length with O'Rourke, giving not an inch, but rather ever pressing in upon him, hammering down upon his guard a veritable tornado of crashing blows.

O'Rourke reeled and gave ground under the furious onslaught. He leaped away time and again, only to find the

prince again upon him, abating no whit of his determined attack. In his eyes O'Rourke read nothing of mercy, nought but a perhaps long dormant blood-lust suddenly roused. He came to an understanding that he was fighting for his life, that this was no mere fencing bout, nothing to be regarded lightly—no child's play, but deadly earnest. And with his mind's eye he foresaw the outcome.

Well—one can but die. At least Prince Georges should have his fill of the fight; and an Irishman who fights hopelessly fights with all the reckless rage of a rat in a corner.

So O'Rourke fought, there in the taproom of the Inn of the Winged God. He took no risks, ventured nothing of doubtful outcome. If a chance for an attack was to come, he was ready for it, his eye like a cat's for the opening for a thrust or a slashing cut. But if that was to be denied him, he had an impregnable defense, seemingly. He might retreat—and he did, thrice circling the room—but he retreated fighting. And so, fighting, he would fall when the time came.

In one thing only he surpassed the aggressor—in endurance. His out door life of the past few days had put him into splendid trim. He battled on, with hardly a hair displaced; whereas Monsieur le Prince pressed his advantage by main will power, advancing with some difficulty because of the heaving of his broad chest, gasping for air, at times, like a fish out of its element—but still advancing, still pressing the Irishman to the utmost.

Thrice they made the circuit of the room, O'Rourke escaping a fall or collision with the tables and chairs seemingly by a sixth sense—the eye in the back of his head, which warned him of obstacles that might easily have proved his downfall.

He was outgeneraled, too; twice he endeavored to back himself through the outer doorway, and both times the prince got himself between the Irishman and his sole remaining hope of escape.

And then it narrowed down to a

mere contest of endurance—M. le Prince already tired, and O'Rourke fast failing and beginning to feel the effects of his day's long tramp.

The room began to whirl dizzily about them both—like a changing, hazy panorama, wherein O'Rourke was dimly conscious of pink, gaping faces filling the doorways, and the round, staring eyes of frightened and awed peasants at the windows.

And so, possibly, it was as a relief to both when, eventually, the Irishman managed to get the breadth of a table between them, and when each was free to pause and pant the while they glared one at the other, measuring their opponent's staying powers—for a test of sheer lasting ability it was now become. The man who should be able to keep upon his feet the longest—he was to win. And neither read "quarter" in his enemy's eyes.

As they stood thus, watching one another jealously, out of the tail of his eye O'Rourke saw the fallen officer—Charles—stir, and sit upright. He dared not take his attention from the prince, and yet he was able to note that the younger man stared confusedly at first, then staggered to his feet, and so doing, put his hand to his pistol holster.

Opportunely a curious thing occurred. A voice rang through the room, loudly, cheerfully:

"The O'Rourke!" it stated explicitly. "Or Satan himself!"

All three turned, by a common impulse, toward the outer door. It framed a man entirely at his ease, dressed in the grotesque arrangement that constitutes an automobiling costume, in these days, holding in his left hand the goggled mask which the driver affects. But in the other hand, level with his eye, he poised a revolver, the muzzle of which was directly trained upon him whom Prince Georges had called Charles.

"Chambret!" cried O'Rourke. "Upon me soul, ye're welcome!"

"I thought as much, my friend," replied Chambret. "And I am glad to be in time to—to see fair play, Col. Charles! May I suggest, monsieur, that you take your hand from the butt

of that weapon and stand aside until my friend has settled his little affair with Monsieur le Prince?"

The face of the young officer flushed darkly red; he bit his lip with rage, darting toward Chambret a venomous glance. Yet he stood aside, very obediently, as a wiser man than he might well have done.

"O'Rourke!" then cried Chambret. "Guard, my friend—guard yourself!"

It was time. M. le Prince, sticking at nothing, had edged stealthily around the table. O'Rourke started and put himself in a defensive position in the very nick of time. Another moment and Chambret's warning had been vain.

Again they fought, but at first less spiritedly; to O'Rourke it seemed as though the contest had degenerated into a mere endeavor to kill time, rather than to dispose of one another. And yet he was acutely conscious that a single misstep would prove his death warrant; and was very, very anxious not to take that step.

He found time, too, to wonder even a trifle bitterly what had become of Mademoiselle Delphine. It seemed passing strange that he saw nought of her—had missed her ever since he had come to her aid. Surely she had been very well content to leave him to his fate, once he had championed her cause! It was strange, he thought according to his lights—very odd—

And so thinking he became aware that the brief interval had refreshed M. le Prince more than it had himself.

Georges now seemed possessed of seven devils, all thirsting for the soul of O'Rourke. He flew at him, abruptly, without the least warning, like a whirlwind. O'Rourke was beaten back a dozen yards in as many seconds. There was no killing time about the combat now—O'Rourke well knew.

And he felt himself steadily failing. Once he slipped and all but went upon his knees, and when he recovered was trembling in every limb like an aspen leaf. And, again, he blundered into a chair, sending it crashing to the floor; when it seemed ages ere he managed to disentangle his feet from its legs—

seemed the longer since the sword of Prince Georges quivered over him like the wrath of a just God, relentless and terrible.

He had one last hope—to get himself in a corner, with his back to the wall, and stand M. le Prince off until the bitter end. At least, he prayed he might get in one good blow before—that end. And so he made for the corner nearest him.

In the end he gained it against odds—for Prince Georges divined his purpose and did his utmost to thwart it. But when at last the Irishman had gained this slight advantage, his heart sank within him; Georges closed fearlessly, not keeping at sword's length, as O'Rourke had calculated he would.

O'Rourke was flattened, fairly, against that wall. He fought with desperate cunning, but ever more feebly, "God!" he cried once, between clinched teeth. "Could I but touch him!"

Georges heard, grinning maliciously.

"Never, fortune hunter!" he returned, redoubling his efforts. "You may as well pray—"

What else he said O'Rourke never knew, for at that instant he felt the wall give to the pressure of his shoulders, and a breath of cool air swept past him.

"A door!" he thought and, leaping backwards, fell sprawling in utter darkness.

It was indeed a door. As he lay there the Irishman caught a transient glimpse of a woman's head and shoulders outlined against the light, and then the door was closed, and he heard her throw herself bodily against it, and the dull click of a bolt as it was shot home; also a maddened oath and a terrific blow upon the panels from M. le Prince.

CHAPTER III.

THE RAT TRAP.

O'Rourke was prompt to scramble to his feet. He found himself wrapt about with profound blackness. The place wherein he stood was like the very heart of night itself. But for the quick flutter of the breath of the woman who was

near him, he was without an inkling as to where he might be.

But for the moment he was content to know that he was with her. He groped in the darkness with a tentative hand, which presently encountered the girl's, and closed upon it; and he started to speak, but she gave him pause.

"Hush, m'sieur!" she breathed. "Hush—and come with me quickly. You have not an instant to spare."

Her concluding word was drowned in the report of a pistol. The girl started, with a frightened cry. A roar of cursing filled the room which the O'Rourke, providentially, had just quitted. It subsided suddenly; and then the two heard the cool, incisive accents of M. Chambret.

"Not so fast, M. le Prince," they heard him say, warningly. "Take it with more *aplomb*, I advise you. Upon my word of honor, you die if you move a finger within ten minutes!"

"And then—?" came the wrathful voice of Georges.

"Then," said Chambret, delicately ironical, "I shall be pleased to leave you to your—devices—shall we call them? For my part, I shall be on my way in my automobile."

They heard no more. The girl was already dragging O'Rourke away.

"Ten minutes!" she whispered, gratefully.

"Tis every bit as good as a year, just now," O'Rourke assured her, lightly—more lightly than his emotions warranted indeed.

"Ah, m'sieur!" she said, deprecating his exultant tone.

"Whisht, darlint," he cried. "Don't ye be worrying about me, now. 'Tis O'Rourke that can care for his head, Mair'selle Delphine—now that ye're given me a fighting chance."

But she only answered, "Come!" tugging impatiently at his hand; and he was very willing to follow her, even unto the ends of the known world, as long as he might be so led by her warm, soft fingers.

He grew quite bewildered in the following few minutes. It seemed that they threaded a most curious maze of

vacant rooms and sounding galleries—all in total eclipse. And once, for some time, they were passing through what may have been a tunnel, dark and musty, wherein the Irishman, by putting forth his free hand, was able to touch a rough, damp wall of hewn stone.

But at the end of that they came to a doorway, where they halted. The girl evidently produced a key, for she released O'Rourke's hand, and a second later he heard the grating of a rusty lock and then the protests of reluctant hinges.

"And where will this be taking us?" he asked, at length.

"To safety, for you, I pray, m'sieur."

"Thank ye, Mam'selle Delphine."

"Quick!" she interrupted, impatiently.

A rush of cool air and fresh enveloped them. O'Rourke stepped out, close on the heels of the girl; who turned and swung to the door, relocking it.

They were standing under the open sky of night. Absolute silence lay about them, and infinite peace was there, under a multitude of clear shining stars.

The change was so abrupt as to seem momentarily unreal; O'Rourke shook his head, as one would rid his brain of the cobwebs of a dream—then looked about him.

"Where would we be, now, me dear?" he asked.

"Hush!" she cried guardedly, pointing.

His gaze followed the line of her arm, and he discovered that they were standing upon a hillside over across from the Inn of the Winged God. Its doors and windows were flaming yellow against the night; and set square against the illumination of the main entrance, O'Rourke could see the burly bulk of Chambret. Without, in the road, loomed the black and shining mass of a powerful automobile, motionless, its lamps glaring balefully—seeming a living thing, O'Rourke fancied, and very like some squat, misshapen nocturnal monster.

But Chambret did not stir; and from that the Irishman knew that his ten minutes was not yet up. Nevertheless, he

tightened his hold upon the hilt of the naked saber which he still carried, and started back toward the inn.

The girl caught him by the arm.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"Back." O'Rourke looked down upon her in surprise. "Back to my friend. What! Am I, too, a chicken-heart, to leave him there, alone—?"

"M. Chambret," she interrupted, "is master of the situation, M'sieur le Colonel. He can take care of himself."

"You know him?"

"You—you—" For an instant she stammered, at a loss for her answer. "I—I heard you name him, m'sieur," she made out to say, at length.

"Ah, yes. But, for all that, I'm not going to leave him—"

"Too late, m'sieur. See!"

Again she indicated the inn. O'Rourke looked, swearing in his excitement—but under his breath, that she—an inn-maid!—might not be offended.

He saw Chambret, for a moment, as he had been—steady and solid as a rock in the doorway. An instant later, he was gone; and from the taproom came a volley of shouts and curses, tempered to faint echoes because of the distance.

Promptly the automobile began to move. And as it did the doorway was filled with struggling men. Chambret appeared to stand up in the machine, and fire at the mass. His revolver spat fire thrice.

The shots were answered without delay. The machine gathered speed, and swept snorting westwards. Prince Georges and Col. Charles of the army of Lützelburg were to be seen pursuing it down the road, afoot, peppering the night with futile bullets and filling it with foul vituperation.

Presently they must have realized what feeble figures they were cutting in the eyes of the peasants; for they halted. By then they were near enough for their high and angry tones to be distinguishable to O'Rourke and the girl.

"Back!" they heard Georges cry. "To the horses!"

"But we cannot overtake him, m'sieur—"

"Fool! The patrol will halt him, and we shall arrive in good time."

As though in answer to Georges' statement, a volley of carbine shots rang sharply from the direction of the frontier, continuing for a full minute, to be followed by the rapid, dying clatter of horses' hoofs.

The Frenchman's automobile had reached the outpost, had dashed through its surprised resistance, and was gone, on to Lützelburg.

So much Georges surmised—and truly. "The fools!" he cried. "They were not alert without us, Charles. Come—let us get back to the inn. At least we have left to us that cursed Irishman and—"

"If so be it they have not already escaped through the fields," interrupted Charles.

Their voices faded into murmurs as they retreated. The girl tugged at O'Rourke's hand.

"Hurry, m'sieur," she implored.

But O'Rourke was thinking of his comrade and the gantlet he had just run. The reports of the carbines still filled his ears with grim forebodings.

"God send that he was not hit!" he prayed, fervently. "A true man, if ever one lived."

"Yes, yes, m'sieur. But come, ah, come!"—with an odd little catch in her voice.

Obediently O'Rourke followed her. They trod for a time upon a little path, worn through the open fields, making toward a stretch of forest that loomed dimly vast and mysterious to the southwards.

"I'm wondering, Mam'selle Delphine," said the Irishman, "how we got out, there on the hillside."

"By an underground passage," she explained, impatiently. "The inn," she added, "is old; it bore not always as good a reputation as it now does."

"Thank ye," he said. "And since ye can tell me that, can ye not go a bit further and tell me how I am to balance my account with you, mam'selle?"

"Yes," she replied; "I—I will tell you."

There was a strange hesitation in her

speech—as though some emotion choked her. O'Rourke wondered, as, silently now, since she did not at once make good her words and inform him, he followed her across the fields.

Nor, indeed, did mam'selle of the inn speak again until she had brought the Irishman to the edge of that woodland, and for a moment or two had skirted its depths. Abruptly, she paused, turning toward him and laying a tentative hand upon his arm.

"M'sieur," she said—and again with the little catch in her tone—"here is the frontier of France."

"And there—Lützelburg?" he inquired, unawed.

"Yes—beyond the white stone."

The white stone of the boundary was no more than a yard away. "Come!" cried O'Rourke; and in two steps was in Lützelburg.

"Did ye think me the man to hesitate?" he asked, wonderingly. "Did ye think I'd draw back me hand—especially after what's passed between meself and that dog, M'sieur le Prince?"

"I did not know," she confessed, looking up into his face. "M'sieur is very bold; for M. le Prince sticks at nothing."

"Faith, the time is nigh when he'll stick at the O'Rourke, I promise ye!" he boasted, with his heart hot within him as he remembered how cowardly had been the assault upon him.

She smiled a little at his assurance. There spoke the Irishman, she may have been thinking. But her smile was one heavenly to the man.

Allowances may be made for him. He was aged neither in years nor in heart; and the society of a beautiful woman was something for which he had starved during the winter just past. And surely mam'selle's face was very lovely as she held it toward his—pale, glimmering in the starlight, with sweet, deep shadows where her eyes glowed, her lips a bit parted, her breath coming rapidly; and so near to him she stood that it stirred upon his cheek like a soft caress.

And he bent toward her quickly. Quickly, but not so swiftly that she

might not escape; which she did with a movement as agile as a squirrel's; thereafter standing a little ways from him, and laughing half-heartedly.

"Ah, m'sieur!" she reproached him for his audacity.

"I don't care!" he defied her anger. "Why will ye tempt me, Mam'selle Delphine—ye with your sweet, pretty ways, and that toss av your head that's like an invitation—though I misdoubt ye are meaning the half of it? Am I a man or—or what?—that I should be cold to ye——?"

"Ah, but you are a man, m'sieur, as you have to-night well proved!" she told him desperately. "You were asking what you could do to even our score?"

"Yes, mam'selle," he said, humbly.

"Then, m'sieur——" And now she drew nearer to him, trustingly, almost pleadingly. "Then, m'sieur, you have only to continue what you set out to do—even at the risk of your life. Ah, m'sieur, it is much that I ask, but—am I not to be pitied? Indeed, I am mad, mad with anxiety. Go, m'sieur, if you would serve me—go on and save to me the little duke! Think, m'sieur, what they may be doing to my son——"

"Your son—Mam'selle Delphine!"

O'Rourke jumped back as though he had been shot, then stood stock-still, transfixed with amazement. "Your son!" he cried again.

"Ah, m'sieur, yes. It is true that I deceived you, but at first it was to save you from arrest, m'sieur. I—I am——"

"Madame la Duchesse!" he cried. "Blind fool that I was, not to have guessed it! Pardon, madame!"

And he sank upon his knee, carrying her hand to his lips. "Madame!" he muttered humbly. "'Tis the O'Rourke who would go to the ends av the earth to serve ye!"

Was it accident, premeditation—or what deeper—that led the woman's fingers to stray among the soft, dark curls of the man?

"M'sieur, m'sieur!" she cried breathlessly. "Rise, m'sieur. I—you—you are very kind to me——"

Her voice seemed to fail her. She

paused. O'Rourke rose slowly, retaining his hold upon her hand. His mind cast back in rapid retrospect of the events of the day, since his advent at the Inn of the Winged God. It came to him as a flash of lightning, this revelation, making clear much that might otherwise have seemed mysterious. And he knew that she was indeed Madame la Duchesse de Lützelburg, this girl—she seemed no more—this girl whom he was suddenly holding in his arms, who sobbed passionately, her face hidden upon his breast.

For that, too, came to him there in the infinite quietude of the woodland, under the soft-falling radiance of God's stars. How it came to pass neither could have told. Whether it was brought about by either some sudden flush of dawning love on her part for this man whom many had loved and were yet to love, or by the tender, impetuous heart of him, whose blood coursed in his veins never so hotly as when for beauty in distress—who shall say?

But one thing was certain—that she lay content in his arms for a time. All other things were of no account. Chambret—Madame la Princesse, Beatrice de Grandlieu. In the perilous sweetness of that moment friendship was forgotten, the love of the man's life lost, engulfed in the love of the moment. The world reeled dizzily about him, and the lips of the grand duchess were sweet as wine to a fainting man.

But she first came to her senses, in time, and broke from his arms.

"Ah, m'sieur!" she cried. And the face he saw was beautiful, even though stained by tears, though wrung by distress. "But this is madness, madness!" she cried again.

"Sure," he said, confusedly, for indeed and the world was upside down with him then—"tis the sweetest madness that ever mortal did know! Faith, me head's awhirl with that same madness, and the heart of me's on fire—ah, madame, madame!"

"No," she cried, softly. "No, my—

my friend—I—I cannot——” And she put forth a hand to ward off his swift advances.

Somehow the gesture brought reason into his madness. He stopped, catching her hand, and for a moment stood with bended head, stroking that hand tenderly.

“Ye are right, madame,” he said at length. “I was the madman. ‘Tis past now—the seizure. Can ye forgive me—and forget, madame?”

“M’sieur, to forgive is not hard.” She smiled dazzlingly through a mist of tears. “To forget—is that so easy?”

But now he had a strong hand upon his self-control. “‘Tis not the O’Rourke that will be forgetting, madame,” he told her. “But Madame la Grande Duchesse de Lützelburg must forget—and well I know that! Let be! ‘Tis past—past—and there’s no time to be wasted, I’m thinking, if we are to outwit Georges this night.”

“That—that is very true. Thank you, m’sieur. You—you are very generous.”

She came closer to him, her eyes upon his face. But he looked away from her, sinking his nails deep into his palms to help him remember his place, his duty. Indeed, the man was sorely tried to keep his arms from about the woman again. “Chambret!” he remembered. And that name he repeated, as though it were a talisman against a recurrence of that dear madness. “Beatrice!” he said also, and grew more strong.

“Lead on, madame,” he presently told her, his tone dogged.

She may have guessed from that what war waged itself in the bosom of O’Rourke. Her gaze grew very soft and tender as she regarded him. And abruptly she wheeled about upon her heel.

“Come, m’sieur,” she requested, coolly. “The night is young, but as you say, there is much to be accomplished.”

He started and followed after her, into the fastnesses of the forest, where the night gathered black about them, and he could only guess his way by the glimmer of her white neckerchief flitting before him.

“Where now, madame?” he asked, after a great while, for it began to seem as though they were to walk on thus forever, and O’Rourke was growing weary.

“We are going to the hunting lodge of—of my son, the grand duke,” she said. And her manner showed what constraint she put upon herself, told of what humiliation of spirit she was undergoing.

“And for why?” he would know.

“It is where I shall change my dress,” she said. “I have the keys to the place, and to-day, when it seemed that I must go to warn you of your danger, m’sieur——”

“Bless ye for that!” he interjected.

“I bethought me of the lodge. So, with two maids, I went to it, by stealth. They do not know now in Lützelburg what has become of their duchess. I disguised myself—as I thought—in the peasant dress, and went alone afoot to the inn.”

“Ye knew the landlord, madame?” he asked, to take her mind from more serious matters.

“I knew him, yes,” she told him, “and bribed him to let me take the place of his servant for the day. M. Chambret, of course you understand, had advised me as to what road you would take to enter Lützelburg.

“Now, it is to bid farewell to Delphine of the inn, m’sieur, and become once more the Grand Duchess of Lützelburg.”

By then they had come out into a clearing in the woodland. Before them a small building loomed, dark and cheerless of seeming; not a glimmer of light showed in any of its windows. Nor was a sound to be heard in the clearing, save the soughing of the wind in the boughs overhead.

“By my orders,” madame paused to explain, “there are no lights, the better to attract no comment. You will wait for me here, my friend”—she turned toward him timidly—“my dear friend, until I am ready?”

“Faith, yes, madame; what else?”

“I shall not be long,” she said. Yet she hesitated at the door of the hunting

lodge, smiling at O'Rourke almost apprehensively.

"You—you will not forget—" she faltered.

"Madame," he told her boldly, "I shall never forget Mam'selle Delphine of the Inn of the Winged God; as to Madame la Grande Duchesse, I have yet to meet her."

"Ah, m'sieur, but you *are* generous. Thank you, thank you."

The woman turned, lifted the knocker on the door, and let it fall thrice, presumably a signal agreed upon between her and her companions. The thunder of the metal resounded emptily through the house, but in response there was no other sound. Again she repeated the alarm, and again was doomed to disappointment.

"Why, I do not understand," she cried, petulantly. "Surely they understood me; they were to wait."

"Allow me," suggested the Irishman. He stepped to her side, tried the knob; under his hand it turned, the door opening easily inward upon its hinges. Madame stepped back with a little cry of alarm.

"I do not understand," she reiterated.

"Something frightened them, possibly," O'Rourke reassured her. "One moment. Do you wait while I strike you a light."

He crossed the threshold, stepping into blank darkness. He heard the voice of madame.

"The lodge is lighted by electricity," he heard her telling him from her stand upon the doorsill. "There is a switch on the right hand wall, near the window."

"Where did you say?" he inquired, groping about blindly.

"I will show you, m'sieur."

She came into the room confidently. "Thank goodness!" exclaimed O'Rourke, gratefully, fearful for his shins.

He heard her step beside him, and the swish of her skirt as she passed. Abruptly she cried out, as though in protest: "M'sieur, what do you mean?"

At the same moment the door swung to with a thunderous crash, and a blaze

of blinding light filled the interior of the hunting lodge of the Grand Duke of Lützelburg.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OUT-TRAIL.

For the moment O'Rourke could do nought but blink confusedly, being more than half blinded by the sudden plunge from utter darkness into the electric glare.

But in those few passing seconds he thought very swiftly, and began to understand what was happening, in proof of which comprehension he stepped back, putting his shoulders to the closed door and tightening his grip upon the naked saber which he still carried.

"A trap!"

He ground the words bitterly between his teeth, looking about him dazedly, still unable to see clearly.

He heard a grim chuckle—the cold laugh of malicious satisfaction—and then, "Messieurs," said a voice that sounded reminiscently in his ears, "permit me to introduce the rat!"

O'Rourke looked directly toward the speaker; his gaze met eyes hard and without warmth—sneering eyes vitalized with hatred, small and black, set narrowly in a face pale and long—the face of M. le Prince.

And as he watched, the thin lips twisted, while again the scornful laugh rang out.

"Messieurs," the prince repeated, "the rat!"

Some one giggled nervously.

O'Rourke recovered somewhat of his composure. He addressed this new-sprung enemy.

"I'm observing," he said, coolly, "that here is not only the trap and the rat, but also the dog for the rat-killing—you infamous whelp!"

He was looking into the barrel of a revolver, held in the prince's steady hand—looking, indeed, into death's very eye. And he knew it, yet turned a contemptuous shoulder to Prince Georges, glancing around the room for others, seeking a friendly eye or a way of escape.

The lodge—or that room of it where-in he stood—held five persons in addition to O'Rourke himself, respectively: Madame la Grande Duchesse, pale with rage, defiant of mien, helpless with the arms of Col. Charles tight about her; Chambret, at the sight of whom O'Rourke caught his breath with dismay, sitting helpless in a chair, his hands tied to the rungs thereof; M. le Prince, Georges de Lützelburg, handsome, ironical of bearing; and a fifth individual, in semi-uniform, whom O'Rourke guessed—and guessed rightly, it developed—for a surgeon of Lützelburg's army.

"Put down the saber," M. le Prince told him.

And O'Rourke let it fall from his hand, being in that case wherein discretion is the better part of valor. But though he was now unarmed, the revolver continued to menace him.

"Let madame go," was the next command, directed to Col. Charles, who promptly released the duchess.

"Messieurs," she cried, "I demand an explanation of this insolence."

Georges, from his chair, regarded her with lofty contempt. "It is strange," he mused, aloud, "that a prince of Lützelburg should be addressed in such wise by a wench of the inns!"

"You contemptible cur!" cried O'Rourke.

"Softly, m'sieur, softly. I will attend to your case presently."

"At least you will adopt a different tone to madame—" O'Rourke pursued, undaunted.

"I shall order my conduct according unto my whim, m'sieur. Another word out of you, dog, and I'll settle you at once."

"Go to the devil!" said O'Rourke, without looking again at the man. He turned to Chambret.

"A pretty mess of fish we seem to have made of this business," said the Frenchman, interpreting his glance.

"You may well say that. What brought you here, *mon ami*?"

Chambret shrugged his shoulders. "The patrol," he explained. "The mo-

tor car broke down, and they caught up with me. What could I do?"

"True for ye there. And d'ye happen to know what's the program now?"

Chambret glanced toward madame, and shut his lips tightly. There was a moment of strained silence, which M. le Prince took upon himself to break, with a sarcastical drawl addressed to madame.

"Permit me, dear sister," he said, "to offer humble apologies for my manner a moment gone; the confusion of identities, you understand—ah! And, more, dear sister, I have a favor to request of you."

She looked him coldly in the eye. "Well?" she said, paling with disgust for the man.

"That you leave us alone for a few moments. We have business to transact with your friends. It will take but a minute, I assure you, and is a matter confidential—"

"I will not go!" she cried, grasping his meaning. "I will not go, to let you murder—"

"Ah!" he deprecated, smiling. "Madame is pleased to be imaginative."

"I know you!" she told him. "I know you will stop at nothing. And I tell you I will not go!"

"And yet you will," he said.

"It would be best, madame—permit me to advise," O'Rourke put in, deferentially. "Let me assure you that in this enlightened age, even a Georges de Lützelburg will not undertake a cold-blooded murder—before witnesses."

He stepped forward, opening the door against which he stood. Madame looked from his face to Chambret's, from M. le Prince's back to O'Rourke's again. "I am afraid—" she faltered; then abruptly was resolved, and, holding her head high, passed out into the night.

"You will be kind enough to shoot the bolt," O'Rourke heard the voice of the prince. Unhesitatingly he complied, turning with a little sigh of relief to face whatever fate might hold in store for him. At least the woman's eye was not to be offended by this princeling's brutality. As for himself,

O'Rourke, he could take what was to be his portion without complaining.

"And now——?" he suggested, pleasantly.

"Monsieur is agreeable," commented the prince: "A becoming change. See here," he added, with a change of manner, becoming exceedingly business-like, "it is a plain proposition.

"The presence of yourself and of M. Chambret in this duchy is distasteful to me. You seem, however, to consult your own inclinations, even at the risk of your necks. Frankly, you have annoyed me. I would have it ended, once and for all.

"Legally, I have no right to prohibit your comings or your goings. Personally, I arrogate unto myself that right. If I request you to absent yourselves, you will courteously refuse. In such event, there is to my mind but one solution of the difficulty."

"And that is——?" inquired Chambret, suddenly brightening.

"Release m'sieur," the prince commanded, and while Charles did his bidding, severing the cords which bound Chambret's hands to the chair, continued:

"And that is—a settlement of our differences by the sword. Candidly, messieurs, you know too much for my comfort. I would gladly be rid of you. By this method I propose to silence you forever."

"What!" cried O'Rourke. "You propose a duel?"

"What else?" M. le Prince motioned toward a table at one side of the room; it bore a long, black rapier case.

"Faith, I'm agreeable," announced O'Rourke. "And you, *mon ami?*" to Chambret.

"It will be charming," returned that gentleman, with a yawn. "It grows late, and I propose to sleep in a bed tonight, at the Grand Hôtel de Lützelburg. Decidedly, let us fight, and that swiftly."

"We are agreed, then, messieurs." The prince rose, went to the case, returned with four long, keen blades. One he selected and proceeded to test, bending it well-nigh double, and permitting

it to spring back, shivering—a perfect rapier.

"Good!" he expressed his satisfaction, and threw the remaining three blades upon the floor, at O'Rourke's feet.

"Obviously, the code is impossible in this emergency," he said, with an assured air. "Our method of procedure will be simple indeed, but it will bear stating.

"M. Chambret will second you, m'sieur, in the first bout, Col. Charles performing the like office for me. In the second assault, M. Bosquet, surgeon of our army, will second me, Col. Charles acting for M. Chambret."

"But," objected O'Rourke, "providing that you do not succeed in spitting me, O princeling?"

"In that case, Col. Charles will first dispose of you, then of M. Chambret. The rules hold good, either way. In any event, two of us leave the room feet first."

"I believe I can pick their names," laughed O'Rourke.

Georges glowered at him suspiciously. It may have crossed his mind that the Irishman was a man extremely confident for one who had, practically, one foot in the grave. But he made no reply.

Smiling his satisfaction—for indeed this was very much to his taste—O'Rourke stooped and possessed himself of a sword. He caused the yard of steel to sing through the air, bent it, threw it lightly up, and caught it by the hilt, laughing for pure joy.

Had he himself pulled the strings that were moving the puppets in this little drama, he was thinking, he could have devised no situation more thoroughly after his own heart.

M. le Prince, he surmised, thought to administer to him first of all a speedy and sure *coup de grâce*. Having discovered that the Irishman was no match for him with the broadsword, doubtless the prince considered that proof of his own superiority with the rapier—a weapon naturally of a greater delicacy, requiring greater subtlety, more assured finesse in its handling than the saber.

Col. Charles meanwhile advanced;

picked up the two swords, offering one to Chambret, who accepted with a courteous bow, removing his coat and rolling up his cuffs ere putting himself on one side of the room, opposite Charles, leaving the center of the floor bare for the principals.

O'Rourke shed his Norfolk jacket, bared his wrists, again seized the rapier. He brought his heels together smartly with a click, saluted superbly, and lunged at the empty air.

M. le Prince watched him with appreciation. "Very pretty," he conceded. "I am glad you have attended a fencing school, m'sieur. It is a matter for self congratulation that I have not to slay an absolute novice."

O'Rourke affected an extreme air of surprise.

"You have scruples, then?" he gibed.

But already Georges' face had become masklike, expressionless—the face of a professional gambler about to fleece a dupe.

"Twill be hard to rattle him, I'm thinking," said O'Rourke to himself. Aloud, "Since we waive code etiquette, m'sieur," he announced, "I am ready."

M. le Prince saluted silently, and put himself on guard simultaneously with the Irishman's guard.

Their blades slithered, clashed, striking a clear, bell-like note in the otherwise deathly silence that obtained within the lodge.

Chambret and Charles advanced cautiously from their walls, watching the crossed swords with an eternal vigilance, their own weapons alert to strike them up at the first suspicion of a foul on either side.

For a moment the two combatants remained almost motionless, endeavoring each to "sense" his antagonist's method, striving each to solve the secret of his opponent's maturing campaign.

Then, looking straight into the prince's eyes, "Come, come!" invited O'Rourke. "Have ye lost heart entirely, man? Don't keep me waiting all day."

Georges made no reply save by a lightning-like lunge, which O'Rourke parried imperturbably.

"Clever," he admitted, cheerfully. "But too sudden, M. le Prince. More carefully another time, if ye please."

Again he parried, riposting smartly; the point of his rapier rang loudly upon the guard of the prince's.

"Careful, careful," warned O'Rourke, gaining a step or two.

"By the way," he suggested, suddenly. "Faith, 'tis meself that's growing forgetful, m'sieur. Before I put ye out of your misery, tell me now, where is little Duke Jehan?"

"Be silent, dog!" snarled the prince.

"Be polite, ye scum of the earth!"

And O'Rourke, feinting, put his point within the prince's guard and ripped his shirt-sleeve to the shoulder.

"Just to show ye I could do it," he chuckled. "Another time, I'll not be so merciful. Tell me, now, where have ye put the child?"

He lunged thrice with bewildering rapidity. The prince gave way a half dozen feet of ground under the fury of the attack.

"Tell me!" thundered O'Rourke, "before I do ye a hurt, man!"

But the answer he got was a stubborn silence.

From that point on he forced the fighting to the end. It was even as he had suspected: he was in no way inferior to Georges. Rather was the contrary the case, for the prince, marvelous swordsman though he were, fought by the rigid rules of a single school—the French, while O'Rourke fought with a composite knowledge, skilled in as many methods as there were flags under which he had served.

Slowly, carefully and relentlessly he advanced, obliging M. le Prince to concede foot after foot of ground. And the combat, which had begun in the center of the floor—and the room was both wide and deep—by gradual degrees was carried down its center to the wall farthest from the door.

And with every skillful thrust, he dinned into the ears of the other an insistent query:

"Where have ye put the child, m'sieur?"

Presently Georges found himself

fairly pinned to the wall. He attempted an escape this way and that, to the one side or the other, but ever vainly, ever, as he sought to make him a path with feint or thrust or sidelong footwork, he found his path barred with a threatening point, like a spot of dancing fire engirdling him about.

For the Irishman seemed to wield a dozen swords, and as many menacing points enmeshed Georges de Lützelburg, denying him even hope.

O'Rourke's wrist was seemingly of steel, tempered like a fine spring; his sword gave nothing, took all ungratefully, and cried aloud for more and more of the prince's failing strength. The eye of the Irishman was clear and keen—now hard and ruthless of aspect. And his defense was a wall impregnable.

"Tell me," he chanted, monotonously, "what have ye done with the little duke?"

Slowly the prince conceded to himself defeat, and yet he sought about for a desperate expedient toward escape, be that however shameful, so long as it saved him his filthy life.

A hunted look crept into the man's eyes, and his breath came short and gaspingly, as he struggled to advance one foot, even, from the wall that so hampered him—and had his striving for his pains.

With the realization of his fate dancing before his weary eyes, yet he rallied and fought for a time insanely, sapping his vitality with useless feints and madened lunges that came to nought but O'Rourke's furthered advantage.

And then, "It is over," he told himself.

O'Rourke's ceaseless inquiry rang in his ears like a clarion knell:

"Where is the Grand Duke of Lützelburg, dead man?"

Fencing desperately, "Will you give me my life if I tell?"

"That will I, though ye don't deserve it!"

"Hidden in my personal apartments at the castle," panted the man.

O'Rourke incautiously drew off, lowering his point a trifle. "Is that the truth?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Truth indeed," returned the duke.

At the moment a slight exclamation from Charles made the Irishman turn his head. For a passing second he was off his guard. That second M. le Prince seized upon.

"The truth," he gasped, "but you'll never live to tell it!"

And on the words he lunged.

Some instinct made O'Rourke jump. It saved his life. The blade passed through his sword arm cleanly, and was withdrawn. The pain of it brought a cry to his lips. "You treacherous snake!" he screamed, turning upon the prince.

The vileness of it made his blood boil. A flush of rage colored his brain, so that he seemed to see the world darkly, through a mist of scarlet wherein only the face of his enemy was visible.

He turned upon the prince, I say, shifting his rapier to his left hand. The very surprise of his movements proved the prince's undoing; O'Rourke's naked hand struck up his blade. He closed with Georges, his fingers clutching about the viper's throat—the fingers of the hand belonging to the wounded arm, at that. With incredible dexterity he shortened his grip on the rapier, grasping it half way down the blade, using it after the fashion of a poniard.

And what was mortal of M. le Prince, Georges de Lützelburg collapsed upon the floor.

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"Ye heard what he said? That the child is in his apartments in the castle?" O'Rourke asked Chambret, a moment after.

The three men—Chambret, Charles and Bosquet, the surgeon—were kneeling around the body of the prince. That man dead, by mutual consent his plan for the continuance of the duel was abandoned. Charles, for one, was ghastly livid, plainly with neither heart nor stomach for another fight.

Chambret looked up from the face of the dying man.

"I heard," he said, grimly.

O'Rourke stood above him, pulling

down his cuffs, composedly, and holding his coat and hat beneath his arm.

