EVERY WEEK

AUG. 9, 1924

Western Story Magazine

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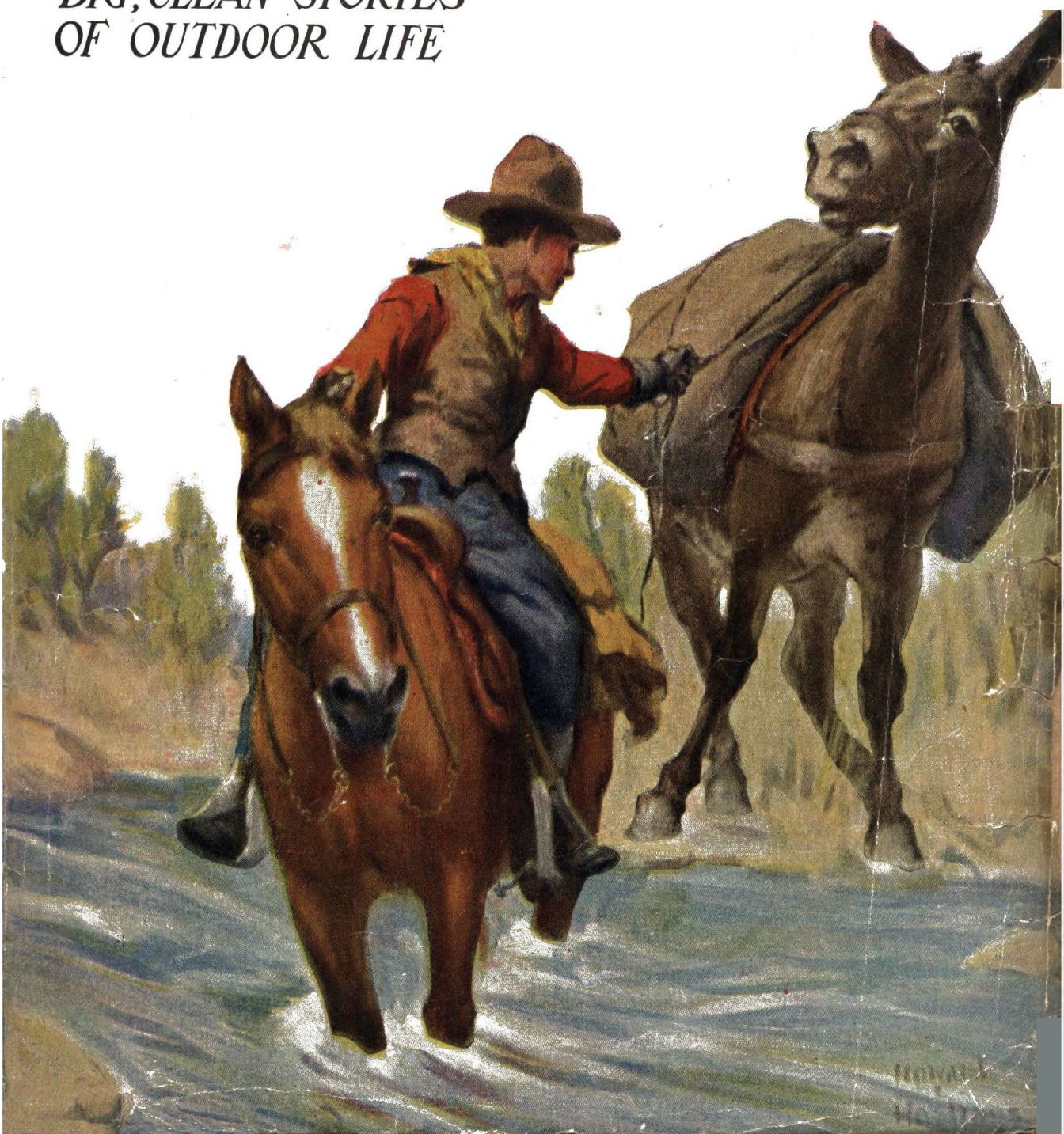

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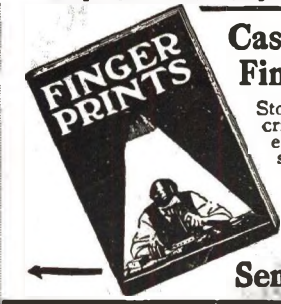

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Vol. XLV **Contents for August 9, 1924** **No. 3**

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ONE ARTICLE

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. XLV AUGUST 9, 1924 No. 3

The Race

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "The Brute," "The Boy in the Wilderness," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"CRUSADER TO BEAT FURY."

THERE was a change in the manner of Crusader. In the old days he had been as content with his paddock and his big box stall as a king in a kingdom. He could loiter in the stall when he wished, or he could go to the trough for the purest of pure well water, or he could stand under the big tree in a corner of the corral through the heat of the day. And always his eye was calm.

But now there was a great difference. One would have thought him an exile from a happier place. In the night he rebelled against the box stall, and when the door was locked upon him, he tried the stretch of the door itself with his heels and then tested the merits of the boards which walled him in with the same pile-driving blows. Twice the lock on the door was burst through and replaced. Then Crusader gave up the task of breaking a way out.

But still he was not any happier, and all night he could be heard stirring up and down in the stall, twisting and turning here and there gloomily, like a child that has been told it must sit on one chair and stay there. And when, in the morning, he was turned out into the paddock again, he would walk restlessly up and down, up and down the fence, like a wild beast in a cage, staring far away toward the mountain, blue in the morn-

ing and the evening and brown in the full flare of the sun.

This was not all, for the finest of hay and the choicest of oats no longer appealed to Crusader. He grew thin. His coat was staring. His ribs were visible all up and down his sides; the long muscles could be seen up and down the length of his neck.

"He needs room," said Colonel Dinsmore, and at great expense he had a forty-acre stretch of good pasture fenced to a height which even Crusader could not jump. But even with this ample range for exercise and diversion, Crusader improved no more. In fact, he seemed to be declining more than ever, for all day long he was trotting or galloping or restlessly walking up and down the fence which barred him from the mountains.

The colonel sent for the wisest man in horseflesh to be found in the whole range of the mountains. It was Jack Murran, who came on his bay stallion, Fury. The colonel went out with him and they leaned together against the fence and peered through at Crusader.

"There," said the colonel, "is a fortune in horseflesh thrown away. What can I do to cheer up the rascal, Murran? You know the story. He's breaking his heart to get back to Harry Camden. How can I cheer him up?"

"Give him company," said Murran.

"I've tried to. He does his best to kill the horses; he pays no attention to the mares, and they're so afraid of him that they daren't go near."

"That's the trouble," said Murran, "with a hoss like that. All nerves and fire. Wear themselves out. Darn it, man, what good is a horse of that size for real use?"

He gave his long scimitarlike mustaches a pull and stared at Dinsmore out of eyes which were a faded blue—sun faded, one might have said, from looking across the hot, shimmering face of the desert. As for the colonel, he could hardly believe his ears. He had been so accustomed to looking upon Crusader as the very greatest horse in the world, that to hear his actual worth questioned, shocked him. He felt that there must be a jest behind all this. But Murran was famous for a lack of humor.

"Tell me," said he, "what would you say that Crusader is good for, if anything, Mr. Murran?"

"For winning races on a track that's shaved off smooth. For sprintin', he would do. But in this here country——" He waved a hand toward the distant mountains, as though to call upon them to be a witness to the justice of his remarks.

"In this country?" prompted the colonel.

"I'd hitch him to a plow," said the curt Mr. Murran. "That's where he'd do the most good. That's where you could use the beef and the bone that he's got on him. Dog-gone me if I see any other way!"

He went on to explain: "Suppose that you was to want a good cuttin' hoss that could foller a calf through a herd, dodgin' like a cat. Would those long legs of his be any good? He'd tie 'em into a knot tryin' to keep up with the calf."

"I admit," said the serious colonel, "that Crusader would not be a very effective mount for the ordinary cowpuncher, granting even that the waddie could learn to ride and handle him. But there are other uses for a horse in this country."

"To go a distance," said Murran, "who'd want a hoss like that? He's got to have his oats every day regular. He's got to have his water when he's thirsty. He's got to be groomed up fine as silk. And he's got to have that every day!"

The colonel shook his head. "Environment is everything," he replied. "Crusader has been raised like a millionaire's child. That doesn't mean that he couldn't get on as a beggar. Give him his chance and you'd see him learn-

in' all the tricks just as any cow pony has learned them."

At this, Murran merely grunted. "Look yonder at Fury," he said, and pointed.

The colonel regarded the beautiful bay stallion with a tolerant eye. "Fury is a nice trick," he said. "For a child's pony, he'd do very well."

"A child's pony?" echoed Murran, with wrath gathering in his face and in his eye.

"He's not an inch above fifteen hands, is he?" asked the colonel, still unable to control a smile.

"Size ain't what counts," said Murran, looking down approvingly over his own form, which was certainly far from Herculean. "Size ain't more'n half of it, partner. The way things is put together inside and out is what makes the difference. Look at that hoss, I say. Ain't he in shape?"

"As if he were in training," admitted the colonel. "Not too fine and not too fat. Just right, I should say."

"How did he get that way?" asked Murran. "I've been takin' a trip on him. He's had his shot of work every day. Work that'd about kill most hosses. But nothin' to Fury. And today I've rode him forty mile to this here place—and I'll ride him forty mile back ag'in, if I have to. And when he steps out to-morrow morning, he'll have his head just as high as he's got it now. Well, colonel, could you say that much for your Crusader?"

With this, he grinned very broadly at the good colonel, who said gravely: "I rather think Crusader would hold up. He's no more of a show horse than he is a work horse, you know."

Mr. Murran flushed a little and then snapped his calloused fingers. "Talkin'," he said, "would never decide it."

"As for a test," said the colonel, "I should be very happy to make one, if Crusader were in good condition, and if there were any one who could handle him!"

"How about that ex-jockey—that Tracy?"

The colonel smiled a little sadly. "Tracy is afraid to come within speaking distance of the horse," he admitted.