"What are ye going to do?" demanded Chambret.

"Go out for a breath of air, *mon ami*," replied the Irishman. "I'll carry the good news to madame, if ye've no objection."

"Ah, my friend, I thank you."

"Say no more about it, me boy."

He walked steadily to the door, pulled it open, after unbolting, and stepped out, closing it behind him.

The duchess was instantly by his side, her hands stretched forth in an agony of supplication.

"M'sieur, m'sieur!" she cried. "You are not hurt?"

"Not a word for Chambret!" he thought. "I must get out of this, and quickly." Aloud: "Not even scratched," he lied, to baffle commiseration, and kept his arm by his side. Though he felt the blood trickling down within his sleeve, a hot stream, yet it was too dark for the woman to see.

"Georges is—dead," he told her, shortly; "and you'll find your son, madame, in his rooms in the castle."

"Thank God!" She was silent for a moment. "My little son!" she said, softly. "Ah, m'sieur, you have saved him from—who knows what? How can I show my gratitude?"

"By forgetting the O'Rourke, madame," he said, almost roughly.

"What do you mean?" She caught him by the sleeve as he turned away. "You are not going, m'sieur?"

"Instantly, madame."

"But why—why?"

"Madame, because my work is done here. Good-night, madame."

"But, m'sieur, m'sieur! Ah, stay!"

He shook his arm free, with no effort to ameliorate his rudeness.

"Good-night, madame," he repeated, stiffly, with his heart in his throat, and was off, swinging down the forest path.

He had not taken a dozen paces, however, before she was at his side, her arms soft, and clinging about his neck.

"Ah, m'sieur, m'sieur!" she cried, and her tone thrilled the man through every fiber of him. "You have not deceived me as to your motive, O gallant and loyal gentleman!"

She pulled his head down, and though he resisted, kissed him on the lips, passionately.

"*Au revoir, m'sieur*," she said, letting him go.

For the second time that night he dropped upon his knee and took her hand to his lips. When he arose it was with a face averted.

"Good-by, madame," he said, and struck off down the path without once looking back.

After a little time he heard Chambret calling his name frantically, and at that moment, coming upon a bypath, O'Rourke took it to shake off pursuit; and, presently coming to a brook, he sat him down on the bank and there washed and bandaged his wound after a fashion.

Then, rising, he went on, fagged and sick at heart, but true to his code of honor; and to be true to that it was essential for him to leave the eyes of Madame la Duchess de Lützelburg far behind him.

Later in the night he emerged from the forest and came out upon a highway, along which he strode purposefully. The exercise sent the blood tingling through his veins, making a brighter complexion for his thoughts.

He put his face toward the East—the mysterious East—and covered much ground.

He lifted his head, sniffing the air eagerly. He was abroad in the open—free, penniless. The world lay before him, it seemed—the world of his choice, his birthright of the open road. And in his ears sounded the siren call of the road to the wanderer.

And so he struck out, ever eastward, his mind busy with a pondering of what claims the Balkans might advance to the right of being the theater of the next great war.

BUILDING THE LINE

A RAILROAD STORY

BY EDWARD STRATEMEYER

Author of "Snow Lodge"

(*In Two Parts.—Part I.*)

CHAPTER I.

FROM COLLEGE TO BUSINESS.

THE telegram was handed to Ross just as he was packing away the last of the books that he intended to ship to Durham by express.

College days were truly over, for even Judson, the senior who was forever late, had called at the rooms to say farewell, and every train leaving New Haven was packed with students and "grads."

Ross' last days at Yale had been of such a character as to upset anybody. First several of the examinations had gone wrong, and then had come the news that his uncle, John Goodwin, had met with a serious accident while inspecting some blasting for the new outlet sewer at Jackson Point. Then had come the death and burial, with Ross as chief mourner, and on top of that the commencement, which blunt John Goodwin had insisted he must attend, funeral or no funeral.

And now his uncle was gone, college days were at an end, and he was left alone in the world.

Ross had been working in an abstracted manner, with his thoughts far away, and for the moment he stared blankly at the messenger boy and took the message mechanically. It was brief and to the point, and interested him in spite of himself.

Stop and see us at our Philadelphia offices when on your way home. Important.

GARTON & WELLINGTON.

"Garton & Wellington?" he repeated, slowly. "Oh, yes; they were Uncle John's lawyers. Um."

"Any answer? Please sign here," came from the boy.

"No—yes," was the answer, and signing the book, Ross wrote out his reply, saying he would be on the next morning.

The boy gone, the young college graduate resumed his packing. He could guess what the lawyers wanted to see him about. He and his uncle had been practically alone in the world. He knew that good, honest-hearted Uncle John had left him the bulk of his property.

The two had never had any differences. It was Uncle John who had made the college course possible. The man had been worth all of fifty thousand dollars, maybe a great deal more, so the prospect was certainly a pleasing one.

"Good old soul!" murmured the young man to himself. "What a pity he couldn't have lived to enjoy the fruits of such hard labor."

For Uncle John Goodwin had been a hard worker, there was no denying that. With but a limited education, he had worked his way up step by step, taking small contracts at first and then those which were larger, until, in that section of the State he was looked at as a business man of considerable importance.

He had built the dam at Highland Lake, the water line running to Durham, the joint sewer at Livermore and Hensley, and the railroad line from Lapp's

Junction to Fenwick—the latter a bit of work that more than one contractor had declared could not be accomplished.

The Jackson Point outlet sewer had been all but completed when that fatal blast came that cost him his life. He had been much liked by his men, and the funeral had been a large one, with even the "Dagoes" and Poles in line at the end. He had not known their names, only their numbers; but they had known him, and more than one tear was dropped from a tanned and dirt-hardened cheek when "Boss Yon" was put under ground.

Ross wondered what would become of the contracting business now. He had entered Yale with no more definite purpose than to get a thorough education.

Some of his friends were going in for law, some for medicine, one wanted to become the editor of a metropolitan newspaper, and another had signified his intention of taking up ancient and modern history with a view of filling some chair when the opportunity offered. None of these had appealed to Ross.

"Guess I'll have to try ranch life," Ross had said, when appealed to by his chums. "I like a life in the open. If I had a pot of money I'd travel around the world."

"Well, all of us might do worse," Finley had answered, dryly. "But as the pots of money are not within reach——"

"Going to follow in your uncle's footsteps?" another had asked.

"I don't know. To tell the truth, I don't feel as if I'm cut out for anything just now." And then the conversation took a new channel.

The books packed away, only one other thing remained on the shelf over the table at which Ross had been in the habit of studying. That was the photograph of a girl of nineteen, with a round, sweet face, clear, frank eyes, and a mass of dark, curly hair. The eyes seemed to gaze directly into Ross' own, and he could scarcely take his gaze from them.

"Dear, dear Margaret," he murmured. "I wonder if I'll ever be worthy of

you?" And he placed the photograph in his breast pocket.

On the way to New York on the following morning, Ross had two of the professors for company. But he separated from these at the Grand Central Depot, and his journey down to the Pennsylvania ferry and to Philadelphia on the Limited, was made alone. For this he was not sorry, for it gave him time to review the situation, even though he was unable to reach any satisfactory conclusion.

By presenting his card he was immediately ushered into Mr. Garton's private office. The lawyer was an elderly man; shrewd, but pleasant.

"Happy to see you, Mr. Goodwin," he said. "Sit down. I'll be at liberty in just a few moments."

And as Ross took a chair he continued the reading of a long, legal document. This finished, he pushed a button, a clerk appeared, and the document was sent away.

"I presume you got my telegram," began Ross.

"Exactly, Mr. Goodwin; and I presume you know why we sent it. We were your late uncle's legal advisers for many years—he employed no other counsel. His will was drawn up by us, and that is the matter to be brought up now. With the exception of several small amounts left to his housekeeper and to his foreman and others, you are his sole heir."

"It was very good of Uncle John to make me that," said Ross, feeling that he must say something.

"It was to be expected, since you were his nearest and dearest relative, and his ward since the death of your parents. Roughly speaking, the value of the property left you is between seventy-five and one hundred thousand dollars. A portion of this is tied up by a bond given to guarantee the completion of the work on the Jackson Point outlet sewer. But I am assured by Lawrence Cole, his foreman, that this work is about done, and in first-class shape, so this money will soon be released."

Ross bowed, for there seemed to be nothing to say.

"Your uncle was a hard-working man, and took great pride in his business," went on the lawyer. "He hated to think that some day that business might fall to decay. He left a letter on the subject for you. Here it is. I think it will be worth your while to read it carefully."

The communication, in a thick, sealed envelope, was handed to Ross, and Mr. Garton excused himself for a short while.

With deep interest the young man broke open the envelope, and read the letter, which was in his uncle's crude, heavy hand and almost as brief as was anything John Goodwin had felt himself compelled to write.

MY DEAR ROSS: The doctor says I can't last much longer, so, in case I don't pull through, I'll leave this for you. By my will you'll see that I have left you most everything, and I think you deserve it, for you have always been a good boy.

What I want to let you know in particular is this: You know I think a whole lot of the contracting business. I've slaved day in and day out to make it a big business. I don't want to influence you too much, for a fellow can't be a preacher if he isn't cut out for it, but I hate very much to see the business go to pieces, and hate worse still to see the contracts go to Mike Breen or to Ike Shacker, both having done their best to down me of late years and ruin me.

If you continue the contract business, beware of both Breen and Shacker, for they are foxy. I think you can trust Larry Cole, my foreman, for I always found him square. O'Mara is a pretty good man, too, although I don't know so much about him as I do about Cole. The Rocky Hill Railroad is going to give out a fine contract soon, and I know Breen and Shacker will do their best to get it, and if they think I'm out of it they'll put in big figures, too. I'd like to see you go in and win from them.

But have your own way. The money is yours to do with as you please, and I'd rather see you not take a contract than take it and then fall down on the job.

Your loving uncle,
JOHN GOODWIN.

Ross had time to read this communication twice before the lawyer returned. His face grew thoughtful and tender as he thought of his uncle and of how John Goodwin had struggled to rise. And all that money was now his own, to do with as he pleased.

"Of course you know the contents of this letter, Mr. Garton?" he said, in a low voice.

"Exactly, Mr. Goodwin—your late uncle spoke of it when he passed it over—on the same day he had me call to make sure that his will was safe."

"He was anxious to have me take up his business just where he left off."

"He was very anxious to have the business go on, yes. But he was afraid you wouldn't take to the idea, being a college man. Had a notion you would want to go into law or some other profession."

"But he wanted me to take up the business?" Ross insisted.

"Well, that is what it amounted to. But you were to make your own choice."

"And in case I did go in, did he leave any other directions?"

"He left several special account books, sealed up. If you gave up the business the account books were to be burned up without being opened."

"Otherwise I was to have them?"

"Exactly."

Ross drew a long breath, and resting his elbow on the desk sank his chin in his palm. His eyes had a far-away look, but he was not thinking of the sealed-up account books. His mind had drifted to the original of the photograph in his breast pocket.

"Of course, you haven't got to decide this at once," went on Mr. Garton. "Take your own time and think it over."

"I'll think it over this week," was the answer. "And I'll reach some sort of a decision by next Monday."

CHAPTER II.

ROSS COMES TO A DECISION.

If Ross had been thoughtful on his way to Philadelphia, he was doubly so as his train sped westward over the hills and through the mountains in the direction of Durham.

"She'll be surprised," he murmured to himself, more than once. "She can't help but be surprised. But when I put

the matter to her in the proper light —” And here he dropped into a vague speculation of just what Margaret Poole would say.

They had been friends for many years, ever since he had paid his Uncle John visits when a boy, and the friendship had become a very close one after his parents had passed away and he took up his residence in Durham. Margaret lived on the valley road, and his uncle's place was not half a mile away.

“She's a fine bird, Ross,” his uncle had said one day. “But she's bound to fly high, you can see that. Don't you go to getting false notions in your head about her.”

But this had not stopped his visits to her, and, almost unconsciously, Margaret Poole had become more to the young collegiate than he was willing to admit.

While he was at Yale she attended a ladies' seminary, and took special lessons in singing. More than once she had sung in local concerts, and it was rumored that she had offers to go with a touring concert company, and that one manager had offered to place her in an opera company. But she would not leave her parents, who were getting old, and besides, her mother, who was of old Puritan stock, did not approve of the publicity.

Ross knew that Margaret took a great interest in his welfare. More than once they had spoken of his future, and in a half-playful, half-serious manner, she had painted fancy sketches of him as a great lawyer, or a doctor, or holding a valued chair in some large college. He knew that she wanted him to make something of himself and do it in a professional way.

It was dark when he reached Durham, and only a few lanterns and lamps lit up the scene around the station.

Old Jerry was at hand with the carriage, and welcomed him warmly. But the drive to the house was a silent one, and the housekeeper was not surprised when he told her that he had dined on the train, and did not want the hot supper she had prepared.

“Can't git over the loss of his uncle,”

she said to the man of all work. “An' I can't blame him—such a good soul as Mr. Goodwin was.”

“Mr. Ross is a good soul, too,” answered old Jerry. “But he ain't the business man his uncle was. Reckon that contractin' ain't a-goin' on like it did no more.”

“No, 'tain't likely 'twill,” answered Mrs. Blake. “But you can't blame Mr. Ross. *He's* a collige man, an' his uncle wasn't that. Collige men ain't cut out fer no work on sewers an' railroads.”

“I see Larry Cole to-day,” went on old Jerry. “He's anxious to know what's goin' to be did. That outlet sewer work comes to an end soon, an' then, unless the business keeps on, he'll be out of a job.”

“A likely man like him needn't be out o' work long. He was Mr. Goodwin's right-hand man, an' always was.” And then Mrs. Blake brought the conversation to a close by beginning to remove the untouched supper.

It was not until ten o'clock in the morning that Ross summoned up sufficient courage to pay the proposed visit to Margaret. Any other time he would have gone over at eight on horseback and invited her to ride with him.

He met her on the road, sitting her nut-brown steed with that grace which he had so often admired. She looked the picture of health and loveliness, and he caught his breath as he drew close to her.

“I was going to ride past, to find out if you had arrived,” she said, frankly, as she shook hands.

“I came in last night, Margy; bag and baggage, books and all. College is now truly a thing of the past.”

“And Sir Ross hath the whole world before him!” she returned, grandiloquently. “What a pleasure it must be, Ross, to think you're not to be tied down to just one thing, but can choose your future for yourself. I was thinking of it last night.”

He flushed—it was so nice to have her think of him. But almost immediately he breathed a little sigh.

“I don't know as I've got the whole world before me, Margy.”

"Oh, yes; you have. I've heard it all. Nearly every dollar of your uncle's money went to you, which was perfectly right. Now, you'll have every opportunity in the world of becoming just anything that you wish. It's grand! and I'm so glad, for your sake." And her face beamed with honest gratification.

"Yes, Uncle John treated me handsomely. And that is just where it comes in, Margy."

"It? What?" she questioned, quickly.

"I don't feel that I can do as I'd like to—or, I mean, just as I thought I'd like to before this—this—before he was taken away."

"I don't understand, Ross." She wheeled her horse, and both rode slowly down a side road under the willows bordering the creek. This path was but little used, and here they would be safe from interruption.

"It's this way, Margy," he plunged in, very much like one taking an open-air bath in winter. "Uncle John sent me to college, and said I could make of myself anything I pleased. But when he did that he didn't expect to be taken away so suddenly. Just before he died he wrote a letter, telling me of his work, and of his contracts, and of how other contractors had tried to get in on him, and of how he hated to see the business go to pieces, after he had worked so hard to build it up. He wanted—"

"You don't mean to tell me he wanted you to continue the business?" she interrupted, with wide-open eyes.

"He didn't put it in so many words, but that was the one desire of his heart."

"Why, it's ridiculous, Ross. The idea of you being a contractor, and building sewers and such things!"

"Perhaps I wouldn't be equal to it, Margy, but I could try—"

"Oh, you don't understand! You weren't cut out for such low work. You must be a lawyer, or a doctor, or professor, or something like that. It's the only thing that will really fit you." She gazed at him half proudly as she uttered the words.

"It's not low work," he returned, half irritatedly. "To build a first-class

sewer, or water line, or railroad, is a skillful feat of engineering. Uncle John was a smart man, in his field."

"Yes, but that isn't your field. Fancy you in a trench giving directions to a lot of those dirty Italians, with yourself all covered with mud. Oh, Ross, you know you can't do it."

"You paint the worst side of the picture, Margy. I wouldn't have to do much trench work. I could leave that to Larry Cole. But, of course, I'd go down to the very bottom of the trench if it was necessary. In fact, I'd do anything rather than fail, after I had once taken hold."

"So you are really going to do it?" Her face took on something of a shocked look. "To put yourself on a level with that ignorant Irishman, Mike Breen, and that old skinflint of a Shacker?"

"No, I'll never put myself on a level with those men. I'll do honest, upright work, as my Uncle John did. And I'll come out on top, too," he added, with a sudden inspiration. "I owe it to the memory of Uncle John to do my level best and knock out Breen and Shacker."

"Then it's all decided? I don't see why you came to me about it." She straightened in the saddle. "But, of course, you have a right to do as you please." She gave a slight upward tilt to her head. "I think I'll go back. I've got several new songs I wish to practice for the concert next week. All the nicest people will be there, Dr. Moore and his wife, and Judge Lathrop, and Mr. Cambian, the lawyer, and that new professor of literature from the preparatory school, and I shouldn't wish to make a miss of it before such a distinguished audience."

"I don't suppose you expect any railroad contractors there?" he flashed back, bitterly.

"I don't think they'd appreciate an operatic concert; do you?" she retorted.

"They might, if the singing was really good. They know the value of honest work, and they wouldn't stand for anything in the way of a pretense."

"Thank you for the compliment." Her head went higher than before. "I

must really go after that. Good-morning."

Like a flash she turned her horse's head, and before he could stop her she was riding in the direction whence they had come. He went after her a few rods, then slackened the pace of his steed. His heart dropped in his bosom like a lump of lead, but a grim smile played around his tightly closed lips.

"I was afraid she'd look at it in that light." He spoke half aloud, as if arguing with a companion. "But it wasn't fair! To her there is no dignity in laboring with one's hands. But I'll show her her mistake! She'll find out — Oh, why couldn't she look at it as I do!" And he ground his teeth in useless heartburning.

But that brief talk had decided him. He would take up the work, be the consequence what it might. He would show the whole world, and Margaret, too, that a man could labor and still be a gentleman. And he would show them, too, that his years at college had not been wasted years.

He would take hold the very next day, and finish that outlet sewer contract just as his Uncle John had expected to do before him. He was glad there was work to do, and he hoped it would require all of his attention—for then it would help him to forget the girl who had just snubbed him.

He plunged into the work sooner than expected. On arriving at home he found his uncle's foreman, Larry Cole, awaiting him.

Cole was a man of forty, tall and sinewy, with black eyes that seemed to read one through and through. He had very little book education, but a thorough knowledge of men, and had worked with John Goodwin for six years and more.

"Glad to see you, Cole," said Ross, shaking hands. "I was coming down to the work to-morrow morning."

The foreman nodded. "We need you," he answered. "That is, somebody has got to say what's to be done. That lawyer in Philadelphia wrote he'd give word next week, but that's too late."

"He was waiting to hear from me,

Cole." Ross paused for a moment. "I suppose you know exactly what ought to be done?"

"If I didn't your uncle wouldn't have placed me in charge."

"I believe that. Well, go ahead as you think best, and it will be all right."

The foreman looked relieved, and something like a smile showed on his wrinkled, leathery face.

"Then you are going to take hold?"

"I am, at least for the present."

"Oh! You mean until this job at Jackson's Point is done."

"No, I don't. I am going to take other contracts—if I can get them. That is why I was coming down to-morrow. I've heard something of a railroad contract that is floating around. Cressing. Do you know anything about it?"

"I know all about it."

"Then give me the particulars."

CHAPTER III.

THE RAILROAD CONTRACT.

In less than an hour Ross had the particulars of the railroad contract so far as Cole knew them. The foreman had been shrewd enough to learn many details, but there were, of course, others at which he could only guess.

Briefly stated, the Rocky Hill Railroad wanted to build a side line from Durham to Cressing, a distance of ten miles. The main line passed through Durham, and Cressing was an important point on the Cedar Lake division. The railroad had wanted this side line for many years, but the old management had hesitated about spending the necessary money. The railroad was now under new management, and the improvement was to be made as soon as possible.

Cole had driven over the route half a dozen times, and knew every foot of the ground.

The line had been staked out by the engineers, and he had seen the blue-prints of the maps. There were two hills to be cut away and a rocky cliff to be blasted out. The dirt from one of the hills was to be hauled to a pond two

miles away, also on the line of the road, and some grading was to be done at Black Rock Creek, over which the railroad intended to put a fine iron bridge.

"We won't have anything to do with the bridge," said the foreman. "That contract has already been given to the Pittsburg Bridge Company. And we won't have anything to do with putting down the track. All they want of the outside contractor is to bring the road-bed to a grade, according to the plans and specifications."

"Who will do the track laying?"

"The regular railroad gang. You see they can't do the grading, because they are working elsewhere at present."

"I suppose this Mike Breen and Ike Shacker are after the contract?"

"Yes. I heard Breen put in his bid yesterday. Shacker put in his bid last week."

"Do you know anything about the figures?"

Cole shook his head. "I wanted to get 'em, but they were as mum as oysters."

"Well, you can't blame them for that. If we put in a figure we'll keep mum, too."

"That's right."

"How long before the time for putting in bids comes to an end?"

"A week from to-day. You see, the thing has been out almost a month already."

"Then we'll have to get at it right away, Cole. You've got to be my right-hand man in this, just as you've been my uncle's right-hand man. I shall depend upon you."

Ross had read the man before him aright. Cole was honest to the core, and he wanted others to appreciate that honesty. His black eyes showed pleasure, and he impulsively placed a hand on the young college man's shoulder.

"It's a go, Mr. Goodwin," he answered. "Give me the chance to go ahead, and I'll stick by you through thick and thin. You see"—his voice dropped a little—"John wanted me to do it—if you continued the business."

Ross caught the brawny hand, and gave it a tight squeeze.

"Then that is settled, and I am glad of it. I don't hesitate to admit to you that I am as green as they make 'em in this. Of course, I know something, but lately I've given all my attention to my college work."

"They tell me you passed with flying colors."

"I came out pretty well, considering the trouble I had at the start of the examinations."

"Didn't expect to take up this work so quick, did you?"

"No. But I'm going to take it up for my uncle's sake, and knock out Breen and Shacker, if I can."

"We can do it, Mr. Goodwin. I'm not sure of it, but I think they have a deal between them."

"In what way?"

"They didn't expect you to step in with a bid. They thought that as soon as your uncle died they'd have things all their own way. Shacker thinks you are nothing but a college dude, as he puts it."

Ross shut his teeth hard. "My thanks to Mr. Shacker for his compliment. I presume his idea is indorsed by Breen?"

"If you must know, Breen says he isn't afraid of any young fellow with nothing but book learning in his head."

"But he doesn't know I have nothing but book learning in my head." Ross grew more resolute than ever. "I'll prove to him that the same blood that flowed in my uncle's veins flows in mine. I'll beat him at his own game."

The young man's fist came down on the table with a bang, and his whole face lit up with a light that was new to Cole; indeed, that was new to everybody, even himself. All in an instant he had found a purpose in life, and he was aglow with enthusiasm. He jumped up, and began to pace the floor.

"Cole, we must get that contract!" he cried. "We'll go at it to-morrow—just as soon as you can arrange matters at the outlet sewer. I'll get the papers, and we can go over them together, and go over the route, too. Is there anybody you can leave in charge of the sewer work?"

"I can leave O'Mara."

"Is he all right?"

"He may be, after I've told him that you are going ahead with the business. He's been snuffing around Breen for a job, thinking this would soon peter out."

"I see. What about the others?"

"Oh, the Dagoes and Poles will work as long as there is anything to do. They don't know but what we have other contracts on hand."

"Well, you fix it with O'Mara, and if you can get through, you meet me in Cressing at the hotel, between three and four o'clock to-morrow."

The next day was a busy one for Ross. There were a number of things to do at home, and it was nearly noon before he started for Cressing. He went over the route of the new road, so as to get a general idea of what would be required in the way of grading and blasting and filling in. This took time, and when the ten miles were covered, he found himself tremendously hungry.

"I guess I am going to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow now," he told himself, grimly, as he entered the hotel and ordered dinner. On a slip of paper he had jotted down some figures as he came along, and these he now looked over while waiting to be served.

The dining room was next to the bar-room, and glancing into the other apartment he saw two men drinking there. One was Michael Breen and the other was a stranger. Presently the stranger left, and Breen came into the dining room and sauntered up to the young college graduate.

"How do you do, Mr. Goodwin," he said, in a broad, Irish accent, and held out a thick, heavy hand.

"I am very well, thank you," answered Ross, and shook hands politely. "How are you?"

"Middling well, Mr. Goodwin. I'm troubled a bit wid rheumatism. I'm glad we met." The Irishman dropped into a chair. "Perhaps it's too early to say anything, but I've heard your late uncle left you about everything he had."

"He left me nearly everything."

"Just so! And that being the fact, I thought perhaps you'd be wantin' to sell some things before long—drills, and

carts, and picks, and shovels, and the like."

"Oh!" Ross paused. "So you take it for granted that I won't keep up the contracting business."

"It's hardly the business that would be after suitin' a college man."

"That depends on the man, Mr. Breen."

"Then you are going to keep on?" said Michael Breen, quickly. His surprise was evident.

"For the present, yes. You know we have that outlet sewer to complete."

"And after that you'll sell out?"

"Perhaps—if I can't get the work I want."

"Take my advice, and keep out of the business, Mr. Goodwin. There's no money in it any more. Anybody who can git a lot of Dagoes together calls himself a contractor. They don't make any money themselves, and they don't give anybody else a chance to make anything."

"Then perhaps you feel like selling out," answered Ross, dryly.

"I do, Mr. Goodwin. But who will give me an honest price for my stuff? I've got thousands of dollars locked up in drills, and horses and carts, and hoisting machinery, and I've got to make it bring in something."

"Well, if business was so poor I shouldn't wish to buy more stuff, if I were you."

"Oh, well, to tell the truth, I liked your uncle—a fine man—and I thought I might help you out, in case you didn't know what to do with the stuff."

"Thanks, but I don't need any help. I might use it to set Larry Cole up in business."

"Him! Don't waste your money on such a fellow, Mr. Goodwin. He did your uncle more harm than good."

"Oh, I can't believe that. He is a very straightforward, honest foreman."

"Is he?" Mike Breen arose and leaned forward. His voice sank to a whisper. "Don't you believe it. If you'll promise not to tell, I'll tell you what he tried to do."

There was an odd smile on Ross' face as he made reply:

"Well, what did he do?"

"He came to me when that outlet sewer contract came up. If I had promised him a thousand dollars he would have sold out your uncle, and the contract would have gone to me or to Shacker. But I was honest—Oh, what's this?"

For a hand had suddenly grasped Mike Breen by the shoulder and whirled him around. As he turned, his gaze met the wrathful eyes of Larry Cole, and the next instant he measured his length on the dining-room floor with a dull thud.

"You dirty hound!" cried the foreman, standing over him with clinched fists. "You miserable, lying dog! Take back what you said, or I'll—I'll—"

"Don't hit him again, Cole!" put in Ross, catching the foreman by the hand. "I don't believe a word of it."

"He ought to be hung!" muttered Cole, but his hands fell to his sides.

With a face full of conflicting emotions, Mike Breen arose slowly to his feet. He wanted to say something, but collecting his senses was not easy. He glanced around the dining room, and was relieved to see that no outsider had witnessed the attack.

"I—I know what I'm sayin'," he began. "Of course I can't prove—"

"Do you take it back?" demanded Cole, and advanced again, despite Ross' attempt to hold him back.

"No!" roared Breen. "I'll take back nuthin'!"

"Then I'll choke the lie down your miserable throat!" yelled Cole, and caught the Irish contractor by the windpipe. He backed Breen against the wall, and banged his head into a bill of fare tacked there.

"Le—let up?" was all Breen could gasp. "Le—" And then came nothing but a gurgle.

"Do you take it back?"

"Ye—yes."

"Then go!" And now Cole flung the man back half across one of the tables.

Staggering like a drunken man, Mike Breen picked himself up, and left the dining room almost on a run. Following to the door, Ross saw him hurry

to the corner, leap into his buggy, and drive off.

CHAPTER IV.

"IT'S MAKE OR BREAK!"

"I'm afraid you've piled up trouble for yourself, Cole," remarked Ross, on turning back into the dining room. "Breen will never forgive you for knocking him down."

The tall foreman shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not afraid of the cur. What else could I do? Stand there and listen to his lies?"

"I suppose he made the yarn out of the whole cloth."

"That's the exact truth, Mr. Goodwin. I never went near him of my own account. Just before the outlet sewer contract was given out he sent for me to come and see him. I went, and he began to pump me about what your uncle was doing, and hinted about giving me big money to sell him out. I let him talk and led him on, just to see what he would do. Afterwards I told your uncle everything—and that's one reason he had no use for Breen."

"We'll have to watch him closely."

"I'm glad I chanced along at just the right time. He would have pumped you full of his lies—"

"Don't you worry about that, Cole. My uncle trusted you, and I said I'd do the same." Ross paused for a moment. "Let's forget it and come to business."

Quarter of an hour later the pair had left the hotel and were making their way over to the railroad offices located in Cressing. The giving out of the contract was in the hands of a Mr. Appleby Sanderson, a thin, nervous, jerky man of business.

"Want to try for the contract, eh?" he said. "All right, Mr. Goodwin; you shall have your chance. Your uncle was all right at this sort of thing, and if you've got his blood—" And then he dropped off and brought forth the plans and specifications.

"May I ask how many bids are in?" Ross questioned.

"No questions of that sort answered," was the prompt reply. "This is a strict business deal. The lowest contractor gets the work, providing he can file the necessary bond."

"How large a bond?"

"Twenty thousand dollars."

"I can do that—if I happen to be the lowest bidder."

A busy hour followed, in which Appleby Sanderson, Ross and Cole went over the plans and specifications in detail. Everything was clear enough, and Ross could see that all he had to do was to figure on the job and put in his bid. Then he received duplicates of the plans and specifications, the same to be returned to the railroad company in case his bid was rejected.

"And now for some real figuring," said Ross, after they had said good-day to Appleby Sanderson. "Cole, here is where you must give me a lot of help. I know the theoretical side of the business, but you've been right in the work for years—"

"I'll tell you everything I know," answered the foreman. He had thought at the start that he could not like a college man for a boss, but he was beginning to fairly love Ross. The young man was willing to acknowledge his greenness, and in Cole's eyes this was his most redeeming trait.

Once more Ross went over the proposed route, and he and Cole did a good deal of measuring on their own account. They inspected the rocky cliff to be blasted away, and Cole explained how the work could be done in the least expensive way.

"Shacker is a handy man at rocks," he said. "And he is the fellow to put in a low figure on this sort of work."

"Well, we don't want to put in such a low figure that we come out of the little end of the horn, providing we get the job," returned Ross.

The next day the pair got down to the real figuring in the case. Here Ross showed the advantages of education by doing sums in a manner that amazed the foreman.

"You can handle the arithmetic end

all O. K.," said Cole, admiringly. "It would take your uncle hours to do the sums you've done in so many minutes. Of course you are sure of your answers?"

"Yes."

"Then you've saved a lot of paper and head worry, too."

To figure on the plain dirt work was easy enough, but with the rock to be blasted it was different.

"You'll need a new steam drill for that," said Cole. "Our old one is played out, and, besides, it's behind the times. I heard it told in Durham that Shacker had ordered one of the latest drills."

"Well, we'll get a new drill—if we get the contract," returned Ross.

He was warming up more and more to the work, and he sincerely hoped that the contract would be given to him—just to show Breen and Shacker that if John Goodwin was dead, his successor still lived. He began to understand something of the spirit of rivalry among all the contractors.

One day while he was out alone on the proposed route, he saw Margaret at a distance. The girl was on horseback, tearing along the hillside trail at good speed. He was almost sure she saw him, but if she did she did not slacken her speed, nor did she come toward him.

The sight filled him with a sudden bitterness, and for fully five minutes he rambled over the rocks unable to bind himself once more down to the work at hand. He tried to catch another sight of her, but the girl did not reappear.

Ross thought of the concert Margaret had mentioned. It was a charitable affair, and was to come off on the evening of the next day. It was to be the occasion Durham had seen for many a day, and he did not doubt but what the finest people for miles around would attend. The committee had sent him five tickets, and in the goodness of his heart he had kept and paid for them all.

He felt that Margaret would look for him at that concert, in spite of what she had said and intimated. Should he go, or had he best stay away?

He asked himself that question, not once, but many times, without reaching

a satisfactory answer. He felt he was in a good deal of a muddle.

"If I go, she'll think I am crawling," was the way he put it to himself. "And if I don't go she'll be cut to the quick."

Then his pride arose to the surface, and he told himself that it would be utterly impossible for him to attend.

The next day was the one he had selected for putting in the bid. From early morning until noon he went over the figures once more, making certain that there were no mistakes. Then in a firm hand he wrote out his bid in detail and signed it, "Ross Goodwin, successor to John Goodwin." The world should know that he intended to follow in his uncle's footsteps, regardless of the fact of his college training.

"It's make or break!" he muttered to himself, after his bid had been safely delivered. "What a lot of hustling I'll have to do if the work really does come my way!"

Only one person had thrown cold water on his enthusiasm. This was Pat O'Mara, the fellow his uncle had known little about, and the one Cole had said had applied to Breen for a situation.

"It's a risky bit o' business, I can tell ye that," O'Mara had said, when Ross met him at Jackson's Point. "The dirt is easy enough, but that rock is as hard as flint. You'll lose money trying to blast it out and cart it away."

"Can't we get the rock out as easily as Breen or Shacker can?" Ross had questioned.

"I'm not after thinkin' so, Mr. Goodwin. They have good drills and foin hoistin' machinery, while our outfit is out o' date."

"Well, we'll have to get new tools to work with—if we get the contract."

O'Mara was anxious to learn if Ross really put in a bid, and when told yes by Cole wanted to know something of the figures.

"You'll have to ask Mr. Goodwin about that," answered the tall foreman. "And you might as well save your breath, for he won't tell you," he added.

But O'Mara was more anxious than he cared to acknowledge to Cole, and late in the afternoon he called on Ross,

under pretext of asking about something to be done on the outlet sewer.

"Cole tells me you've put in a bid for the railroad work," he said, during the course of the conversation.

"I have, O'Mara, and I suppose you'll be glad if I get the job," answered Ross, with a smile, and at the same time studying the face before him.

"If you don't lose money, sir. I hope you made your bid high enough to clear yourself."

"If we get the work Cole and I have calculated that we'll make a fair profit."

"Your uncle knew how to figure, but I don't know as Cole ever did." O'Mara shifted uneasily. "If it's any of my business, about what is the job worth?"

"Oh, it's worth something in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars," and Ross gave a light laugh. "You mustn't bother me about figures now. I've been over them so often that I am sick of them," he continued, pointedly.

O'Mara was rather thick-headed, but the hint was sufficient, and he said no more on the subject. He returned again to the subject of the outlet sewer; and a few minutes later took his departure.

While eating supper Ross found himself looking at the clock more than once. He had imagined that the bid would claim all of his thoughts, but he was sadly mistaken.

His mind reverted continually to Margaret and the concert. After all, why shouldn't he go? It was a local affair in which many others were interested besides Margaret.

If he did not go folks might begin to ask questions, for they all knew what intimate friends he and the girl had been in the past. He certainly didn't want to cause any gossip.

"I'll go, but I shan't make any fuss over her," he told himself, and flew upstairs to get into his dress suit. But then he thought of his late uncle and the funeral not so many weeks past. Perhaps he had better not go, after all.

While he sat on the edge of the bed deliberating the bell rang. It was a message from Jackson Point. There

had been a cave-in just as the men were getting ready to quit for the day, and two of the Poles working in the trench had been hurt. Would Mr. Goodwin come at once and say what should be done, as neither Cole nor O'Mara could be found?

Instantly the concert was forgotten, and a few minutes later he was on his way to the point. The cave-in proved quite a serious one, and he had his men work half the night repairing part of the damage done. In the meantime the men who had been hurt were given the best of medical attention.

It was not until the next day that he learned, through the medium of the *Durham Daily Press*, what a grand success the concert had been and of how Margaret had carried off the best of the honors. There was a quarter of a column devoted to her singing, which was pronounced superb, and her dress, which was described as exquisite. The article ran:

Miss Poole undoubtedly has a great future before her. We certainly expect to see her at no distant day on the grand opera stage, or singing in one of the finest of metropolitan churches.