"There you are!" exclaimed Murran. "High-headed fool—excuse me for statin' the facts, colonel—but that's what he is; too many nerves. All on the surface. Can't stand nothin'. *Won't* stand nothin'!"

The temper of the colonel had been put under a severe strain during this interview, and now his nerves snapped. But he held himself under a stiff control.

"I really wish," he said, "that Crusader could have a chance to justify his existence—in your eyes! And I suppose the other people hereabouts think of him very much as you do?"

Murran nodded. "A pretty fine picture hoss. A fine racer, of course. We know what his record is on the track. But we've seen these thoroughbreds worked out before in endurance races. Take 'em across country, up and down, hot and cold, rough trail, poor feed—and they can't stand the gaff."

At this, the colonel cleared his throat and frowned. "I've heard somethin' about that," he said. "I know that some foolish men have sent out their fine horses—their best, even, and entered them in endurance tests here. They have put their horses into weather they were not accustomed to, terrain unfamiliar to them, different water, different food, and then expected them to do well."

"I've heard 'em talk the same way—after their hosses was beat," said Murran. "But by my way of thinkin', a good hoss is a good hoss, come bad luck or good. He'll work his way out, and that's all there is to it! What's weather or food or water to Fury?"

He pointed triumphantly to the bay stallion; then he made a gesture implying some scorn toward the black in the corral—the lofty form of Crusader.

But he had gone quite a bit too far. The colonel had endured a great deal more than he could stand, and now his temper got the best of him, though he was still able to smile.

"Murran," he said, "I should like to know what you would consider a conclusive proof of a horse's real ability."

"They ain't more'n one," said the other. "That's the Jericho race."

Even the colonel was taken a little aback by this. For the race over Mount Jericho, which took place every third year, and which was due to be run within six weeks, was a six-hundred-mile grind through terrible mountains and burning deserts, beginning and ending with the crossing of Mount Jericho itself, a terrible mountain which even a goat would have shunned. In that famous race, scores of the finest horses in the West were entered; Arabians were brought from across the seas to attempt the winning; but in the end, it was always some Western horse, built up with the blood of thoroughbreds or Arabs, perhaps, but always with a liberal cross of the old Spanish mustang, that won; some hardy animal which was accustomed to the terrific mountain trails, the withering heat of the desert, the blighting winds which comb the bare rocks above timber line.

"Is Fury," asked the colonel, "entered in that race?"

"He is," said Murran.

"Do you ride him?"

"Nobody else, sir!"

A thought had been born in the brain of the colonel, and his eye glinted with it.

"Do you think, Murran, that Fury would beat Crusader in such a race?"

At this, Murran laughed frankly and openly. "Two like him! He'd beat two like Crusader!"

"That is easily said——"

Mr. Murran was in possession of millions which far exceeded even the great wealth of the colonel. Copper and cattle told the tale of his success. Moreover, in his own way, he was just as proud of the horse breeding which had produced Fury as the colonel could be proud of the great Crusader himself. He grew a bit red in the face as he snapped out: "I'm willing to talk any way you say, sir! Five thousand that Fury beats Crusader. But who the devil will ride your hoss?"

"I'll attend to that. That's my risk."

"I'll give you odds, colonel. Ten thousand to five."

"I never take odds in such propositions. Ten thousand even, if you will."

"I hate to do this, colonel," said Murran. But his pale blue eyes were shining.

"Naturally," said Dinsmore. "But an idea is an idea, and we have to suffer for them."

He called to a dapper young man who had just come out from the house toward the corral. "Charlie Mervin! Come here, will you? I want you to shake hands with Mr. Murran. You are to witness that we have just wagered ten thousand apiece on the Jericho Mountain race. Crusader to beat Fury."

"But, colonel," gasped out young Mervin, hurrying up, "who's to ride Crusader?"

"One man," said the colonel, "or no one."

CHAPTER II.

THE CARDBOARD NOTICE.

THERE was no doubt but that the colonel regretted his bet ten minutes after it was made. He was heard to walk up and down in his room for a long time that night before he went to bed. And the next morning early, he rode briskly to the town of Twin Creeks.

In Twin Creeks, he went straight to the house of Sheriff Tom Younger, that man of wisdom and of might.

"Sheriff," said he, "I see you are in health."

"You never seen me no other ways,"

the sheriff assured him. "What might be wrong with you, Mr. Dinsmore?"

"Nothing. I've come to ask you a question."

"Set down and rest your feet, colonel. What might it be?"

They sat down on the veranda of the old house, about which the huge cottonwoods made a semblance of coolness.

"I've come to talk about Harry Camden."

"It ain't the best thing I'd pick for talkin'," he observed.

"I know that. What I wish to know is: Exactly what is there against Harry Camden?"

"You ask that?" shouted the sheriff. "Why man, ain't it Harry Camden that stole Crusader?"

"He did," admitted the colonel, "but you know that Crusader is back in his corral."

"Because we made it so hot for the hound that he had to bring back your hoss!"

"Now, sheriff, that's hardly logical. He proved that he could run away from everything in the countryside while he was on the back of Crusader."

"Him? Not at all! It was luck that saved him, the day that he was hunted through the hills."

The colonel had not come to argue in this fashion, so he remained discreetly silent for the moment. Then he went on quietly: "That's the capital charge against him, then, the stealing of Crusader?"

"That? The devil, man; I should say not. Ain't it Harry Camden that come in and tried to wreck Twin Creeks?"

"When was that?"

The sheriff groaned at the mere recollection.

"That jail was my pride," he said. "There never was a man that broke out or bought his way out. I had steel bars that I could trust. I had guards that I could trust. Then along comes this here Harry Camden. He makes a fool out of the best guard that ever stood over the jail. He busted in, he took out young Ned Manners, and he got clean away with him. Maybe you ain't heard about that more'n a dozen times?" he added sourly. "The boys'll never forget it, nor let me forget it. I ain't been able to mention the jail for months for fear of bein' laughed at."

"And yet," said the rancher, "the man whom Camden took out of the jail was innocent of any crime. He could never be put back into the prison, could he?"

"That ain't the point. We ain't talkin' about young Manners. We're talkin' about this Camden. He's guilty as the devil, partner!"

"And what else besides breaking into the jail?"

"A nacheral born thief. He's swiped stuff from twenty men!"

"I understand about that. When he needs ammunition, he rides to the nearest ranch and takes what he wants, but doesn't he always pay for it in his own way? If he takes food to-day, he comes down from the hills next week with a load of venison that will feed the whole ranch for three days. Isn't that the way he works it?"

"You can't take stuff and then try to pay for it later," insisted the sheriff. "It ain't the law. A gent has to be willing to sell what he owns before you can out and buy it. And then pay your own price!"

"But Camden usually pays three times as much as it's worth."

"I dunno—I dunno!" said the sheriff, frowning and shrugging his shoulders in a manner which very plainly indicated that he was tired of this conversation, or at least a good deal embarrassed by the direction which it was now taking. "The outstandin' fact is that young Harry Camden has made a pile of trouble. Folks don't feel safe ridin' through the mountains. That big devil might jump on 'em. Look at him ridin' right into this here town and stickin' *me* up—right on this here porch—right——"

He choked with fury. "Yonder into them bushes he chucked the gun that he took from me."

The sheriff drew out a long Colt forty-five. "And I says to myself then and I says to myself now that some day this here Colt will have a chance to talk right back to him, and say what it's got on its mind!"

"These various thefts," suggested the colonel, "might be compromised, I presume?"

"How d'you mean?"

"If people thought that Camden would pay back the value of any actual claims which they might have against him——"

"I dunno," said the sheriff. "I never heard it put that way."

"How many," said the colonel. "How many actual complaints have been lodged against Camden by people who——"

"Complaints? I hear 'em near every day."

"They want him jailed?"

"Sure. I don't have to ask. He's a crook, ain't he?"

The colonel sighed. It was a difficult proposition to persuade the sheriff. And suddenly he said: "Sheriff Younger, there is preëminently only one thing in which you are interested."

"I dunno till you tell me what."

"The maintenance of the dignity of the law, sir."

"Sure, sure. Speakin' by and large, that's the thing."

"This affair of Camden in Twin Creeks—that is what troubles you most?"

"I dunno that I'd say that."

"Surely," said the colonel, "you would hold no malice against this fellow Camden because he liberated from jail a man who was in danger because he was accused of a crime which Camden himself had committed? And if he came to hold you up on this very porch, wasn't it to assure you that the guilt belonged on his own head and not on that of young Manners?"

"Look at it that way," said the sheriff more gently, "and there's something in what you say. About him busting into the jail—or what he done to me—I guess that I ain't aimin' to hold that agin' him! Not at all! If the gents that have got claims agin' him would give them up—he could go free, for all of me!"

It was a huge concession; and the colonel instantly took it up.

"I will pay every cent," he said, "of every claim which is made against Camden by any and all. You may publish that. Let people bring their charge and their proof to you, and I'll pay every cent of it without too much debate on the subject."

It staggered the sheriff. He sat for a moment as one dazed. Then he turned his head and examined the features of the colonel cautiously, as though fearing that the offer might be qualified with a smile. But there was no qualification. The colonel was obviously perfectly serious.

"I dunno that I understand," muttered the sheriff. "He swiped your horse and now——"

"He brought back Crusader. Will you do what I ask?"

After all, the sheriff was as generous a man as ever lived. He swore violently a few times. Then he shook hands with the colonel and vowed, with just as much additional profanity, that he would be glad to do as much as he could to give Camden another chance.

That was the reason that, the next day, a singular notice appeared in the *Twin Creeks News*. In a week it brought in merely half a dozen applications for relief. And all of these were trifling sums. The others who had been plundered by Camden seemed to be perfectly willing to let the matter drop; or perhaps they had been so generously repaid in kind that they would have welcomed another visit from the thief. All of those who made application received instantly the cash they demanded from the hand of the editor of the *Twin Creeks News*, who asked them, in return, to renounce

all legal claims against the criminal who was then at large. And it was done.

The criminal record of Harry Camden was so securely purged that there remained against him only the voice of the colonel himself and the sheriff, and the sheriff and the colonel chose to hold their piece.

When the week had ended and the colonel and the sheriff decided that there would be no future applications, Mr. Dinsmore went into his room at his ranch and wrote out an announcement in large letters on a stiff piece of cardboard.

It read as follows:

HARRY CAMDEN: If you will trust yourself to an interview with me, you will find me any night after to-night, and beginning with to-night—Tuesday—alone in my room, unarmed. I shall be very glad to see you when you choose and will vouch for it that you will learn of matters which will be greatly to your satisfaction.

ROBERT OLIVER DINSMORE.

This he carried to the corral fence and tacked it securely to the outer side of a post. Charles Mervin read the sign first and came hurrying into the house.

"Colonel," he said, "do you mean to tell me that you would trust yourself in the hands of that murderous villain—alone—and actually unarmed?"

"I mean exactly that," said the colonel, who disliked explanations, and he refused to say another qualifying word.

Charles Mervin did not trust himself to make further comment. He went to the open air and walked up and down to cool off and adjust his thoughts to this astonishing situation. He had only one desire, and that was to preserve the life of his friend.

CHAPTER III.

PROTECTING THE COLONEL.

CERTAIN recollections decided Charles Mervin that it would be folly for him to await the coming of the big man and to try to check the onslaught of Harry Camden. Better, far better, to gather to his aid some man of known talent as a fighter and of unquestioned courage. The two of them, working together, might be able to really protect the rancher.

The person he sought out in the bunk house was Dan Johnson, long, freckled, silent, mighty of hand and deadly with a gun. Dan Johnson listened to the strange story without saying a word, because words were never current coin with the big Swede. But when the story was ended, Dan Johnson took up his sombrero, clamped it hard on his head, girded his guns around his waist—for Dan was a true two-gun man—and then accompanied Charles Mervin to the house.

He agreed implicitly with Mervin that the only thing to do was to sit quietly near the room of the rancher and wait until the man from the mountains came. Then they would strike him down.

"Which it looks like settin' a trap for a lobo," stated Mr. Dan Johnson. "It looks sort of sneakin' work."

"What is he?" asked Mervin. "Very much worse than a wolf, in fact. Is he not?"

Dan Johnson was forced to agree. "After all," said he, "he's outlawed. We're safe."

"No longer outlawed," answered Mervin gloomily. "He was brought back inside the law to-day, because the colonel paid all his debts. And persuaded the sheriff to drop his grudge. He's back inside the law."

"Suppose we drop him, then?"

"If we find him sneaking into the house? No jury in the country would ever find us guilty for that!"

They sat down in the garden, close under the side of a strong hedge, commanding from their position the little balcony on which the two windows of the colonel's room opened. There seemed no reasonable doubt that the man from the mountains would approach the house from this direction, and coming at them across the open lawn, they

would be able to challenge him, and then pick him off as they chose.

It was careful work, however. They had to deal with one who carried with him the brain of a man and the sense equipment of an animal. Therefore they could not drowse at their post. They had to sweep the lawn constantly and anxiously. They had to watch the road which twisted in a dim white course over the distant hill and into the next valley.

"The colonel believes that Camden is watching the horse pretty closely," said Mervin at last. "You would think that he was confident that Camden came down every night to see the horse!"

"Maybe he does!" murmured Dan Johnson.

"What?" exclaimed the other. "Comes down here to the ranch and risks his neck to see the horse?"

"We've found the print of his foot four times," said Dan. "Twice it was bare, and by the size of it, I guess that it was Camden's, all right. Then, over by the watering trough, we seen what looked like the print of a pretty rough-made moccasin. I guess that was Camden again."

"You didn't tell the colonel?"

"What good would it do?"

"He'd double the guards on Crusader. Do you think that he can afford to lose that horse, Johnson?"

Johnson lighted a cigarette. "He's guarded enough. That fence is enough, and they's enough padlocks on the gate to break the heart of any crook that ever tries to get through 'em. No, sir, Camden ain't gunna sashay into that there corral and get away with the hoss. Not unless he had half an hour to cut his way through the fence, and a plumb silent saw to do the work for him. Then he might have a chance to get Crusader out, but just the same, he's been able to get in to the hoss. I guess half a dozen times he's been in to see him. That's why Crusader is dyin' on his feet."

Mervin started. "You think that he's poisoning the horse? Do you think that, Johnson?"

Johnson shook his head. "Seems," he said, "like it would please you a lot to have him turn out the worst skunk in the world. Well, sir, that ain't what I mean. Maybe he's bad, but I dunno that he's bad enough to kill a helpless hoss like Crusader. What I mean is that about the time when Crusader begins to get used to things in the corral and in the stall, and about the time that he begins to walk up and down the fence a little bit less, and take a pile more notice of his shuck, along comes Camden again, and the next morning we find old Crusader out there in the corral starin' at the mountains, and neighing at the hawks over his head, and bustin' his heart to get through that fence and away!"

To this Mervin listened, greatly impressed. "A very queer fellow," said he.

"If he could act like other folks," declared Dan Johnson, "there wouldn't be none better than this here Camden. You take it by and large, it was pretty square of him to bring back Crusader after the colonel done him that good turn on the trail!"

"I fail to see that point," objected Mervin stiffly. "He owed his life to the generosity of the colonel—the absurd generosity of the colonel, I think that I may call it. Naturally even the wildest man would wish to make some sort of a return. He could hardly have done otherwise."

At this, Dan Johnson smiled through the darkness. "Look here, Mr. Mervin," he said, "I figger what the rest of the boys figger—that you got a reason for wanting to see this Camden put out of the way."

"I?" cried Mervin in the strongest protest. "By no means! What on earth could the fellow mean to me?"

"It's only hearsay," said the cow-puncher, and offered no more.

"Tell me what you're driving at,"

insisted Mervin. "I'd like to know—no matter whether or not there's anything in it—and of course there can't be!"

"Of course," said the cow-puncher, "there ain't anything in it, but the boys have got to talk, you know. There ain't very much else to do, Mr. Mervin. What they say, I don't mind tellin', is that you see a good deal of pretty Ruth Manners. Which everybody else would like to, too, if they had the time."

"A lovely girl," admitted Charles Mervin at once. "But what on earth have my calls on Miss Manners to do with this brute, this cave man, Harry Camden?"

"Why," murmured Dan Johnson, with some embarrassment, and straining his eyes toward the other through the darkness of the night, "they say that Harry Camden is sort of interested in the same place, and that maybe you'd like to have him out of the way to get clearer sailin'. I've blurted it all out. There's what folks say. I guess that there ain't nothin' in it, Mervin!"

Mr. Charles Mervin felt very much like the ugly lady of the story who refused to have any mirrors in her house, but could not help seeing herself in the water one day as she leaned to drink from the still waters of the pool.

So it was with Mervin. He had been telling himself in such a convincing manner that he desired only the protection of the good rancher, that he had almost persuaded himself that he had no ulterior motive whatever. Now, being brought up short and checked with the facts of the case, he could not help wincing. For he saw himself and the condition of his mind too clearly.

He had never admitted before this moment, really, that he loved Ruth Manners. She had been merely a pretty picture which remained a vast deal of the time in his mind. But now she was something more. He could not avoid seeing that what the cow-punchers rumored among themselves was the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He loved Ruth Manners. And he dreaded the rivalry of that wild man, that singular will-o'-the-wisp, Harry Camden. And how fortunate it would be if he could brush the thought of Camden from the mind of the girl forever—with a bullet!

He recovered from the brown study into which he had fallen. He looked to the cow-puncher. "Of course," said Mervin, "this is a very serious thing. And of course there's nothing in it."

"Sure," said the good-natured companion. "I'm just telling you. Leave it go at that."

They became silent again. Then they watched a lantern carried from the bunk house toward the corral, the immense, shadowy legs of the carrier swaying dimly across the fences and the barns as he strode like a giant. Then the antern was swallowed in the black mouth of a barn. From the belly of the barn it cast forth only an occasional ray or sparkle. All the rest was darkness. And in the darkness nothing lived, nothing stirred, except an occasional whispering of the wind in the big oak tree which grew on the farther side of the hedge and extended its strong branches across the place where they sat. They held their breath and waited.

"Could he get up to the house from the far side of the hedge?" asked Mervin of his companion in a sudden whisper.

"No chance of that. He'd have to get across the hedge before he could come at the house, I guess."

"Johnson!"

"Well?"

"Look sharp!"

"D'you hear something?"

"I *feel* something!"

"What you mean?"

"There's a danger near us, Johnson! I can feel the chill of it in my bones."

"The devil, Mr. Mervin," said the other sharply. "What could there be that's wrong? Just look around you!

There ain't a thing!" He added: "I guess you been thinkin' about this till you got all wrought up and——" Here, as he raised his head toward the tree, his voice ended in a gasp. He had no chance or time to cry out. There was only a brief gurgling sound which formed vaguely from the hollow of his throat.

Mervin glanced sharply up in the same direction and he had scant time to glimpse a body descending from the limb of the tree which arched above them. The form struck Dan Johnson and crumpled the big cow-puncher against the ground as if he were a figure of brittle paper.

Mervin himself had barely time to snatch the revolver from his pocket, but he did not have time to press the trigger with his finger before the form of the assailant lifted itself from the helpless body of Johnson. Then there was revealed to the terrified Mervin no wild beast, but a thing in the shape of a man that sprang at him from all fours, like a very beast indeed.

A hand whose fingers threatened to crush the bones of his wrist first fastened upon him. And the gun fell to the ground. Then a fist which struck as a club strikes, landed with full force across the side of his jaw, and darkness dropped heavily across his brain.

When he recovered, he was dangling in mid-air, with the brightness of the stars swimming dizzily above his eyes. A moment later he had recovered enough of his senses to know that he was being carried through the balcony window and into the room of the rancher.

Then he was caught by the nape of the neck, and thrust forward at arm's length by the big man who had captured him. Before him sat the colonel himself, staring wildly at this odd scene.

"I came along trustin' to your word, colonel," said the deep rumbling voice of Harry Camden. "And this is part of what I found waitin' to murder me!"

CHAPTER IV.

CAMDEN TO RIDE CRUSADER.