"She certainly must have made a hit," he mused. "Wonder what she thought when she found I wasn't present? Perhaps she didn't think anything about it."

He heaved a long sigh. It was not such a far cry from business to sentiment, after all.

CHAPTER V.

AWARDING THE CONTRACT.

To sing at such a concert, even before the elite of Durham and vicinity, was no ordeal for such a girl as Margaret Poole. Strong-willed and self-reliant, she scarcely knew the meaning of "nerves," and after her practicing was at an end she scarcely gave the concert a second thought. She would sing her best, and Durhamites might think what they pleased about it. When it came to singing in Philadelphia, or New York, or some other large city, it would be time enough to worry.

Consequently, when she was dressing, her mind was on other things. She remembered her last talk with Ross. She had not seen him at the rocky cliff as he had believed. But she had heard through others that he was preparing to go to work. This made her sigh. Well, he must know best. But, oh, she had hoped for so much from him!

As it grew later the leading florist of Durham sent his boy around with a bouquet. But it was one she had ordered herself, and not one from Ross, and this gave her heart another pang. In the past he had never forgotten to send flowers, no matter how trifling the occasion.

"I suppose he's thinking so much of his contracting he can't stop to think of me!" she told herself. "Well, I don't care! If he isn't going to make something of himself—" And then a curious lump arose in her throat which she swallowed with difficulty.

To let her in at the stage door to the concert hall the coachman had to drive around the corner of a side street. On the far corner was a saloon, and as the turnout came closer she saw two men come out of the drinking place and walk along the pavement. She recognized one as Michael Breen, the contractor.

"And to think that Ross wants to put himself on a level—" she began to herself. "But no, no matter what Ross does he'll never get to be like that horrid man."

The coach had to wait for another coach to get out of the way, and when Margaret alighted she found Breen and the stranger standing in a dark corner near the doorway, talking earnestly.

"So you couldn't find out Goodwin's figures?" she heard Breen say. "It's too bad, O'Mara."

"I done me best, Mr. Breen. But he ain't givin' nuthin' away. I'm after thinkin' Cole set him up to it."

Margaret paused, for she could not help but feel interested. They were talking of Ross and, most likely, of that railroad contract. She bent down as if to do something to her shoe.

"We mustn't let him swipe the job

from under our noses," Breen continued. "Didn't you tell him there was no money in it?"

"I did that; and I'll bet his figures is high enough."

"Yes, but so are ours. Shacker and me both thought we had competition out of the way."

"If ye made a deal fer a rake-off," began O'Mara, "you had best put in a new bid. Say the old wan was a mistake, or somethin' like that."

"It's easy enough to talk," retorted Breen, angrily. "We have a deal—I don't deny it. But to cut under now—"

This was all Margaret heard. Another coach came up, with more singers, and there was a babble of voices, in the midst of which Breen and O'Mara sauntered off. Then the girl was surrounded by friends and swept away to the tiny greenroom behind the stage of the only public hall of which Durham boasted.

Even here she looked for Ross to visit her, and she determined to tell him all she had heard, without delay. It might not mean much, and then, again, it might mean a great deal—he would know about that. She would let him feel that she had his success at heart, no matter what he attempted to do.

As already told, the concert was a great success, but all the applause she received did not compensate for the bitterness that filled her heart when she at last admitted to herself that he had not come. Her hope held out until the second part of the concert, and until her last song was sung, and she looked around for him even at the final encore.

"He doesn't care, after all," she told herself, for the fiftieth time. "Or else it is possible that he stayed home on his uncle's account," and with this last thought she tried to comfort herself.

Should she write him a letter, telling of what she had heard the night before? Such was the question she asked herself in the morning. She wanted to be his friend. But he might not understand that letter, and might think that she was merely trying to draw him back to her. At this her cheeks flamed.

"I couldn't do that—I really couldn't," she murmured, and began to pace the floor. Then an inspiration seized her. In a disguised hand she wrote a letter, telling the particulars of the talk, and signing the communication "A Friend." This she posted herself, on the sly, at the local office.

The letter was brought to Ross, with several others, by old Jerry that evening. The bids for the railroad work were to be opened at noon of the following day, and it must be confessed that the young college graduate was a trifle nervous. Inside of the next twenty-four hours he would either have a very large contract on hand, or he would be, practically, out of business.

He opened the communications quickly. One was a bill, another an application for work, a third a "library" offer of Balzac's works at the low price of a dollar down and a dollar a month until paid for, satisfaction guaranteed. These he thrust aside impatiently. Then he read the letter signed "A Friend" slowly and critically.

"Unless this is a fake somebody is trying to do me a good turn," he said to himself. "Wonder who wrote it? I'll be hanged if I can recognize the handwriting. It looks like a man's hand in some spots and like a woman's in others." He caught his breath. "Could Margaret—pshaw! she wouldn't be any place she could hear Breen and O'Mara talk."

After deliberation he determined to say nothing about the letter. It was too late now to do anything more concerning the contract. The bid was as low as he cared to make it, and if Breen really felt able to cut under the price why the work would have to go to the Irishman. In that case O'Mara would be out of work, so far as Ross was concerned.

On the other hand, if the contract came his way the young college graduate determined to watch O'Mara closely, and give him no more leeway than was necessary.

He would not discharge the fellow until he was certain the man deserved it.

Early in the morning Cole came in,

and the foreman showed plainly that he was worried.

"The cave-in was O'Mara's fault," he said, coming to business at once. "He didn't shore up the trench as I told him. He used the weakest planks we had when I told him to use the heaviest."

"We'll see about this later," answered Ross. "To-day tells the tale for all of us."

"I've got news," went on Cole. "Shacker and Breen are getting together. Your putting in a bid has scared 'em."

"Can they drop below us, do you think?"

"Will they, you mean? They can do anything they please."

"But they've got to give a bond, the same as myself."

"Yes, that is where the railroad company will have 'em where the hair is good and long." Cole stretched his long, loose-hung frame. "Hang me if I don't wish the thing was over. It's like waiting for a jury to come out and say guilty or not guilty."

Ross had to laugh at the apt simile. "Well, the agony will be over in a very few hours now," he said.

"Are you going over to Cressing?"

"Yes, and you might as well go along. I know you'll be on pins and needles until you hear from the thing."

Cole was willing enough, and they started so as to reach the railroad offices shortly before noon.

The opening of the bids was to be a public affair so far as those interested were concerned, and over a dozen men were crowded into the place, some sitting on chairs and the others on a railing, and on a box somebody had brought in from the depot platform.

The air was thick with tobacco smoke, and everybody appeared to be talking at once. To appear at ease Ross filled the "bulldog" he had brought along from Yale, and puffed away with the rest.

"Has anybody any other bid to hand in?" was the question put presently by Appleby Sanderson.

"I have," came from Breen. "I've gone over the ground again and want to

make a new bid. Can I withdraw the old?"

"Certainly; the time isn't up yet."

"Then give me the old one back, and here's the new one," went on the Irish contractor, and an exchange of documents was made on the spot.

"Ike, Mike is going to cut you sure," said one man in the crowd. "Haven't you got a new bid, too?"

Ike Shacker, a small, shrewd-faced individual, who was smoking a Pittsburg stogy, shook his head.

"I've made my bid and I'll stick to it. If I can't make a little honest money I don't want the job."

At this one of the men turned to Ross.

"I suppose you are in this? Somebody told me you had stepped into your uncle's shoes."

"We'll see if I am in it when the bids are opened," Ross answered, briefly.

This was the first time Cole and Breen had met since the quarrel. The Irishman avoided the foreman, and Cole also kept away from his enemy.

"Got to do it, or I might pitch into him," whispered Cole to Ross.

"Don't make a scene here, Cole," the young man answered.

The clock struck and the time for putting in more bids came to an end. Ross as well as the others were surprised to see that Appleby Sanderson held five documents in his hands.

"We have five bids here," he said. "One from Michael Breen, one from Isaac Shacker, and one from Ross Goodwin, all from this neighborhood, and one each from the Pittsburg Contracting Company and the Alton & Carr Company, of Buffalo. As announced before, this contract is to go to the lowest bidder, providing he can file the necessary bond, otherwise it goes to the next lowest. We will now open the bids and read the figures. We will start on the bid of the Pittsburg Contracting Company."

The envelope was torn open and the document inside examined.

"Total amount for all work, \$82,000,"

announced the railroad clerk. "Takes all or none."

"We can beat that," whispered one of the men to Shacker.

"The next bid is that of Alton & Carr, who also bid for all the work or none. Their figure is \$85,000."

"They must want a profit," said one man, and several laughed, while the representative of the firm backed to a far corner of the office.

"The next bid is that of Isaac Shacker," went on the clerk. "His bid is for all or none of the work, the same as the others. His figure is \$90,000."

There was a good-natured laugh at this announcement.

"Say, Ike, you did want to make a little honest money, didn't you?" said one in the crowd. For reply Shacker merely scowled.

"The next bid we have in hand is that of Ross Goodwin, successor to John Goodwin," went on the clerk. "The bid is in two parts—\$35,000 for the work from Durham to Grass Creek, and \$45,000 for the work from Grass Creek to Cressing, or else the whole work for \$79,000."

"The devil!" burst from Michael Breen's lips. He pushed forward. "Give me that last bid o' mine?" he demanded.

But it was already open, and the clerk had glanced at the figures.

"The last bid here is from Michael Breen," he announced. "He wants \$36,000 for the work from Durham to Grass Creek, and \$45,500 for the work from Grass Creek to Cressing, or else \$81,000 for the whole job."

Cole slapped Ross on the shoulder. "The contract is ours. You are \$2,000 below any of 'em," he cried. And Ross realized that he spoke the truth, and that he himself was truly in business at last.

CHAPTER VI.

'TWIXT BUSINESS AND SOMETHING ELSE.

Immediately after the last announcement had been made there was a hum of conversation all over the room. Sev-

eral came forward to congratulate Ross on his success.

"Going to follow in the footsteps of your uncle, I see," said one man. "Well, I hope you come out all right on it." But his face showed some doubt of the young college graduate's ability to cope with the work he had undertaken.

Breen's face was filled with disappointment and anger. A keen, understanding look passed between him and Ike Shacker, and then the Irishman glared at Ross.

"You've got the job," he almost hissed. "But ye ain't carried it through yet. The railroad will soon see how a dude of a college boy can bite off more than he can chew, be gob!" And then he hurried from the office, followed by several others, including Shacker.

It was not long after this that Ross found himself alone with three of the railroad officials. Appleby Sanderson shook him by the hand.

"Goodwin, I'm glad you've got it, and I sincerely trust you make a success of it," he said. "Your uncle and I were old friends. It would have been a shame to have let the splendid business he built up go to pieces."

"When do you expect to start in?" questioned another official.

"I'll file my bond to-morrow, and I think we can start work by Monday. Don't you think so, Cole?"

"Not later than Wednesday," answered the foreman. "That cave-in at Jackson's Point has put us back a bit, you'll remember."

"We must have one thing clearly understood," put in the third railroad official, who for reasons of his own had favored Ike Shacker. "This contract has got to be put through on time. There is to be no begging for an extension of time when it comes to finishing up; isn't that right, Morton?"

"That's right."

"We'll put it through on time, unless an earthquake or something as bad stops us," said Ross.

There was not much else to say after that, and presently Ross and Cole took their departure. Cole's face was beam-

ing, and as they walked across the depot platform he gave Ross' shoulder a tight squeeze.

"I feel like dancing a jig!" he exclaimed, in a low voice. "Did you see Breen's face, and the look he gave Shacker? Both of 'em were about half-willing to murder you."

"I saw the look that passed between them," answered Ross. "I think there is some sort of a deal there. Did you notice the figures of Schacker's bid? Most likely Breen's first bid was about as high. They thought they had it all to themselves."

"Well, I was surprised myself to see those outside bids. Those outsiders must have looked over the ground and suspected Breen and Shacker of a combination to hold up the price. Perhaps the railroad suspected it too and invited the outsiders to come in. But no matter, you have it, and at a fair price. Now it is up to us to show all hands what we can do," concluded Larry Cole.

On reaching home Ross found it impossible to settle down for some time. There were a hundred and one things to do and what to go at first was a serious question. He did not wish to make any mistakes, and he now realized as never before what a contract of this sort really meant. Like every other piece of business, the thing looked easy enough at a distance, but when one drew closer the details, which had before seemed of small account, now became the essentials.

When putting in his bid he had been afraid that the price was too low, for he had placed the figures down "to the limit" in order to obtain the contract. But the bids of the others assured him that his own was only fair, and that if he went to work properly he could make a handsome profit on the job.

"Breen was only two thousand higher," he reasoned. "And he must have calculated to make six or eight thousand on the job, if not more. If I can't put it through and clear five thousand or more I'd better give up the business." Cole had told him he ought to clear ten thousand dollars.

Ross had already communicated with

the lawyers in Philadelphia, and now he telegraphed that he had secured the contract. In reply to this he received a visit from Mr. Garton, who brought with him the two sealed-up account books.

"I must congratulate you, Mr. Goodwin," said the lawyer. "If we can be of any use to you do not fail to call upon us."

Ross found the account books of great interest, for they showed how John Goodwin had worked out more than one large contract, and what he had paid various employees from time to time. The pages of the books were filled with notes, some in ink and some in pencil, suggestions of great practical value, as the young contractor discovered later. All told, the volumes represented nearly a lifetime of experience.

"Poor Uncle John!" he murmured, as he placed the books in a safe place. "It's a pity he couldn't have lived to enjoy the fruits of his labors."

The bond was duly filed and the signed contract given to Ross, and on the same day he ran down to Jackson's Point to see how the work was progressing. He found Cole in charge, while O'Mara was sullenly directing another portion of the work.

"Had another row with O'Mara," announced the foreman. "When I got here he wasn't pushing things at all. Any old time is good enough for him."

"I'll have a talk with him," answered Ross, briefly.

He found the Irishman among a gang of Italians who were piling up the timbers that had been used in shoring up the sewer trench. He was sucking away on a short clay pipe, and his face was far from cheerful.

"Well, how does it go, O'Mara?" he questioned, brightly.

"Oh, it's goin' all right, Mr. Goodwin," was the answer. "But I can't see how we are going to get out of here by Tuesday. There's a week's work ahead, an' more."

"We've got to get out," answered Ross, firmly.

O'Mara shrugged his shoulders. "It's easy enough to say so, Mr. Good-

win, but the Dagoes will do just so much work an' no more. Besides that, I'm pushin' them to the limit now."

"Cole doesn't think so."

"Humph! Larry Cole ain't after knowin' everything——"

"He knows a good deal, O'Mara, and you must remember that he is the head foreman."

"That means, I suppose, that I've got to take orders from him."

"You have, when I am not around, and so has everybody else that works for me."

"All right, Mr. Goodwin. You're the boss. But it wasn't that way when your uncle was alive." O'Mara puffed away harder than ever. "If ye push them Dagoes too hard they'll all be after leavin', mark me wurruds!"

"I'll risk that. One thing is settled —this job has got to be finished up by Tuesday night."

Ross walked away and rejoined Cole once more. The foreman was directing the loading of some heavy trucks with the machinery that had been used on the job, and the young contractor watched him with interest.

"Lay to it now, boys!" he heard Cole call sharply. "Step up lively with those jacks. Now then, Gorgi, tell the men to haul around. Steady now, all of you! Now up with 'em! Up, I say, up!"

The men were in a bunch and working hard, for they knew that the eyes of the new boss were on them. Sometimes they were awkward, but their willingness made up for this, and even Cole smiled to see the work going on at such a lively rate.

"Your gang here is worth two of O'Mara's gang," observed Ross, when the tall foreman had a breathing spell.

"Not at all," came sharply from Cole. "I'll take that other crowd and get just as much work out of 'em. I tell you it's O'Mara. He don't seem to know how to put any life into 'em."

"Perhaps he doesn't want to know," answered Ross, dryly. "But I've been talking to him, and maybe he'll do better in the future. I told him he'd have to take orders from you, and that the

job must be finished up by Tuesday night."

At this news Cole squinted one eye suggestively.

"I'll bet he liked that a whole lot."

"I don't care if he did or not. I meant what I said."

"Supposing he won't take orders from me?"

"Then I'll discharge him, and you can tell him so. I'm willing to give him a chance, but I don't intend to take too much from him."

Ross had come down to gain a few points as to how the work was really done, and he remained in the vicinity the best part of two hours. While there Larry Cole gave him a list of the things needed for the opening up of the work on the railroad, and these the young man said he would order without delay.

Monday found Ross in Harrisburgh, whether he had gone to make purchases of certain pieces of machinery, to be used in connection with some cinder cars the railroad company were to furnish for the hauling of dirt.

He wanted a new hoisting engine, and also some cable and an overhead traveler, as well as several dozen new picks and shovels. A new drill was also needed, but he resolved to order that later, when he had made certain which was the best kind to purchase. He was willing to buy everything that was necessary, but he resolved to be cautious and not throw money away.

"I'll show them that I can put this through on time and make money on it too," he told himself.

Chance made him pass one of the concert halls of the city during the middle of the afternoon, and happening to glance at a bill posted on one of the boards, his eye caught the name of Margaret Poole. He at once stopped to read the bill in detail.

It was another charity concert, given under the auspices of one of the leading charitable organizations of the city. A dozen artists were to appear, giving both vocal and instrumental selections, and a well-known humorist was also to assist. The general admission was a dollar, with reserved seats considerably

higher, and the whole indications were that it would be a very swell affair. He glanced at the date.

"The seventh! Why that is to-night!" he murmured to himself. "To-night! I wonder if I had better—oh, pshaw, what's the use? She wouldn't care if I was there or not."

Nevertheless, after that Ross found it very hard to buckle his mind down to the remaining business on hand. This took him until after six o'clock, and then he discovered that he was tremendously hungry and needed dinner.

He entered a restaurant, and while waiting for his order to appear, consulted a time-table of trains to Durham. There was one at seven-thirty, one at eight-forty and another at eleven-fifteen.

"It's all foolishness; I had better take the seven-thirty and get to bed to-night," he told himself. "The concert won't amount to much. Besides, I'm not dressed to attend such an affair."

But the more he tried to persuade himself that he should go home the more he hesitated. He could get a clean shave, and a new collar and tie, and have his shoes blackened, and his black suit would slip through in a crowd. He could remain at the rear of the auditorium where nobody would notice him. He just wanted to see her appear and sing one song, that was all.

And thus he surrendered, and went to face fate.

CHAPTER VII.

O'MARA SHOWS HIS HAND.

The concert hall was a blaze of light when Ross entered. The place was filling up fast, and the scent of flowers and perfumes filled the air. Around the front of the stage stood a row of beautiful palms.

The majority of ladies and gentlemen were in full dress, and for once in his life the young college graduate felt strangely out of place. He took a seat in a far corner and was rather glad when several ordinary folks came and took chairs beside and in front of

him, thus hiding him still further from view.

The ushers were members of the charitable organization. Ross had met several of them on social occasions some years back. None of them recognized him, for which he was thankful. They were what Cole would have called "society dudes," and he smiled grimly to himself as he thought of them and then of himself and of the work on the outlet sewer and the railroad.

"Some of those fellows will think the gulf between us as wide as the Mississippi," he reasoned.

Presently a dapper young fellow, dressed in the height of style and with an opera hat under his arm, came in the door just behind him. At once the usher standing near greeted the newcomer.

"How d'ye do, Parmalee," he exclaimed. "Thought I'd see you. You're late."

"Just left Miss Poole at the stage door," replied Parmalee. "You see, she came over from Durham with me."

"Lucky dog."

"Thanks."

"You haven't set any date yet, have you?" in a lower voice.

"Oh, come now, Devere, that's going too far. But she's a charming girl, I tell you, charming."

"That's right."

"And her singing—but you'll hear it later. Where is this seat? I might as well settle down before the concert starts." And then the pair passed out of Ross' hearing.

Ross looked at Parmalee curiously. At first he had been unable to place the dapper young man, but now he remembered him.

Parmalee was the son of a Harrisburg physician, and had himself studied medicine. He had graduated from college a year before, and after a brief trip abroad had come to Durham and opened an office in the fashionable portion of the town.

Since the death of his uncle Ross had not met the doctor; but he had heard of him, and knew that he moved in the highest of local society.

There was just a trace of jealousy shot through his heart as Parmalee disappeared from view and the concert began, with a solo by a well-known violinist.

Ross remembered that other concert and how he might have accompanied Margaret had he chosen to do so. Now she had come with the doctor. Was it possible the two were keeping company?

He looked at the program and saw there were three numbers before Margaret would appear. The time dragged heavily through those numbers and, if the truth must be told, he paid little or no attention to them, although he clapped mechanically when he saw those around him applauding.

When she finally did appear and came sweeping to the front of the stage with a graceful bow he drew a deep breath and his heart almost stopped beating.

She was dressed in white, with a string of pearls around her neck, and a white rose in her soft, fluffy hair. There was a faint tinge of color in her cheeks, and never had she looked more winsome or more beautiful.

The song was a classic, rather difficult, but she appeared to have no trouble in singing it to the entire satisfaction of the audience, and the applause was so great that an encore was necessary, and then she gave them a simple ballad that seemed to fairly sink into Ross' soul as he hung on every note that poured forth from her snowy throat. He stared like one in a dream, with no thought of clapping, and it was not until she had disappeared from view that he aroused himself.

Then he felt he must have air, and left the concert hall, forgetting to ask for a return check.

"What a face! What a voice! Oh, Margaret!" The words sprang to his lips, but he suppressed them.

He walked several blocks before he fairly knew what he was doing. What had he lost by displeasing her? How could he hope for anything from one who could sing like that, look like that? And he only a contractor, a maker of roadbeds for railroads? Had he not

better give up that job, after all; give it up and put his college training to higher use?

His thoughts became a torture to him, and it was in the full height of his bitterness that he all at once found himself standing in front of the window of a fashionable florist. In that window were displayed a great bunch of white carnations. He gazed at them and thought of how he had once given her a similar bunch, when they were going to a fashionable harvest home at the Durham church.

A sudden idea struck him, and almost before he knew it he had purchased the white carnations and a ribbon to go around them, and had obtained a blank card from the florist. On this he wrote, "From an old friend," putting it below her name.

"This is to go around to the concert hall," he said, to the man behind the counter. "Send it at once, and tell the ushers to present it when Miss Poole sings. If they ask who sent it say you don't know." And the florist agreed to everything.

Ross had fully made up his mind not to go back, but half an hour later found him in his old seat, having purchased another ticket of admission.

From the talk around him he discovered that Margaret had made the hit of the evening, and when she came out to sing again the applause was tremendous. Then his bunch of white carnations was handed up, along with another bouquet and a basket of flowers, the latter he felt sure coming from Dr. Parmalee.

The song was another classic and the encore another ballad, and once more Ross was entranced, both by the face and the voice. To him this vision was almost supernatural. Margaret was not as she had been, but something more ethereal, more lovable than ever before.

He left the hall as soon as the song was over and she had bowed herself out of sight.

He went straight to the depot, to discover that he must wait half an hour for the train. Dropping in a seat in the smoking room, he drew out his bulldog,

filled and lit it, and gave himself up to his reflections.

They were of a kaleidoscopic character, impossible to analyze.

At one moment he felt he must turn over the railroad contract to Cole, and go in for something else, or perhaps go abroad; at the next he set his teeth hard on the pipe stem and determined to stick to what he was doing, regardless of what she might think of him. And then a vision of his late uncle crossed his mind, and he determined to go ahead as he had begun, and she might like it or not, as she pleased. But, oh! if only he might make sure of winning her in the end!

His misery for that night was not yet over. Just before the train came in he saw a coach drive up and Margaret and Parmalee alighted. The doctor carried the basket of flowers and one of the bouquets, but not the bunch of white carnations. *That* was nowhere to be seen. The pair entered one of the coaches near the front of the train, and Ross got in the smoker at the rear.

"He's going to see her home, and she didn't think enough of my flowers to bring them along," thought Ross, bitterly. "All right, let them go their pace and I'll go mine."

And then he did his level best to dismiss Margaret from his mind.

Although he went to bed at one it was nearly four before he dropped into a troubled doze. While he slept he dreamt that he was at the bottom of a muddy trench, in workingman's garb, and Margaret was at the top, singing a classic song, and pointing a finger of derision at him.

It had been decided, upon the advice of Cole, to begin the work on the railroad at Durham rather than at Cres-sing, although, later on, two gangs of men might be employed, each working toward the other.

Some material had already been sent up from Jackson Point, and directly after breakfast the next morning the young contractor rode over to the spot, to see that everything was going along smoothly.

Gorgi, the Italian, was in charge,

with a gang of twenty-two, known only to Ross by their numbers.

Matters were progressing slowly, and it was evident to the young boss that something was amiss.

"Da men worka hard, for da little mon," said Gorgi, in reply to a question from Ross. "Notta worka so hard for da Boss Yon."

"I don't know about that," answered the young contractor. "They always worked hard when I was around—and they didn't get a cent more than I am paying them."

"Worka verra hard, gitta little mon," went on Gorgi, and drew a long sigh.

At that moment a middle-aged man stepped up to Ross and touched him on the arm. "Mr. Goodwin, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ross, cheerily.

"My name is Lovel—I'm from the Pittsburg Construction Company. Perhaps you remember me."

"Oh, yes, we met when this contract was given out," and Ross shook hands.

"I'm glad you got the contract," went on Lovel in a low voice. "I mean I'd rather see you get it than that dirty Breen and that miser of a Shacker. We put in a bid because the railroad asked us to—thought Breen and Shacker would squeeze 'em, now Mr. Goodwin, your uncle, was gone." Lovel paused and Ross nodded. "But that isn't what I am here for. I want to know something about a man you've got—fellow named Pat O'Mara. Is he O. K.?"

The young contractor was interested and gazed sharply at his questioner.

"What do you want to know for? Has O'Mara applied to you for a situation?"

"I reckon that's the size of it. The boss told me to look him up."

"I can't say much about him."

"Are he and his gang going to help you on this job?"

"His gang? He hasn't any gang. I placed him in charge of some men, that's all."

"Then there must be some mistake. He said he had a gang of about twenty men."

"Oh, he did? And did he say he

could take those men with him if he left here?"

"I—er—that's a delicate question to ask, Mr. Goodwin. Of course, if you've had trouble with him and the men under him—"

"I haven't had any trouble with the men, but I've had trouble with O'Mara, and I don't propose to have any more." Ross was growing angry. "He's a two-faced fellow, and I believe he tried to play in with Breen against me. He shall have his walking papers next pay day."

"Then you won't recommend him?"

"How can I? He understands the work, and he doesn't drink any more than the most of them. That's all I can say in his favor."

"If he's an underhanded rascal we shan't want him."

"Well, that is your lookout, Mr. Lovel, not mine."

"And you are sure about those men?"

"I think I am. I'll find out mighty quick, I can tell you that. If he has been tampering with my hired help there will be music in the air."

Ross' eyes flashed fire as he spoke. He was thoroughly aroused and his indignation fairly boiled over as he remembered how indifferent O'Mara had appeared when he had ordered him to put through the work on the outlet sewer on time.

"I reckon we had best let the matter drop for the present," said Lovel, and shaking hands again, he moved off and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

ROSS AND HIS ENEMIES.

When left alone Ross remembered that Gorgi and his men had worked under O'Mara, and that Gorgi had seemed to be much dissatisfied over the present situation. With a view of taking the bull by the horns without delay, and especially before O'Mara appeared on the scene, the young contractor called the Italian from the work.

"See here, Gorgi, I want to talk to you," he said, pleasantly.

"All right, boss."

"I want to know if you think you are working for me or for Pat O'Mara."

At this the Italian looked perplexed for a moment.

"You paya da mon, but Pat O'Mara he say he da boss."

"Is that what he told you and those fellows over there?" And Ross jerked his thumb in the direction.

"Ye-as, boss. He say he da boss—he no letta you cut da pay down, not much! He say you cutta da pay ten centa da day nex' week, if he not stop you."

"O'Mara told you a lie, Gorgi. I have never said a word about cutting down wages, and he knows it. I expect to pay the present wages as long as this job lasts."

The Italian looked suspicious. He started to speak, hesitated, and then broke out:

"Dat not all, boss. He saya you losa da mon on da contrak, you bust up, da poor devil Dago he got no worka."

"And he told you he would get you another job—in Pittsburg?"

"He says som'thing like dat, ye-as."

"He said that to make trouble for me, Gorgi. I shall not lose money on this contract, if you and the other men stick to me. If you won't stick I'll get men elsewhere. I don't intend to lower your pay. Tell that to the other men, will you?"

"All right, boss. You saya you put da job t'rough sure?"

"Yes. And Gorgi, how much do you get now?"

"On dol seventy-fiva da day."

"After this I'll give you two dollars a day. But you must keep those other men from leaving me, do you understand? Tell them that I will promise to give them work so long as this job lasts and at the same pay they are now getting."

Gorgi's eyes glistened. The quarter dollar extra a day looked very large in his eyes. He was at heart a good fellow, and he promised faithfully to do all he could for the new boss.

"No can maka all da mans stay," he

said. "Two or three go, maybe, but da udders da stay sure, now."

"All right; and get them to work a little faster if you can," answered Ross, and this Gorgi promised likewise.

Ross had not expected to see O'Mara again that day, but his indignation over the way this under foreman had acted would not let him wait, and he leaped on the first train going down to Jackson's Point, and rode over to the works on one of the construction wagons. Cole saw him coming and surmised at once that something was wrong.

"I was afraid of it," said Cole, after hearing the news. "The skunk! He ought to be kicked full of holes!"

"Is he here?"

"He was half an hour ago. I think he has gone up to the saloon at the crossroads."

"All right, I'll go up after him. Such a rascal as that can't stay in my employ another hour."

"You'd better go slow. He may have more of a hold on those Italians than you imagine. We can't talk to the Dagoes, and he can tell them anything through one of his mouthpieces."

"I don't care—I'll not put up with him," returned Ross, firmly.

The saloon Cole had mentioned was a quarter of a mile away, located where two of the country roads crossed each other. It did not take him long to reach the place, and without hesitation he entered the long, low barroom, with its dirty tables and sanded floor, and looked around.

The sight that met his gaze surprised him not a little. At a table in a far corner sat O'Mara, Breen and Schacker, talking earnestly. All had been drinking, and the empty whisky glasses rested before them.

"We've simply got to do it," Schacker was saying. "The railroad will give the job—" And then he caught sight of Ross, and his mouth closed as tightly as a mousetrap.

Both O'Mara and Breen followed the direction of Schacker's eyes, and both gazed at Ross in consternation. O'Mara was much disconcerted, but tried to put on a bold front.

"Did you want me, Mr. Goodwin?" he asked, rising. "I just stepped in to get a glass. Work at the point is dry and dusty."

"Yes, I did want you," answered the young contractor, steadily. He noticed that Shacker had been doing some figuring on a sheet of paper, and now thrust the paper hastily in his pocket.

Ross moved toward the door of the barroom, and O'Mara followed, with a back wink at the others. Breen jumped up and came forward.

"Have a drink with us before you go, Mr. Goodwin!" he cried.

"That's it!" put in Schacker. "What shall it be?"

"Thank you, gentlemen, but I don't care for it just now."

"Oh, just onc, to show there is no ill-will," insisted Breen.

"We don't bear any grudge," put in Schacker. "You won out fair and square enough. What shall it be, whisky, or do you prefer beer?"

"I prefer nothing," answered Ross, as coldly as before. "Come, O'Mara, I want to talk to you." And he led the way outside, while the barkeeper grumbled openly at a man who would come in so unceremoniously and then not help trade along.

"Is it about the work?" asked O'Mara, when they were in the road.

"No, it's about you, O'Mara. What I've got to say won't take long. You can consider yourself discharged from this moment. I don't want you around the work any more."

"Yes, but see here, my time—"

"Your time is up this instant. I wouldn't have you around longer if you paid me to stay. On Saturday you can draw your pay for the week. I could cut you short, but I won't go to the bother of it."

The Irishman's face grew dark and sour.

"So that's what a man gets for only taking a sociable glass with a couple of friends, who would be friends to you, too, if you'd let them," he growled.

"I wasn't thinking about that, O'Mara, although you had no right to be loafing in time that belongs to me.

I know what you've been up to—how you tried to help Breen get that contract, and how you were going to try to get the men to desert and go with you to the Pittsburg Construction Company."

"It ain't so. I didn't help Mike Breen!" roared the other, but his face showed that he was much disturbed.

"You did, and perhaps I can prove it if I'm put to it. O'Mara, you're a snake in the grass."

"Oh, ye needn't be after throwin' compliments at me. If I'm discharged I reckon I can stand it. I lived before I ever knew you, or your uncle either!"

"I presume you did, but you won't occupy any position of importance in the future if you are going to act in this manner."

"That means that you won't give me a recommendation?" with a sneer. "All right, Mr. Goodwin, I'm after thinkin' I can get along without it from such a person as you. What do you know about contract work, anyhow? Nothing at all, with all av your book wurruk." When O'Mara grew excited his accent was stronger than ever. "Yez can go to the devil wid yer job!"

"One word more, O'Mara," went on Ross, trying to remain calm. "If you know when you are well off, you'll leave my workmen alone."

"Phat are yez after meanin' by that?"

"I mean that I won't allow you to hang around and try to get them to quit for another job. If you do come around I'll have you placed under arrest."

"Yez can't arrist me fer talkin' to a man."

"That's according to how you look at it. Anyway, I can swear out a warrant, and then we'll see what comes of it. I think I can make a pretty good showing in court if I'm put to it."

"Wid yer money, I suppose," sneered the discharged one. "Well, don't git worried, I won't hurt ye. But the contract is goin' to ruin ye right enough. Don't fergit that, an' remember Pat O'Mara told ye!" And with a swagger he turned on his heel and re-entered the road house.

From behind one of the partly drawn

shades Breen, Shacker and the discharged foreman watched Ross depart as rapidly as he had come. As his business-like figure disappeared around a bend of the road O'Mara muttered an imprecation under his breath.

"So he has thrown you down, eh?" said Shacker.

"Did yez hear the talk?" demanded O'Mara.

"Yes, we heard it all," answered Breen. "Why not? Both of you talked loud enough."

"He's a high-flyer," sneered the ex-foreman.

"Not at all, Pat," came calmly from Shacker. "He did exactly what Breen, or I, or yourself would do under similar circumstances. You got found out, that's all, and you had to take your medicine," and the contractor laughed harshly.

"It's a shame Pat didn't get out and take the gang of men with him," came from Breen. "Hi, Dave, give us another round of whisky. I'll put a shingle on the roof even if that dude of a Goodwin won't."

"I ain't sayin' that I can't git the men yit," said O'Mara, as he cooled down a little.

"Did Gorgi say he'd stick by you?"

"He said he'd see about it, and talk it over wid the rest o' the Dagoes."

"This takes another spoke out of our wheel," said Shacker, as the liquor was brought. "But we have got to do something; eh, Breen?"

"To be sure." The liquor was downed at a single toss. "And we can't be after waitin' too long either."

"What was this you was sayin' about another railroad contract, just before he came in?" asked O'Mara.

"I got word of it yesterday," answered Shacker. "It came out through Sam Flood, the freight agent, who is a particular friend of mine. He says he heard Sanderson and the others talking it over. They are going to make some big improvements next year and the year after, and they as much as settled to give Goodwin the jobs, if he puts this contract through and in good shape."

"At that rate he'll be gettin' everything an' our business will be ruined," observed Breen.

"That's the way I look at it, and that's why I said we must prevent him from putting this contract through on time. If he loses his twenty thousand forfeit he'll feel sore all over, and most likely he'll go out of business.

"Then we must make him lose it," came solemnly from Breen. "I've got no use for a college dude that won't even drink wid me."

"If you can plan anything to make

him lose, I'll help ye to put it through," put in O'Mara. "I don't care what it is either. I'll show him that he can't trample on me fer nuthin'!" And he brought his fist down on the table so that the glasses rattled.

Shacker closed one eye suggestively and looked around to make sure that the bartender was not listening. Then he leaned forward.

"I've got a plan," he whispered. "Both of you stand by me, and I'll put Goodwin in such a hole that he'll never get out of it!"

[TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE NEXT NUMBER.]

Jimmy James, Practical Politician

BY FRANK N. STRATTON

OLD Simpson, veteran in politics, and young Eaton, novice at the game, gazed across the table littered with law books, into Wilton's troubled face.