THE surprise, the grief, the fury of the colonel made him half rise from his chair and then fall back into it. After this, he fastened his glance upon the white face of young Mervin and saw a great blue and red lump forming on the side of his jaw. Certainly that youth had received at least a partial punishment to reward him for his ill doing.

"Mervin," he said at last, "I am trying to believe that this thing is a dream. Do you mean to say that you attacked Camden when he came to the house upon my public and special invitation?"

"It was for the sake of your own safety, colonel," stammered Mervin. "If Camden will stop choking me——"

He was released, and sank into a chair where he fumbled at his throat and lay back breathing hard. He had received a shock far more severe mentally than physically.

"We were afraid, sir," he said at last, "that this man would do you some harm."

"Camden," said the colonel, turning his back on Mervin, "I hope you will believe me when I tell you that I had nothing to do with this—unhappy affair?"

The big man nodded. "There ain't any harm done," he said. "Let him run along and keep away from me, though. It sort of works me up, colonel, to look at him."

"Mervin," said the colonel coldly, "I cannot help thinking that Mr. Camden is very generous—and gives you very good advice. I'll talk with you later about this affair."

So Mervin, with a final glance of grief and rage at his conqueror, rose and left the room. The colonel, in the meantime, had pointed out a chair which The Brute took. For "brute" was the first word that would have leaped into any mind at the first sight of him. Two hundred pounds of brawn and bone,

he gave an impression of far greater size. He seemed a giant. His clothes, perhaps, helped toward that impression. They were primitive things. A flap of skin sewed roughly together served as mocasins. His trousers were frayed through at the knees. Undressed deerskin made his jacket. He carried no gun. There was only a long sheath knife at his belt, cased in a homemade scabbard of horsehide. His hat was a battered piece of old felt, faded from its original black to green. From under its short brim a brown, big-featured face, and bright, steady eyes looked out at the colonel.

"Camden," said the colonel, "before I'm through talking, you will understand how greatly it would be to my disinterest to plan such an attack on you; to say nothing of what a man of honor would feel about such a matter!"

Camden made a gesture which dismissed the entire story of the attack which had been planned against him. "Honest men," said he, "are like black foxes. You can tell 'em by a look. I wouldn't be here, colonel, if I had any sort of a doubt about you."

At this, the colonel sighed with relief. "It's about Crusader," he said at last.

"You still got him," said the big man, snapping out the words. "That fence of yours is hard for me to beat. But I'll figger out a way, pretty soon."

"Perhaps," said the colonel, "you will not have to plan. I want to ask you, in the first place, if you think that with you on his back any horse in this country could beat Crusader on a cross-country ride?"

Camden smiled. "That ain't worth talkin' about," he declared. "I got no money to put up; otherwise, I'd make a bet. I mean, if I was on the real Crusader—not the skinny old black hoss that you got in your corral."

"Take Crusader with you," said the colonel bluntly. "Handle him as you please; get him in shape. You still have five weeks. In the meantime, I'll enter his name in the Jericho Mountain race. Camden, will you ride him in that, for me?"

"And afterward?" asked Camden sharply.

"Why, afterward——" the voice of the colonel trailed away. It was what he had known must come into their discussion.

"I've arranged matters with the sheriff," said he. "You are now a citizen in good standing in the community, Camden. The law has no hold on you. I thought that, considering this small service, you might be willing to handle Crusader and ride him in the race for me. For that, plus a considerable sum of money, of course."

Camden shook his head. "The law don't bother me none," he observed. "It's sort of a game to play with it, colonel. What gents have done for me was never none too gentle. What the law has done for me ain't been none too gentle."

He thrust out his great craglike jaw as he spoke. "I don't ask no favors," said Camden. "I don't give none. I got no regrets about what I've done. I got no regrets about what the others have done to me. It's a fight, and I like fightin'. I was made for it, and I was trained for it. And I ain't got the worst of the game yet! Now, what we're talkin' about is Crusader. I ride him in this race and win it for—*you!*"

He put a solemn accent on the last word.

"Me and Crusader walk around and get used to one another again," said he. "And when we're pretty friendly, then I got to bring him back to your corral and put him up there? Colonel, I dunno that I'd better try it. I might do my best to get that hoss back into your corral, but it might be too hard for me to do it. Colonel, you been square with me; and I want to go square with you. Don't ask too much out of me."

It was perhaps the longest speech

that Harry Camden had made in his entire life before; certainly never again thereafter did he say so much consecutively. Even the colonel was astonished.

"Crusader's disposition has changed," said he. "Do you think that you could still handle him?"

"I figger that I could, maybe," said the big man.

"Suppose we go out and see."

They left the house and went to the forty-acre run; they unlocked the gate, and entered. And before the first lock had been snapped behind them, a rush and a whir of hoofs sounded in their ears.

"Crusader's got my scent," said Camden, as the colonel shrank away for safety and even laid a hand on the rail of the fence to climb out of the enclosure.

The mighty hand of Camden fell upon his shoulder and drew him back. "There ain't nothing to fear," said the man of the mountains. "Crusader won't do you no harm. He won't see nothin' but me."

With this, he stepped boldly forward and met the charge of the black monster.

There was only starlight for the colonel to see what followed, but that starlight was enough. He watched Crusader dance and plunge and frolic around Camden. He saw the great stallion rear as though he would beat the man into the ground, but his forehoofs descended gently. He saw the horse frolic like a dog, which cannot show its joy except with its teeth on its master's hand.

And when at last Crusader came to a pause, his head was high, the arch was back in his long neck, and his eyes were glittering again. Magic had transformed him. And Camden came slowly forward, with the horse following at his heels.

"It is a marvelous thing," said the colonel, with all of his heart in his voice. "It is a very great thing, my friend. Will you tell me how you managed it?"

"By never usin' a whip," said Camden. "And by lookin' at him the same way that you look at a man. When you look at a man, you figger on what is goin' on behind his eyes. When most folks look at a hoss, they don't figger on nothin' except how he's actin'—what he's doing with his heels—his head, and all that. But hoss has got a mind. A hoss has got a soul. If they's a heaven, colonel, and I can get there, it'll be on Crusader's back. If they's a hell and I land there, Crusader, he'd come rarin' and tarin' down to hell and take me plumb out. That's about the way of it."

And the colonel, although he was a hard-headed man, saw and watched and believed even those extravagant words.

"In fact," said he, "Crusader is your horse, Camden. I've paid money for him. But you've made him know his master." He sighed bitterly. "I've never been able to touch that horse, Camden, unless at least two men were holding him!"

"Colonel," said the wild man, "you can't hold no hoss like this with a rope. But look here. I ain't even touchin' him. But you could walk around him and lay a hand on him where you pleased."

"Do you mean that?"

"I mean just that."

The colonel gathered his courage like a robe about him. He advanced. He stretched out a tentative hand. Crusader snorted and tossed his head.

"He'd tear my arm off!" breathed the colonel, stepping back.

"He won't touch you," insisted Camden. "Try him."

And he added to the horse a brief word—or perhaps it was a mere wordless murmur. At any rate, it made Crusader stand like a rock. And the colonel, with fear and delight in his soul, touched that fine head fairly between the nose, and ran his fingers lightly down to the velvet of the muzzle.

Crusader did not stir, nor did he move

when the colonel slipped his hand down the silken neck of the stallion.

"Camden," he said, "if my heart were big enough to do such a thing, I'd give this horse to you. Because it's to you that he belongs. But I'll do something else, which is as generous as I can be. If you'll ride him in the Jericho race, I'll lend him to you for six months. If you win the race, you can have him for a year."

"And then?" asked Camden.

"Then we'll see."

There was a pause, during which Camden stared through the dim light at the face of the colonel.

"He's your hoss," said he. "And I'd go to hell and back for the sake of ridin' him only one day."

CHAPTER V.

"THE BRUTE'S" RESOLVE.

THE whole force of the big Dinsmore ranch stood about to see famous Harry Camden ride famous Crusader away from the corral, but they were disappointed. He did not even mount the stallion. But when the gate was unlocked, Camden entered and came out with Crusader behind him. Straight across the plains toward the mountains walked Camden, and just behind him jogged Crusader, his flanks a series of high lights and shadows, so deep were the hollows between his ribs.

Those who hunted for sensations, followed the wild man across the plain for some time, until Harry Camden turned back on the riders and drew a long Winchester from the holster which ran diagonally down the blanket which he used in lieu of a saddle on the great horse. The view of that gun served instead of a harangue. The followers observed, noted, and departed with haste.

And Camden went on for the mountains. Crusader was lean and weak with leanness. The journey through the foothills was most exhausting, but Camden knew what he wanted, and he pressed relentlessly forward until he had climbed above the first range, and then journeyed laboriously on to the second. On the farther side of the crest he found the place. It was a narrow plateau, perhaps half a mile wide and eight or ten miles in length. It was fenced away from sheep or cattle or even the deer by the precipitous rocky slopes on either side. To be sure, the mountain sheep, those irresistible climbers, loved that airy pasture and were often near it, but they did not come in sufficient numbers to seriously deplete its stores. The bunch grass, that finest of all food for cattle, grew thick on this upland. The sun had cured it as well, and better, than the finest haymakers in the world could have done. It was sweet to the tooth of Crusader.

There he ate his fill morning, noon, and night, and when he cared for water, there was a rill which tumbled down from the eastern height and pooled itself in a crystal little lake at one end of the plateau. He had exercise, too, even during those days of the upbuilding of his strength. He was ridden at a gentle pace up and down the plateau with the weight of Harry Camden on his back, first walking, then trotting, then cantering, but inside of a week, Camden let him gallop.

Another week and a third ended, before he was willing to loose the reins on Crusader, but as the third week terminated, he would sometimes cry aloud to the big black stallion and send him winging over the rolling surface at breakneck speed. It was not running; it was flying, and the horse loved it as much as a man.

Once a week Colonel Dinsmore traveled up into the foothills, and Camden brought the great stallion down. And every week, as he saw the changes in the big animal, the colonel marveled. The first seven days worked a great transformation. By the end of the first fortnight the original and natural strength of Crusader showed through

his shining skin, and the big ropy muscles working plainly.