"So Powers and Billings have deserted me—gone over to Feeley—and the convention less than three hours away," Wilton said, incredulously.

"That's what they've done," replied Simpson, a note of hopelessness in his drawling voice. "Feeley's peculiar brand of eloquence fetched 'em; money talks, you know."

"It's an infernal outrage," snapped Eaton, viciously digging his penknife into the polished table.

"It's politics," remarked Wilton, wearily. "I'll be glad when it's all over."

"It's all over now," Simpson growled, "except Feeley's speech of acceptance—and the shouting."

"Unless Harlow shouldn't get here," suggested Eaton, hopefully. "Simpson's his alternate, you know."

Wilton laughed dryly.

"He'll get here on time; his train isn't due till 12:30. He'd circle the globe to beat me out of this nomination."

"If he doesn't, and Simpson takes his place, twenty-one of those forty-one ballots will bear the name of Thomas H. Wilton," Eaton persisted, aggressively. "This fight's not over until the last ballot's cast. I'm going to watch that train come in."

Wilton smiled affectionately after the retreating figure.

"Loyal fellow," he observed.

Simpson nodded absently, walked to the window, and scowled down upon the chattering crowd that had begun to assemble in the courthouse yard. Wilton's eyes roamed over the rows of

dry law books and the two scantily furnished rooms.

"Six years more of this grind—in stead of a seat on the bench," he murmured, repressing a sigh.

Simpson whirled about and glowered at him.

"Look here, Tom Wilton!" he exclaimed, "in one hour I can raise enough stuff to buy those two scoundrels back. You're a fool if you don't consent."

Wilton shook his head.

"You know my views, Dick," he answered, decisively. "I'll mount that bench clean-handed, or not at all."

"But it's politics—it's part of the game; you must fight the devil with fire," Simpson persisted.

The outer office door flew open, and Eaton rushed in with a war whoop that jarred the dust from the venerable countenance of Chief Justice Jay on the wall.

"You're it!" he screamed. "Freight wreck just this side Whitewater! Harlow's train held up, and he can't drive forty miles in two hours."

He hurled his hat at the bust of Blackstone, and dropped panting into a chair.

Wilton's face shone; the wary Simpson closed the door between the two rooms.

"If that's true——"

"It's straight!" Eaton ejaculated. "The *Chronicle* just got it by 'phone from Whitewater. Feeley's ~~is~~ tearing around like a maniac. But he can't buy any more of our delegates, and——"

Wilton threw up a hand to enjoin silence, and grasped the receiver of the vociferous telephone.

"Hello! Yes, this is Wilton. Harney—at Whitewater. All right. What is it, Harney?"

Then, as he listened, the smile faded from his lips; two deep furrows slowly formed above the keen, blue eyes. Simpson, noting the signs of bad news, hung over him eagerly.

"Look's bad, Harney," resumed Wilton. "But something *may* happen to help us out. If not, we'll take our

medicine like little men. Thank you for your interest, old boy. Good-by."

He hung the receiver on its hook and turned to the other two.

"Harlow will be here in time to vote," he said, quietly. "He borrowed an auto of a friend in Whitewater, and is racing this way over the Toby pike."

"He's a demon!" Eaton gasped. "Oh, for a punctured tire, a collision—anything to stop him! If you'd only let us buy——"

"Hush!" hissed Simpson. "There's some one in the front office!"

With a quick movement Wilton jerked the door partly open, and thrust his head into the other room.

"Well, Jimmy," he said, gruffly, "what is it? Be quick. I'm busy."

A burly, one-armed man, unkempt, and of forbidding countenance, rose from a chair suspiciously near the partition door.

"Youse slipped away in de shuffle before I could t'ank youse in de court-house," he muttered, thickly. "Say, dat spiel of yourn was a peach. Ol' whiskers on de bench would have handed me ten years, sure, if——"

"That's all right, Jimmy," interrupted Wilton, impatiently. "Now, you just move on, to the next town, or they'll pinch you again."

"Sure! I'm goin'. But—about dis here convention of yourn. Say! I learned politics up in Ch'cago—from de boss. D'y'e know what we'd do to dat bloke, Harlow——"

"I know that we don't need your advice—and I suggest once more that you move on—and begin now."

"Oh, dat's all right," the unkempt one mumbled, as he slouched toward the door. "I'm movin'. As I was sayin', what youse needs right now is——"

Wilton shut the door with a bang.

"The hobo I saved from the pen this morning," he explained. "He'd have braced me for a dollar in another minute."

"Serve you right if he'd knock you down and take it from you," Simpson growled. "Wasting your time defending tramps, with this convention coming on."

"Couldn't stand by and see them railroad a man to the pen without evidence," Wilton rejoined, with a little laugh. "I had to butt in, tramp or no tramp. Come, boys, it's time for lunch—and then we'll tackle Feeley's convention."

Half an hour later, as the three approached the crowd that struggled into the courthouse, Eaton emitted an exclamation of surprise.

"There's your hobo friend, Wilton!" he exclaimed. "And he's guarding Feeley's auto!"

With his solitary hand the unkempt one touched the brim of his torn hat as the three passed by.

"Got a job; eh, Jimmy?" Wilton called out.

"Sure. An' a silver plank, jest for keepin' me eye on de masheen. Makes me think of when de boss ust to rush me along in his masheen—fer speshul service—mostly after night."

"Another friend gone over to the enemy," laughed Wilton, as they climbed the courthouse stairs.

In the courtroom, Simpson pushed his way through the noisy crowd to the group of delegates and alternates assembling in the farther corner. Wilton and Eaton mingled with the crowd, stopping to exchange jokes or comments with friends, but slowly making their way toward the platform around which the waves of political battle would soon surge.

"Hello, Feeley," Wilton cried, as his rival brushed past him. "Fine day for a convention, isn't it?"

"Or for a swift run in an auto," Feeley called back, with a significant smile.

Eaton muttered something not complimentary to either Mr. Feeley or Mr. Harlow.

"Harlow's not here yet," Simpson reported, hurriedly, a few moments later. "Till he comes, we're twenty-one to twenty. We'll put Burns in as chairman, an' then we'll rush things."

A moment later the gavel of the temporary chairman fell with a crash. Comparative silence settled upon the expectant throng. Through clouds of

tobacco smoke Wilton saw Feeley's perspiring face as he whispered instructions to his chief henchman.

"May not be such a fine day for that run, after all, Mr. Feeley," Wilton muttered to himself.

Glancing at the clock on the wall, he caught himself comparing fearfully the sluggish movements of its hands with the whirling spokes of Harlow's automobile.

The short, sharp fight of organization resulted in the election of Simeon Burns, by a vote of twenty-one to twenty.

"First blood for us!" whispered Eaton, exultantly.

"Too close to be comfortable," Wilton answered, his eyes on the clock.

Quickly and mercilessly the chairman named the various committees—men favorable to Wilton—men who knew what one minute's time might mean.

The report of the committee on credentials was submitted promptly; the report of the committee on resolutions, surprisingly brief, followed immediately; both were adopted—twenty-one to twenty. Over the heads of his fellow-delegates old Simpson blinked innocently toward the corner where Wilton and Eaton sat. Things were being rushed.

Above the murmured comments of the struggling, pushing auditors arose audible protests from Feeley's friends against the evident partiality of the chairman, protests mingled with fervent anathemas upon the head of Harlow.

"We must have order, gentlemen," roared the imperturbable chairman, wielding the gavel savagely. "Nominations are now in order. Proceed with the nominations, gentlemen."

It took pompous, prolix old Judge Turley but fifty seconds to present the name of Thomas H. Wilton.

"And I had prepared the speech of my life," he wheezed, indignantly, to his neighbor as he resumed his seat.

"Any others?" asked the chairman, laconically, raising his gavel. The reason for the silence was known only to the wise; the rank and file could only stare and guess.

"If there are no others I shall declare the nominations closed——"

As the gavel swung further upward, State Senator Freeland sprang to his feet and addressed the chair. A look of stern resolve was on the senator's shaven face—the look of a man prepared to talk against time—the expression of one hoping for night or Harlow; the glance he shot through the window that opened toward the Toby pike might have been such as those cast by the Iron Duke toward the invisible Prussian columns.

The crash of the gavel interrupted the senator's deliberate accents. The suave voice of Mr. Burns followed the crash.

"It is only fair, before the gentleman begins, to call the gentleman's attention to the fact that in this district a custom of limiting nominating speeches to five minutes has prevailed for so long that it has come to have the force of law. Believing it to be the wish of the majority of this convention, I therefore rule accordingly."

Above wild yells of "Gag rule! "Yes! Yes!" and "That's right!" the shrill voice of the senator arose in passionate appeal from the ruling of the chair. Ruling sustained—twenty-one to twenty.

"The crowd's with you, Tom," shouted Eaton, above the din, as order was being restored and several pairs of enthusiastic partisans were hustled into the corridors, there to finish their belligerent arguments.

Wilton, standing in his chair that he might see over the heads of the cheering crowd, had one eye fixed on the rear door and the other on the lazy clock. He nodded energetically.

"Ten minutes more will turn the trick," he called back. "Where on earth is Harlow!"

"Phillip Feeley is placed in nomination," the chair announced. "There being no further nominations, you will proceed to ballot. The chair appoints William Sully and Enoch Crilley tell-

ers. As the secretary calls the roll each delegate will come forward and deposit his ballot in this box. The tellers will see that but one ballot per man is inserted. Proceed, gentlemen."

Forty-one slips of paper fluttered into the box. Then, as the tellers lifted the lid and began to count, a burly, red-faced man, wild-eyed and mud-bespattered, crashed through the rear door and furiously plowed his way to the front. Panting and gesticulating, he sprang upon a chair, but Feeley reached him and pulled him down.

"Don't make an ass of youself, Harlow," Feeley snarled. "It's all over. Where the devil have you been?"

"Where've I been?" shouted Harlow. "Well, I've not been attending a picnic—don't look like it, do I? A one-armed idiot smashed my machine—and his too—ten miles up the pike! I've run ten miles to——"

The gavel and the voice of the chairman drowned in the ears of Wilton and Eaton the remainder of Mr. Harlow's explanation.

"Mr. Wilton having received twenty-one ballots, and Mr. Feeley twenty, I declare Thomas H. Wilton the nominee of our party for the office of judge of this circuit."

Wilton, mounting the platform to deliver his speech of acceptance to the cheering crowd, was intercepted by a breathless urchin bearing a dirty scrap of paper, a dirtier face, and an air of supreme importance.

"One-armed feller on th' through freight slung this at me and said fer me to take it to Mister Wilton, th' next judge."

"Th' next judge" smiled as he and Eaton hastily read the penciled scrawl:

"I've ben a movin' on—purty swift—prove it by Harlow. As I was sayin' when youse slammed that door—what youse wanted was less powwowin' an more politicks—practical politicks."

"JIMMY JAMES,
"Practical politishun."

The International Disappearance Syndicate, Ltd.

BY "THETA"

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

The story opens in the main office at New York of "The Central Trust," as the giant corporation representing a combination of all trusts is termed. The creator of the colossal aggregation of capital announces to his associates that the time has arrived when it is necessary to remove from the path of the Trust all those in every part of the world who oppose its progress. It is decided to bring about the disappearance, among others, of Senator Grosvenor, of New York, who is supposed to be the power behind the newly elected President of the United States, and also of his private secretary, who also is his niece, Miss Ethel Verity. When this is done, Wilson Staritt, who loves Miss Verity, resolves to find and rescue her. No sooner is his decision made than Staritt discovers that he also is marked for removal. A short time after the disappearance of his fiancee Staritt's valet, Thorne, discovers a man going through his master's pockets, and in a fight the stranger is knocked down and rendered unconscious. In searching the body, Staritt finds a stolen letter addressed to himself. It contains a thousand-dollar bill with instructions to join immediately the writer, a friend of Staritt's, in Tangiers. Staritt and his valet set sail and find the friend, Gregg, in a strange place called the "House of Isaac." Here recourse is had to the Black Art to discover the whereabouts of Miss Verity. Staritt becomes excited and is attacked in the dark. Something is forced down his throat, and he feels himself sinking into a pit.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOLE IN THE GROUND.

MY first impression was that of cold; I was shivering. Instinctively I coiled myself up, with my knees to my chin and my arms clasped about my head; the only posture of self-defense against low temperature that man knows.

But the movement brought out racking pains in every joint of my body; and I groaned aloud. And that, in turn, contributed to bring about other, more clearly defined, impressions.

I became conscious that I was resting on no bed of roses; my couch was intensely hard, and cold, and damp.

Through half-closed, leaden eyelids,

that burned when I moved my eyeballs, I noted that it was almost dark; a sort of brownish dusk obtained all about me, which might have been the twilight of dawn or of evening, for all I could determine to the contrary.

And there was a ringing in my ears, which subsided when I lay perfectly motionless; then I became aware that it rained. A confused murmur, a moist patter, punctuated by an intermittent drip, drip, drip that ended in a sharp splash, was dominant over a deeper note as of rushing waters.

I wondered, in a half-hearted, cowed fashion, where I was; and by what means I had come to this pass, that I should be so desperately uncomfortable.

But the bare exertion of thinking set

my brain to cringing painfully—I can express the sensation by no other word; and I was presently content to suffer in a silent, dumb torpor.

That is, until the cold grew more intense. It permeated my entire being, so that my flesh was like ice; and my teeth chattered with a violence that I could not gainsay.

At whatever cost, I realized, I must walk about and warm myself. But it took a struggle to make the initial movement.

I summoned up my resolution, and put it into effect—suddenly, as all resolutions are effected.

I sat up and groaned.

For a moment I thought I was blind; a wave of mortal anguish seemed to envelop me, to smother and crush life and spirit out from me, so that I could not see, or hear, or think.

In time that passed, although my head continued to ache persistently, as though determined to split itself in halves; indeed, I was half convinced, for a while, that my skull was fractured.

I had been lying in a shallow, cavelike place—more like a niche, such as a statue is frequently set in—carven out of the living rock. Its floor was of rock, too, and covered with a thin film of wetness.

The front of the shelter—if it can be called such—was open to the four winds of heaven. It formed a rude arch, from the edge of which water dripped constantly, a steady stream of glittering bright drops.

The threshold seemed to be elevated a few inches above the surrounding ground. Beyond it I could see a yard or so of drab sandy soil; and beyond that, nothing; a curtain of rain shut off all farther view.

Rain falling as I had never seen it fall before, creating a veritable curtain of steel-blue needles, so steady as to seem almost permanent.

My teeth continued to chatter and my flesh to quake in the frigid air; the outlook was discouraging to the extreme. Clearly, it was impossible for one to exercise in that downpour; and within the

niche there was no room. One step either way would bring me flat against the wall; a pace forward, and I would be out of my shelter.

Poor as it was, it seemed a haven of refuge, infinitely preferable to the drenching that awaited the venturesome without.

I sat down, cuddling my legs, shrugging my shoulders, nursing my pains. And those shot through me like fire-tipped needles. My head was like dough—if dough can comprehend agony; my feet were like cakes of ice; my legs, arms, my several joints, were stiff and sore.

My eyes burned, and my mouth was hot and dry. In short, had I wakened from the unconsciousness that follows a protracted debauch, I would have been in no worse shape.

Not half so bad, probably; in the other case, had I indeed been drunk, I should very likely have wakened in surrounding at least passably familiar to me.

Where was I?

I sat a miserable prey to shapeless conjecture. I sought to place myself, and vainly. I cast about, as a hound casts about for the scent of its prey, for some clew to my position.

My mind went back suddenly to Ethel. In an instant the whole train of chimera-like adventures through which I had passed since leaving my betrothed in the hall of the Grosvenor residence flashed across my mental vision, like a fragment of some half-remembered hallucination.

Where had I been last? I remembered Tangiers, the house of Isaac, Gregg, the abortive *scânce* with the naked child and the ball of crystal, the nightmare-like conclusion—but no more.

Darkness had overtaken me. After that, what?

Not even a hazy recollection had I of what had passed since that moment when the fire-like draught had been poured down my throat. And yet it seemed as though much time had elapsed. I *felt*, intuitively, that I was far from the scene of that frantic struggle.

But, where? And what had happened to Gregg?

I stood up with a cry, afire with determination to go out, to make discoveries, be the consequences what they might.

As though that movement had been the cue for a transformation scene upon some bleak stage, the rain abruptly ceased.

Gaping with astonishment, I stood looking out over a landscape of a kind, not more than half a mile in width, cut sharply off at the farther side by a curtain of granite.

Between there lay a sheet of water, perhaps a quarter of a mile across, smiling and sun-kissed, reflecting a sky of fathomless blue with its little, high, fleecy clouds.

On the farthest side of the water was an expanse of grassy lawn terminating in a grove of trees; but on my side there was notling save barren, sandy soil, like a beach, flat and expressionless.

Despite the pain, I moved out and stood in the glare of the blessed sunlight; and at once the steam began to arise from my saturated clothing. But I was grateful, and basked for several minutes in the glow of warmth and light—which was life to me.

Above me, towering perpendicularly from the sand, was a precipice of living granite, so cleanly cut as to seem smooth and to be utterly unscalable. Its counterpart, from which it must have been riven by some gigantic cataclysm of nature, faced it, frowning across the canyon.

A canyon I was at first disposed to call the place; but it was not. Baldly and simply, it was a hole in the ground. For the total area of it was not more than that of a square half-mile; to the right and left as well as before and behind me it was inclosed by beetling cliffs, certainly no less than five hundred feet in height.

What could it mean? What was it?

I pressed my aching head with both my hands and vainly sought to fit some explanation to my presence there. I could not, and presently giving it up in despair made my way to the edge of the

lake, knelt and scooped up a handful of water.

It was sweet and cold. I drank my fill, feverishly, and rose feeling strengthened and encouraged.

Still, I reeled with weakness and a terrible fatigue, shaken no less by illness than by the dread uncertainty that encompassed me round about. A question, a single word, seemed to be voiced aloud by my side; but the voice was mine own.

“Marooned?”

Was that the explanation? Had I been taken at last by the hand of the enemy and cast into this hole to live or to die, to drag out a purposeless existence where I could not interfere with the world-moving schemes of that hand?

And was I alone in this place, or had others been similarly immured to share a like fate? Was Gregg, too, taken and to be my companion in exile?

I would look for him, I concluded. Indeed, there was nought else to do, unless it were to find food, which my stomach craved intensely.

The right hand wall—I afterwards discovered that it was the eastern one—was the nearest. To husband my strength, I made up my mind to go to that. Failing to find anyone there, I would return to the base of the western precipice and gradually make the circuit of the pit.

Along the edge of the sheet of water, where the sand was firmest, I began to stagger in the easterly direction. Presently I came to the end of the lake. Beyond that were a few hundred yards of sand, and then a fringe of trees at the foot of the cliff.

Toward these I made shift to totter; but I had not gone far before something happened to induce me to change my mind.

Very suddenly there was a dull *plop*, right at my feet. A spurt of sand rose and spattered me. I started back with a cry, and at that moment a tiny *bang!* fell upon my ears.

Some one was shooting at me. I stopped, looked up, shading my eyes with my hand.

At the edge of the southern cliff I saw a little cloud of white smoke, no larger than a man's hand, ballooning suddenly aloft.

I stood irresolute. What did that mean I asked myself.

The answer was clear and comprehensive: a second bullet that dropped into the sand not a foot from the first; and a second cloud that popped up suddenly from the cliff's brink.

"Well," I said aloud, "that is better. At least some one takes an interest in me. I am not entirely deserted."

My spirits began to rise, strangely enough, at the mere knowledge that I was not completely cut off from humanity in that desolate pit.

"A hint is as good as a hole through my skin," I said. "Plainly it is not wished that I should go any further in this direction." I took off my hat and bowed derisively, flouting a hand to the smoke puffs.

"Thanks to you, my courteous guardian angel," I cried. "I'll act on your suggestion."

For I was, it would be futile to deny, more than a little light of head and silly, as a result of my suffering and privation.

My feet, shifting in the unstable sand, had kicked a little of the surface to one side. I was turning when I felt my heel grind upon a hard substance.

Without thinking, I looked down to see what it might be, then stooped and dug it from the sand with my fingers.

Vaguely I was reasoning that it might be the bone of some prehistoric monster; for it was white and hard, and chalky to the touch. And this setting was certainly desolate and wild enough to be the sepulcher of some forgotten creature of the tertiary epoch with an unpronounceable name.

I don't ask you to believe that I arrived at this conclusion by any process of reasoning. The action on my part at best was instinctive: my brain was half asleep, and I was but obeying an instinct that bade me satiate my curiosity.

I stooped, I say, and dug it out; and

held it in my hands and gazed into the eye sockets of a grinning human skull.

Nor was I, at first, more than somewhat interested: here was proof that another had lived in this pit.

It was also proof that another had here died: something that I did not care to consider, but which was forced upon me by damning evidence, not only of the skull itself, but by that which indicated the manner of its owner's death.

Squarely in the top of the head was a small, round hole, about which the bones were shattered and splintered. Something rattled within the skull; and a pellet of metal fell into my hand.

I gazed, petrified with horror; the logical deduction was conclusive enough; the bullet was a steel-capped one, of the kind used only in the Charter-Burnside rifle, a weapon known to inhumanity for not over eighteen months at that time.

My imagination re-created the tragedy. I saw in a brief moment the lonely man, by man immolated in this fearful place, doomed to serve a life sentence without word of mouth to a fellow-being.

I saw him crazed and rendered desperate by the prospect; I saw him determined to gain liberty, or die in the attempt; I saw him, with the dread of death in his eyes—bitter as life must have been to him!—rushing across what I had been clearly warned was the dead line.

Myself, I must have been a trifle mad. For this picture that passed across my mental vision brought in its train a craven thought that, for the moment, I actually considered.

After all, it would be better to die honorably by a bullet—better far than to drag out a purposeless existence, tormented by the nine devils of solitude.

It would be better to give my invisible warder a live target for his practice. It would be better—

As though one stood by my side and audibly tempted me to self-destruction, I clapped my hands to my ears and fled the spot, leaving that skull to grin sardonically to the open sky.

CHAPTER XII.

THE IMMOLATED.

I made a difficult progress—or, rather, a difficult retrogression. Both because of my bodily weakness, which now and again gripped me like a strong enemy, and because of the heat, which waxed terrific, I lost track of my movements for a while.

The sole impression of the journey is one of heat—blinding, searing heat that beat down upon me from the brazen skies, and up to me from the sizzling sands.

Nor can I indicate how long the journey took; I fancy it must have been a length of time entirely incommensurate with the distance covered. For the walk was not long; but when deadly lassitude clogs one's footsteps the shortest journey is infinitely prolonged.

I remembered the niche wherein I had rested, and passed it with a glance that told me that the place was now dry as a bone; moisture had a short shrift in the burning pit wherein I labored; and perhaps I wondered stupidly how the lake itself managed to escape drying up.

Under such circumstances, however, one does not stop to figure things out: he goes on, as I went on, stumbling hopelessly toward the trees and the cool shade beneath them, for which I thirsted as, a short while gone, I had thirsted for water.

It seemed that hours passed. And then I heard a sound as of a human voice.

I remember stopping stock-still, hypnotized by the sound, more than half-inclined to credit it to a figment of my imagination; and then making forward once more, plodding with my ears on the alert for a repetition, and truly never thinking to get it.

But get it I did—the voice again, louder, nearer, and charged with a tone I could not understand.

I halted, looked ahead; but the sun-glare on the lake dazzled me, and the heat demons reeled and whirled dizzily above the sands. Primarily I saw nothing; and then I made out the heat-

distorted figure of a man, standing out from under the trees.

He was shouting and waving his arms; I fancied that he beckoned, and I pressed on, laughing with joy to think that I was not alone—selfish as that emotion was in me.

Then the shouting redoubled; I remember wondering that a lone man could furnish such a volume of sound; and when I looked there were more figures by his side, and their howls wrung echoes from the granite walls of the pit.

Some suspicion of the true explanation flashed upon me; and a deluding hope that I dared not trust welled in my heart. I tried to give an answer, but a feeble yelp was all that my parched throat could muster—a wistful cry that could not have carried a dozen feet.

Moreover, I would run; and made an attempt to do so. But it was hard—momentarily growing harder; the sand clutched at my heels like a hostile hand, and my feet were like lead for weight; my legs ached with the strain of lifting them, and my tongue hung from my mouth as I panted.

As a rule it is no easy matter to make a strong man, confident in his strength, patient with a cloying weakness. I had ever held myself one more powerfully builded than the average man; and it exasperated me and made me wonder in a befogged, brutish way—the difficulty I experienced in getting across that stretch of sand.

The cool sensation of moisture about my feet was the first warning, after those of the yelling men, whose cries I failed to interpret.

I stopped, looked down, thinking that I must have wandered off at a tangent, and so into the waters of the lake.

But I had not. My feet were ankle deep in the sand, however; and they were wet. I failed to comprehend, for the surface of the sand was dry. Turning I looked for my footprints.

At first I could not find them.

I rubbed my eyes, wondering had I gone mad. Was I dead, a walking phantasm, that I should leave no marks on that light, yielding sand?

Then I saw the nearest one: it was twenty feet back, and rapidly disappearing: a brown stain where my feet had plowed through the surface.

But the others, the steps that I had afterward taken? I looked down again; and the sands were calf-high on my leg.

A wave of horror swept over me, close upon the heels of a glimmer of the truth; I pulled madly—and succeeded in getting one foot near the surface.

But the effort necessary sent the other leg knee-deep.

I shrieked, lost my head completely, began to flounder about like a decapitated hen, sinking more deep and deeper still with every movement of my body.

Indeed, I was slowly but surely being dragged down whether I moved or not.

A quicksand had me in its relentless power.

I could feel its thousand fingers, treacherous, slimy, enervating, fastened upon me with ruthless intent, stealthily overcoming me, inch by inch—pulling me down to a living tomb.

When full realization of the position came to me, and I counted myself lost, the effect was like that of his drug upon a morphomaniac.

Very suddenly my head was clear as a bell, and I stopped struggling; I saw the futility of wasting my strength.

I have always wished to die slowly, at my leisure, with a mind unfettered, unclouded: to have time to think it over and resign myself to it—whatever lies in the great Beyond.

Now—it was coming quicker than I expected; I was yet young, and life was sweet. And the time was not very long; I was down to my thighs, already. But what fleeting moments of this world remained to me, I wished to make the most of.

So I surrendered without further resistance—thereby saving my life. Standing with folded arms, I gazed off over the little breadth of the quaking sands, and watched the group of men who had vainly tried to warn me off from this peril.

For the past moment or two, before peace came to me, I had been unconscious of their existence, my whole being wrapped up in the fight for freedom. But now I remembered, as one hears an echo, that their shouting had been incessant, and that they had done what they could to warn me.

With the clearing of my brain, my vision seemed improved, also; I could make them out quite distinctly, now, despite the dance of the goose-heat.

But latterly they had become suddenly silent; and I saw one of their number haranguing them, with wildly waving arms. His remarks seemed to have an effect, for a ragged cheer burst from their throats—I should judge there must have been twenty of them, altogether—and they rushed down toward me in a body.

Had they gone mad? They were making for the quicksand at a furious pace, and from their manner I fancied—absurdly enough—that they were going to attempt a rescue by running swiftly over to me, to what end it would be hard to say. A dying man's fancies are not always reasonable.

But I was mistaken. At the very verge of the deadly place they stopped. Then I comprehended their plan.

A space of thirty feet was to be spanned; they made it by a living chain, one holding on to another with a vise-like grip, stringing themselves out until the first was within a yard of me—and up to his waist in the hungry quag.

I recall his face distinctly: he was a little, lithe and wiry Japanese, bronzed like an idol of his native land, with high cheek bones and slanting eyes, and coarse black hair that stood out from his head like the tonsure of a Jap doll.

And he was very cool and purposeful and rather good-natured withal, thrusting out his hand and grabbing at me with a guttural word or two that sounded as though they might have come from the throat of a courteous corn crake.

His little, waxen fingers clutched me by the collar and he fairly yelped with pleasure. Turning as best he might, he

whooped back an order, and the others began to pull in.

It was an heroic expedient, a desperate remedy for the trouble. The fight to get back to dry land was a tedious one. Personally I was helpless; my Jap was in little better shape; only we managed to hug one another like a pair of long separated brothers, while the balance of the company did the work—did it just in time, too; for, by the time I felt firm ground beneath my feet, I was almost under. The sands had engulfed me to my chin; the Jap's hand was invisible, and he himself was struggling with tight-set lips to keep the sand from entering his mouth.

But then the worst was over. It was a matter of but a moment or two ere I found myself on my back in the shade of a tree, drinking a draught of water with which a bearded Russian was fairly bathing me, and feeling decidedly under the weather; for my legs were limp as strings, and as numb; nor could I move a single step.

The rest is pandemonium. I shall carry with me to my dying day the memory of the scene that I watched while the water choked me and trickled down my neck.

Reinforcements had arrived, it seemed. I thought as I looked them over, that fully a hundred men must be gathered together. Later I discovered that their full number was over one hundred and fifty.

They leaped about me, yelling, crying, pushing toward me, besieging me with a million questions in a hundred strange tongues, rattling exclamations and inquiries like a battery of rapid-fire phonographs. They thrust strange, bearded faces into mine and made fierce, unintelligible demands. They pawed me all over with not ungentle hands, yet hands deliriously unsteady, trying to do what they could to relieve me from my faintness; and ending by stripping me stark of my sodden clothes.

The whole affair is rather nightmareish to me, as I recall it. It came like a thunderstorm out of a clear sky; and I'm sure the confusion of Babel was as nothing to the uproar of cries.

Had I understood a tenth of the demands they made of me, I could not have made answer to a thousandth part; I lay flaccid and exhausted, weak as a cat, unstrung and—bluntly—dazed.

Here was something that I did not immediately comprehend: the guarded pit, the little colony of strange madmen, no two of whom seemed—at the time—to be of the same nationality. And I half wondered if it were an open air lunatic asylum for incurables.

It came to an end with the advent of a man to my side, whom I have reason to hold very distinctly in my mind's eye.

He was a big fellow, middle-aged and bearded with a short, unkempt, stubby growth of grayish hair; he was very stout and carried himself like one of important standing in his land; and he wore insouciantly a canvas shooting jacket, two sizes too small for him, an undershirt, and a pair of trousers that made his beefy legs look like tight-packed sausages.

He shouldered and elbowed his way through the press, and when he had come to me, stood looking at me for an infinitesimal fraction of a second. Then he turned and flung out his arm, with a word or two of French, strongly tainted with an English accent.

Obediently the crowd fell back, the big man's voice berating them unmercifully.

"Get back!" he cried, sternly. "Give the man air! D'ye want to stifle him, to crush the life out of him before he has a chance to recover himself? Keep back, I say."

He followed that up with a word to a chap who stood by his elbow, and who trotted off. I closed my eyes, wearied of the sight of that circle of haggard, intent faces that glared at me so hungrily—as though I had been a tidbit for their delectation, and they starving.

I closed my eyes, I say, and slipped into a languid stupor, from which I came out with a jerk that rattled my nerves: a bucket of cold water had been dashed over me.

It was followed by another and another and another: thoroughly they sluiced me down. And truly nothing

more reviving than the treatment could have been devised.

It was like ice—the water—and threw me into a state of tingling, nervous energy. I wanted, at once, to get up and to move about, to find out things.

My big man divined as much.

"Can you walk?" he inquired, bending over me.

"Try," I made out to say.

"Good," he replied. "Give me your hand."

Putting an arm about my waist he assisted me to my feet. I stood erect—and cringed, made suddenly aware of my nakedness. "My clothes!" I cried.

They were not yet dried; but a collection was made among these worn and impatient men, whose eyes never once left me; one contributed a coat, another trousers, a third a shirt. I slipped into them thankfully, and walked a step or two, supported on the big man's arm.

"Are you strong enough to talk?" he asked.

"I'll make a stagger at it," I said, smiling faintly. "Tell me where I am, first."

"I can't," he said, shortly; thereby puzzling me infinitely for a little while. "Have you any news?"

"News?" I iterated.

"Yes, news!" he cried, harshly. "You're here. Tell us how you came here, and if plans are afoot for a rescue, or were afoot when you left the world."

I could only stare, bewildered; I dare say I was stupid enough, but even now I did not take in the meaning of the scene.

"A rescue?" I repeated. "I've heard of no rescue."

"Oh, the devil!" He turned upon the men. "No news—nothing is being done," he told them.

They chorused a dismal groan; and I watched the interest that had illumined their faces die to bleak hopelessness. Instantly they turned their backs upon me—at least the majority did—and began to stroll off disconsolately.

It seemed rude enough to me just then; but now I can allow for the black disappointment that entered into their

hearts and embittered them; I, too, was to know that sensation ere long.

Even my big man half averted his face and stood for a moment in glum silence; when he considered me again he was lowering and gloomy.

"Who are you?" he demanded, gruffly. "What's your name, and why did they take you?"

I pondered a moment. Who *were* "they?" was a question that interested me more than did his.

"My name's Staritt," I told him— "Wilson Staritt. But to whom do you refer when you say 'they'?"

He stared. "My name's Grimes," he said, with his eyes full upon me, and, I thought, the shadow of an amused twinkle lurking in their depths.

"Grimes!" I cried. "John Grimes?"

"Of England—yes," he answered, rather shamefaced.

"Then—" My suspicions of the actual state of affairs recurred to me with added force. "Then you mean that you—that all these men here are ——"

"Victims of the International Disappearance Syndicate, Limited? Yes; I mean that."

His turning of the nickname struck me as extremely apt. But now hope was tugging at my heartstrings.

"But is—are—" I began, almost afraid to ask the query that trembled on my lips.

"Look here!" he said, putting a kindly paw on my shoulder. "Did I understand you to say that your name was Staritt?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, there's some one here who'll be interested to see you, or I'm not mistaken."

CHAPTER XIII.

TREACHERY.

Before the words were fairly out of his mouth I had him by the arm and was dragging him this way and that, heedlessly, mad to be off.

He smiled sweetly upon me. "Eh, the young heart!" he said. "Come—this way, my impetuous friend."

I fairly rushed him through the little grove of trees. He was willing and kindly disposed, but I was frantic and maintained a pace which made him perspire and swear and puff like a porpoise.

And the others of the colony—it seemed they had not gone far—swallowed their despair and caught the infection of my excitement. Perhaps they guessed what was afoot; men in their case are liable to be rather confidential and to acquire more than an inkling of one another's affairs; and it's no wonder that they knew of me.

I heard my name caught up and passed from mouth to mouth, with a half-hearted cheer. Certainly public interest in me was stimulated for the second time. They followed me, falling in behind by threes and fours, forming a sort of triumphal procession.

And so I came to my love; in such a manner found her seated at the entrance of a little cave in the foot of the precipice, listening with a bowed, attentive head to something that a certain man was saying to her.

That man was Senator Grosvenor, although I was hard put to it to recognize him.

He had lost none of his flesh, it seemed; if anything he was more ponderous and jolly than ever. Some men are so in misfortune, if at no other time; if Grosvenor's manner were to be taken as evidence, he did not suffer greatly. And it's truth that many a man in that hell pit would have lost his reason through brooding and anxiety had not Grosvenor volunteered to the task of general comforter to all of them, keeping them in good spirits despite themselves, for the most part.

The noise of our approach roused them from their talk. Grosvenor was the first to turn his head and look to see what was going on.

I looked and gasped: he was and was not my friend. Of course it was the beard that had changed him. Guiltless of a razor's touch for a month, his formerly clean-shaven face had taken on almost a new character.

And for fear that I may have led you to believe that he did not care, I may

mention that, for all his kindly humor, his hair had whitened. When last I had seen him it had been brown as a nut.

As for Ethel, by some miracle she was unchanged; by some marvel of feminine management she had kept herself fresh and spotless in this abandoned place where men the most punctilious about their dress went blowsy and unshorn, because they could contrive no better.

As I neared her, she rose. I could see her dear eyes shining, and the color that had gone back to her heart suddenly crimsoned her cheeks to her brows.

A hand, fragile and delicate and white, went toward her heart; but lingered there for no more than a second.

For then she knew me, and I saw her arms both outstretched toward me.

And as I stumbled on, half-blinded by a dimness which came into my eyes, I caught a bit of conversation which is of moment because of what followed. Grimes started it, in a low aside to Grosvenor.

"Mr. Grosvenor," he said, "I judge that your young friend here doesn't know."

"You mean the syndicate?" Grosvenor responded. "You don't mean it." He turned to Ethel. "Don't tell him, my dear," he said, earnestly. "I have my reasons—they're sound."

Despite her agitation she managed to understand him, and to give a hurried assent to his request.