"I am going back to bet against the field," said Colonel Dinsmore. "And the field is growing every moment, Camden. The entry fee is raised to a hundred dollars for every horse, and there are over sixty entries. Think of it, Camden! They have thoroughbreds from England and from France. They have Arabs, Kentucky bred. They have an Arabian mare which has been shipped all the way from the desert of Arabia. They have mustangs of the pure hell-fire breed. There are a few mongrels of the range—crosses of unknown blood, but every one a horse of tried endurance. Every one of them is being worked across the mountains now. They are growing used to the rocks and the steep places. There is only one devil that worries me, Camden. You are a big fellow; and Crusader is a big horse. Won't your own weight kill you? The best climbers ought in reason to be the small tough horses with the very light riders. What will Crusader do among the rocks?"

Camden opened his lips to speak, but apparently he decided that argument or illustration was useless. He merely stated a calm conviction: "Crusader will not be beaten," said he, and there let the matter rest.

After all, it is much easier to put faith in miracles than in common sense. There is in every man a desire to believe in the impossible. So it was with the colonel. He stared at the giant, formed a question in his mind, and then decided that it would be well enough to let matters stand unexamined. If this strange fellow, this child of nature, this unexplained mystery among men, was certain that he could win the race with Crusader, by all means let the thought be cherished in him!

So felt the colonel. And, half an hour afterward, he was started for his ranch again.

He was gone some time before Harry Camden remembered that he had not yet asked a most important question concerning the course over which the race was to be run. For rocks and for mountains he would answer for the big stallion. But he must know the nature of that wide stretch of desert south of Jerico Mountains over which they must pass. If it were firm ground, let the heat and the distance be what it might, the confidence of The Brute would not alter. But if it were soft sand, that was very different. For, in that case, Crusader must be given work in the same footing. He must be trained to plod patiently through sand fetlock deep, and learn the art of desert travel. For it *is* an art, and a horse which attempts to fight his way through will exhaust his strength quickly, whereas the horse which goes delicately, putting down the hoof flat and without a drive, gets on famously well. Camden had seen mustangs cross the desert sands with almost the ease of camels. This was the question for the answer to which he hastened after the colonel. He blanketed Crusader again, leaped onto his back, and presently was coursing down the side of the long mountain in pursuit.

The colonel, however, must have taken advantage of the fine spirits of his horse and loosed the reins on it. For it was nowhere to be seen, though Camden could see plainly the sign of its trail along the slope. He prepared himself for a longer chase, therefore, and he had just drawn back Crusader to a swinging, effortless long gallop, when he saw where another rider had cut in and followed the same course.

Presently, in fact, he saw the horse and rider looming ahead of him, with the sun flashing on the sweating flanks of the animal. He recognized it at once. It was the fine mare of Charles Mervin, a beautiful brown horse with a white-stockinged left foreleg and another white-stockinged right hind leg. By that mark alone he could have recognized the animal, but even without those marks,

he felt that he would have known the rider. It was Mervin himself, and of all men in the world he was least welcome to the eye of Harry Camden, for this was the most ardent suitor of Ruth Manners; this was he who, as Camden had reason to believe, was the favored lover of the girl.

Even now, indeed, Mervin was changing the direction of his mare and turning her toward that point of the compass where the Manners house lay.

It seemed odd to Camden. Here was a man from the household of Dinsmore who had ridden in the colonel's direction far up into the mountains; and yet he had not accompanied Dinsmore. Certainly he must have known that the colonel was riding, and where. Why, then, had Mervin chosen to go alone? Why was he not returning now in the company of the colonel? And what had brought Mervin here among the highlands?

To see Crusader. There seemed no other object. Why, then, had he wished to see the stallion in secret, and spy upon the big horse from a distance?

Any one of these questions would have caused Camden to follow the other. He swung away from the trail of Dinsmore and followed close on the trail of Mervin, keeping just out of sight, with always one range of hills between him and the other.

They dipped out of the higher and steeper hills. They came into rolling ground in the dusk of the day, and at last, as he had surmised, Mervin came through the evening to the little hollow in which the Manners' house stood.

He reined Crusader into a clump of trees and stared gloomily down to the little shack; it brought back to him with a bitter vividness two great moments in his life—the happiest and the most tragic.

Then the door of the house opened and Mervin came out with the girl. Neither her father nor her brother were with them. And it was another small touch which deepened the surety of Camden. For why should she wish to walk with young Mervin alone through the dusk of the day unless she loved him? So, with a swelling heart, Camden watched them walking up the hill. He feared, for a moment, that they were bound for the trees where he sat with Crusader, but they turned past him and strolled by so near that he could well nigh make out their faces through the shadows; all that they said was perfectly clear.

And they were talking of what most people in that district had in their minds most vividly at this time: the Jericho race.

"Ned has been to Twin Creeks to hear the talk," said the voice of Ruth. "Every one is talking about the two Arabs—Ali and Musa. Have you seen them?"

"They may do well enough across the flat," said Mervin authoritatively. "But they'll never last in the mountains. That's where they'll fail. Is Ned betting?"

"Of course. Every man is! You can guess whom he picked out?"

"I can't imagine."

"Crusader!"

"Ah?" said the other. "It looks as though he'll have the most backing. At least from people around here. They've heard so much about him! But I don't think he'll ever start."

"Why not?"

"No one but Camden can ride him."

"Why shouldn't Camden ride him?"

"Too heavy, for one thing. But aside from that, he'll never get into the saddle to ride that race."

"What do you mean?"

"It's very simple. You know that all the horses and all the riders have to be in Jericho for a week before the race. That's arranged this year so that the crowds can look them over and make their choices, of course. Well, Ruth, can you imagine Camden living among other men for a whole week—among

rough fellows such as will be in Jericho? He'll have a fist fight the first day and a gun fight the second. And when the race begins, he'll be resting in jail. Sheriff Younger has sworn that if Camden so much as raises a hand, he'll take no further chances, but lock him up. And you can't blame the sheriff, can you?"

At this, she paused and faced Mervin. "You hate him, don't you?" she asked.

"Camden? Certainly not!"

"Well," she said, after a pause during which Camden hungered to hear her speak in his defence, "I suppose that you're right. He's nothing but a wild man. I suppose he'd kill a man with no more thought than most people would kill a chicken. Did you ever notice his eyes?"

"Yes."

"It makes me shiver just to think of them; but I hope he wins."

"Why?"

"Ned has followed a 'hunch.' He's bet every cent he can put his hands on that Crusader will win. I don't know what we'll do if he fails."

In the darkness among the trees, as they passed on, the big man formed two solemn resolutions. The first was that Crusader should not lose if he ran the race; the second was that nothing under heaven should tempt him to any act of violence that would keep him from riding.

CHAPTER VI.

MERVIN DECIDES AGAINST CAMDEN.

HE waited to hear and see no more. He reined Crusader back into the night and fled softly back toward the mountains. And in the meantime, having strolled to the rim of the hollow, the girl and Mervin came back again.

They no longer talked of the race, now. It was quite another subject, quite another tone. Mr. Charles Mervin was telling her plainly and forcefully that he was breaking his heart on her account and that he would die without her. At this, the heartless girl laughed. Oh, that Camden could have been near to hear that laughter, for it would have taken a great burden from his mind.

That same mirth made Mr. Mervin stand very straight and stiff, and grow extremely red. She explained at once, and without embarrassment.

"I'm mighty flattered by all that you've been saying," she told him. "But of course I don't believe a word of it. You like me because I'm different. Not because you have to have me. I'm not the kind of girl that you're used to in the East. But suppose we were married. Do you think it would turn out well? Could you get along in country like this? Or could I get along in the city?"

"If you let me take the chance——"

"That would be a wild gamble," said Ruth Manners.

At this, he looked at her sharply, through the dark. In fact, he was immensely pleased by this mental acuteness. He was not one of those who care for a clinging vine as a wife. He liked cleverness, and she was very clever. She saw through him just far enough to make him nervous, though he still felt that the secrets of his nature were securely kept from her.

"If you really cared for a man," said he, "would you ask all of these questions, and have all of these doubts about East and West and city and country?"

"I guess not," answered she with stunning frankness. "That's partly why I know that I don't care for you enough to marry you safely, Charles. Because my idea of love is a thing that will carry me off on wings. I won't be able to help myself."

"You'll never find a man in the world," said Charles Mervin with infinite conviction, "who'll be able to take you so far off your feet as that."

Her answer took his breath. "I've already met one who did—almost!"

"What!" cried Mervin.

"I have only talked with him once, and that was the strangest talk any woman ever had with any man. He's the only man I was ever afraid of. And if he wanted my love, I think he could take it, whether I wanted him to or not!"

Mervin could not believe his ears. "What man is that?" he asked finally.

"Of course I couldn't tell you his name."

"Why not? If I know what you really like, perhaps I could make myself more after that pattern."

At this she laughed again, but with such an open frankness that he could not read malice into the sound.

"I laugh," she said, "because if you knew his name, you'd be horrified. There's nobody in the world like him, Charles."

"By Jove," cried Mervin, "I think you're more than half in love with this man already, without knowing it!"

She was silent for a moment. He feared that he had offended her, until she spoke again, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps I am," she said. "I don't know, really. Perhaps I am!"

"I mean," he said, "that you may be caught by some foolish illusion——" He corrected himself with haste: "I don't intend that as it sounds. But you see, sometimes even the strongest minded people are taken off their balance by strange things——"

"And what could be stranger than a wild man?" asked the girl, nodding in the night.

"A wild man?"

"Just that!"

A chill of conviction darted through him. "Ruth," he cried, "you're talking about that unhuman devil—big Harry Camden!"

The words came out before he knew it—before he was prepared for them. He would have given a great deal to recall them after it was too late—after he realized the absurdity of what he had said. But the greatest shock of all was her answer.

"How did you guess that, Charles?"

"I'm right, then?" breathed Mervin. "It's Camden whom you prefer to me—I mean——"

"Don't ask me!" cried the girl. "I don't know. I can't think. My mind's all whirlin'. Charles, I'm going in!"