And then the voice of Grimes rose loud above the clamor of our fellow unfortunates.

"Come, come! Let's get out of this for a while!"

As one man they turned and put their faces toward the trees; even Grosvenor waddled slowly away, pausing but to shake my hand fervently, and to mutter something about his being damned if he was glad to see me.

Which, when you come to read the meaning of it, was probably true.

* * * * *

It was simple enough, the story that she had to tell me, and that she did tell

me with her tear-stained cheek to mine, with my arms about her, and with the happiness of the world considerably added to, I believe, in spite of the fact that we were reunited in such parlous straits.

She had been called up on the telephone, that night so long gone, and had thought she recognized Grosvenor's voice; the simulation, she says, must have been nearly perfect, for she had not an atom of suspicion.

At once she rang off and called for a cab, putting on her wraps and securing Grosvenor's papers while waiting for it.

Of course, I had seen her enter the cab; and she affirms that even when she had seated herself she did not suspect that anything was amiss. And when she found that there was another passenger in the conveyance, it appealed to her as a mistake, merely.

She attempted to signal the driver. The immediate result was a slight struggle, of which she remembers very little. At its inception the man stuffed a handkerchief into her half-opened mouth; she tried to eject it, but he rammed his brutal fingers in with it, and held her so, half choking, while he pressed another cloth to her nose.

When she came to, she was lying, fully dressed, in the berth of a yacht's comfortable stateroom. She rose, tried the door, found it locked, and rapped upon it incessantly, to no end.

It was night; which she spent miserably huddled in a corner of the room, sick with terror.

At length it wore through and morning came, and with it a neat, mute negress, a stewardess, who listened attentively to all that Ethel had to say, but would vouchsafe not one word in reply—neither then nor later. She brought breakfast, and set the rooms to rights while Ethel made a pretense of eating; for she was cool-headed enough to consider that she would need strength, and much of it, to bear whatever the future had in store for her; which it was not reasonable to assume would be peace of mind.

She had no freedom during that voyage, which was so seemingly intermi-

nable that she lost all track of the days. She had to keep her room, perforce, but was unmolested; only the silent stewardess attended her regularly, and obeyed such of her commands as she saw fit to hear.

As the voyage dragged out, a certain sense of personal safety came to her; she began to sleep, fitfully at first, more soundly later. And one night she retired as usual, to wake from a drugged stupor in the morning and to find herself in the pit—as we came to call the place of our durance.

Meanwhile Senator Grosvenor had undergone a similar experience, save that he was not greeted by a stranger in his coupé, as he entered it. It was as the carriage stopped near the approach to the Williamsburg Bridge that the door was suddenly opened from outside, and a pair of burly ruffians invaded the astonished man's privacy.

The thugs got down to work at once, one seizing and gagging the senator, while the other drugged him.

With the exception that he was attended by a negro steward, his subsequent experience was identical with that of his niece in all particulars.

Nor was there any great variety of experience to be discovered in the narratives of the others.

The International Disappearance Syndicate, Limited—the phrase became a popular one among us—appeared to have just two methods of procedure:

The first was substantially that pursued in the case of my fiancée and of Senator Grosvenor, involving the cab, or some similarly closed vehicle, the anæsthetic, and the private yachts—or whatever the vessels were.

The second appeared to be more complicated and perilous to the operators, to say nothing of the resultant detriment to the health of the victim.

Essentially, however, it was more simple. The case of John W. Mille will serve as an illustration. Him I found in the valley, together with the other unfortunates; and found him no more than a shadow of his one-time virile self.

He had gone to bed one night, dream-

ing of no danger. He had wakened in the pit. But upon him—which was not the case with the majority of those who were subjected to this form of the outrage—the drug had seemed to have less effect.

I mean to say, that its power had not totally extinguished his consciousness. He told me that the affair seemed to him as one long-drawn nightmare, resembling somewhat an experience he had undergone in a dentist's chair when the gas failed to work properly.

Some things he remembered quite distinctly; others recurred to him in vague, distorted perspective, unreal, almost unbelievable.

He had a vivid recollection of being strapped to an operating table in what seemed to be a private surgery; after which a man with a cloth about his jaws and heavy, high-powered glasses, performed some operation upon his face—an operation that seemed quite painless, but which changed his face until it was barely recognizable—as I had reason to know.

Again, the encounter with me upon the deck of the *Empiria* was so hazy in retrospect that it was like a time-obliterated recollection of his childhood; the most prominent point in the affair being his consciousness of an ineffectual struggle to utter his name, which he knew perfectly, but was unable to pronounce owing to some lack of control over his vocal chords, the sensation being one of a tongueless agony.

But, even with him, the dominant impression was of a restless oblivion like that of a sleep troubled by the subconsciousness of impending horrors.

In recounting this I am aware that I have gone ahead of my story—a sin which should not be unforgivable. Were I to set all this down as it came to me, in fragments, a bit at a time developing as I conversed with this man or that, my narrative would be interminable.

Things should come in their place, one knows, at their appointed time, and this is why I cannot here set down what was the secret that lay at the bottom of this well of infamy.

It was long, long before I myself knew.

For that night, as the little company congregated at the edge of the western cliff, around a half-a-dozen fires that served to temper the biting cold of the evening air—from which one judged that the elevation of the pit above sea level was great—I put the question that had been tugging at the reins of my inquisitiveness throughout the day. A question which, indeed, I had more than once put without receiving a satisfactory answer.

I fancy we made as strange a picture as ever was limned by the brush of that mad artist whose name is Incongruity; the ruddy glow from the fire casting uncertain, elusive and wandering shadows upon the rock face of the cliff and among the trees of the grove; the girl who sat there alone and queen of as oddly assorted a lot of men as ever were thrown together, *nolens volens*, in a hole in the ground; and the men themselves, in their various attitudes, each expressive in its way of impotent rage or abiding dejection.

Some there were who squatted, peering into the dancing flames with blank, lack-luster eyes; some who lay about and feigned indifference or sleep; and some who paced ever restlessly to and fro, like free-born animals caged, their hands twitching with the impatience of chained power, or with their hungry eyes fixed upon the spot where the great, gaudy, tropical stars marked the edge of the eastern precipice.

There, as all knew, was the only means of entrance to or exit from the pit, where also lurked—death to the curious.

For atop the western edge of the hole, a searchlight had been established; and its lance of pure white flame was ever steadily centered upon that spot which I have called the dead line.

He who dared encroach upon that reservation committed suicide.

In the circle about our fire were some eighteen or twenty, mostly those English-speaking captives of the syndicate.

Of them three or four stand out in striking prominence. First, of course, Ethel, sweet-faced and sad, a prey to a

melancholy from which my most determined attempts had failed to rouse her, after the first joy of our meeting was over.

There was also Grosvenor; fat and sociably inclined, looming in the flickering light like some animated Indian god, interjecting a leaven of wholesome humor to our talk.

And the Earl of Mole, Chancellor of the Exchequer of England; tall and loosely put together; reserved to an extreme and suspicious as the day is long; turning upon each speaker a saturnine monocle from which he never allowed himself to be parted.

And Grimes, most marvelous of financiers in the world's fiscal history; the big man who had come to my rescue when the others would have rent me in twain in their frenzied thirst for news; a quiet man, contained and forceful.

He it was, I believe, who addressed me.

"You might tell us, now that you're rested," he suggested.

"Tell you?" I wondered.

"I mean," he explained, gravely, "that it would be very good of you to tell us at first-hand what brought you here. Miss Verity you have very likely informed; doubtless Senator Grosvenor knows. But for the rest of us, we are eager for any additional light upon the workings of—"

He paused.

"Of what?" I wanted to know.

Silence; with Grimes contemplating his ridiculous trousers with a sardonic expression, his lips forming a thin, set line; Grosvenor grinning at me wagishly; Lord Mole polishing his monocle with absorbing care.

"Who," I persisted, "is the author of this wholesale outrage?"

Grosvenor spoke: "I've told them that you don't know"—wisely.

"What has that to do with it?"

"Much," snapped Grimes; with a last, fond glance at those inadequate trousers, he transferred his gaze to me.

"Are you sincere, sir, if I may put the question without offense?" he questioned.

"In what?"

"As to your ignorance of the—let us call it—the Board of Directors of the Disappearance Syndicate?"

"Indeed," I assured him, "I am."

There was an interested movement of the men behind me; I heard some one laugh—an incredulous cackle; and the talk at the nearest fire ceased as heads were craned our way.

I went on, earnestly: "I am completely in the dark, upon my word."

"How do you explain your kidnapping, sir?" demanded Lord Mole. "If you held no such knowledge as we do, why were you deemed worthy of removal?"

"I interfered. I can suggest nothing else. I recognized Mr. Mille on the steamer, thereby providing a clew which a good detective might take up and make much of."

"Ah, yes."

A new voice struck my ear; I looked up, to find that a wall of men hemmed us in, their attention being centered upon me. One interposed a question—I afterwards identified him as M. Goncourt, president of the Bourse, of Paris.

"And, monsieur," said he, "and the world doesn't know?"

"Nor suspect," I replied in French, in which tongue we thereafter conducted our conversation, it being common to nearly all of these men of diverse nationalities.

"Strange!" muttered Goncourt, and lapsed into silence.

Another pause—rather strained, to my taste. In the background a man laughed again, with a hysterical note. Abruptly Grimes got to his feet and faced the assemblage.

"Messieurs," he said, in a voice that shook, "I ask of you all, as men, not to supply Mr. Staritt with the information which he does not possess."

I was everlastingly astonished. "Why?" I demanded.

"I will tell you why," he said, soberly. "And you'll find my reason a good and sufficient one. You, messieurs, will all agree with me, beyond doubt. Observe—let us get it clearly.

"Mr. Staritt says that he does not know what conspiracy it is that has

dared lay hands upon us, who are here assembled through no wish of our own.

"We know, messieurs—you and I know. He does not. He alone is so ignorant, among us all. And that ignorance may save his life for him.

"We are all aware of the danger in which we are dragging out our days here. The chances are that none of us will ever see the outer world again—that is, none but one or two. Yet there is a bare possibility that we may escape. If we do, and if then that hand which put us here is still potent, we shall live in daily—nay, in hourly—peril of death at an assassin's hand. For we know too much.

"Mr. Staritt, I repeat, does not carry this knowledge concealed about his person, like a petard wherewith to hoist himself. The—the syndicate would have no object in taking his life, should he escape.

"Messieurs, I ask you in the name of humanity, to render him immune from the fear of that death which we shall ever fear, by refusing to reveal to him the identity of the syndicate."

But I, too, was now on my feet, and hotly protesting :

"I refuse to accept the distinction. I would be one with you all, share and share alike. My lot is with you, now; it is not fair that I should not be permitted to participate in the danger which menaces even my fiancée.

"I must know," I proclaimed; "and will! At all events, messieurs, if you refuse me, I dare say I know one who will not."

"No," said the voice of Ethel.

I turned to her. "Ethel!" I pleaded with imploring hands. "You at least —"

She shook her head, her eyes meeting mine firmly.

"No," she repeated; "not from me shall you learn the truth."

"That is nobly said," I heard Lord Mole approve.

"But it is nonsense," I cried, furiously. "How is this syndicate to know that I do not share this knowledge, who am here alone with you, and shall so continue, with every opportunity to acquire

the information if you were not so—so scrupulous?"

Like a thunderbolt was the answer that I got. It came from Grosvenor; and for the time all the assumption of cheerful endurance was gone from his broad face as he faced me; and his eyes shone deep and seriously anxious in the firelight.

"Because," he replied, "because, my boy, I'm sorry to say that we have every reason to believe that there is among us a spy, a traitor!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

There came a deep-throated growl of affirmation from the ranks of the captives; an inarticulate word that reeked with the disgust of clean men for the unclean thing that is called a traitor, a spy.

"Treachery!" I exclaimed, astounded.

"Ay, treachery," assented Grimes.

"But how? And who? And why should there be a spy sent among us? Surely," I argued, "we are safe enough here, helpless enough. Then why should they—the syndicate—wish to know what we say, or think, or do?"

"There may come a time," said the Earl of Mole, "when our hands may be unbound, my young friend. There may come a time when we might be disposed to seek revenge, say, for the hurt that is being done us. Now, if we here put our heads together and conspire as to our future action, undoubtedly it would be to the interest of the syndicate to know, to be forewarned."

"You must remember," Grimes took up the thread of argument, "that there are here practically the brains of one-half the world; that is to say, the honest, well-intentioned brains. Of those standing in the light of this fire, I can see scarcely one who is not at the head of some movement, some enterprise, intellectual, financial, industrial, or who has not written his name large and clear on the pages of contemporaneous history, as a man of value to his nation or to the world at large.

"Should we, then, take it into our heads to conspire, it is conceivable that we might make things rather interesting for the syndicate. Oh, a spy is not wasted upon us.

"For that matter," he concluded, sadly, "his value to his employers has been proven."

"Who is he?" I asked, quietly.

Lord Mole addressed vacancy. "Myself," he announced, "for all that the rest of you can tell. This much is certain—the man is here."

"How are you sure?"

"If it were daylight," said Grimes, "I could point out to you the evidence in support of our convictions. It is a cross that stands upon the verge of the northern cliff; there is a skeleton dangling from that cross—the bones of a man who was among us a fortnight gone. The birds of the air have picked him clean."

I shuddered. "Tell me," I pleaded.

"You see the searchlight?"

I nodded. It overhung our head like a flaming sword, baleful.

"It is something of recent establishment. When I woke up here, a month ago, there was no light by night—only the eternal vigilance of our guards.

"We plotted to escape—we were a few over fifty strong then. We plotted openly, each man contributing his advice. It seemed positive that there was no way of escape except by the eastern cliff, beyond the dead line; and not one of us had seen that cliff, or consciously put foot within the proscribed space.

"We picked out one—or, rather say he volunteered—young Lobko, M. von Zoegner's secretary. He was to creep stealthily through the night and endeavor to find out whatever he might of the defensive arrangements over there.

"On the evening of that night upon which he was to make the attempt, the captain of our guards entered the pit, strongly supported by a company of armed men. He made us stand up, on parade, while he walked down our line, watching each man's face closely.

"It was a farce, of course; he acted on information, but thought to impress us

with his powers of divination. Before Lobko he stopped and ordered him to stand forth.

"'You,' he said, 'want too great knowledge, sir,' and shot him through the head with a revolver.

"They carried the body up there, to the top of the cliff, and crucified it to be an ever-present warning."

"Since when," added Lord Mole, sententiously, "we have not plotted."

"Each," said Senator Grosvenor, "looking upon his brother as a double-dyed villain."

"But these guards?" I asked. "Who are they?"

"You shall see them in the morning," I was told. "Every day they come down into the pit to bring us our rations."

"But what race are they?"

"East Indians, we think. We cannot tell, for they do not talk; and they are masked."

"Their captain?"

"An Englishman or an American, by his voice. He also is masked."

"I should like," I said with feeling, "to have an interview with this captain of the guards. If I had arms, I'd warrant to make it interesting for him."

My wish was to be gratified sooner than I expected.

I have given my words up there as they were in my head. The latter part of the sentence was never uttered; for in the middle of it, Grimes gave me pause.

"What's that?" he cried, in a tone that brought every sitting man to his feet.

If it was not his tone, it was what had caused the question: a crash as of a heavy body falling among the trees at the base of the northern cliff. For a full minute we stood in absolute silence, each man holding his breath for fear that some sound would come that we would miss.

There was a patter and rustle of the leaves, as though some unwary foot had dislodged a quantity of pebbles on the brink of the cliff. And then—for us—a succeeding quietness that was absolute.

But in the midst of it the searchlight was moved; it traveled swiftly from the dead line and was focused steadily upon the middle of that northern sky line.

Hardly had it become stationary before there was a sound that chilled my heart's blood, so long-drawn and plaintive was it.

"Ai-i-i!" it sounded over our heads like the plaint of a lost soul.

It acted as a stimulant; we moved uneasily. I heard Grimes saying: "A man is dying, up there—"

And at that instant something flashed down through the radiance of the searchlight—something that was falling swiftly; a dark object, flapping shapeless and weird, like some quaint bird of night swooping down upon its prey.

It fell with a soft, sickening crash; and then all was still once more—still but for the southing of the night wind on the upper surface of the earth, and the never-ceasing roar of the cataract that fed the lake.

For a little while we stood enthralled by the tragedy that thus forced itself upon our comprehension. Mentally, I think, each was picturing to himself the details of what had occurred, so near to us and yet so infinitely removed from our knowledge.

Myself, I could see plainly the sentinel—for as such I thought of the man—treading, perhaps, upon a loose stone; losing his balance and slipping, as the stone rolled from under him and fell to rouse us with the first crash.

And then the heartrending struggle for life; the man digging his puny fingers into the uneven surface of the granite, feeling himself ever surely slipping, slipping, knowing that his fight was futile, that he must inevitably fall unless help arrived, striving to retain his hold that was no hold until the nearest guard could reach him.

And then the end; the last, despairing kick wherewith he sought to force his toes into the heartless rock, the last foiled clutch as he tried to dig his nails into some crevice—into a mere scratch,

if that would give him a moment longer of life; and the wail that was wrung from his soul by the horror of it, as, at last, there was nothing between him and destruction—nothing to touch, to cling to, to fight for even if the fight was a losing one.

Suddenly the night was split by the snap of a rifle; three times it sounded, up there on the edge of the precipice, near where the man had fallen, and thrice we saw the angry spat of flame that jumped from the muzzle of the invisible weapon.

From the eastern edge there came an answering report—one, sharp and loud; and at once the searchlight danced uneasily, thrown downward, illuminating the entire pit by gigantic patches of fugitive brightness; to settle, finally, back on its accustomed resting place of the dead line.

Some one spoke, brokenly. I did not recognize the voice.

"He fell—"

It was a cry that spoke of nerves unstrung by the thought of the frightful death. It woke us, as though from a trance.

There was a confusion of cries, one speaking to another in the accents of dread. And there was a hasty, irresolute movement toward the spot where it had fallen.

I heard Grosvenor telling Ethel: "Go back to your cave, my dear; I'll come and tell you if—if you can do anything."

Instantly I was by her side; with my arm about her I helped her cover the few paces to her shelter. She was fearfully shaken by the happening, a-quiver with a formless terror that rendered her a prey to useless fears. For long she clung to me, nor would she let me go; but at length I quieted her, and, waiting, heard her sob herself to sleep. And then went out.

Our fires were deserted, rapidly smoldering into cold ashes. I heard a murmur of voices that seemed to come from the north border of the lake. Thither I hurried at top speed.

BELOW THE DEAD LINE*

BY SCOTT CAMPBELL

[NOTE.—When Inspector Byrnes commanded the New York Police Force he found it necessary to issue an order calling for the instant arrest of every crook found day or night in that part of the metropolis lying south of Fulton Street. This stringent order quickly gained for the district the title "Below the Dead Line," at least in police circles. As the lower part of the city contains Wall and Broad Streets and Maiden Lane, where the great diamond houses are located, various efforts were made by the "under world" to evade the order. For several years a number of crooks headed by an unknown but extremely clever criminal succeeded in operating in the district despite the police, and it is to chronicle their doings and their ultimate capture that Mr. Scott Campbell has written this interesting series of stories. Each story will be complete in itself.—EDITOR.]

VI.—THE CASE OF THE BANKER'S DOUBLE

I.

IN response to the bell of the telephone on his desk, Mr. Felix Boyd raised the receiver to his ear, then called sharply:

"Hello!"

In reply he received over the wire, in accents of terrible haste and alarm:

"Boyd—robbery—haste! I'm Smith, of— God, you'll kill me! You—"

Then came the startling noise of a heavy blow, as if the speaker had been violently struck; and then that peculiar click heard when a distant receiver is suddenly dropped, instead of hung in its socket, a sound readily recognized by a familiar ear. Then rather more faintly, yet plainly audible to the listening man, came the sound of a fallen body, as that of a man stricken senseless, or lifeless, to a floor.

The significance of all this was alarming. For the fraction of a second Boyd listened intently, then sharply cried:

"Hello! hello!"

No answer.

"What's amiss, Felix?" demanded Jimmie Coleman, who then was seated

near by and had observed Boyd's changing countenance. "Anything wrong?"

"There's the devil to pay, I guess," Boyd quickly answered, while he hastened to ring up the central office of the telephone exchange.

From the clerk there he hurriedly endeavored to ascertain who had communicated with him. The attempt proved vain. The clerk could report only that Boyd's number had been called for through some instrument the number and location of which were unknown, and that the desired connection had been made by means of the central office switchboard.

Once again Boyd listened briefly at the receiver, but silence only rewarded his effort. In so far as he could judge, the beginning and end of what appeared like a dreadful crime, if not an appalling tragedy, had been suggested in those few short seconds, those wild words over the wire, followed by a sickening blow and a heavy fall.

"The devil take it!" he exclaimed, impatiently, as he hung up the receiver. "This is what I call having one's hands tied."

* This series of complete detective stories "Below the Dead Line," began in the February issue. The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer or direct from the publishers for fifty cents.

"What was it?" queried Coleman, amazedly.

Boyd quickly told him what had been said, and described what he also had heard.

"It looks very much as if there was something wrong somewhere—but where?" he impatiently added.

"The call most likely came from one of your own clients," suggested Coleman, quickly. "No other person threatened in the way suggested would have appealed directly to you."

"That's true enough, but I have over fifty patrons," cried Boyd. "I cannot rush to all fifty offices at once, and an attempt to visit them successively would require half a day. In that time any sort of a crime could be committed, and the criminals easily make their escape."

"Don't you recall the name of Smith among your clients, or isn't he one of them?"

"No, no, and that's the trouble. The man who telephoned cried only that he was Smith, of—, and there he plainly was interrupted by a violent blow. Evidently he was about to add the name of the firm by which he is employed, which would have told me just where to hasten."

"I see," nodded Coleman. "I see."

"But I know of no clerk named Smith, employed by any of my clients," Boyd hurriedly added. "That's the devil of it. For I feel certain that Smith was in some mighty desperate corner when he attempted to telephone to me for help."

"Indeed, it looks so."

"Plainly his last words were addressed to an assailant, whom he must have seen approaching even while he tried to telephone to me. Then came the blow I distinctly heard, and then the fall of a body. Yes, yes, Smith certainly was in some desperate situation. It's like being on nettles, this sitting here in ignorance whither to turn," Boyd nervously added. "A murder may have been committed. A robbery may at this moment be in progress. I tell you, Jimmie, my reputation is at stake. What the deuce am I to do?"

"Try the directory!" cried the central office man, jumping to his feet to get

it. "We may find Smith's name there, and that of the firm by which he is employed."

"Smith!" cried Boyd, in accents of impatient derision. "Good heavens, Jimmie, there are a thousand Smiths in the New York directory. It would take an hour to examine the entire list, and then the search might prove futile."

"By Jove! that's true."

"There's but one thing to be done," Boyd decisively cried, reaching for a leather-bound book on his desk. "Here's a list of my patrons. I'll draw off half of it on paper, and start you on a round to the several offices to learn if anything is wrong. Meantime, I will take the balance of the list and do the same. That's all we can do."

"Stay!" exclaimed Coleman. "Your idea is all right, and I'm with you; but you can expedite matters if you will tear the pages from the book, instead of delaying to copy so long a list. That's the stuff. Now give me half of them, and I'll let no grass grow under my feet. You look after the others."

Boyd had acted upon the suggestion even while Coleman was making it; and before the latter fairly had finished the two men were hastening from Boyd's Pine Street office, each with some of the pages torn from the book, and both bent upon reaching the offices of the numerous business houses with the least possible delay. That the interrupted telephone call had come from one of them seemed most probable, save alone that the entire episode was only a practical joke, which seemed too remote to be seriously considered.

Boyd's employers, moreover, comprised many of the wealthiest firms in the great banking district; and thither both men hastened, parting company as they approached Wall Street.

As a matter of fact, the telephone call had come from the office of one of the firms noted in that portion of the list which Boyd had retained. Yet for half an hour he hastened from one office to another, pausing only to glance into most of them, and in none disclosing the occasion for his hurried visit and abrupt departure.

Not until nearly noon, when he had almost completed his round, and was beginning to think himself on a veritable wild-goose chase, did the incident occur which set him right.

He was about entering one of the smaller office buildings in Broad Street, when, just as he left the sidewalk, a young man came rushing through the lower corridor and down the vestibule steps, fairly into the arms of Felix Boyd.

"Oh, Mr. Boyd, is it you?" he cried, pale with excitement. "Thank God for that! I was just seeking an officer."

"An officer!" exclaimed Boyd, quickly. "For what? And who are you?"

"I'm Joe Galvin, clerk for Hersey & Co. You know Hersey, sir. There's a dreadful thing happened in our office. I just found Ben Smith, Hersey's book-keeper and confidential clerk, dead on the office floor. He—"

"Wait!" Boyd sharply interrupted. "Half a second."

He quickly turned back, intending to call a policeman in case he required aid, but fortunately discovered Coleman at that moment entering an opposite building some distance away. A single sharp whistle drew his attention in Boyd's direction, and the latter delayed only to signal him to follow, then dashed up the steps and rejoined the waiting clerk.

The firm mentioned, Hersey & Co., was an old and conservative banking and brokerage house, of excellent reputation and recognized stability, though then doing only a moderate business. The firm originally had comprised Hersey and his son-in-law; but the latter having died, Hersey alone had conducted the business for some years, the daughter retaining her husband's interest. That the firm name appeared in the list of Boyd's clients, at length had led the latter to seek Hersey's office.

"Galvin your name?" he cried, as he rejoined the clerk. "When did you make this alarming discovery?"

"Only just now, sir," replied Galvin, as the two men hastened through the deep corridor, at the rear of which the banker's office was located. "I had been out on an errand for Mr. Hersey, and returned only to find Smith dead on the

floor. At least I supposed him dead. I at once rushed out to call an officer."

"When did you start out on the errand mentioned?"

"Nearly an hour ago."

"Was Hersey then in his office?" demanded Boyd, noting that the time stated was about that at which he had received the telephone call.

"Yes, sir," replied Galvin. "He was in his private office, with Mr. Smith."

"Is Hersey absent now?"

"Yes, sir. He was there—"

"Enough for the present. Here we are."

They had reached the office door, and Boyd quickly opened it and entered.

It opened into a square, commodious room, the main office, about half of which was given to an inclosure containing three desks and a large safe, together with the other appurtenances ordinarily seen in such an office. A counter mounted with a tall brass lattice divided the inclosure from the open portion of the office, which was furnished with a table, several leather-covered chairs, and a small desk near one of the walls.

At the right of the door by which Boyd had entered, and barely four feet distant, was a door leading into a smaller side room, which was Mr. Hersey's private office. The door stood wide open, revealing a rolltop desk, the cover of which was raised, though the room was deserted.

Directly opposite the corridor door was a telephone, attached to the wall, and having no closet or inclosure; while upon the floor nearly below it was stretched the body of a man of forty, or thereabouts, prone upon his back, with arms widely extended and face upturned, the latter as void of color as that of a dead man, save one livid bruise extending across his brow and into his hair.

Plainly enough this was the scene of which Felix Boyd had received such a startling intimation nearly an hour before.

Boyd's sweeping glances quickly took in the details mentioned. Further indicating that his first deductions had

been entirely correct, the telephone receiver still was hanging by its cord as when suddenly dropped, while upon the floor near the prostrate man lay a short but very effective leather bludgeon, commonly termed a sand bag.

Surely if such evidence was worthy of any consideration, Smith had been brutally assaulted while at the telephone, nor had the office been entered since the crime was committed, until the clerk named Galvin appeared upon the scene.

Though Boyd had deferred his investigation of the circumstances hardly a minute, as he was about to begin it Coleman also entered the office.

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "You have located the trouble."

"Finally," said Boyd, tersely. "Close the door, Jimmie."

Quickly crossing the room he dropped to his knee upon the floor, and felt of the hand and wrist of the prostrate man. The effect upon Boyd was decidedly unexpected. For a moment there was reflected in his forceful, clean-cut face a surprise almost beyond containing. It was not like him to betray himself, however, and the expression vanished almost instantly, and he went at the case in his own peculiar way.

"Ah, thank Heaven, this man is not dead," he cried, quickly. "He is badly done up, that is all. A drop of liquor will revive him. Hasten to the nearest saloon, Galvin, and bring a flask of brandy. Lose not a moment."

The clerk, with a look of relief mentally noted by Boyd, at once hurried from the office, and the latter rose to his feet.

"It appears dead open and shut, doesn't it?" demanded Coleman, who had been sizing up the case and making a hasty survey of the two rooms.

"Yes, plain enough," replied Boyd. "This man's name is Smith, the one who telephoned to me. Done up alone here by some miscreant, and the place probably robbed. A dastardly crime, to say the least, and a bold one."

"Where the deuce were the other clerks at the time?"

"Can't tell yet. We shall have to inquire."

"It seems as if some of them should have been here, or have returned before now. It is nearly an hour since Smith called you over the wire."

"That's true, and he must have been lying here ever since," admitted Boyd. "We'll get at the particulars a little later."

While speaking he glanced at the floor, then carelessly picked up a book on the table, and quietly turned it over. It was a large volume of Dun's references, quite as large as an ordinary ledger. Boyd merely glanced at both sides of it, however, and betrayed no interest in it sufficient for Coleman to observe.

"I'm blessed if I understand the absence of the other clerks," repeated the central office man, with a glance at the senseless figure on the floor. "Hersey also is away, and the——"

"Ah, here's Galvin with the brandy," interrupted Boyd, as the clerk re-entered. "Give him a dose, my boy; only a few drops. And while you're about it, Galvin, answer my questions. Then we shall waste no time."

"Here, I'll look after putting Smith on his pins," cried Coleman, seizing the brandy flask from Galvin's hand. "You give your attention to Mr. Boyd."

"Certainly," Galvin readily answered.

"Tell me what you know of this affair, Mr. Galvin," said Boyd, quickly. "State anything that occurred here this morning likely to have a bearing upon it."

"Really, sir, nothing very extraordinary happened while I was here," Galvin frankly replied. "The entire affair must have occurred during my absence."

"How many clerks does Hersey employ?"

"Three, sir. Smith is the bookkeeper and cashier, and frequently acts as Mr. Hersey's confidential clerk. Besides him there are Frank Torrey and myself."

"Do you know where Torrey has gone?"

"Mr. Hersey sent him to Brooklyn more than an hour ago, sir, to get a bank book which he keeps at his residence."

Boyd's brows knit a little closer over his searching gray eyes.

"Sent him to Brooklyn an hour ago, eh?" said he. "He has had hardly time to return. Do you happen to know why Hersey wanted the bank book?"

"I think so, sir. When he came in at nine o'clock this morning, he stated that he should remain only to examine his mail, as he had an important engagement. Some person whose name he did not mention was about completing a big financial deal, he explained, and that he had an opportunity to place some ready cash at an unusual advantage. Something over a hundred thousand dollars, I think he said."

"Ah, that probably is why he wanted his bank book," observed Felix Boyd, a bit dryly. "Go on, Mr. Galvin. How long did Hersey remain here?"

"Until about ten o'clock. Then he took his coat and went out, saying he might be absent until noon. He returned in less than half an hour, however, and hastened directly into his private office, where he at once called for Mr. Smith. A little later Smith came out here and—"

Galvin stopped abruptly, with a nervous glance over his shoulder. From the lips of the man prostrate on the floor a feeble groan suddenly had risen, and the muscles of his hands and jaws were twitching convulsively.

"Go on, you two!" cried Coleman, who had been listening while he labored over the stricken man. "Don't mind us. I'll presently have him on his feet."

"Continue," said Boyd. "What about Smith?"

"He came out of the private office after a few moments, saying that Mr. Hersey wished to raise a hundred and forty thousand dollars in cash as quickly as possible. I was at once sent out with a check for forty thousand, and some negotiable bonds for forty more. I thought the affair just a bit unusual, but Smith stated that Hersey was in a hurry, so I did not wait to ask questions, but rushed away on the errand. When I returned, Torrey was just entering from a similar mission, and had nearly sixty thousand in cash."

"That was about half-past ten, think you?" queried Boyd, with a curious squint of his attentive eyes.

"It was nearly eleven, sir, when we both returned," replied Galvin.

"Was Hersey still in his private office?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him at his desk, counting the money which Mr. Smith at once took in to him."

"Quite convincing," nodded Boyd. "Go on, Mr. Galvin."

"Immediately afterwards," continued the clerk, "Torrey was sent to Brooklyn for the bank book. Then Hersey sent me to Harlem to take a letter to his daughter, of whose private funds also he wished to avail himself. When I returned I found the office deserted by all except Smith, whom I thought to be dead, and I at once rushed out and met you. That is all that I can tell of the—"

"One moment," interrupted Boyd. "Did Hersey himself instruct you to go to Harlem, or did he send out word to you by Mr. Smith?"

"By the latter, sir. Mr. Hersey still was busy over the cash we had brought him."

"So that Hersey and Smith were left alone here when you and Torrey departed at eleven o'clock."

"Yes, sir," declared Galvin. "I am positive of that. I saw Mr. Hersey still at his desk when I went out, and Smith was then helping him—"

He was interrupted by an approaching step in the corridor. Then the door was quickly opened, and Hersey himself entered the office.

"Good God!" he involuntarily exclaimed, recoiling when his gaze fell upon the scene. "What has happened to Mr. Smith?"

"Surely you should know," cried Boyd, bluntly. "You were the last to leave him here."

"Leave him here!" echoed Hersey, loudly. "What do you mean by that, Mr. Boyd? I have not been near this office since ten o'clock!"

"Humph!" muttered Boyd, under his breath. "Precisely what I suspected!"

II.

Hersey was a man of nearly seventy, and of an ordinary type. He was of medium build, had a complexion common to men of his years, and wore a gray beard and mustache. Though always neatly trimmed, his silvery hair was worn quite long, and in a way was his one distinctive feature, save alone that he invariably dressed in a suit of black. He was a type of man easy to counterfeit, and nearly any expert actor could, with very little art, have made himself into quite a perfect likeness of Mr. Rufus Hersey.

The banker's consternation and amazement were too genuine to be doubted, even if Felix Boyd had not already guessed the truth, or a part of it. Yet before Hersey could repeat his assertion, Smith again groaned deeply and moaned, as if he had heard, and now made an effort to corroborate his employer:

"That's right—that's true! He hasn't been here."

"Ah, good enough!" exclaimed Coleman, who had not ceased working over the wounded man. "You're coming to time, are you? Good for you. You're worth half a dozen dead men, after all. Yet this was a deucedly nasty clip that some cur gave you. Lend a hand here, Felix, and we'll get him up."

Boyd hastened to comply, and together they raised the clerk from the floor and placed him in a chair. The stimulant given him was having a salutary effect, and he gradually was regaining consciousness, though he still appeared weak and dazed, and sat with his head wobbling from side to side much as if his neck were made of rubber.

"Still a bit groggy, eh?" Boyd cheerily cried, patting him compassionately on the shoulder. "Well, well; you'll presently be O. K. A nasty clip, indeed. Get him a glass of water, Galvin; that will revive him. I'll wait until you are quite yourself, Mr. Smith, before asking you to explain what occurred here. Lucky we arrived as soon as we did, eh?"

"Yes—yes," Smith huskily faltered. "Did—did the scoundrel escape?" he added, with his dilating eyes now turned anxiously about the office.

"Well, yes, I'm afraid he did," replied Boyd. "I guess you don't realize that an hour has passed since you telephoned to me, and were knocked out at the instrument. Ah, here's the water, Mr. Smith. Take a long drink of it, and you'll soon be on your pins."

"Yes, thanks. I already feel better."

"Meantime," added Boyd, "I will enlighten Mr. Hersey, who appears very much in the dark over the occasion for such a scene."

"Decidedly so," declared the banker. "What does Smith mean by the escape of a scoundrel?"

"You said you had been absent since ten o'clock, I believe," observed Boyd, turning to face him.

"I did, and it's perfectly true."

"Yet your three clerks would have testified to the contrary half an hour after your departure," said Boyd, more gravely. "I fear, Mr. Hersey, that you have been made the victim of a very original bit of knavery, and one of the shrewdest and most daring crimes of the day."

"Good heavens, sir! What do you mean?" demanded Hersey, growing very pale.

Boyd disclosed the misfortune to him as considerately as possible.

"I think my suspicions will prove very nearly correct," said he. "Soon after your departure, Mr. Hersey, a man entered who resembled you so closely that your three clerks were completely deceived by the likeness. He at once went into your private office, where, with the help of Mr. Smith, who is entirely innocent of any misconduct, the scoundrel succeeded in securing by crafty misrepresentations a considerable part of your fortune. If the figures given me by Galvin are correct, the amount of your loss is about one hundred and forty thousand dollars."

The banker staggered, too astounded by the appalling information to go to pieces at once under the shock.

"Wha-a-at!" he almost shrieked.

"Robbed of one hundred and forty thousand dollars! Robbed of—are you mad, that you stand here idle! The police—I must call the police!"

Boyd quickly sprang between him and the door.

"One moment, Mr. Hersey," he cried. "You must not notify the police."

"Not notify them—you are crazy! I shall certainly do so! Let me pass—"

"Not until I have had my say," Boyd firmly insisted. "Remember, Mr. Hersey, that you are one of my clients, some of whom evidently have more faith in me than you have, since they have accepted my advice in emergencies quite as serious as this. Now, understand me, sir. Either I shall handle this affair entirely alone and in my own way, or I shall drop it at once and return to my office. Now, sir, you may call the police, if you wish."

Boyd had an ugly way of making such moves as this, and the effect upon the banker was precisely what he expected. Hersey fell back a step, pale and crestfallen, and rejoined brokenly:

"Pardon me, Boyd. Perhaps I am wrong. I'm so shocked I hardly know what I am saying."

"I can appreciate your feelings, I assure you."

"But have you any clew to the thief?"

"Not the slightest," Boyd emphatically declared. "Yet I shall be quite as likely to find a clew as any member of the New York police."

"You are right, quite right," Hersey hoarsely admitted, staggering to a chair. "I am in no condition to act wisely. I leave the case entirely to you, Mr. Boyd. But what's to be done—what's to be done?"

"The first thing to do," replied Boyd, "is to hear Smith's story of the extraordinary affair. How are you feeling now, Mr. Smith? Are you able to clearly recall all of the circumstances which led to the brutal assault which you have suffered?"

Jimmie Coleman wondered a little why Boyd thus laid stress upon Smith's mishap, which was as nothing when compared with that of his employer;

but the central office man wondered vainly, for the subtleties of Felix Boyd were quite often beyond his discernment, which was by no means inferior for all that.

"Yes, I am quite myself again, barring an aching head," Smith now rejoined, pulling himself together. "I can tell you precisely what occurred. God help me, I fear that Mr. Hersey never can forgive me for my blindness."

"The facts!" said Boyd, tersely. "First of all, let's get at the facts, that no time shall be wasted. Omit no details, Mr. Smith, however trivial they may appear to you."

"I will endeavor to be exact," said Smith, mopping with a wet handkerchief the dull red bruise on his brow. "You are right in saying the scoundrel resembled Mr. Hersey. I never saw such a likeness."

"State just what occurred," suggested Boyd. "We all know you thought the scamp to be Mr. Hersey. Confine yourself to what was said and done."

"He hastened into the private office, and called me," Smith now explained. "Mr. Hersey already had informed me that he might require a large amount of cash this morning, hence this rascal's instructions did not at first surprise me."

"Naturally not."

"I found him seated at Mr. Hersey's desk, still with his hat on, as if he intended going out again. When he spoke, moreover, his voice was so like that of my employer that I had not the slightest suspicion."

"What had he to say?"

"He first stated that he had perfected the deal mentioned to me this morning, and required a large amount of cash at once. He appeared in some haste, and told me to write a check for forty thousand dollars, which I did, and to which he signed the firm name."

"Ah, a forgery! Did you examine the signature, Mr. Smith?"

"I did not. No thought of distrusting it entered my head."

"Evidently the scoundrel had laid his

plans very carefully, and knew just what he was about," observed Boyd. "What next?"

"He next told me to have Galvin take the check, together with bonds to the same amount, and go out and get cash for them."

A groan of despair broke from Hersey upon hearing these details, but Felix Boyd quickly signed for him not to interrupt.

"I did what he commanded," continued Smith, "and sent Galvin to the bank. I then was told to send Torrey to the deposit vaults for some stock certificates, amounting to nearly sixty thousand dollars at their market value, and of which the scoundrel appeared perfectly well informed."

"Further indicating that he was indeed your employer," remarked Boyd. "Really, only a very superior knave could have informed himself so fully before undertaking this delicate job. I think I see how it was done. Go on, Mr. Smith."

"I obeyed his instructions, and Torrey brought the certificates here. I took them into the private office, where the rascal filled out and signed the transfer blanks, and Torrey then went out and got them cashed. Both he and Galvin returned at the same time."

"Each with the cash desired?"

"Yes, sir. It was chiefly in large bills. While waiting for the clerks to return, I had resumed work at my desk out here, leaving the man seated in the inner office. Meantime, he wrote two letters, one to his wife, and one to his daughter. That is, sir, if——"

"I understand," put in Boyd. "Such would have been the relations had the fellow really been Hersey. What next?"

"He told me to send the clerks to deliver the letters; Torrey to Brooklyn, and Galvin up to Harlem, where Mr. Hersey's daughter resides. He explained that he wanted additional funds from his daughter, also a bank book which his wife would deliver to Mr. Torrey."

"A ruse!" exclaimed Boyd, with a toss of his head. "Merely a part of his

infernally clever scheme. The knave knew that he already had accumulated all the cash he could hope to get away with, and the letters were designed only to get the two clerks well out of his way, thus making detection less liable when he attempted to leave the office, and also reducing the number of his opposers in case of discovery. A bold and farsighted rascal, indeed! What next, Mr. Smith?"

"I obeyed his instructions, and then offered to help him count and arrange the cash, which I had placed on his desk."

"Ah, yes! Galvin stated that you were so engaged when he and Torrey departed with the letters. Up to that time you had not a thought, of course, but that you were dealing with Mr. Hersey."

"Assuredly not! No idea of such a swindle had entered my head."

"Strange if it had," cried Boyd, quite heartily. "It was a scheme to have blinded any man. But what led to the subsequent clash? I infer that you finally discovered that you were being deceived, or at least formed some suspicion of it."

"I did, and it occurred in this way," Smith hastened to explain. "The swindler had not once risen from the desk, over which he sat bowed most of the time, in which attitude his face was partly hidden by his soft felt hat, which was precisely like that worn by Mr. Hersey. In moving about him while I helped arrange the money, however, I accidentally knocked his hat awry with my arm. Then, for the first time, I suddenly discovered that the fellow did not look quite natural."

"Ah, I see!" exclaimed Boyd, approvingly.

"Yet the idea that the man was not Mr. Hersey appeared utterly absurd," cried Smith; "and naturally my first impression was only very vague, or I certainly should have betrayed myself. As it was, I merely begged pardon for my awkwardness, and the swindler nodded and replaced his hat, and we continued counting the money."

"Which gave you a chance to fur-

tively study him," cried Boyd, with a nod. "I see—I see!"

"Precisely, sir!" Smith eagerly exclaimed. "Yet for my life I could not make sure of the fellow. The likeness was perfect, and he appeared so utterly unconcerned, that I could not feel convinced one way or the other. As you must know, Mr. Boyd, all this occupied but a moment or two."

"Yes, of course."

"Then the unusual business engaging us occurred to me, and my misgivings increased. I felt impelled to throttle the man then and there, but the fear of making a dreadful mistake in thus assaulting my employer served to deter me. Then the desperate possibilities of the situation began to alarm and confuse me. I dared not question the man in a way betraying my suspicion, lest he should instantly resort to violence, and possibly overcome me and escape with the cash."

"Quite right," nodded Boyd. "You acted discreetly."

"I tried to keep cool and steady myself, yet my hands were trembling violently," Smith excitedly continued. "I feared each moment that the scoundrel, if such he was, might turn and close with me. Nor did I dare go from the office after help, lest he should escape, or I myself prove to be in error."

"I see."

"But I obeyed the next impulse born of my alarming excitement. I had been instructed to summon you at once, Mr. Boyd, in case of any such emergency. The number of your telephone is on the card attached to ours. I resolved to ring you up, sir, or at least make the attempt, knowing that, even if I was in error and the man really Mr. Hersey, no great harm would be done."

"True, Mr. Smith," bowed Boyd. "I appreciate the uncertainties under which you were laboring."

"All this transpired within a minute," Smith went on. "After strapping a package of money which I had just counted, I left the desk and started for the telephone yonder. I tried to appear indifferent, but my knees were shaking and I was greatly excited. I reached

the instrument without having heard any move in the private office, and quickly rang up the central station and called for your telephone number."

"And then the trouble began, I take it."

"Indeed, yes!" admitted Smith, with a groan. "The moment I heard you cry hello, I also heard the scoundrel dashing out of the private office. When I saw him I fully realized that my fears were warranted, for murder itself cried out in his every feature. He did not start for the door, but for me, drawing a weapon as he came. I yelled something into the telephone, yet I hardly knew what, for the ruffian reached me in an instant. I dropped the receiver and tried to grapple with him, but he dealt me the blow on the head which—

"Look out—catch him, Jimmie!" shouted Boyd. "He's fainting!"

So, indeed, he was. The rehearsal of the episode in which he had played so unfortunate a part had proved too much for him, in his weakened condition, and with his eyes rolling upward in his skull he suddenly had pitched forward in his chair, and fell like a dead weight into Jimmie Coleman's arms.

Some brandy and water presently revived him again, however; whereupon Boyd kindly remarked, suppressing with a glance the further inquiries to which Hersey would have subjected him:

"You need rest and quiet for a time, Mr. Smith, or a fever may follow your injury. The scoundrel gave you a brutal blow, indeed, and here is the weapon with which it was inflicted. Lucky it is a sand bag, instead of a locust, or you'd not have lived to tell what happened here. The knave has made off with the cash all right, and left only a mighty fine spun thread behind him. You just sit quietly, Mr. Smith, while I ask Mr. Hersey a few questions, and I then will take you home in a carriage. You need rest for the balance of the day, or you may go entirely to pieces."

"I do feel a bit done up, for a fact," Smith faintly admitted.

From Hersey, whom he then proceeded to question, Boyd soon gathered the facts which enabled him to size up the case at its face value.

It appeared that Hersey recently had been approached by a western mining operator, ostensibly, who brought him letters of introduction from Denver bankers, and who offered to borrow quite heavily of Hersey at a high rate of interest and on good securities. He wanted the funds in cash, he stated, and by very plausible representations he succeeded in leading the aged banker into the deal. He bore the very respectable name of Arkright, and Hersey had been at the Hoffman House that morning by appointment, to complete the arrangements for the loan.

"And while you were detained at the hotel, and out of your office since ten o'clock," said Felix Boyd, after getting all of the particulars, "the clever confederate of your Mr. Arkright has played his part of their little game. It is plain on the face of it, and undoubtedly is the work of a gang of exceedingly clever criminals, who long have been operating in this locality."

"By Jove! I guess that's right," muttered Coleman.

"Your habits have been carefully studied," continued Boyd; "and in telling Arkright on what securities you promptly could realize cash, you yourself very probably gave these swindlers the information enabling them to craftily impress and deceive your clerk."

"Alas, yes!" groaned Hersey, wringing his hands. "I do remember that I mentioned them to Arkright only yesterday. But I had no doubt of his honesty. His letters of introduction—"

"Pshaw! Forgeries, every one of them."

"But his confederate's likeness to me seems utterly—"

"Faugh! that was but child's play for such clever criminals," cried Boyd, impatiently. "You have been watched and studied until your every habit was known. Your physical characteristics, your gray hair and beard, your invariable suit of black—all combined to make you a man easily impersonated."

"Then you do not think the rascal really was my double?"

"No, no; never! One of these knaves very skillfully made himself up to resemble you, and while his confederate detained you at the Hoffman House for a couple of hours, the scamp came here and slipped quickly into your private office. Observe that the doors are quite near one another, making the move comparatively easy."

"That's right, too," nodded Coleman.

"Then the rascal did all his business through your chief clerk, Mr. Smith, thus keeping well out of sight of the other two," continued Boyd. "It's not strange that Mr. Smith was deceived, Hersey, for you really paved the way for it when you remarked upon the loan you hoped to place this morning, and then hastened out to arrange for it. These swindlers worked up each and every delicate point of their rascally game, and Smith did only what any man would have done under such circumstances. He is in no way culpable."

"I do not say that he is, Mr. Boyd."

"I heard his call for help, and the connection remaining unbroken when he dropped the telephone receiver; I also heard the blow dealt him, and then his fall to the floor. Really he deserves much credit for his courage, and for his efforts in your behalf. Help Smith into his coat, Jimmie, and I will see him safely home and abed."

"But is there no hope, no clew upon which to work?" demanded Hersey, white with distress. "The man at the Hoffman House—if you could only secure him."

"Nonsense!" growled Boyd, contemptuously. "He has dusted long before now. No, no, Mr. Hersey, there at present is not the slightest clew, I am very sorry to admit."

"Then, God help me, I am almost ruined!"

"Yet you must leave the case entirely to me, Mr. Hersey, and I will do all I can with it. I can give you no encouragement of any immediate results, yet I shall do what is possible. Give the facts no publicity, mind you, but leave all to me."

"But, Mr. Boyd——"

"Really, Hersey, there are no buts admissible, if I am to continue my interest in the case," Boyd pointedly interrupted, signing for Galvin to open the office door. "I will see you again in the course of a few days, and report anything I may discover. Give Smith your arm, Jimmie, and we'll get him out to a carriage. We are up against it again all right. The Big Finger has got in his work once more, take my word for that."

"Sure thing!" growled Coleman, as he supported Smith from the office. "It is the work of the same old gang. Only their infernally long-headed rascal of a chief could have devised such a snake's game as this."

"Right you are, Jimmie! And the crafty cur hasn't left us a thread worth following. Steady, Smith; dear fellow! Still a bit weak in the legs, eh? No wonder—no wonder! But a day or two abed will set you right, so keep a stiff upper lip. This way with him, Jimmie! I'll go on ahead and hail a cab!"

So they made their way out of the office and out of the building, and one would have said that Felix Boyd was all at sea.

Not far from eight o'clock that evening, however, while Jimmie Coleman sat smoking in the men's room at police headquarters, a desk man from the outer office hurriedly entered the room and tossed Coleman a telegram. The central office man quickly opened it, and read:

"Bridge Street station, Flushing. Rush.
"Boyd."

Terse though it was the message told Coleman that Boyd wished to be met at the station mentioned, and at the earliest possible moment.

"Something serious in the wind!" thought Coleman, as he prepared to go. "Surely it cannot relate to that Hersey case, for Boyd was badly balked by that. Luckily I can just catch a train, barring detentions. No doubt he figured on that, and on hitting me here at this hour, since he never misses anything worth hitting. Well, I'm not the man to disappoint him!"

Slipping an extra revolver into his

pocket, Coleman hastened by ferry and rail to Flushing, and arrived at the Bridge Street station about an hour after receiving the telegram.

Not a little to his surprise, however, he could discover no sign of Felix Boyd. There were but few people about the station, and for nearly ten minutes Coleman chafed uneasily under his misgivings, now feeling sure that Boyd's mission, whatever it was, had taken him away and possibly into danger.

While still in doubt what course to pursue, he was hurriedly approached by a lad of a dozen years or so, evidently a street gamin, who suddenly had appeared upon the scene and was much winded from running.

"I say, mister!" he exclaimed, quite breathlessly. "Is yer name Jimmie Coleman?"

III.

The night sky was partly obscured by a mist that swept inland from over the bay, and by darker clouds gathered here and there, through the rifts of which a few stars brighter than their celestial neighbors could at times be faintly discerned.

Felix Boyd, however, had no eyes for clouds or stars that evening. At about the time Jimmie Coleman was accosted by the unknown lad at the Bridge Street station, Boyd was crouching alone outside of a west window of an inferior wooden dwelling nearly a mile away—an isolated old house close upon the bay, the gray walls of which and the general aspect of decay told of half a century of exposure to wind and weather.

One room only was lighted, at the window of which Boyd had for some time been crouching, peering through a small rent in the soiled and faded curtain. Through the loose window frame the sound of the voices within plainly reached his ears.

The room was dimly lighted by the rays of a smoky oil lamp in a bracket on the wall. A square deal table without a cover occupied the middle of the

room, which plainly was the dining room of a dwelling then unoccupied by any tenant.

There were three men seated there, while a fourth stood leaning on the table, upon which he had tossed an unkempt red wig and beard, evidently a discarded disguise. His slouch hat was pushed back from his brow, disclosing a long, dark bruise, which seemed to lose itself in his disordered hair.

Ben Smith—the chief clerk at the office of Hersey & Co.

Of the three men the clerk had come there to meet one was a stranger to Felix Boyd. The other two Boyd had not seen for some weeks, on which occasion he had stood face to face with them in the secret subterranean chamber of this gang of malefactors, and bluffed half a score of them into suffering him to escape.

Of the two men recognized by Boyd, one was a fellow named Busby, probably the scamp closest to the chief of the gang. And the second, seated in a chair near the dingy wall, was none other than the chief himself, that obscure and crafty criminal genius so long sought by Felix Boyd, and known among his confederates as the Big Finger.

Yet the strong, malevolent face of this arch criminal then was far less stern and hard than that of the man watching him from outside, and who then was listening to what Smith was saying.

"Kelley yet to come, eh? Damn him, I ought to have it in for him! There was no need of his laying me out with so hard a crack. A less brutal blow would have served."

Ignoring the sly grin that rose to Busby's face, the chief drew forward in his chair and replied, with a deliberation that accentuated his vicious meaning:

"No purpose of ours, Mr. Smith, is served by any half-hearted measure. We never do things by halves. If you resent the blow which Kelley dealt you, learn now that it was delivered under my instructions, and therefore you may expend your wrath upon me."

The voice of the speaker carried a

subtle threat, and Smith drew in his horns and laughed uneasily.

"Oh, I am not deeply cut over it, since it was necessary," he replied. "Yet had I not come round before I was discovered, I might possibly have split the whole business while regaining consciousness."

"Since you did not, why speculate upon it?" queried the chief, acidly. "Furthermore, though the blow hurt, you have a very soothing balm for the wound. Fifty thousand dollars is a rich remuneration for a single knockout blow. That was to be your part of the stake, I believe."

"Yes! Nor is it any too much, to my way of thinking!"

"Nor any too little, to mine," retorted the chief, with subtle austerity. "Understand me, Mr. Smith. But for us, and the craft and cunning we are able to employ, you could have played no such game as that now so successfully terminated, despite the readiness with which you accepted our invitation to become a partner therein. We did most of the work, and faced most of the danger. At no time during the game were you in peril, for had Kelley been discovered and exposed by your associate clerks, you still could have denied any knowledge of the fraud. Nor would you have been betrayed, since loyalty to a loyal confederate is one of our most binding ties. So in getting the portion mentioned, Mr. Smith, you will get all that you have earned, and all that you deserve. Let that settle it."

"Sure that settles it," nodded Smith, a little awed by the other's icy voice and penetrating scrutiny. "I'm satisfied, if you are."

"If we were not, you would promptly be informed."

"And the money—was it brought here?" demanded Smith. "That was the agreement."

"We always do all that we agree, Mr. Smith," was the caustic rejoinder. "The provision upon which you insisted, that the money should remain intact and be brought here for division thus soon after the crime, was not entirely to my liking. Yet your resolution to that ef-

fect. left me no alternative but to assent. Understand me, however. I demurred only in apprehension that you might not be able to hoodwink that evil genius, Felix Boyd, after we had rung him into the affair solely with a view to avert suspicion from you. The design was crafty, however, and I am glad that you feel positive that it was successfully executed."

"Positive—well! I should say so!" cried Smith, with a derisive laugh. "Felix Boyd, indeed! Why, sir, no bat was ever more completely blinded. Though he laid the crime to you and your gang, he was forced to admit to Hersey that you had not left a clew—not the slightest clew!"

"Yet Boyd is artful—infernally artful! Are you sure he meant all he said?"

"As sure as I am of death and taxes," cried Smith, laughing shrilly. "Why, sir, he even assured Hersey that I was in no way culpable, but deserved much credit for my endeavor to save the plunder. Come, come, sir; is it here? Let the division be made, then. I have no wish to hang about here longer than necessary."

"Nor have I—far from it!" rejoined the chief, with sinister significance.

"Get at it, then."

"Where's the grip, Busby?"

"Right here, old man. It's hardly left my hand since I got it from Kelley, who made off home to shake his Hersey togs."

"I've seen him since," was the reply, while Busby placed a stout leather bag on the table and proceeded to unlock it. "He may not show up at all. I sent him to Pine Street at five o'clock."

"That so? For what?"

"To locate that infernal hoodoo of ours, Felix Boyd," the chief grimly answered. "Kelley placed him all right, and telephoned me at six. The kid in Boyd's office said that Boyd was at police headquarters with Jimmie Coleman. Probably working up this case. I reckon 'twas true enough, for Boyd wouldn't look for any of us at his office."

"Humph! Not much!"

"I aimed only to make sure that he wasn't wiser than we knew, and may be on the heels of—"

The chief concluded with a significant glance in Smith's direction, then reached for a package of bank notes which Busby removed from the bag.

For a moment the flinty hardness of Felix Boyd's countenance relaxed a little, and he murmured, complacently:

"Luckily I did anticipate just that move, and instructed Terry accordingly. So there's their plunder, eh? I must recover that, at least, cost what it may. And it's up to me to play a lone hand against them, I'm blessed if it isn't."

He peered back over his shoulder through the semi-darkness of the night, towards the desolate country road by which he had come, but no sign of any approaching person rewarded his searching glances.

Once more he gazed through the rent in the curtain, and fixed in mind every feature of the dismal room. Next he shifted his revolvers to the side pockets of his short reefer, and then silently left the window and stole to the opposite side of the house.

There he found that he could slip his knife blade between the loose sashes of one of the windows. To throw the catch unheard, and then raise the lower sash, required a little time and much caution; but he finally accomplished both, and then silently entered the room.

It adjoined a narrow hall leading towards the dining room; and Boyd, after listening for a moment, decided that further delay would be dangerous. Within a very few minutes the knaves would be making off with their divided booty. Boyd drew both revolvers, then stole softly through the hall.

"Fifty thousand—that's right," Smith then was saying. "Yet I'd sooner have had smaller bills—"

"You'll have none of them, Smith!" Boyd coolly interrupted, stepping suddenly into the room with both weapons leveled. "Quiet, you fellows! The first move will invite a bullet! Now up with your hands, every man of you, or there'll be a corpse here! Steady there,

Busby! Don't think of bolting for the kitchen, for I'll shoot you dead before you can reach the threshold! You, Smith, edge a little to the left, so that I may cover all hands more easily. Careful—that'll do, you dog!"

Half-smothered ejaculations of dismay, and the sound of quickened snarls of rage—these were the demonstrations which followed Boyd's sudden entrance and accompanied his sharp utterances, a series of commands and threats spoken with a voice so cold and penetrating that not a word was lost, the while his stern, white face wore a look no man among them dared to disregard.

Within half a minute he had the four men lined back against the wall, three of them seated with hands upraised, and Smith standing a few feet aside, as white as a ghost when he now realized his ruinous situation.

"Very good, you fellows!" added Boyd. "Bear in mind that I'm a dead shot with a gun, and the first man who stirs will be the first to go under. So don't be the first, any one of you."

"My God, I'm ruined!" groaned Smith, involuntarily.

"Not the slightest doubt of it," said Boyd, bluntly.

Then he took a chair at the side of the table opposite the four, that he might rest his elbows on the table and steady his constantly leveled weapons, under which a more powerless group of rascals scarce could be conceived.

"You're an infernal blockhead, damn you!" the chief bitterly snarled, referring to Smith. "And I've been a cursed fool for once in my life!"

"Quite correct, Mr. Big Finger," nodded Boyd, with a swift glance at his distorted face. "I think my trap will hold you this time."

"Don't you be too sure of it," the knave fiercely sneered. "Four to one are long odds, for all you now have the best of us."

"Well, don't you be the first to move, or the odds will be reduced in a way you'll not fancy," retorted Boyd, sternly. "And you, Busby, look to yourself! I've an eye for every man of you."

"You be damned!" growled Busby, white with impotent rage.

"Now, Smith, you do what I command," said Boyd, sharply. "I want this money repacked in this bag. To this end of the table—steady! not too fast! Now you're right. Pack it all in again. Now buckle the strap. Now fall back where you were, and throw up your hands. Correct!"

Smith had obeyed like an affrighted child, and the leather bag, with the stolen cash secured in it, now stood on the table at Boyd's elbow.

Not one of the gang had raised an objection, nor stirred hand or foot, but their enraged faces were speaking volumes.

"Yes, Smith, wise for once in your life," repeated Boyd, with subtle irony. "You should have been as wise when you lay stretched on the floor of Hersey's office. Remember this, you foolish fellow: The pulse of a man knocked out with a sand bag does not heat in the nineties. The throb of your excited blood was alone enough to betray you, and the moment I felt your wrist I knew you were shamming."

"Idiot!"

The single word, a bitter, malignant hiss, came from the twitching lips of the master criminal.

"Idiot is right," said Boyd, curtly. "When I learned that he was shamming, it became very easy to make a counter-move against him, to let him think himself unsuspected and me utterly blinded, and then prepare to run him and you to cover. I wasn't looking for a division of the plunder quite so quickly, Mr. Big Finger, but I think the trap will serve."

"Not much!" cried the chief. "We still are four to one, and can sit here as long as you can. Some day, damn you, I'll have you under my heel."

"Oh, I think not," interrupted Boyd. "The boot already is on the other leg. You'll sit right here until the help arrives for which I have sent, and then —"

But then there came the very last move any mortal man could have anticipated.

Their partly expected confederate, Kelley, had arrived, and through the window had observed the situation within.

Fortunately for Boyd the miscreant happened to be unarmed, so could not shoot him; but the crafty fellow, who, so cleverly had impersonated Bunker Hersey, had stolen unheard into the dark kitchen of the house, then crept cautiously under the table at which Boyd was seated, in a position that made the cunning move comparatively easy.

The next moment Boyd's legs were seized and he was jerked half out of his chair, while Kelley yelled wildly from under the swaying table:

"Nail him, boys! Now nail him!"

The gang leaped forward like men electrified, and Boyd fired wildly and missed.

Then the side window was beaten in with a crash, and a second weapon rang through the house, followed by a roar from Jimmie Coleman.

Busby went to the floor with a bullet in his shoulder, while Smith, observing Coleman at the window, yelled wildly:

"The cops! They're here already!"

With an upward sweep of his arm the chief of the gang instantly hurled the lamp from the bracket, leaving the room in Egyptian darkness.

The struggle that followed was confined to the two men still on the floor, for the others of the gang, seeing Coleman and fearing that a squad of officers might be with him, thought only of escape and fled through the house. Yet Smith did not know the way as well as the others, and Coleman nabbed him at the door.

When the affray terminated, moreover, Boyd had Kelley in irons, the bag of stolen cash in his possession, and Coleman had Smith and Busby prisoners, the latter badly wounded.

Yet again the chief of the gang had evaded Felix Boyd, escaping through one of the smallest loopholes of his evil career.

Boyd restored Hersey's money next morning, giving the banker the surprise of his life.

As remarked by him, Boyd's first suspicion of Smith's treachery to his employer, and the former's immediate insight into the game attempted, resulted from his feeling Smith's pulse, which he had done only to learn whether the clerk was dead or alive. Then a square section of disturbed dust on the rug, and flecks of lint on the heavy book on the table near by, told Boyd what he had heard fall, the book having been thrown down by Kelley immediately after striking Smith, and solely with a view that Boyd should hear it through the telephone, the circuit having been left open.

Thus it at once became plain to Boyd that he probably was up against the same old gang, and that their design was to avert suspicion from the dishonest clerk. Hence Boyd's counter-move to reassure Smith and take him home, after which he constantly watched his house, and saw him leave in disguise that very evening.

Boyd then shadowed him to Flushing, where Smith waited in a saloon for some time, evidently a prearranged hour, before proceeding to the rendezvous described, which was a dwelling recently occupied by Busby, and of which he still had the keys.

While waiting Smith's next move Boyd had telegraphed to Coleman. Before the latter could arrive, however, Smith started for the house and Boyd was obliged to shadow him. Never at a loss for resources, Boyd picked up a lad and took him along until he had the house located, then sent the boy back to bring Coleman, or a policeman in case of his failing to find the central office man.

Coleman was on hand, however, and arrived at the house just after Kelley, and with the results depicted. The criminals secured got their just deserts, it may incidentally be added; but Felix Boyd had by no means seen the last of their rascally chief.

BEATRICE, OF VENICE*

BY MAX PEMBERTON

Author of "A Daughter of the States," "The Giant's Gate," "The Iron Pirate," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

The scene is laid in Venice in the latter part of the Eighteenth Century. Gaston, Comte de Joyeuse, a friend and emissary of Napoleon, is in the city of the Adriatic on a secret mission. He has been followed by spies and marked for death by the Council. He is rescued by a beautiful Venetian patriot, Beatrice de St. Remy, with whom he is in love, and kept as a sort of prisoner in her house. It is given out that he has been assassinated. Villettard, his friend, seeks to probe the truth, and discovers where Gaston is. Meanwhile, Beatrice has fallen in love with Gaston. The latter is anxious to get through the lines to Napoleon, and Beatrice promises him that she will procure for him a passport from Lorenzo, of Bresica, a powerful noble, who thinks Gaston is dead. This she obtains, passing Gaston off as a young servitor of hers. Gaston leaves to join Napoleon, after confessing his love for Beatrice and promising to aid Venice. Villettard overtakes him and prevents him proceeding. Meanwhile Beatrice tells Lorenzo the truth. A certain Captain Paul da Ponte is sent to search her house, which he accomplishes in a brutal manner.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MORT.

THE captain of the mercenaries remained at the door of Beatrice's room until he was satisfied that it was well with her; then with a brief word of relief he went downstairs to give instructions to his men. It was plain to him now that the young man, Giovanni, had escaped with his story to the city, but Paul da Ponte was not the man to be surprised by such an advantage, and he set about the business of his excuses without any loss of time. For a full hour there were messages to and fro between the Casa degli Spiriti and the ducal palace; gondolas drifted about the steps of the house and men passed in and out with letters at their girdles.

Not a clever man by any manner of

means, Da Ponte nevertheless was equipped with a certain vulgar cunning which served him well in the decadent days of Venice. And now opportunity had come stumbling upon him, and he embraced it with clumsy arms. So far had Beatrice of Venice stood above his schemes yesterday, that even his audacity made no mention of her in its wildest flights. Rich, well befriended, high in favor, she had passed him by in the public hour and the private, not disdainfully, but as one who was totally unaware of his existence. In his turn, the night of wonders had set him in her house to be the master of it, her judge and jailer. He would be a fool, he said, not to gather the last ear of such a harvest of opportunity; and emboldened by the advantage, he could go further and say that she, herself, might not be willing to purchase his friendship upon any terms—even marriage,

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* This story, "Beatrice, of Venice," began in the April issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer or direct from the publishers for thirty cents.

and the right to her name and possessions. Herein was a fool's hope, which exacted from him a curse upon his own clumsiness, and the manner of the first assault.

In her room, Beatrice prayed for the day, though the patient clock told her that there were six hours yet to the dawning, and that they must be hours of uncertainty and of peril.

She tried to sleep, but oblivion would not befriend her; and in her waking dreams she walked and talked with Gaston again, and asked herself once more what was this young soldier's influence over her.

She loved Gaston—her woman's heart made good excuses for him. Not a second time would she tell herself that he had betrayed her, forgotten, perhaps despised her. And this must be set down in some part to that tenacity of will which refused to admit that her final judgment of man was incorrect. She had believed from the first that if any woman could awaken Gaston de Joyeuse to a real passion, she would have him for the most abject of slaves. And to this idea she clung hopelessly through the long night of waiting. He had left her, dismissed her from his mind—perchance had entered some other house upon the road to Gratz and there found another dupe; nevertheless, she would be patient through the years, and the after-hope of faith should be her staff. As the dream began to be lost in the blackness of sleep, the bitter thoughts passed away, and she perceived Gaston's image near to her and held up her arms to him and uttered his name, and in his embrace found rest. Then, for a full hour, she slept. Her eyes were heavy still when Fiametta waked her and bade her listen.

"Madame—for the love of God, do you not hear them?"

Beatrice had not wholly undressed herself, and she sat up upon her bed and pressed the sleep from her eyes. The dawn was breaking in the room, the candles had guttered down in their sockets, and deeper shadows were being gathered up by the glimmering

daylight. This, however, was the lesser thing, for the new day sent up to them a loud message from below, whence came the sound of heavy footfalls and sparkling steel and the low cries of men hard pressed. And so it was that Fiametta had come to say, "Do you not hear them?" She herself had been listening for fully five minutes, her hand pressed close to her white chemise, as though to still the beatings of her heart. She knew that something dreadful was happening in the house.

"I heard a voice," she said, "and that waked me. Then a gondola rowed up, and some one entered by the garden gate. I think it was Giovanni—they did not speak for a long while afterwards; and then, oh! my God, dear madame what is it—what can it mean?"

Beatrice drew her gown about her shoulders and crossed the room with bare feet. She remembered long afterwards how cold the parquet flooring was, and how clumsily she fumbled with the key before she could turn it in the lock. Fiametta, meanwhile, crouched down in the bedclothes, shuddering and crying like a frightened child. When the door did at last yield to Beatrice's hand, she opened it but an inch or two and so tried to discern what was happening in the hall. But the light refused to help her, and the black shadows of the great well played with her fears. One figure alone could be perceived—it was that of a trooper who lay stone dead by the outer doors with a great wound in his right lung, and the lantern he had been carrying still burning at his side. The yellow glimmer of light seemed to play in horrid mockery upon the black puddle beneath the man's tunic—his eyes were staring upward toward the dome of the hall; he had evidently been struck down by some one who surprised him upon the threshold.

It was such an unlooked-for turn, so wholly fearful and bewildering that Beatrice remained at her door afraid either to advance or to draw back. And yet it cannot be said that fear predominated in her mind above that strange prompting of hope which whispered the

truth, that the dead man had been killed by her friends and that help was at hand. For who else but a friend would have come to the *Casa degli Spiriti* at a moment when even the least loyal to the republic must shun her as a leper. She bethought of many names, but none of them save the name of Giovanni Galla satisfied her reason or answered her question. Yes, the girl Fiametta was right, after all. Giovanni had returned, but whence? And if it were he, why this perplexing silence, this truce of voices and of arms? Not a living being was to be seen in the hall. She was sure of it—she could not hear so much as the sound of a man breathing, and she said that whoever had killed the Scavonian trooper had been alarmed at his own act and had fled the house. Where, then, were Da Ponte and the others? Could it be that he was asleep? The darkness told her nothing. She half shut her door and leaned against it panting. Would the sunlight never fathom that great well of the staircase and declare its mysteries?

"They have killed a soldier, Fiametta," she said, almost breathing the words in her excitement. "Tell me all you have heard. I see no one; we are alone, child. What was it that waked you, then?"

Fiametta stood up and shuddered again when she saw that the door was a little way open still.

"Some one cried out," she said. "It was like an animal's cry. Then I heard the captain—yes, it was he—I know, but I cannot say it. Giovanni will come back, madame. If you shut the door we could still hear them. Dear Christ, how frightened I am! Will they kill us, madame? I am afraid to die—I am such a child. Why should they wish me harm? Oh, Giovanni should speak. Why does he not speak when he knows that we are waiting?"

"If it is Giovanni—if it could be he," Beatrice reiterated as one who did not dare to believe so great a thing—and Fiametta watched her moving from place to place, now toward the window, now toward the bed, and she said to

herself again, "All is lost, my lady is afraid."

But it was not fear—at least not fear of things known which wrung from a brave woman these witnesses to her mental distress. Beatrice cared nothing now that Paul da Ponte was in her house and would come to her at dawn for an answer—such an answer as ninety of every hundred women would give willingly under similar circumstance—to the blunt question he had put to her. Relatively while she pitied the poor fellow who lay dead upon the threshold, the rugged manners, the strong nerves of her age, left her in some way indifferent to death. The torture was that of the darkness and the shadows. Why had the unknown friend left her house? She felt that she could not rest until she knew all; and bidding Fiametta get up, she took one of the silver candelabra in her hands and told the girl to follow her.

"We must know," she said often. "If you are afraid, come but a little way. We must have light. Are you thinking of Paul da Ponte? No; it is I whom he seeks, Fiametta. And I am not afraid—not now—not now!"