He did not attempt to restrain her, but he watched the door open, saw her stand for an instant against the rectangle of yellow lamplight, then saw her shut into the black wall of the house.

So Mervin went slowly to his horse, and mounted it, and began to ride hard through the night. He had made up his mind not ten seconds after the girl had spoken. What he decided was, first of all, that she was far more deeply attracted by Camden than she herself realized. In the second place, the form of Harry Camden loomed upon his eye again. He had always thought of him as a mere abysmal brute. He looked back into the picture of the man now and felt that he saw in it something which might prove attractive even to a woman—especially to a vigorous-minded girl like Ruth Manners. She had touched the huge fellow with the wand of romance and converted him, in a trice, into a hero. All that was strange about him helped on the illusion. And Charles Mervin, shuddering, nodded with a deeper conviction. If he desired her in the first place as his own wife, he desired her in the second place to save her from the terrible fate of becoming the bride of such a creature as Camden, that mighty-handed wild brute who happened to wear the form of a man.

And, before the door had closed upon her, he decided that the next step in his courtship of the lady should preferably be the removal of Mr. Camden from his path as a rival. He was a brisk young man, this Charles Mervin. Now that he had made up his mind, he saw that two things could be accomplished in one mission.

He covered five miles of country until

he came to the house which he had in mind. It was the remnant of what had once been a great ranch. The house itself had been a huge three-story affair, with four wooden turrets, each with a single hexagonal room in it, set off with six shuttered windows. And the main part of the building was on an equal scale.

Even in the flourishing times of the ranch, there had never been a need for a house half of this size; and since the fortunes of the Loring family fell into a decline, it had been a great white elephant on the hands of the descendantts of that first Loring who had made fame and fortune raising cattle. Twin Creeks had known him as its first rich citizen; now it knew Pete Loring, his descendant two generations removed, as one of its most penniless vagabonds.

For Pete was too filled with the greatness of his family in the past to be contented with any mere job as a rider on the range. He could ride and rope and shoot with the best of them; but the only accomplishment on which he prided himself and which he took pains to cultivate, was his natural skill with a gun. For ability as a warrior was not out of key with the talents of a gentleman; but Pete felt that the other accomplishments of a cow-puncher were rather to be frowned upon in himself. He had grown up in the last flush of the Loring prosperity, when they were still able to spend freely. He had as good an education as money was able to buy for him, and in a high-priced school he had picked up a taste for tailor-made cigarettes and wine. He had learned how to dress and how to talk as befitted a gentleman. His manners were smooth, his address could be ingratiating when he chose to make it so.

But as a rule, he did not choose. For he felt that his neighbors about Twin Creeks were frankly beneath him. Moreover, he knew that the rough people in that vicinity were in the habit of smiling at his pride behind his back. They feared to affront him face to face because of his known flightiness of temper, and because of his dreadful certainty with a gun. But at the same time, among hard-working, careless-mannered cow-punchers and cowmen, he was considered in the light of a somber joke.

All of this, because he was a sensitive man, he realized perfectly. It deepened the hatred and the contempt with which he repaid their scorn. It gave a darker shadow to his character. And he still felt that all of those prosperous ranches which had been split off, morsel by morsel, from the great mass of the one-time Loring estate, were owned by people who had pirated their wealth from his ancestors. He considered himself their victim. And when he saw their fine horses and watched their careless expenditures, he begrudged them all of their dollars.

Strange fancies grow up in an idle brain, and in the mind of young Peter Loring there was born a belief that, sooner or later, he was certain to have redress in some manner. The land which had once belonged to his forefathers he felt should still be in the family, and he had a sort of sacred and inalienable right upon it. That this viewpoint might have been considered rather amusing by the men of the law never once occurred to him. In fact, he saw nothing amusing in himself. When he thought of himself, it was of a tragic figure, far above the pity of the world, but well worthy of its awe.

These were the things which Charles Mervin had learned soon after the first of his long visits to Colonel Dinsmore. The only man in the neighborhood who was of breeding and refinement enough to be a companion to him, outside of the colonel himself, was young Loring. But these were the details which made a meeting with Loring impossible. He remembered all of this, while he surveyed the romantic, dark outlines of the big house which towered above him, and

listened to the banging of a ruined shutter in the rising wind.

Then a horse neighed loudly from the tangle of corrals which lay in the near distance, and the heart of Mervin grew stronger in him, for he was recalled to an identity of interest which he had with Mr. Loring, and the talking point on which he could open his call.

CHAPTER VII.

FACING PETE LORING.

HE dismounted at the hitching rack, tethered Flight, his mare, and advanced to the front door of the house, turning over in his mind the words with which he would introduce his subject. And he was somewhat in trouble as he contemplated this thought. From what he had heard of young Peter Loring, that worthy might take it in mind to butcher his guest for daring to make those suggestions which Mr. Mervin had intended. Or else, he might decide to publish the proposals abroad and crush Mervin forever with the scorn of the world.

Mr. Mervin flushed hotly and then turned quite cold. He was still pale, but resolved, when he gave his summons at the front door, which was opened after a considerable time by an old servant, his back bowed and his head thrust forth by the withering touch of time. His toothless mouth pursed together as he stared at the stranger, seemed struggling to suppress a grin of malicious glee. But when he heard the name of the visitor, he nodded and asked Mervin in.

"Mr. Loring," he said, "is resting after his dinner, sir, but I will tell him you have come—if you will sit down."

He hobbled away, and Mervin looked about him with a particular interest. Poverty was what he wanted to see. Poverty, that strong alembic in which the good of human nature is so often distilled away and only the dregs of evil remain behind. There was all that he could have wished. The lofty hall, whose arched ceiling was vaulted over with shadows two stories above, contained for furniture a lofty mirror with a wretched little table standing beside it, and a single tottering chair. Along the walls, the heavy woodwork had warped with the moisture of winters and the dry heat of summers. It stood out in gaping seams, it waved along the wall. And along the unpainted floor a pale path was worn by the passage of many feet from the front door to the next room.

Mr. Mervin noted these things and felt at the same time a chill of dread and of relief. The dread was inspired by the feeling that this man had been wronged by the world—that he must inevitably have been so, or else his condition could never have been like this. And those who have been wronged by society, repay society, in turn, with an unfailing, deathless passion for destruction.

The older servant was gone for some time, and during his absence, Mr. Mervin heard certain stealthy sounds in the distance, as of furniture being quietly moved. He smiled, and the traces of the smile had not yet left his eyes when the old man returned and ushered him into an adjoining room.

It was bare as a tomb. The curtain rods were still rusting in their brackets, but the curtains were long since gone. A rag rug made a small patch on the wide, worn surface of the floor, and there were a few old chairs which had once been splendidly upholstered with leather. Rough usage had split away the leather here and there, and the contents were oozing forth—rolls of stiff padding.

The central piece was a table over the top of which, apparently, a cloth had been thrown—and thrown very recently and hastily, to judge by the wrinkles in it. An exposed corner of the surface of the table was notched with old brown and black marks where cigarette stubs

had burned out, and in an easy chair beside the table sat Peter Loring himself, reading. The shaded oil lamp marked a path of light across his breast and over the slender, bony hands which supported the book. The rest of the man was in the dark. It was not until he had put aside the book and advanced to meet Mervin that the latter could make out his features. Then he recalled having seen the man before—riding a brown horse with two white legs—the same horse, in fact, whose description had in the first place inspired his visit this night.

Peter Loring was still known as "Young Pete" because in the background of the time behind him there loomed the grand form of "Old Peter," gaunt, gray, taciturn, kindly. But he was well over thirty and looked even older. He was a yellow-skinned, unhealthy-looking fellow with sunken black eyes and remarkably heavy black eyebrows which ran in a level, unbroken line across his forehead. On his coat were dim white spots—cigarette ashes which had recently been hastily brushed away, and the whole room was thick and rank with the heavy sweetness of the Egyptian tobacco.

"I am Charles Mervin," said the visitor.

"I'm very glad to know you," said Loring. "Will you take this chair?"

"I won't disturb you——"

"If you please," said Loring, rather imperiously. "Because, as a matter of fact, the others cannot be offered to a guest."

He added this with a slight lifting of his chin and a flare of hostile light in his eyes, which Mervin avoided instinctively. But he took the chair which was pointed out to him with no further argument.

"You are staying with Colonel Dinsmore?" asked the other.

"The colonel has brought me out here a number of times. He knows that I love the open. And there's no open country in the East, you know. All too intimate. Little rolling hills—towns everywhere—a handmade countryside. Very different from the West, you know."

To the majority of this speech, Mr. Loring replied with a gloomy nod; and all that he cared to say in answer was: "In the life of my father, sir, we saw a good deal of Colonel Dinsmore. I might even say that he was a family friend. But our fortunes have changed. Lately the colonel, I may say, is a most infrequent visitor. A very rare pleasure to have a glimpse of him here!"

These last words came out in a drawling voice with a covered snarl of danger behind.

"The colonel," said Mervin defensively, "is such a gay fellow, and has so many friends, that I suppose we all see not half as much of him as we'd like to."

"Perhaps—perhaps," muttered Loring, with his habitual frown. "I haven't offered you a cigarette?"

"Thank you!"

He lighted the smoke ceremoniously for Mervin.

"This is good stuff!" exclaimed the latter.

The dry tinder of Loring's temper instantly caught fire. "We have fallen very low indeed," he said, "but still we can afford a bit of the best tobacco, Mr. Mervin." And he drew himself into a frozen silence, guarded with a mirthless smile.

Mervin was appalled. He had been prepared for a difficult interview, but this man was impossible of handling, it seemed. And the high hopes which he had begun to build into the sky he felt crumbling beneath his touch. He saw that he must strike into the nature of his business if he wished to make any headway whatever.

"You are riding a horse in the Jericho race?" he suggested at last.

"One must be amused," answered Loring. "I was able to rake together

enough cash for the entry fee. As well that as to pay grocery bills, eh?"

Once more his sour smile dared Mervin to show the slightest hint of surprise or even of amusement.

"You are a lover of horses, I see," said Mervin, trying another tack."