She was picking unlighted candles from the glass chandelier in the center of the room while she spoke, and when she had three in the candelabrum she carried, and Fiametta had put on her gown and discovered candles in her turn, they went to the door together and passed through it to the balustrade of the great staircase, wherefrom they could look down into the open well, but not to the corridors which its pillars walled. The glow of dawn was fuller, and less gray by this time, the shadows had receded somewhat, and the dead man's lantern no longer burned as a taper by the body; but all else was as it had been—no living thing appeared to move in the hall, and as Beatrice descended the stairs in her white gown, her hair unbound, and the candelabra in her hand, she might have been some figure of imagery appearing from the spirit world. Shining faintly through the gloom, the dancing rays were but wan stars in that great world of twi-

light—she felt for every step, feared to go on, and yet would not draw back, Who was there, who stood so near to her? An intuition said, "Gaston, your lover." Her heart beat quick—she called his name aloud—he did not answer her.

Again she advanced a few steps, again she stood to listen. Surely some one was breathing almost upon her cheek. She lifted the light on high and perceived the figure of a man. He was Paul da Ponte, standing all his height behind one of the pillars, and she perceived that the point of his naked sword touched the pavement before him; but when he saw her he cried out aloud and sprang into the open, whither another figure followed him—the figure of Gaston de Joyeuse, who had been counting the minutes until the sun should discover his enemy. And now the wan light said "Here." Beatrice did not know that one brief hour had taught Gaston how to love her.

So do men learn of loss, that which gain may never teach them.

Da Ponte had been quick to wheel round toward the west, and he had the light behind him and a full sweep for a heavy rapier. Gaston was armed with a light French sword, but he, too, had a master's hand; and for many minutes one blade engaged with the other, and not even a twitch of the wrist declared that sense of touch which is the finest in all the swordsman's art. When the disengagement came, the Italian cried out like a drillmaster to a squad, "One, two! Now!" and feinting, he came to the engagement again with a hollow laugh which had been better kept. There was a grace, a pose, an easy play about Gaston's style which invited confidence. He did not attack, made no feint, was a mere defender. For he anticipated the rogue's artifice. No code of honor, written or unwritten, would bind Paul da Ponte. Gaston meant to wait, and while he waited Beatrice stood like a statue, motionless, spellbound, a very type of death. She knew that he loved her—and this man might kill him. The agony tortured her, the day and night seemed to pass,

and she was standing there and the blades were crossed; and upon the one side there was the hollow laugh, and, upon the other, the clean, straight limbs of the finest fencer in Buonaparte's army.

Da Ponte attacked in *quarte* now, with lightning swiftness and perfect distance, and the flashing point touched Gaston upon the sword arm, and left a long, jagged scar, from which the blood welled slowly. He recovered himself instantly, and met a lunge with so firm a touch that fire flew from the steel and the Italian's wrist trembled like prisoned steel. There was swift attack, new and sure defense; and stamping, lunging, the sweat pouring from his face, his lips close set, the Italian moved up and down upon the parquet in such a strife that a miracle alone seemed to snatch his antagonist from death.

Now, all this had taken place by that pillar of the hall which sheltered Beatrice from the light; and as the two men moved over toward her in the frenzy of the bout, she retreated yet nearer to the wall, and stood trembling there with Gaston so near to her that her outstretched hand could have touched him. The maid, Fiametta, had run upstairs again at the first pass, and she, from the stairs' head, watched the moving figures and the daring swords. At first Fiametta thought that it was Giovanni returned, and her faith in him said, "He will save us"; but when she perceived that it was not Giovanni, but the French count, she lost hope again, and, shivering in the cold air, she turned her face to the wall and would not look. From this attitude she was called by that last supreme attack in which the duelists moved toward my lady; and thinking less either of Da Ponte or Gaston than her mistress, she ran a little way down the staircase, and, lifting up the candlestick, she uttered a loud cry, which echoed through the hall and was heard even at the gate. Almost in the same instant, some one knocked heavily upon the bronze doors, and believing that here were men to his assistance, Da Ponte took a new stand, and for a spell neither lunged nor

feainted. In this brief interval the girl Fiametta ran to the door and opened it; and discovering a man there, she implored him, for God's sake, to save her mistress. Joseph Villettard, however—for it was he who knocked—pushed her aside roughly, and making his way into the house, he called loudly, "Gaston! Gaston! Where the devil are you, Gaston?"

This brisk appeal, the French tongue, the strange voice, fell like a bolt upon Da Ponte's ear. He half turned his head and took a step backward. Though all befell in the fraction of a second, it seemed to him that a full measure of his life was dealt out to him when the steel touched his soft flesh and was turned in it, and ran like a burning iron to his heart. What an age it rested there and yet left him conscious of strength and vitality and sight and sense, the great hall whence the sunlight chased the shadows, Beatrice pale and shrinking by the wall, Fiametta upon the stairs—the glimmering candles, the cold statuary, the pictures—and this strange face looking so oddly into his own. And then the veil of instant darkness—the shuddering sense of sinking down as into the bowels of the earth—death to touch his limbs with icy fingers and to shut all from his glazing eyes.

He fell face downwards almost at Beatrice's feet, and the sword bent and broke beneath his huddled body.

But Gaston turned to my lady and caught her swooning in his outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

FLIGHT.

She had fainted, but the arms which held her were strong and sure, and they lifted as though she had been a child, and carried her towards the doors of bronze by which Joseph Villettard waited. Cynic always, even in the face of death, the emissary's flinty eyes followed the count wherever he turned, with a certain ironical satisfaction which seemed to say, "Such is the jest of youth, and you two must play it."

His words, however, were brief and quick, and characteristic of one who is surprised by no danger and bears himself more shrewdly for its presence.

"Laugier is there with sixteen men," he said; "we have no time to lose. If I had thought——"

He broke off and peered about the hall. The girl, Fiametta, seeing that they were leaving her, besought him pitifully that she might go, but he brushed her aside and would not hear her.

"No, no, girl—one of your sex is quite enough—we shall be twenty in a boat. Besides, there is your friend, Giovanni, at the gate. Go out to him and tell them to send Georges and the others. You will be safer with Giovanni."

Fiametta seemed to think so, too, and she ran away with a sylph's foot to the water's edge, and to the man whom she believed had saved them that night. When the sailor, Georges, and two others entered the house, they found Villettard still upon the threshold.

"Take those carrion and throw them into the canal," he said, quietly. "Monsieur le Comte will be glad of the half of his sword. Bring it to me. I give you five minutes."

The sailors carried out the bodies with no more concern than they would have lifted their own sea chests, and throwing them headlong into the narrow canal, which borders upon the garden of the house, they returned to the *riva* and the longboat of which Villettard had spoken. There they seated themselves without a word, while a young officer, in a cocked hat and a gold-laced coat, who had the tiller lines in his hands, gave the word of command, and the sixteen oars were dipped into the water as one.

"Is your excellency determined to take this lady to the ship?" Laugier asked, for that was the name of the young officer. Villettard replied that he was quite determined.

"Then I am not to trouble, whatever happens?"

"Exactly—the responsibility is mine, Capt. Laugier."

It was six o'clock of the morning by this time, and while the wind blew cold and shrill across the fretting lagoon, Venice herself caught the wintry sunshine and gave to it beams of gold and silver in return. But of Venice, those in the long boat thought little. Their eyes were turned toward the open sea where the French sloop of war *Lafayette* was anchored. Thither Villetard carried his friend. This was their haven from the republic and their enemies.

"Is everything prepared on board? Are you quite ready to sail, Laugier?" Villetard asked when the quays of the arsenal came into view and a group of men began to gather at the water's edge. Laugier had no doubt of it.

"The lieutenant understands quite well," he said; "he is to weigh anchor and stand in as far as our friends at the fort permit."

"And that will not be very far," Villetard rejoined. "I know your friends at the fort, captain. Their permission will be written on a cannon ball. Is not Dominic Pizzamano in command there? Well, there's a rogue for you. He has threatened to blow us out of the water if we show our noses at the port. Some day, Laugier, I shall have the pleasure of hanging that man."

Hardly had the longboat come abreast of the arsenal, when the well-known black cutter, in which the police patrolled the lagoon, shot out from the low arches by the dockyard and was propelled with splendid strokes toward the flying Frenchman.

Capt. Laugier was the first to see the police boat, for he stood at the tiller; and he made known his discovery with some jocularity as one well pleased.

"Well, here are the police," he said, gayly. "I suppose you have some tale ready for them, chevalier?"

Villetard stood up, and, shading his eyes with his hands, he took a long look at the arsenal and its quays. Many of the workmen were gathered there now, and for the moment the common sounds of ringing hammers and clanging iron gave way to a babble of talk and the clamor upon the lagoon. Villetard

could see the men running hither and thither in search of some high place whence they could view the chase; and while the big gondola was at first the only craft between the dockyard and the longboat, anon the *barcaroli* began to put out in numbers until there must have been at least a hundred ships in the wake of the pursuit. All this Villetard took in with greedy eyes before he answered Laugier.

"They are very kind to us, Laugier. Please signal the sloop. Since Frenchmen cannot go unmolested in an ally's port, it is necessary for us to be protected. You will fire a gun and let the others know."

Laugier appeared to be a little troubled. He was not altogether sure even yet how far Buonaparte would support him.

"I am understanding that you take the responsibility for all this, chevalier," he put it.

"You are understanding, captain, that if you don't make the signal, I will. Come, what are you thinking about? Did you not read the general's letter?"

"He gave you full authority within the city, but here on the sea——"

"Ha, ha! There's a coward for you!" laughed Villetard, "a man who hesitates when the general is to be served."

Laugier blushed like a girl, for he was no coward, and he determined that some day he would make this crafty schemer eat his words.

"You know it's not a question of cowardice," he retorted, hotly. "There are some honest men left on the ships if not on land. Give me the musket, Georges; I am about to obey this honorable gentleman."

He fired the musket in the air, this being the signal to his own ship to enter the harbor, and Villetard applauded him with cool effrontery.

Now, those in the police boat had been quite unprepared for this new turn, nor were they at first aware that Laugier signaled to a warship. Acting upon their instructions to prevent any Frenchmen leaving Venice unless they could show the necessary passports,

they had put out from the dockyard to demand Laugier's papers; and when they came up to the longboat their chief stood up and hailed it bluntly.

"If you please, gentlemen, I must trouble you to halt."

No one paid the slightest attention to him; the two boats raced side by side onward towards the incoming ship. For this the police officer was in no way ready, and he cried a second time.

"Do you hear what I am saying to you? Easy there, my men, I must see your papers."

No one in the longboat appeared to hear him; the oarsmen bent anew to their work; Villetard sat smiling in the stern; Laugier stood at the tiller, Gaston and Beatrice, sheltered by a rude awning for which a ship's tarpaulin served, were in the bows.

When it was quite evident that the captain of the boat meant to hold on his course, the police officer permitted his temper to get the better of him.

"Make fast there!" he cried, to one of his subordinates at the bow. "Bring them to, Otto. What the devil do they mean by it, then?"

The subordinate obeyed him with alacrity. He took a rude boathook and tried to catch the side of the longboat. When he had fixed the prongs in the woodwork the two ships were grappled together and went on as one, while the police officer stood up and endeavored to board the Frenchman.

"Come," he said, "we can have no nonsense here. I must see your papers, gentlemen. If they are all right, you will be allowed to proceed. Why do you give me this trouble?"

He was midway between the two boats as he spoke, and in another instant would have been at Villetard's side; but the chevalier, stretching out a hand as though to help him, suddenly jerked him backward and threw him into the lagoon. At the same moment Laugier drew a pistol from his belt and shot the subordinate through the arm. The fellow gave a loud cry and let go his hold, and the longboat bounded on again towards the haven of the ship.

So concerned were those upon the

police boat for the safety of their chief that no man bethought him of answering the Frenchman's audacity, or of firing upon the retreating crew. Those who witnessed the scene from the shore declared that it all happened so suddenly and took a new shape with so little warning, that they were quite unaware of disaster until the longboat was well under the shelter of the sloop's guns and a cutter had put off to its assistance. When they did understand, messengers were dispatched in haste to the ducal palace, and while the press of boats increased momentarily about the Dogana and the arsenal, the alarm bells sounded the tocsin from many a steeple, and the whole city awoke at last to the grim truth—that the French were in the lagoon and had passed the Lido.

It was well enough to prate of outrage and infamy, of Buonaparte's broken pledges, and the effrontery of his emissary, Villetard. This any gossip could do—but that which brought every senator pell-mell to the palace, called the Doge from St. Mark's, and set the alarm bells ringing, was the fact that the French flag flew before the castle of St. Andrew's, and that the French admiral was sailing towards the very heart of Venice. Should he be permitted to advance or should he be resisted? Lorenzo, my Lord of Brescia, and the "forwards" were all for hostility. They carried their point about the time when the longboat came riding to the war sloop's side, and Joseph Villetard declared that all danger was at an end.

The French ship must be sunk. The Doge bade them carry the order with all speed to the commander of the fort. The hour for Buonaparte's trifling was gone by, and Venice at last would speak for herself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEATH OF LAUGIER.

When Gaston carried Beatrice from her own house to the longboat, she was quite insensible to all that happened

about her, nor did she wholly recover consciousness until they lifted her on board the sloop of war, and Villetard commanded them to prepare a cabin for her. The long night with all its changing scenes of doubt and fear had so wrought upon her endurance that, when she succumbed, it was almost in a swoon of death; and from this nothing but youth and the devotion of a lover restored her. In the cabins of the *Lafayette*, the surgeon, Maurice, attended her with a gallant care which satisfied even the count's anxieties; and together they watched and waited about her bed indifferent to any desire but that of her safety. Unable at the moment to say how this flight would influence her life, Gaston, nevertheless, realized that she was leaving a home and city dear to her, forfeiting forever, it might be, her good name and the position her talents had won for her in Venice, and going out at the bidding of destiny to some new way of life which must be hazardous for them both. That Venice would call her "traitress," he knew full well; and yet Venice had numbered no citizen more faithful. Her very zeal had led her to this *cul-de-sac* of intrigue—so that, while her own people said that she had betrayed them, the French believed her to be the enemy of their countrymen—even the mistress of assassins. Neither within the Italian lines nor without would she find a safe refuge; and, considerable as was Gaston's influence with Buonaparte, he doubted his ability to protect her. The future was dark, indeed, for them both.

Such foreboding moments kept the count in her cabin, even when the surgeon, Maurice, declared that the immediate danger was over and that she must sleep.

Gaston could not yet understand how a few short hours had stripped his mind of those vain sophisms with which he had once justified his treatment of this generous woman; but he asked their service no longer, and he did not hide it from himself that he had now no hope of life which did not begin and end with her.

And he was carrying her from Venice, her home, whither and to what end?

Even the optimism of Gaston de Joyeuse could not answer that question. Enough for the moment that he watched by her, could touch her hand and say that she lived. For that which was happened on the deck above he cared not at all, since the anchor was weighed and the sloop stood out toward the Adriatic and their freedom. Gaston could hear the heavy tread of seamen upon the deck, and he knew that arms were being served out to the men; but this he imagined to be a precautionary measure, and when Villetard came down to the cabin a little while afterwards, he did not question him about it. Indeed, Joseph Villetard could never rest for many minutes together in any one place; and he merely broke in to change a pleasant word with his friend, as one who snatches opportunity at a hazard.

"*Ha! mon vieux*, is she better, then?"

"I think so, Joseph; she is sleeping. Come in and tell me what you think."

The chevalier entered on tiptoe and took a hasty glance at the prone figure.

"I congratulate you, Gaston; she is really a beautiful woman. Well, I'm afraid those fellows will wake her up—but we shall soon be out of it," he added, thoughtfully, "and then to the general and the camp, my boy."

Gaston said nothing, though he continued to watch Beatrice with affectionate anxiety; Villetard, turning to the door, nodded his head at the pleasure his own thoughts gave him.

"This Laugier is the devil on board his own ship," he remarked. "I believe he wants to fire upon the fort."

"But that would be against the treaty, Joseph."

"Oh—ah—yes; but then, you see, my dear Gaston, so much has happened against the treaty. Take care of the lady, for she is going to be worth a great deal of money to us."

"Then go upstairs and tell those noisy fellows to keep their dancing for to-morrow. Why are they playing with thunderbolts, Villetard?"

"Because there is about to be a storm, my dear count."

He went up to the deck, chuckling softly at his own humor; and, finding Laugier upon the poop, he stood with him to watch the busy movements of the crew and the execution of that daring maneuver in which it was then engaged.

The young captain, however, had eyes only for the stunted, dangerous bull-necked fort, whence a puff of

smoke had come and a rolling report which went gamboling over the waters like the thunder of a volcano. The commander of St. Andrew's castle was summoning the war sloop to lay to. Laugier liked the sound of it. He gave an order to the lieutenant at his side, and he in turn to an officer upon the lower deck who commanded the men, heartily to stand to the guns. It was clear that any moment might bring the crisis.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A FLURRY IN SOAP

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN

In which a small manufacturer and a powerful trust lock horns in a conflict which results in a cleverly earned victory for one of them.

"**N**O, sir!" said old Mr. Gregory. "Not a dollar—not a red cent, sir!"

Then he lowered his head, bull fashion, and glared over his glasses at Higham, seated beside the desk. It was preposterous—preposterous! Nephew or no nephew, he had no right to come begging for a loan—a fellow situated as he was. In the distant day of Mr. Gregory's youth, a young man had started business on one hundred dollars, or two, or possibly even five; and grubbed for twenty years, and thanked God for the chance. But this thing of a boy—a mere young one of twenty-eight—owning a manufacturing plant! Of course he was in a muddle—and serve him right, sir!

"Even one thousand would carry me

over, you know," Higham advanced, rather wearily.

"It won't be my thousand, sir—let me assure you of that! I'll drop no money into that bottomless pit of yours! You had to make your venture—now get out of it in the best fashion you can!"

"But it isn't a venture," Higham asserted, with some heat. "We've been running for five years or more already, and paid a profit every year. Don't you understand that if Benning hadn't turned tail and left the concern and taken his money with him, I shouldn't be in this hole?"

"It appears to me, James, that your partner, Benning, exhibited a far greater degree of horse sense than yourself."

"Possibly."

"Yes, sir, he did!" Mr. Gregory pursued. "Benning's well out of it. You're not. You've got your soap factory and your big stock and so on—and the Trust people have got you! Right by the nape of the neck, sir! And they'll shake you well! Yet on top of that, sir, you come here and ask me for one thousand—"

"I retract that," said Higham, stiffly, arising. "I don't want it."

"Brrr! Sour grapes, sir! And now we're flying into a passion, eh?" rasped old Mr. Gregory.

"I think I'll go before I say anything that may need an apology later. Good-day."

"I say, James—James!—tut, tut! Let him go!" snapped the old gentleman, as the door closed with somewhat impolite vigor.

Well, hope from that quarter had departed, Higham reflected, as he left the building and bent his footsteps toward his unfortunate soap factory. Where else could he look for ready money? Higham abandoned it as a hopeless speculation and scowled at the pavement.

It was tough! Yes, it was just the limit of bad luck! If Benning hadn't deserted! But Benning had—at the very first sign of pressure from the Trust—and his wretched two thousand dollars had gone with him.

Higham frowned as he recalled their last discussion, its civil beginning and its violent ending. He remembered with disgust how they had passed from business arguments to highly invidious personalities, and from that almost to blows; until at the last they dissolved partnership, amid the hot haze of wordy battle smoke, and separated as enemies.

Benning was a thoroughly low-down, mean sort, too—Higham was well aware of that. If he saw a way to injure Higham, there was no doubt whatever that he would use it to the utmost, and derive a quantity of petty satisfaction from the act. There were certain epithets which Higham had applied to Benning at that last memorable interview, that the latter gentleman would be long in forgiving.

Indeed, from recent happenings, it seemed palpable that Benning had disclosed to Gorman Brothers—otherwise the Trust—certain inside details of Higham's business, from the sole desire to injure his quondam partner. Two or three matters could be explained upon no other ground. Higham clinched his fists as he hurried along and yearned for an opportunity to plant them upon Benning's person.

He was ready enough for a fair fight in business; but the Trust worked on different lines.

At the beginning, just after Benning's defection, they had sent a representative to Higham, with an offer of five thousand dollars for His Star Soap Works, lock, stock and barrel.

Five thousand dollars for the whole business! Higham had turned down the proposition in a pithy little speech which promptly ended negotiations with the Trust.

Then the Trust had gone to cutting prices—and good heavens! how they had slashed at them! White soap or brown soap, laundry soap or toilet soap, they seemed fairly determined to sell it for less than Higham could buy the raw materials.

People who had ordered steadily, all the five years that they had been making soap, dropped off their books by the score. They were buying of the Trust—and why not? They could get the same thing—or almost the same thing—for little more than half the old prices.

Higham had cut and cut, too, and manufactured in huge quantities in the effort to cheapen his soap; and, after all, he could only put to himself that painful question—*cui bono?*

For the Star Soap Works was crazily overstocked with soap, and the Star Soap Works' bank account had dwindled almost to a negative quantity, and the Star Soap Works' business would not have consumed—and in fact did not consume—the time and attention of one clerk for one hour daily!

It was a combination of Trust, over-production and Benning; and so far as was apparent to Higham, the three

quantities together were about to write "finis" to the biography of the Star Soap Works. It was a poor sort of goal, after five solid years of hustling.

Higham let himself into the soap works through a rear door, at which he arrived shortly. It was silent and lonely, for no wonted hum of machinery greeted his ear.

Although McCarthy, the engineer, still busied himself with the making of one or two small specialties which had not been of sufficient importance to warrant Trust attention, to all intents and purposes the Star Soap Works was shut down.

Higham sighed, as the deadly stillness of the place came over him; then he glanced around with an ironical smile.

He stood within the storehouse. Before him, in boxes to the ceiling, was—soap. At the right he saw—soap. To the left, great piles of packing cases contained—soap. Soap! soap! soap! Every dollar that might have been available—that might have been used in the effort to discourage the Trust by sticking it out—lay there, locked up in soap.

So much for manufacturing in large quantities to save money, thought Higham, bitterly, as he turned away from the spectacle and made for the office.

He favored Rudolph, his general utility young man, with a lifeless good-morning, and passed to the private office. Rudolph was upon the verge of being out of a job; probably he understood that, but he might as well have official notification.

Higham twisted around to call the boy and impart the dire information, when that individual entered the office with a stack of letters.

"Eh? What?" said Higham, staring in amazement at the collection.

"And they all came in the first mail," replied Rudolph, who had recovered from his own astonishment at the phenomenon.

"But we haven't had more than two letters a day, lately! Brown & Brown—Coggsell Company—Jenkinson Brothers—" muttered Higham, running over the names on the envelope corners. They were all old customers

of the Star, long since captured by the Trust. What had happened?

"All right, Rudolph. I'll attend to them."

He opened the envelope with shaking fingers and scanned the letter. Then his eyes opened wide and he whistled in sheer amazement, for the communication read:

GENTLEMEN: Kindly ship us at your earliest convenience, two gross cakes XXX laundry soap, and oblige, yours very truly,
BROWN & BROWN.

"What under the sun—" Higham began. "Are they coming back to me, after all? Has the Trust gone out of business?"

The letter was short and sweet—but it was an order! Actually, an order for two gross of soap, and from an old customer at that!

The next epistle turned out to be even more startling. It hailed from Jenkinson Brothers; and the elder Jenkinson himself, not two months ago, had given Higham to understand that their business relations were over until the Star Soap Works could hammer down their prices to the Trust level. Now they wanted twelve cases of "Mayfair," Higham's beloved white toilet soap! And Coggsell duplicated it, and went better with an order for brown soap! And Richards came next with a request for a bill of goods that would have elated Higham in the firm's most palmy days!

There were letters from druggists and wholesale grocers, from department stores and jobbers; and they all wished to buy that commodity of which Higham was so heartily sick—soap!

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated, when he had opened half the letters. "Is it a dispensation of Providence!"

Unhappily for that pleasant illusion, a clew to the mystery came with the next letter:

GENTLEMEN: We beg to file our order for twenty-four cases of "Mayfair" for immediate delivery, at prices quoted in the current *Grocers' and Druggists' Journal*.
Yours truly,
SANFORD & SMITH.

"Prices quoted in the current journal," Higham repeated. "I haven't been quoting prices in the *Journal*! Prices quoted—"

He reached to the table, where lay the week's copy of the trade paper. Certainly, he had been quoting no prices, there or elsewhere. Quoting prices had seemed an imbecile waste of time and money, lately. He had not even felt sufficient interest in the paper to remove its wrapper. What other people were doing in the line was no earthly concern of his.

But now he opened the sheet with alacrity and turned the crisp pages.

At first neither his name nor that of the Star Soap Works appeared. He had almost reached the last page, when the thing stood out before him in glaring black type, among the advertisements:

THE STAR SOAP WORKS OFFER.

And there followed an outrageous list of quotations on his grades of soap—a list compiled by one intimately familiar with his stock; a list which named prices by some cents lower than the Trust's most desperate cut!

"That's Benning's work!" said Higham, leaning back with an angry scowl.

There seemed to be no question. An outsider could never have listed his stock so accurately, could never have devised so unerringly such utterly ruinous prices! Benning, long known to the *Journal* people, as a member of the firm, had inserted the advertisement, and its purpose was clear.

Higham had now two alternatives. Either he must publicly repudiate the quotations, and thus admit that his attempt at competition with the Trust was dead and done for, and that people might as well buy elsewhere if they were looking for bargain prices; or he must take the pile of orders and fill them—and get out of business.

There was no doubt as to that last. When he had disposed of his soap at the *Journal* quotations and pocketed the entailed losses, he could never go on and fight the combine. And yet—

The proprietor of the Star walked to the window and stared abstractedly at the huge brick building two blocks away.

By chance, he and the Trust were near neighbors. That immense red structure represented the machine that was grinding him to bits.

He wondered whether the Trust was chuckling over his predicament—certainly they knew that he had never published those quotations. In all probability, they were waiting for him to refute them. Then they would sail in and put the Star Soap Works *hors du combat* for all time.

What should he do? Do? Benning's spite, expressed in the advertisement, seemed to have settled that question. He could write all the people who had ordered and tell them that the advertisement was a fraud—and shut up shop. Or he could sell out at a heartbreaking loss—and shut up shop.

Either way, the Star Soap Works had reached the end of its rope. Still—

Higham returned to his desk, opened the balance of the letters and figured for a time on the back of an envelope. There were orders sufficient to clear out a good quarter of his stock.

All right—he'd fill them! He would abide by the terms of Benning's advertisement and sell out his soap at the ruinous figures, to the very last cake! He'd die fighting—or with the appearance of fighting, at least. And when the stuff was all paid for, there would be a little cash for him to take out, and the machinery was worth something—although not much—at second hand.

It was better than sacrificing his stock later, and the loss no greater. For two or three days, or perhaps a week, the Star Soap Works should do a rushing business; even the Trust couldn't cut under the murderous prices in the *Journal*. And if the Star Soap Works must go up in smoke, at least a little blaze of glory should precede the fumes.

With considerable amazement Randolph received the memorandum of orders to be sent out that day. With even greater surprise, the truckman shortly heard that young man's voice

over the telephone, for he had harbored the impression of late that Higham was dead.

He sent a pair of double trucks, and they backed up before the Star Soap Works. Men began to pass out cases, until dozens and literally hundreds of them stood on the little shipping platform. Then they were loaded on to the trucks and carted away to their various destinations.

A couple of blocks down the street, a man on one of the upper floors of the Trust factory happened to note the activity, and remarked upon it to another man. The second man unhooked the telephone on his desk and transmitted the information to the general offices, downstairs. An impression took shape in the Trust offices that Higham had inherited money or gone insane; for the advertisement was evidently genuine and the Star Soap Works was shipping goods in quantities.

By night, a quarter of the storehouse had been cleaned out. Next morning, a fresh assortment of orders greeted Higham. He classified them, made out another memorandum and handed it over to Rudolph.

That day the truckmen appeared before ten; and they returned with empty wagons at four in the afternoon, to load up once more.

Late in the day, Higham was seated in his offices, wearing a smile that might have passed for serene satisfaction, but which actually denoted the calm of resignation, when a little, black-whiskered man entered.

Higham observed his entrance with secret wonder. The man was the agent of the Trust!

So they had noted his spurt of business! But—surely they must realize the shallowness of the demonstration.

Still, it appeared to have caused the Trust some concern. After a few preliminaries, it developed that the emissary was there for the sole purpose—the astounding purpose!—of offering Higham ten thousand dollars for the Star Soap Works!

Higham managed to mask the emotions that struggled within him; and

the ambiguous smile being as convenient as any other expression, he allowed it to remain upon his features.

Ten thousand dollars, eh? Would he accept? Will a duck swim? The place was worth more than that—two or three thousand more—but what infinite luck to escape so well!

Higham had almost spoken the words that would have closed the deal, when another idea flashed over him. The Trust had been impelled to this action by the amount of shipping he had lately been doing. No other cause could account for it.

Higham drummed an absent-minded tune upon his teeth with his lead pencil. There were possibilities in the situation that had not hitherto appeared to him.

Presently he turned to the Trust man with a bland smile.

"Honestly, now," he said, in the most friendly manner possible, "don't you take me for rather an easy mark?"

"Does that mean, Mr. Higham, that you refuse?"

"Assuredly," replied Higham, drawing a cigar from his pocket with the air of a multi-millionaire captain of industry. "Most assuredly."

The Trust agent departed in a mental haze. Higham arose and went into the storehouse. It was fast emptying. Tomorrow, or the next day, would show the whole floor bare.

"What an ass I am!" said Higham. "Why didn't I take it and be satisfied?"

But he was committed now. He returned to the office and drew forth the Star Soap Works' bank book. A balance of exactly two hundred and seventy-two dollars remained. It was enough. Higham seated himself and wrote a letter; and as he sealed it a pathetic element of doubt entered into his smile.

Now, there are two ways of looking at what followed. First, Higham's way.

On the following morning the familiar quota of orders were awaiting him. He jotted down the items and returned to the storehouse. One by one he checked off the list; and when he had done he perceived that not more than

three full cases of soap would be there that evening. The stock was exhausted!

On the morning after that he found quite as many orders for soap; but this time he bunched them with a rubber band and laid them away for future attention.

From the street, one could observe operations in the second way—as the Trust saw them. Cases of soap were coming out thick and fast, and Rudolph and Rudolph's brother, who had been called in to help, went rapidly over them with the marking brush. The truckmen scurried around and piled boxes of soap on their trucks; and drove away; and returned later for more boxes of soap. At night—although this did not appear from the street—the storehouse was empty.

Next day, Rudolph exclaimed when Higham left the mail unopened, and a few words passed between them. Rudolph grinned, and the day's business began.

The trucks appeared as usual. So did the cases. One by one, they were carried out of the storehouse and marked and loaded upon the wagons. One by one the wagons drove away with their loads.

From the chimney of the Star Soap Works volumes of soft coal smoke belched forth, and the rattle of machinery was audible in the street.

In the Trust factory, the black-whiskered man ascended to the top floor on the freight elevator, viewed the situation and scratched his head. It appeared that Higham was manufacturing at high pressure and shipping soap at a rate that was nothing less than astounding. But how the dickens was he doing it? Who had put up the money?

One day followed another, until a week had passed; and with the regularity of time itself, the daily program was repeated at the Star Soap Works. The chimney smoked furiously, the trucks backed up, the boxes of soap were loaded on. More boxes emerged from the storehouse and were piled on the platform, where Rudolph and his brother marked them, under Higham's pompous supervision.

The Star Soap Works was doing close to a record-breaking business; and as a consequence of the *Journal* advertisement, the Trust's orders had fallen off astonishingly during the week.

It was really a serious situation—an unexpectedly threatening situation. They came to that conclusion in the Trust offices. Their salesmen couldn't bring in orders—everyone was buying from Higham. And Higham was selling at prices below their own cost of manufacture, and seemed quite likely to keep on doing it. At the pace he was setting, running the Star Soap Works out of business would be a proposition simply tremendous in its actual money losses.

Something must be done and done speedily, if the Trust was ever to recapture the local trade.

In the end, the people in the executive offices intrusted to the black-whiskered man a bundle of documents, and sent him forth to tackle Higham once more—and have the thing over with on the spot!

The owner of the Star Soap Works was frankly reluctant to consider any proposition. He said so, and smiled with snug self-satisfaction as he said it.

They could see how he had stirred up some little business for himself—they could see just what he was doing. He wasn't anxious to sell out, for spot cash or any other consideration.

But he of the black whiskers was persistent and persuasive. He purred and reasoned, and argued and analyzed and cajoled. He played up this cogent point—and then that. He dilated upon the terms "spot cash." He told Higham—almost to a dollar—what the Star Soap Works was worth, and then laughed deprecatingly as he mentioned their price.

Very slowly, very gradually, very grudgingly, Higham allowed himself to come over to the Trust man's views.

Rudolph was at last dispatched for the notary across the street. And when that person had performed his solemn office, the Star Soap Works belonged to the Trust!

The deal was closed, and the black-whiskered man departed. He had been obliged to go the limit, but he was satisfied. The Trust's last and formidable antagonist had been "absorbed." Even the swirling clouds of black smoke above the Star Soap Works belonged to them now.

Alone in his office, Higham's lips expanded into a smile; they broadened into a grin; then they parted and Higham's robust laugh set the place a-ringing. He flourished a bit of paper and roared and roared again.

When he had quite finished, he perceived that old Mr. Gregory had entered and was regarding him with an inquiring smile.

"I dropped in, James," said his uncle, "to inquire out of pure curiosity what the devil you're doing?"

"At the moment, I'm laughing."

"So I perceive. But what has happened? I'm hearing about it everywhere. They say that you are suddenly doing a tremendous business—sending out hundreds of boxes of soap a day! Where the deuce did you get the money, sir?"

"I didn't get any money," said Higham. "Here's all I have on earth."

He handed over the slip.

"God bless my soul! Twenty-five thousand dollars!"

"Exactly. The Star Soap Works has sold out to the soulless corporation."

"Good gracious! How—how—how—"

"I'll tell you, uncle," said Higham. "Benning inserted a notice in the *Grocers and Druggists' Journal*, in my

name, advertising prices on my soap for which no mortal could sell it and survive. Of course, orders rained in. I determined to sell out the stock and quit. Then the Trust man came along and offered to buy me out for ten thousand—and, well, I turned it down."

"Humph!" said old Mr. Gregory. "That sounds like you."

"You see, I caught on to the fact that the Trust had been rather jarred by the amount of shipping I'd been doing for a few days. Well, I told McCarthy, the engineer, to start the fires and the machinery—just to give us a little more business-like air. Also, I decided to do some more shipping, so I went ahead and sent out a couple of cases every day. The Trust watched it from their windows, I suppose—and a few minutes ago, they bought me out for twenty-five thousand dollars!"

"Yes, yes," said old Mr. Gregory. "That's all very well. Most amazing, I must say—the whole affair! But where the dickens did you get all your soap, sir? You couldn't possibly have manufactured it. Why, you must have shipped something over a thousand boxes!"

"I did—twelve hundred and something," Higham replied. "You know Jones, our truckman?"

"Well?"

"Most of them are piled up in his stable!"

"What?"

"Yes. That's where the Trust put too much faith in what they saw. The last nine hundred cases that went out of here were nothing but empty boxes!"

THE ETERNAL SNARE*

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT

Author of "When I Was Czar," "A Dash for a Throne," "By Right of Sword," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Mervyn Ormesby, who tells the story, is the secretary of Cyrus Grant, an American multi-millionaire, who has plans to Americanize a part of the Turkish Empire for commercial purposes. The two, while walking in a suburb of Constantinople, rescue a Greek woman named Haidee Patras from assassination. The Greek is engaged in a plot to remove the Sultan, and Grant, notwithstanding his affiliation with the Turkish Government, becomes so fascinated with her that he decides to join the conspirators. Enid Grant, his sister, is present in Constantinople. She promptly denounces the Greek, and attempts to deter Grant from involving himself, but without success. Finally Cyrus Grant is poisoned by a servant named Koprili and lies in imminent peril of death. Ormesby, disguising himself as Koprili, makes an attempt to interview a Pasha from whom he expects to secure certain information. He is discovered and locked up, but finally makes his escape. On rejoining Grant he finds that word has come that the Sultan is to be abducted. The two men, despite Grant's illness, succeed in rescuing the Sultan; and Ormesby is made a Pasha. In the meantime Enid Grant disappears and Ormesby prepares to search for her. After many disappointments and false clews, he discovers that she has been abducted by the Pasha, aided by the Greek, and he succeeds in reaching her place of imprisonment and is ushered into her presence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAND OF LOVE'S DELIGHT.

"THANK God, I have found you at last," I said, hurrying forward with outstretched hands.

But to my no small consternation she drew herself up, and the look of relief changed to one of anger.

"Those who hide can generally find, Mr. Ormesby. I think you have treated me abominably to keep me here in this way at such a time."