"Not at all," replied Loring. "Not at all! In fact, I frankly confess that I despise the sentimental bosh which a good many men of apparent sense talk about horseflesh. A horse is a dumb beast. If it was designed by God for any useful purpose, it was designed to be a slave to men, and any thing that is a slave is worth nothing but contempt. I have a truer respect for a mule than for a horse, Mr. Mervin. I assure you that I respect a mule more because though we may compel it to serve us, it serves us with frank hatred all the days of its life."

This cool doctrine he enunciated slowly, and his deep black eyes searched the face of Mervin slowly, carefully, to the faintest trace of dissent. As for Mervin, he was half inclined to think that the man was under the influence of liquor. He had never seen, before, so much wicked devil in any human. Perversity was the one controlling passion in the life of Mr. Loring, it seemed.

"A very sensible way of looking at it," said Mervin, determined to be pleased, in appearance. "As you say, there is a great deal of bosh talked at one time or another about horses. I understand, by the way, that the horse you ride greatly resembles mine."

"Perhaps," said Loring carelessly.

"In fact," insisted Mervin, making his point with some solemnity, "I understand that the resemblance is very great!"

At this, Loring raised his brows, frowned as though he were hunting to find something offensive in this remark, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose——" he began, but before he had a chance to end the sentence, the door at the farther end of the room opened suddenly, and Mervin had a glimpse of a short, wide-shouldered man standing in the opening, with a broad, blunt-featured face. He had seen ugly men before, but never before one in whom the expression was so thoroughly evil as that of him who stood in the doorway, gave them a single glance, and then hastily and noiselessly closed the door again and was gone.

Into the mind of Mervin ran certain odd tales which circulated now and again through the countryside to the effect that Loring, unable to gain a revenue in any other way, had confederated himself with a scattering of criminals and gave them refuge in times of stress in his big house.

"I suppose," continued Loring steadily, fixing those grim eyes of his upon Mervin, "that there are vague resemblances between horses as there are between people, eh?"

Mervin endured that stare very well. The danger in this man was stimulating as well as nerve straining.

"I'd like to have you look at my horse. She's at the rack in front of your house now."

Loring hesitated for a long moment —long enough to allow Mervin to see that he had no desire to bestir himself. But at length he rose, for courtesy could not permit him to refuse the invitation, particularly because of the pointed manner in which the other gave it. So they went out, carrying a lantern with them, and stood before the brown mare.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AN EXCELLENT ASSISTANT MURDERER."

THE first exclamation of Loring relieved the mind of Mervin of one anxiety.

"Why," he cried. "You have Sally Ann, here!"

So striking was the resemblance between the two!

But he added, raising the lantern and stepping closer to the head of the mare:

"No, not Sally Ann. She's a shade smaller, I think. And—no, there's a barbed-wire nick in the left ear of Sally Ann——"

"Hush!" whispered Mervin. "Not so loud, if you please!"

Loring whirled on him with a scowl. "I don't understand you, sir," he said stiffly.

"You shall, presently," answered Mervin. "But what I want you first to look to are the points of similarity. Would any one other than yourself be able to tell the difference between the two? That is what I want to know."

Loring favored him with another stare in which, however, there was as much sheer curiosity as there was disapproval. Then, without a word, he went over the horse from head to heel. He came back and made a terse report.

"The stocking on the rear leg, there, is a bit longer than Sally Ann's. Otherwise—and I think I know the points of a horse fairly well—there's hardly a hair's difference between 'em. And now, Mr. Mervin?"

"I think that we could talk a trifle better in the house, now," said Mervin.

"This begins to become a mystery."

"I hope it will be one to your liking," said Mervin, more pointedly than before. At this, Loring paused abruptly on the way to the house and turned the light of the lantern into the eyes of Mervin. What he saw there was doubtless firm resolution, and that shade of desperation which comes into the face of any man who has resolved beyond recall upon a dishonest action, or a criminal one of any nature.

"Well," said Loring, "it may be——" And he led on into the house and to the room which they had recently occupied. There he laid his hands upon the table and looked across it at his guest. "I like short talk," he said at last. "Now, Mervin, what do you want from me?"

"To begin with, I'm in need of money, Mr. Loring," said Mervin, growing a trifle red in spite of the long rehearsal of this speech. "I'm in need of money——"

"And you presume, sir, that I am in need also?"

"I presume nothing. I have come here to make a—business—proposal. No more!"

"Very well. I'll hear you out."

"There are various ways of making money, and one of the quickest and easiest ways, I understand, is to bet a small sum on a horse race."

Loring made a gesture. "I have lost money," he said, "in a great variety of fashions. I have lost money investing it in real estate. I have lost in mines and in cattle. And all of these ways seem fairly expedite when one wishes to decrease a bank account. But I know of no way in which one can lose more money or lose it faster, than by betting on horses!"

"Exactly," said Mervin. "But if one could be more than reasonably sure——"

"You have a system, I see," broke in Loring with an uncontrolled sneer. "A system? One system cost me ten thousand. I have never had any appetite to try out a second. Betting systems are short cuts to suicide, my friend."

Still Mervin endured and persisted.

"This system of mine," he said, "has never been tried before. I want to ask you in the first place if you think that your horse has a good chance of winning the Jericho?"

"I have paid the entry fee," said Loring in his disagreeable way, "and I expect to ride the race myself. I suppose that's your answer. I would not make the effort if I did not think that I have a chance. Sally Ann is not the fastest thing on four feet, but she's one of the toughest; she has to be," he added grimly, "to suit my tastes—and I've ridden her two years without breaking her heart!"

Mervin added slowly: "Flight, the mare you've just seen, was given to me by Colonel Dinsmore. He told me when he made the present that other horses

might distance her at the beginning of a race, but that none would ever come in ahead of her in a long test. She's as gentle as a lamb, and brave as a lion. She'll run her heart out and ask no questions. She'll go from morning to night, and at the end of the day, she'll still have her ears pricking.

"Enter her in the Jericho, then, by all means," said Loring. "But may I inquire why you have come here—at night—to tell me the good points of your mare?"

Mervin gritted his teeth, but still his patience held. "I'll tell you this, sir. If your horse is half as good as you say she is, and mine is half as good as I think her to be, it will take a good deal of beating to get ahead of the pair of them."

"There will be several dozen entries. The odds are big against us. Is that what you mean? To enter them as a stable?"

"Not that. But suppose, Loring, that each horse ran half of the race."

"What!"

"Loring, if you rode the first quarter of the race on Sally Ann, and then, in a secure meeting place, appointed beforehand, met Flight and mounted her and rode the next half of the race, on your return trip you could be met by Sally Ann again, mount her, and so you would start and end the race on the same horse, but a good half of the work would be done by another which could never be told from your own mare!"

It was part of the pride of Loring never to be surprised, but he was plainly staggered now. And finally he burst out: "By the heavens, Mervin, what a handsome scoundred you are!"

Mr. Mervin was a fighter, and his nerve was of the best, but though he turned pale with fury, he held his temper. For, after all, he was more at home with his fists than with guns, when it came to fighting, and it would not be hard to guess how long it would take Loring to get a revolver in his fingers. So he ran on smoothly, as though he had not heard the last remark: "You understand, of course, that this race will be worth the winning. The actual stake and the added money will come to around fifteen thousand dollars."

"I know that, of course."

"Half of fifteen thousand would make seventy-five hundred apiece."

"I," said Loring coolly, "ride the horses and take the risk of detection, and you get half of the money?"

"Two parts to you, then, and one to me. Ten thousand to you and five thousand to me."

"Well?"

"There's more than the stake, however. Consider that before the time of the race, the crowd will have picked out its favorites, and among those favorites, Sally Ann is not apt to be one."

"Not when they know that I am to ride. They would bet against me, for the exquisite pleasure of seeing me lose, if for no other reason."

"Exactly! Very well, then: The odds against Sally Ann should go up to thirty to one. And there will be people on hand at Jericho who will be ready to back their opinions with hard cash. There are plenty of millions in this part of the country!"

"Stolen, and otherwise," said Loring, sneering. "But stolen money will burn its way——" He checked himself short; after all, the scheme they were even then contemplating would not brook too much moral contemplation.

"Twenty or thirty to one," he granted. "Well? What good would it do me? I have no money to bet!"

"But I have, Loring. I have five thousand that I can get together. Five thousand at thirty to one would be a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. At twenty to one, it's forty thousand to me and sixty thousand to you. Am I wrong?"

The eyes of young Loring turned up to the high ceiling above him, as though to note the cracks in the plaster and

study the places where the laths were bared.

"Sixty thousand dollars?" he murmured at last. Then: "Well, Mr. Mervin, that would be worth some effort. They owe it to me, heaven knows. If I had what is my right, sixty thousand dollars would be a mere nothing. The very ground that Twin Creeks is built upon—however, let that go. The dogs owe me money. What difference how they pay it to me?"

"Very clear reasoning," agreed Mervin, grinning. "And certainly, Loring, it would be very strange if any horse should beat our pair?"

"Run such a distance and beat two such horses as ours? No animal in the world could manage that!"

"Certainly not. Flight will at least keep you up close to the leaders. And for the last quarter of the race, when all the men will be working hard on their ponies, you will have Sally Ann as fresh as a daisy under you. Certainly nothing could possibly beat you, Mr. Loring. Nothing, I am sure."

"A thousand thanks. I am not a heavyweight, at least, and I shall fear nothing."

"Nothing," said Mervin, "except one man and one horse!"

"And that?"

"The one which is sure to be the favorite."

"That will be one of the Arabs, I suppose."

"No, no! It can't be other than one horse—Crusader with Harry Camden riding him!"

"Camden? Crusader?" cried Loring. "Why, man, no one but a fool would bet on a pair of heavyweights like them to win any distance race of more than a mile or two!"

But Mervin shook his head. And there was a shade of thought in his eyes. "I've seen him," he said.

"With his ribs standing out?"

"As sleek as Flight, I give you my word. What Camden has done with the big horse is a miracle. If he can train Crusader in that fashion, why may he not work another miracle in the riding of the race? As for his weight, you have to remember that he does not ride in a heavy range saddle. He rides only on a light blanket and he seems to know how to make himself a part of the horse."