For an instant her reception and her words hurt me beyond telling, until like a flash of divination I realized all that it must mean. They must have brought and kept her here under the pretense that it was my wish. No harm could have been done to her, not even an insult offered. That laughing devil in

the carriage outside had probably not even seen her, and in my joy at the knowledge I laughed; I could not check it; I laughed aloud.

"It was very good of you to stay," I said, inanely, scarce knowing indeed what I said.

The tense, torturing mental strain of the last few hours was relaxed in that moment; the excitement which had kept me up and rendered me oblivious to the claims of bodily fatigue, hunger and thirst ended with the knowledge of my success and Enid's safety.

All suddenly my strength was exhausted like water from an overturned glass, and I staggered and fell into a chair, muttering with slipshod incoherence much like that of a drunken man:

"I'm sorry I couldn't get here before; I've been rather busy, you see."

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* This story, "The Eternal Snare," began in the March issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer or direct from the publishers for forty cents.

And so I sat, clinging to the remnant of my strength and fighting hard against the overpowering sense of faintness that threatened me with complete collapse, and conscious that Enid was staring down at me with surprise, indignant anger and an inclination of disgust.

Truly, a strange lovers' meeting.

My prostration was so complete that Enid soon took alarm, and, bending over me, she asked, gently:

"Are you ill, Mr. Ormesby? Can I do nothing for you?"

"I'm—a bit tired, that's all," I said, with a feeble sort of smile. "I shall be all right in a minute or two."

She knelt down by me then, and, having some scent, she poured it in her handkerchief and bathed my forehead and temples and the palms of my hands, and then chafed them gently.

Whether it was the scent that refreshed me or the gentle touch of her solicitous hands or the wish to ease the look of alarm in her eyes I cannot say, but I began to get back some measure of strength, and after a few minutes I struggled to my feet.

"We will go when you are ready," I said.

She looked at me searchingly.

"How peculiar you are. But I'm ready, or shall be, in a moment." And she went into an inner room, returning in a minute with her wraps. "Can I help you?" she asked, for I was holding on to the back of a chair.

"I think I can manage it. I'm getting all right again. Oh, wait a moment, I'd forgotten."

I took from an inner pocket the money which I had promised the bey, and placed it ready, Enid watching me with much curiosity.

The old servant was waiting at the door and led the way, Enid and I following in silence, for all the world as though we had been paying a society call. The tame conventionality of the rescue appealed to me as something almost humorous.

"Will you wait a moment?" I said, as we reached the door. "I have to get some one out of the carriage." And, going on, I had the handcuffs unfas-

tened from the bey's wrists, and when he got out I drew him aside and pushed the money into his hands. Then I put Enid into the carriage, and, giving the few necessary directions, I followed her and we started.

"You are very strange," she said. "Who was that man, and what were you giving him?"

"I was paying him. This is his place, you know."

"Do you mean you were paying him for the use of it while I have been here? What do you mean?"

"Well, not exactly that perhaps. But it's rather a roundabout story altogether, and I'm a bit out of sorts," I said, in a maunding tone. "I'm so exhausted, I can't keep my eyes open. I'm ashamed of myself, but I can't help it."

I could not. Nature insisted upon sleep, now that the excitement was over, and before Enid could make any reply I had to yield and fell fast asleep, and was only roused with great difficulty when we reached Stamboul, and had to leave the carriage to go on board the launch.

Even the fresh night air of the Bosphorus could not rouse me for some time, so beaten was I; and for nearly half the run across I wrestled against sleep, dozing, nodding, starting up, dozing again and again rousing myself, and trying to think what kind of a yarn I could spin to give color to the story which Enid believed, and so spare her the knowledge of the peril through which she had passed.

I joined her then where she sat, still and intent, gazing now forward through the dark in the direction of The Home, and again back to the lights on the Pera hills.

"You ought to be asleep, Mr. Ormesby," she said, very gently, as I sat down by her side.

"I'm afraid I deserve the snub, but I really couldn't help it. I am horribly ashamed of myself. But I can't stand things like some men."

"It wasn't a snub. I meant it."

"I'd rather talk to you, if I may."

"Of course you may," she answered,

a smile in her tone. "Are you going to tell me why you put me in that house?"

"Yes, that's just it. That's just what I want to do," I said, with a nervous laugh. "I'm afraid I jumbled things up a bit just now, but I was half asleep all the time. And I want to say something else. You'll find the Greek, Haidée, you know, at The Home. She's with poor Cyrus."

"Is Cyrus worse?" The question came with a catch of the breath.

"I wish I could tell you he isn't. But it's no good—and of course you must face the truth as bravely as you can. It's terrible."

"Is he going to die? He was so much better. Has anything happened while I've been away?"

Her fear and love for Cyrus were too deeply stirred to let her think of reproaching me for having divided them at such a time. As, of course, she thought I had.

"He was better, but he insisted on getting up from his sick bed and going out last night; and Arbuthnot takes a very grave view now."

"You let him go out?" The reproaches were coming now.

"No, I wasn't there; but I couldn't have stopped him if I had been. I found him at the White House, and he did as noble a thing as ever cost a great man his life," and I told her briefly of the adventure of the previous night on the Golden Horn.

"It was like a Grant. I would not have had my brother do otherwise."

Her quiet, proud resignation showed me she understood. She was silent for a minute or more, and then added:

"I am so glad you were with him," and somehow her tone set my pulses tingling with delight.

"When we got back to The Home he was so set on seeing the Greek again that, of course, I fetched her."

"Of course. Poor Cyrus! I never dreamed he could have loved a woman so," she replied, meditatively. "Poor Cyrus!" and she sighed deeply.

"And such a woman!" said I, thinking of her act toward Enid.

"It does not make much difference

with a love like this," she murmured, in the same soft voice. "Did he ask for me?" she added, after a long pause.

"Yes, eagerly."

"And you told him?" and she turned and peered into my face by the dim light shining through the windows of the deck house.

"I told him that I—why, of course, that I would fetch you."

"And why did you send that extraordinary story about your having been wounded and wanting me, and why a letter written by Mlle. Patras, of all people?"

I wished devoutly that she would drop her cross-examination.

"I thought you would know then it came from the White House."

"But you could have sent Stuart?"

"Yes, I could have sent him," I answered, stumbling and blundering worse than ever. "But he wasn't with me. You see, when a man's ill he does odd things."

"But you say you were not ill? What do you mean?"

The light was very dim and I could scarcely see her features, but I thought she was smiling.

"Why, I mean, of course, that I had to act as I suppose I should have acted if I had been ill."

"Are you still half asleep?"

It was very strange, but instead of the indignation I had anticipated, her manner was now half bantering.

"No, I feel all right now. I only wanted a nap to set me right. I get tired so easily, I think."

"When did you take the Greek to The Home?" she asked next, in a more serious tone, as if a fresh link of questions had occurred to her.

"I am glad to say, in the early hours of the morning."

"And did not come for me until tonight?"

"I'm afraid it does look odd, but I really didn't lose any more time than I could help. There were such heaps of things to do at the White House and—and other places."

"Things which his excellency, the pasha, had to attend to, I suppose, be-

fore his excellency could spare time to think of me."

"I'm afraid I must leave it at that," I admitted, for I had no answer unless I told her the truth.

"Do you think I ought to be pleased or angry at that?"

"I suppose you ought to be angry. I see it now," I replied, as though perceiving and regretting an error. And the pause that followed was a very uncomfortable one for me.

She broke the silence abruptly, with a very disquieting question.

"Where is that Count Stephani?"

"Stephani? Why, what on earth made you think of him?"

"No matter; I have thought of him. Where is he?"

"He's—he's at The Home."

"At The Home?" Then, with a note of great surprise: "Why, how came he there?"

"I took him there."

"You? You took Stephani?" she repeated, unable to believe me. "When?"

I bit my lip in confusion.

"Late this afternoon, or rather early this evening. I think if you don't mind I'd rather talk about these things another time. I find I am growing sleepy again. I think I'm getting confused." She laughed, but whether in anger or raillery I could not tell. It was a very gentle laugh.

"But I wish to talk about them," she persisted. "You are making your actions seem so strange and inconsistent. How did you meet him, and where, and when?"

"He was in one of these prisons here."

"Do I understand you rightly? You say Cyrus was asking for me at the same time he asked for Mlle. Patras; you fetched her, as you say, at once, and then, instead of coming or even sending for me, you went off first to find a man like Stephani, and took him across to The Home, leaving me in that house all the time? Can you really have done this?"

"I'm afraid it looks like it, doesn't it?" I said, feebly. "I can see it looks black, but it really isn't so black as it

looks, if I could only make you understand." And I shook my head dismally and sighed.

It was a bit rough to be so misunderstood, and I sat waiting for her indignation to burst out against me with such resignation as I could muster.

But it did not come. She did not make any reply for a while, except that she laughed again, gently and sweetly; and as I looked up in genuine surprise she asked, in a low tone full of meaning:

"And what if I do understand? What if I know you to have been guilty of all this awful conduct, and, what is worse, that you have crowned it with a round-about, rambling, inconsistent story intended to deceive me grossly?"

"I am sorry you think I would—"

"Please, please," she broke in, putting out a hand as if to stop me. "Now, answer me one thing honestly. Do you think I would believe you, even on your own confession, to be capable of treating me so?"

"I don't see—"

"Answer, please; yes or no?"

"I hope you would find it difficult," I mumbled.

"Is that yes or no?"

"I suppose it's no," said I. "And yet—"

"And yet you tried to make me."

Unmistakably there was reproach in her tone now, but reproach very different in its origin, and my heart leaped with sudden hope. Then came banter again:

"I suppose you acknowledge I received the confession of your baseness with great equanimity, and merely questioned you instead of being bitterly angry. Doesn't it occur to you I might have had a good reason?"

"What reason?"

"When we came on the launch I questioned Stuart. It was an easy guess, then, that you wished me not to know the danger I had been in and from which you saved me. They lured me to that house in the hills to see you, and kept me there with the tale that you were coming, and I am so ashamed that when you came, after having done what

I know you had to do, I received you as I did. You will forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive. You couldn't know," I answered.

"And I never gave you even a look or syllable of thanks."

"There was no need for anything of that sort. When I knew you were all right, it was enough for me. It was all very easy that I did, although it took time. That was all."

Yet it was not quite all. We sat in a somewhat embarrassed silence, until with a sudden impulse I took my courage in both hands.

"I had a very strong incentive," and as suddenly I stopped, my voice seemingly to be choked in my throat.

She turned quickly, and as quickly looked away; perhaps my voice betrayed me.

"Incentive?" she questioned, in quite a low, uncertain tone.

"My love, Enid. I—I have always loved you."

Then in the dark our hands found each other, and she let hers stay in mine, and she was trembling, and as I drew nearer to her she sighed and seemed quite glad to rest against me.

Then I knew. And as I pressed my lips to her hand life was suddenly radiant, the Bosphorus transfigured, and the darkness glorious light, for the magic of ecstasy had cast its witchery over me, and I had crossed the frontiers of the land of love's delight.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PASHA NO LONGER.

When we reached The Home our first question was, of course, for news of Grant, and we were relieved to hear that no change for the worse had taken place in his condition.

Dr. Arbuthnot would not allow himself to hope for any recovery, but his patient was in no great pain, he said, had taken nourishment during the day and had slept well.

The arrival of Haidee had greatly eased his mind, but he had asked once or twice when Enid was expected. On

the whole, however, the day had passed without any setback, and we agreed that Enid should get ready to go to him the moment he woke.

Many things had occurred during my absence. I found the house full of Ottoman officials, and an urgent request was awaiting me that I should go to his majesty as soon as I arrived. This was a physical impossibility, however. I was utterly done up and could hold out no longer even at the command of a dozen sultans, and so soon as I had had some food I took the very prosaic but rational step of going to bed.

The sun was up some hours before I awoke, and I found that at Enid's thoughtful instigation Dr. Arbuthnot had given strict orders that I was not to be disturbed.

The sleep restored me, and after a bath and breakfast—over which Enid and I had a long and delightfully confidential chat—I felt equal even to the task of confessing my offenses of the previous day to the sultan himself.

He received me graciously, but with some reserve, accepting my apology for not having seen him on my return, listened with patient courtesy to what I told him, and expressed himself as pained and shocked beyond words at my description of the scenes at the prison.

"You exceeded your commands," he said, in a tone of quiet, dignified reproof, adding, after a pause and with a gracious smile: "But under similar circumstances I might have done as you did. I will, at any rate, confirm your acts, and will myself see that those responsible for the misdeeds are punished."

"Your majesty will do better to see that such abuses are put down with a strong hand," I said, audaciously. "These things are a disgrace to your majesty's government."

"You speak frankly."

"I say no more than any honest man would say who had seen what I saw yesterday, your majesty."

"But you did not see with Ottoman eyes, nor perhaps do you understand the conditions and exigencies of Otto-

man rule. The East and the West are widely divided."

"In neither West nor East need a prison be a hell, your majesty. Torture, disease, filth and suffering appalling beyond conception and belief need be no more the predominant features in an Eastern than in a Western."

He paused a moment, and I thought was going to rebuke me, but with a slight lifting of the hand he said:

"Still, the East is the East, and these men are the vilest of the vile."

"That is true—of the jailers, your majesty," said I, not without indignation at this implied defense of the scandal. "Many of these poor tortured wretches are no worse than mere petty thieves, and even in the East it should be an anomaly that the man who steals a single piastre should be done to death with horrors, and he who robs a whole province should be honored and titled."

"Again I say you speak very frankly. If it were ever your lot to rule an empire, you would know more of the limits of power. We can but rule with the means at command." He spoke reflectively and, I thought, sadly.

"If I speak frankly it is only by your majesty's permission. I do but speak the thoughts in me. That country is surely in a desperate plight where the truth may not be told and facts must be softened lest they offend the ear of authority."

"That is right, no doubt; but you do not understand. I do not always know the truth. Yet I seek it zealously by many agents."

"Who, corrupt, are molded to utter only the things palatable to your majesty's ears."

"Now you speak too boldly."

"Your majesty has but to express a wish, and I can be silent. But in the West we have found less harm is done by freedom of thought and liberty of speech, even when liberty becomes license, than by the dumbed acquiescence and injustice. We cannot ward off ruin by closing the lips of those who would tell of its causes."

"The future lies in the lap of Allah, the most high."

How insufferably sickening that cant of the East sounded to me after what I had witnessed.

"Most true, but in the West we have a saying that God helps those who help themselves, your majesty; and it is as true of nations as of men?"

"If true of either," he retorted, and then said quickly: "And have I not striven? Who has done more than I to educate my people? Who more to develop the country by encouraging the spread of communication by railways? What nation in Europe, or in the world, is more tolerant toward the faiths of others than this? We do but ask to go our way alone, and to work out our own destiny."

"I know, and have admired your majesty's efforts in these directions. But they are not all. Your majesty is surrounded by men whose life work it is to keep from you the truth. With what result? Your empire is one of the richest in natural resources and possibilities on the face of the earth—and they lie undeveloped and neglected to the bewilderment of the world and the ruin of your government. Shall an empire thrive in such a case? Can it? Or is it not certain to be rushing upon ruin riven by such wide upheavals as this foul conspiracy which has just been plotted against your government and aimed even at your majesty's throne?"

Not once did the sultan look up at me, while I spoke, but sat grasping tightly the arms of his chair, frowning ominously, with lips pursed and face hard set. And in ominous silence he remained a space until his anger passed restraint.

"It is impossible," he cried, hotly. "It is impossible. I have listened to you, but it is impossible. We are misunderstood. And now, it is enough. I will have no more."

He spoke in his sternest tone, and I could see I had given him deep offense by my plain words, but I cared nothing for his anger now, and stood waiting for him to dismiss me or to say why he had summoned me. He did not keep me long in suspense.

"I have sent for you to say I am re-

turning to Yildiz to-day, and should have asked you to accompany me but for what I have learned in your absence. Where is Abdullah Bey?"

"I do not know, your majesty," I replied, surprised at the question.

"Was he not one of the villains with whom Mr. Grant found me that night?"

"My poor friend is dying, as the result of rescuing your majesty, and is too ill to be questioned," I said, with a touch of Eastern evasion.

"I am not asking Mr. Grant, but you, Mr. Ormesby. You can answer if you will."

"By your majesty's leave I prefer not to do so."

"But I do not give you leave. I require an answer. Is it not the case that he was brought here a prisoner, and that you yourself took him away?"

"What I have done, I have done under your majesty's own written authority," and I produced the paper that had been of such signal service to me.

"Give it to me." He took and tore it up with the impetuous fashion of a child. "This was not granted for you to use it to shield the villains who with their own hands sought my life. You have proved unworthy of the trust I placed in you."

"As your majesty pleases," I answered, firmly. "But I would remind you it was granted that I might do anything and everything that was necessary to rescue the sister of the man who gave his life to save yours. And there was no other course save that which I took. But I am in your hands, and it is for you to remember or forget, as you will."

"I am not ungrateful to Mr. Grant for the service he rendered me. Far from it. You will convey my deep thanks to him, and I wish to be kept informed of the progress of his illness. It has distressed me painfully. But you have exceeded your powers, and have aided the escape of as desperate a traitor as ever lived; and that I can neither forget nor forgive. I made you one of my pashas, and that should at least have rendered my enemies yours."

"It is for your majesty to confirm or

concel the honor you were pleased to confer upon me of your own will."

"I have canceled it already, sir," he said, angrily.

"Then that absolves me from any official and personal obligation to answer your majesty's questions," I answered, quite as warmly, very glad of the opening. "I repeat, that in all I did I had no alternative."

"You did very ill, sir," he declared, sternly.

"Miss Grant's life was in danger."

"That was no reason for you to abet the escape of the dog who dared to lay hands on me. And I meant so well by you."

"I shall always have a lively recollection of your majesty's favor and disfavor," I returned.

And with that I asked permission to retire, and bowed myself out, disgusted at his implied readiness to have sacrificed Enid for the mere sake of personal revenge.

I went then to my dear friend's room, and found him looking better than on the previous day. He welcomed me with one of his kindly, fascinating smiles as I took his hand. Enid and the Greek were with him, one on either side of the bed.

"You are better, Cyrus," I said, cheerfully.

"I am happier, for we are all here now, and all friends. I owe you much, Mervyn," he said, quietly.

"And can pay me in full as soon as you are up and about again."

"You are partly paid already, I hear," and he looked towards Enid, who smiled in her turn. "I pray God you will be happy," he said, earnestly.

"It will be my fault if Enid is not," I answered. "And now we've only one thing to think about—to get you through this."

"I want to speak to Mervyn," he said, quietly, to the others, who left us alone at once.

"You mustn't worry about things, Cyrus."

"I'm not worrying, Mervyn. But you and I need not pretend. Haidee and Enid think I do not know that the end

is near; and I don't wish to distress them. But you and I know."

He spoke as quietly and firmly as ever in his strongest health.

"I don't think it's as bad as that, by any means."

"Well, we'll hope not. I should like to live, of course. It is hard to leave Haidee—and all. Everything is so unfinished. But I'm going to die none the less."

The tone was one of absolute conviction. The calm note of a brave man facing the inevitable.

"The doctor doesn't take that view."

"I think he does, Mervyn; for he knows. But now, I have made no will, and I want to speak to you about that. I am anxious for Haidee's sake."

"There is no need to speak of this, but if you wish it I will write one now and you can sign it."

"Yes, I wish that. When I am gone you will wind things up here as best you can. Do just as you think best about everything. Somewhere in my papers you will find all the particulars of my money and some notes of what I have always meant to do with some of it. Will you see that they are done?"

"Yes, certainly. You have my word on that."

"They will take the greater part of what I have; and as to the will, divide what is left equally among Haidee, Enid and yourself."

"I'd rather not——" I began.

"It is my wish, Mervyn," he interposed, with the old dominant note.

"Shall I write it out here and now?"

"No: Write it somewhere else, and let Haidee come to me. The air seems cold when she is away. She told me how you found her. Ah, my dear friend, what I owe you for that one thing!" And he pressed my hand again. "Let Haidee come alone now; Enid will be glad to be with you."

I was deeply moved and went at once in search of the Greek, whom I found pacing the corridor alone, close to the door of the chamber, her face, eyes and gestures like those of one distraught with unbearable anguish.

"Will you go to him, mademoiselle? He has asked for you."

"Holy Virgin, it is killing me, Mr. Ormesby," she exclaimed, in a quick, whispering tone, flinging her arms high, and then pressing her clinched hands to her face.

Whether it was remorse for the part she had played in the catastrophe or poignant regret at the loss of the man she loved, I could not say. But her agony of mind was unmistakable as she clutched my arm suddenly and bent her hollow, eager eyes on me, and asked:

"Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing, I fear. The issue is in higher hands than ours. We can only play our parts and wait and hope."

"Hope!" she echoed, in a voice of utter despair and desolation. "There is no hope in my heart."

"Will you go to him? He is waiting for you," I reminded her, after a pause.

"If I could only give my life for his!" she murmured, leaving me.

"He would not value the life saved at that cost." She turned back quickly, her face radiant with a smile and her eyes dashed with the dew of tears.

"Almost the only kind thought of me you have ever uttered, Mr. Ormesby. You know what we are one to the other. Holy Mother of God, if he could only live!"

"You must not let him see your grief."

"Do I not know that? Have I not worn the mask all through and smiled—smiled, my God, when my heart was swelling in my bosom till I thought and hoped it would burst and I could die first."

"He is waiting for you, mademoiselle," I said again.

She turned away and entered the room, and I heard her speak to him in her low, caressing, gentle tone.

Enid was waiting for me below, and I told her what had passed between Grant and myself, and while setting out the papers to write the will at once, I described the scene with Haidee.

"She is suffering acutely," I said.

"What her agony of mind must be!" replied Enid, softly. "I pity her."

"You mean her knowledge that it is through her?"

"Indirectly through her; not directly. I know now how wrong I was at first, and I am bitterly sorry I ever said what I did. Loving Cyrus as she did, I must have seemed horribly cruel. I know now how cruel. I ought to have known then."

She was standing by my chair, and laid her hand on my shoulder as she spoke. I understood that "now," and I captured the hand and kissed it.

"Yes, that's why," she said, smiling down on me.

"Have you spoken to her since you came back?"

"Only once alone—to tell her I was sorry, and to ask her to appear to be friends before Cyrus."

"And her answer?"

"That she would never forgive me. She is a creature of passion; as strong in her hate and in her love."

"She is a Greek."

"Would to Heaven she had never crossed Cyrus' path," exclaimed Enid, vehemently.

"In that case Maraboukh would have found some other way. Perhaps more cruel even than this. It is the pasha we must blame."

"My poor Cyrus. I suppose there is no hope?"

"I wish to God I could think there was."

I began the writing of the will then, and had nearly finished it, when I was interrupted by a loud cry that rang through the house, startling us both.

"It is the Greek's voice," I said; and it rang out again and again as we rushed up the broad stairway to Grant's room.

CHAPTER XXX.

A GREAT MAN'S DEATH.

As we reached the passage by the sick-room door I saw the Greek fall unconscious, and rushing past her, we entered, to find Grant out of bed, clinging to the bedstead, and groaning as if the pains of hell were already tearing and racking him. Dr. Arbuthnot, Mrs.

Wellings and the nurse had just come to his help, and together we got him back to bed, where he lay writhing in agony.

"Quick, the morphia," said the doctor, urgently, and as soon as it had been administered Grant drew a couple of long, deep breaths and lay still.

"What does it mean, doctor?" I whispered.

"It is the end, Mr. Ormesby. Perforation has taken place."

"How long has he to live?"

"At most two or three hours."

I went out then, and sent Stuart in hot haste to Pera for a clergyman. Meanwhile, Haidee had recovered. She had been overwrought and had fainted, and she told us now what had occurred. She had been alone with Grant and he seemed as peaceful as ever, when suddenly he gave a great cry and leaped out of bed half delirious with agony, and she had rushed away to call for help.

We returned to the room together and found him still more than half unconscious, in which condition he remained for nearly two hours. Then with returning consciousness came the pain again, and Dr. Arbuthnot was about to make a fresh injection of morphia when Grant stopped him.

"I can bear it now," he whispered, calmly, although the perspiration was pouring from him and his features now and again twitched with his tortures. "Better the pain than unconsciousness, doctor." He murmured Haidee's name, and put out his hand to hold hers. "We will not part until we must," he said, with a brave smile.

She stooped and kissed him, and then crouching by the bed she laid her face close to his.

"Courage, Haidee; courage, my dear one," he murmured.

"I shall be within call. I can do nothing," whispered the doctor, signing to the nurse to leave the bedside.

Grant saw the sign, and withdrawing his hand from the Greek's held it to the nurse.

"You have been so good to me and so patient," he said. "And you, doctor, how can I thank you enough?"

I saw Enid choking back the tears at this as she fell on her knees by the bed, and I moved round to her and stood close to her side.

Grant put his hand back again into Haidee's and whispered fresh words of encouragement to her, and stretched out the other and laid it on Enid's head, his face all this time wearing a smile, broken only by the spasms of pain which even his powerful will could not wholly control.

In truly trying silence the time passed until they came to tell me Stuart had returned from Pera.

As I re-entered the room Grant saw me, and smiled.

"The end is close now, Mervyn," he said, faintly, as I reached the bedside.

"It is God's will, Cyrus."

"Yes, it is God's will," he answered, calmly.

"The chaplain from the embassy is here. Will you see him?"

"You are always thoughtful, my friend. Let him come."

I brought in the chaplain then, and when the moving, beautiful prayers had been read and the last solemn rites for the living administered, my dear friend was perceptibly weaker. But he faced death with a calm, resigned composure infinitely beautiful to see.

When the chaplain had left, Grant whispered my name.

"Good-by, old friend. You will remember what I wished?"

"It is all written; will you sign it?"

"I have no strength. Like so much else, it is unfinished. But you and Enid together will finish it. God give you happiness."

I held his hand a moment, felt the pressure of his fingers, and caught his last glance, smiling, brave, trustful as ever.

"I am quite at peace, old friend."

The tears were in my eyes as I turned away to hide them.

He spoke next to Mrs. Wellings, and then to Enid and kissed her, telling her he was glad we had come together, and he prayed for God's blessing on her, and she was too overcome now to do more

than sink back on her knees and bury her head as she prayed for him.

Then he turned again to Haidee, drew her face to his and kissed her for the last time, still smiling and seeking to cheer her, and lay back with a deep sigh, as though his last effort had spent the remnant of his strength.

And so he passed; his last look for the Greek, his last smile for her; his last faint movement to press her hand.

I saw the change, and silently beckoned the doctor. He came instantly, and after a brief look or two and a vain touch for the heart's pulse he drew the sheet over the face of the dead man.

I lifted Enid to her feet and led her from the room, signing to Dr. Arbuthnot to see to the Greek. She was all but unconscious, and when the doctor roused her she started and stood a moment like one in a trance, staring down in white horror at the sheeted dead.

With a cry she threw herself upon the bier, tore away the white covering from the face, called to her lover by name, showering kisses on the broad, pallid forehead and bloodless lips, and appealing to him in her distracted frenzy, with a thousand terms of caressing passion, to look and speak to her.

She would not believe him dead, and raved with the raving of insanity that we were trying still to take him from her.

Then with a fearsome suddenness the truth seemed to seize upon and convince her. She sprang to her feet, raised her arms on high, every muscle set and each nerve at highest tension, dashed her clinched fists against her head and then pressed them against her face, now drawn, haggard, wild and dead-white with the strain of her vehemence.

She stood thus for some seconds, her eyes wild, staring and fixed in horror on the dead face of her lover. Next a fearsome tremor seized and shook her, until with a loud, long shuddering scream of agony her strength appeared to give out, and she fell headlong across the lifeless clay.

It was her death cry, and when they raised her it was only to find that life was extinct.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE END.

Some eighteen months after the death of my friend, Grant, the curiosity of the passengers on a British steamer making for Constantinople was acutely aroused by the sight of one of the oddest-looking vessels that ever put to sea. She was steaming slowly down the Bosphorus, flew the Ottoman flag, and was clearly a Turkish boat; but what extraordinary kind of cargo she could be carrying baffled us.

Almost the whole of the deck from stern to forecastle had been boarded in; the bulwarks had been built high up, and the whole superstructure being of rough, unpainted timber, she resembled nothing so closely as a huge floating packing case. Only a couple of men were to be seen on board, and not a sound came from her save that caused by the churning of the propellers. Almost a weird object.

"What an extraordinary boat, Mervyn," said Enid, as we stood together looking at her. "What can she be?"

"I should have guessed she was carrying a cargo of wild beasts, only there wasn't a sound of any sort on her as she passed, and we were quite close. Besides, they don't come to Turkey for wild beasts."

"Not four-footed, perhaps," answered Enid, with a shrug. "I expect there's something horrible behind it. Let's ask the captain."

He came by us at the moment, and she asked him.

"I don't know for certain, Mrs. Ormesby," he answered, "and I don't fancy I could guess. Turkish riddles of this sort aren't easy to guess, as a rule. But it's pretty sure to be some Turkish devilment or other. Possibly a shipload of poor devils that the sultan or the pashas find in the way; Armenians, likely, or Jews, or something of the sort, that they don't like to butcher openly, and are sending instead to the living death at Yemen."

"Poor wretches," said Enid, pityingly.

"I tell you what it may be. Do you

remember there was a fire at Yildiz Kiosk a year or so back?"

We did, and told him so, as we exchanged glances.

"Well, they've had some sort of inquiry going on about that. I heard of it a couple of voyages back. I shouldn't be surprised if yonder odd-looking craft has got the guilty ones aboard, as if it was any sort of a crime to plot against a Turkish government," and with a shrug of contempt he went on.

"Do you think that can be it, Mervyn?" asked Enid.

"Anything can be it in Turkey. But we shall soon know," said I; and the captain proved to be right. "See, Enid; there's The Home," I exclaimed, a little later, pointing to the island which lay away to our right.

"Poor Cyrus," she murmured, with a sigh, after gazing at it thoughtfully and sadly for a while. "You won't stay in this dreadful place an hour longer than necessary, will you? It makes me low-spirited as I think of that dreadful time. I almost wish I hadn't come—but, then, I couldn't stay away," she added, with a smile, as she slipped her hand under my arm.

"Two days, or three at most, will fix up everything. There are only the formalities to complete." There were, of course, the final arrangements in connection with the abandoned scheme.

After her brother's death, nothing would keep Enid in Turkey a minute longer than was imperatively necessary, and as she would not hear of my remaining without her I had rushed through so much of the mass of work as I could settle and had left the adjustment of details in the hands of my then secretary.

Despite his tone in our last interview, the sultan had made overtures to me to remain and carry on the scheme under Turkish auspices, promising me the full weight of his assistance. But I had no heart for any such venture when Grant had gone. Moreover, I knew that unaided by his energy and brain, and impeded by Turkish lethargy, the thing was sure to be foredoomed to ignominious collapse and failure. Thus I had

declined, and within a week of my dear friend's death we had left Turkey, my intention being to return and wind up the business affairs so soon as I had seen Enid and Mrs. Wellings safe in New York.

The intention was not carried out, however. Enid pleaded nerves. She had been so sorely tried that she declared she could not bear the thought of my return to Constantinople; and although she showed no other symptoms of nerve breakdown, I remained, a very willing convert to her theory. She felt her brother's death intensely, and her grief was none the less real and poignant because mingled with it were the golden threads of delight in our new and sweet relationship. But youth is youth, and love is love, and youth and love and time brought consolation and blunted, as they do all the world over, the edge of our mutual grief. And then we had been married quietly.

Some months in England followed, until at length the demand for my presence in Constantinople had grown too pressing to be resisted longer, and together we made the journey.

The sight of the old scenes reopened in a measure the old wounds; but there were compensations. It was there that Grant had lost his life; but it was there, also, that we had found our love, and the earth does not hold the lover who cannot find a sweet and soothing pleasure in renewing such associations.

I hurried my work through. I hunted up those who had helped us—old Ibrahim, the Jew, and his granddaughter, the man who had helped me to escape from Maraboukh's house, even Stephani; his treachery long since forgiven in remembrance of his help in Enid's rescue; all I could find, in fact, and left them substantial cause to remember us with gratitude.

When all was done and even our trunks were packed for our departure we left ourselves an hour or two for one sad task that remained—a visit to Grant's grave.

Although the edge of Enid's grief had been mercifully blunted by time, the wound of his loss was still fresh enough to bleed; and she was deeply affected as we stood together by the side of the tomb in the lovely cypress-shaded corner of the cemetery.

The spot was marked by a monument, plain and massive, "standing foursquare to the winds of heaven," and typical in its silent eloquence of the grandeur, strength and self-reliance of the man whose death had meant so much to the country wherein it had been so treacherously compassed.

The early shadows of the fast-closing day were already settling down upon Stamboul; the minarets were beginning to grow dim in the twilight; the waters of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn were rapidly darkening, and a depressing gloom was lowering over the land. "Islam sleeping away her strength." The words flashed into my thoughts, and with them the scene of the fatal and ever-memorable night when Grant had spoken them; the night when the first coil of the treachery was cast over him to lure him with the gilded sweetness of love to his death.

His ambition had been to lighten with the golden shafts of liberty and prosperity the gloom of misrule and persecution for the toiling, long-suffering people; to lift the grinding heel of the oppressor; to restore something of the due balance of result to effort, and to sweeten the lot of those to whom life meant a life of fruitless toil, rewardless struggling and crushing poverty. Surely a scheme worthy of as great a man as ever dreamed a dream of the unattainable and set out to give it practical reality.

He had failed, and had paid for failure with the forfeit of his life, and all that remained of both the work and the worker was the monument that covered his ashes and those of the woman, who, all unconsciously, through the medium of their mutual but fatal love, had been used for his undoing.

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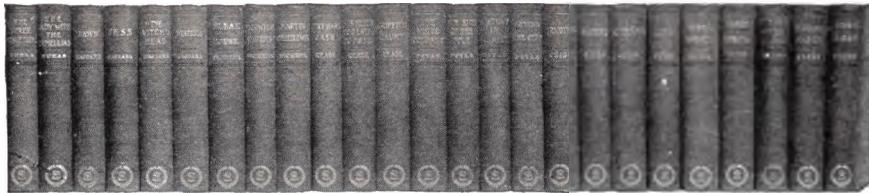
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by BEATRICE HANSCOM, is a charming love story with the scene laid at a popular seaside resort.

Peleg Myrick's Piano

by JOSEPH C. LINCOLN, is a typical humorous story written in the delightful vein so thoroughly identified with this author's work.

The Ship's Scandal

by OWEN OLIVER, lends a pleasing variety to the table of contents. It is a story of certain incidents occurring on a P. & O. steamer en route to India, and is told in the form of a series of monologues.

Bob Baxter, of Fairweather

by CHAUNCEY C. HOTCHKISS, is a love story strong in the picturesque local color of the Western desert.

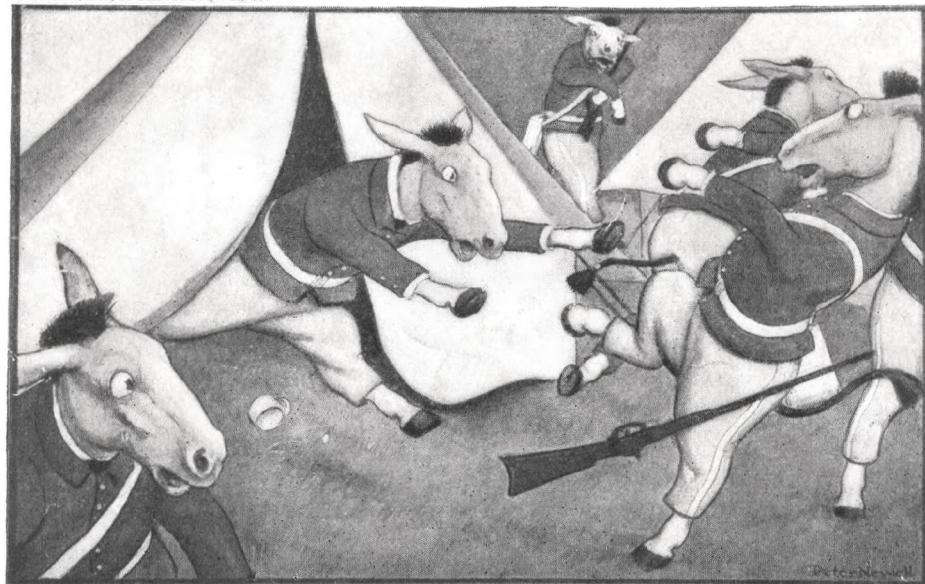
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