"Perhaps he rides well. However, there is nothing that could beat the two mares, if your Flight is a tithe the animal that Sally Ann is!"

"You'll find her as good, or nearly so. But this Camden understands how to wring everything out of a horse. He is a part of Crusader, I tell you!"

"Bah!" exclaimed Loring. "You will have to persuade me that a madman from the mountains can outride a gentleman. I only hope to heaven that you may be wrong!"

"Not horsemanship—magic, Loring! That's what you'll have to contend with when you ride against Camden. I've seen him riding Crusader. He goes like the wind, and he manages the animal with his thinking, not with reins. They know one another better than two men."

Loring merely smiled.

"I tell you," said Mervin seriously, "that though I would bet freely against any other man riding in the race and any other horse than Crusader—I feel that even with our two horses against him we have no better than an even chance. And that chance must be improved, man, before I invest five thousand dollars."

"Improved?"

"Exactly that. I must have a better surety."

"Tell me how that can be managed?"

"Suppose, for instance, that Crusader never starts in that race?"

"Eh?"

"It could be managed."

"In what way?"

"Isn't it possible, say, that Camden should be incapacited for riding——"

There was a gleam in the eyes of

Loring, now. He began to nod and smile in a wickedly gratified way at Mervin.

"That's the way with the devil," he said. "He takes left-handed ways of getting at us. You start with a little crooked work in a horse race, which involves the loss of nothing saving honor"—and here he laughed short and sharp—"but now you are coming on finely. You want a murder done, Mervin!"

"Murder?" gasped out the other. "Certainly not! It was never in my mind. Never!"

But, even as he spoke, the glitter was in his eye, and flare was in his nostrils.

"You only mean that Camden should be incapacitated?"

"Only, that, Loring. On my honor, only that. And the man's a mere brute. He doesn't deserve consideration as anything else. An animal, Loring, but no decency, no refinement, no——"

"Honesty?" cut in Loring.

Mervin was silent, and his host went on slowly and dryly: "Be anything, Mervin. Be a liar, be a villain, be a murderer, even, but don't be a hypocrite. Put your cards on the table. Face up! Let me see what's in your mind. Bah, man, you don't have to tell me, for I can see it too clearly in your eyes. You want him killed. You want it with your whole heart and your whole soul. You want the death of this Camden. Is not that so?"

Mervin blinked. Then, unable to speak aloud, he whispered: "I want him dead, Loring! I admit it. God knows it may be a guilty wish, but there's no need for such a man on the face of the world, and——"

"You've said it, now. And now that I have your mind, I'm satisfied. Only, Mervin, I tell you frankly that I like my part of this deal better than you can possibly like yours. All that I have to do is to fight a man and a strong one, and kill him. And that can be managed—oh, yes, that can be managed! But you, Mervin, have to sit in the background and pull the strings. You think you are master of the puppet show, but I tell you, my friend, that when I am in purgatory for this, you will be in hell for the mere thinking of the thing! However," he added, "that's apart from the point, which is: Where am I to get at Camden, and how?"

"When he brings down Crusader to Jericho."

"I must do it in the crowd?"

"Do you wish to do it alone, where there'll be no witnesses, and where they'd hang you for it? No, Loring. Do it in the open. They know that he's a killer. They don't know, a good many of them, that you could beat him with a gun. Because he's strong in his hands, they think that nothing can ever beat him in any sort of a fight."

Loring smiled. "You make," said he, "an excellent assistant murderer! My share is two-thirds, throughout all the profits?"

"Two thirds, man. You stand to make a comfortable fortune."

"From this moment," said Loring, "never mention the money to me again!"

CHAPTER IX.

TAKING WATER.

WHEN Camden was just two miles from Jericho, the sheriff met him, Tom Younger himself, riding on a strong gray gelding. He turned in at the side of the dancing black giant, and for a moment he watched the magnificent play of muscles over the satiny body of the stallion.

"You've trained him down fine, Camden," he said. "Not too fine, I guess?"

Camden smiled.

"You've never raced him before, you know," said the sheriff, "except when you were running for your life—with me behind you!"

He grinned at Camden, but there was no great store of friendliness in the smile.

"I was amin' to free Manners," he said quietly. "I guess you ain't holdin' agin' me what I did to you, sheriff?"

The sheriff twisted up his face into a sour grin. "I'll tell you this, Harry," he managed to say at last. "No matter what happens, I'll play with you fair and square. I won't make no trouble for you, and I won't hunt up no quarrels agin' you that the law might find. And I don't mind tellin' you, Camden, that they's some that would be pretty glad to see you jailed and kept there till the runnin' of the race is over. But all you'll get from me will be fair and square. Will you believe that?"

"I'll believe that, sheriff," said the wild man. "No gent that is a fair fightin' man could ever want to step on a gent that was down."

"Down, Harry?"

"I'm down when I get inside of that there town. I hate towns. They ain't meant for me, I tell you. I hate 'em mighty bad. They crowd me. They don't give me no chance to get by myself or to think my own kind of thoughts, I tell you! No, sir, I'll be down so long as I'm in that there town of Jericho!"

It amazed the sheriff to see the forlorn expression on his face, most like a child confronted by a great and baffling sorrow—a first day at school! He could not help smiling, but presently his smile darkened again.

"I don't mind tellin' you, Harry," he said, "that the law has been stretched till it's all plumb out of shape for the sake of what we've had to do for you. It was Colonel Dinsmore that saved your hash, young man. He come to me and he talked pretty strong. And then he went along to the judge and he talked pretty strong to the judge, and finally, we decided that we'd give you one more chance. But understand, Camden, that you don't have to do no more'n lift a hand while you're in this here town, before I'll have you arrested if I got to call out every armed man in the town, which they's some considerable heap of men and guns in that town right now, young man!"

"Maybe there is," sighed The Brute. "But I ain't gunna bother them none!"

"You'll watch yourself, Camden?"

"Every minute."

"Then, we'll all be happy in Jericho, Harry. I've been lookin' for hard times beginnin' when you come to town! But maybe I'm all wrong!"

He turned off on a byroad. Camden went on into Jericho by himself, and for the first time saw that queer little town, which lies curled around the foot of Jericho Mountain, as though clinging to the great slope for protection. Everywhere he found that the streets were crowded, for the race had brought throngs. Every cow-puncher who could afford to waste a week had left his job and ridden in scores, perhaps hundreds of miles to see the race and enjoy the excitement, and place his bets before the contest took place. Every rancher within a wide radius, every miner, every lumberman was there. Reporters and sportsmen had come from distant cities; and the tourists, wide-eyed, smiling, a little weary, were everywhere.

Through this crowd went Camden down the long, twisting street of the town. Beyond the double row of houses, and filling up the interstices between them, was every form of shack and lean-to and tent which could be imagined built or pitched for the convenience of the throng of visitors which, had Jericho been thrice its normal size, could never have been accommodated. He had not gone a block before he was recognized. And in two blocks more the reporters were at him. They walked on either side of him, writing pads or cameras in hand. They shouted to him for statements.

"Do you expect to win?"

"Is Crusader in shape, do you think?"

"Got a picture of yourself?"

"What will Dinsmore pay you if you win?"

"Have you ridden over the course before?"

"Is Crusader too big for mountain work?"

Thus came the first of a rattling volley of questions which went on and on in gathering importance and gathering loudness until he said, at the last: "Lemme alone, gents. I'm not here to talk. I'm here to ride Crusader."

Even so they would not desist, and he paused in front of the hotel to the tune of clicking cameras on every side. People already had heard the rumor of his arrival. They were pouring out of the houses behind him. They were swarming up around the big horse. And Crusader, standing like an ebony statue, merely flattened his ears against his neck, but otherwise paid not the slightest attention to them all. Camden tethered him and went inside. He found that his friend, Ned Manners, had succeeded in locating the room which had been reserved long in advance by Colonel Dinsmore. To it he conducted Harry Camden. They sat on the edge of the bed and ate a hurried lunch.

"The colonel doesn't expect you until to-night, at the quickest," Manners informed him, "and when——"

Here there was a tap at the door, which opened before an invitation had been given. A short, thick-set man, with a wide, ugly face stood in the doorway.

"Mr. Peter Loring is downstairs askin' for you, bo," said this ill-omened visitor. "I mean you, big boy!" He pointed to Camden.

Then, as he disappeared, Manners said: "D'you know Loring, Harry?"

"Never heard tell of him before. Who is he? One of these reporters?"

Manners grinned. "The most part of his talkin' he does with his guns. He's one of them busted-down gentlemen that ain't forgot what their grandfathers done. The only thing that he warms up about, they say, is how great all the Lorings have always been. What in the devil can *he* want with you? You ain't had no trouble with him, Harry?"

"I never heard his name before."

"He wants to get down a bet with you, maybe. But if he does, don't let him put up nothin' but cash. His word and his note ain't worth the time it takes to listen to 'em or to read 'em. He's a dead beat, Harry!"

This warning reached Camden as he strode for the door and so down the creaking stairs to the veranda of the hotel, and there, leaning against one of the fluted wooden pillars which supported the roof that extended past the veranda, and far over the watering troughs where fifty horses could drink comfortably at the same time, stood a slender man with a yellow skin, and eyes lost in the deep shadow of his brows.

Camden, half a stride through the doorway, felt the stare of the other and knew that this was he who had sent for him, and that that errand was one of mischief. For there were instincts in Camden as keen as the scent is sharp in a lofer wolf. And all of those instincts rose up in him to tell him that here was something foreign to his nature, something deadly dangerous. The stranger stood away from the pillar a little, thoughtfully smoking his cigarette and watching the big man.

But when he spoke, his remark was addressed to the nearest cow-puncher. "My friend," said he, in his patronizing way which had earned him the hearty dislike of the entire countryside, "is that fellow Harry Camden?"

It was very much like asking if a roaring fire were warm, for Harry Camden was known, and known with fear. It is not for nothing that a man "sticks up" such a sheriff as Tom Younger and breaks open such a jail as that of Twin Creeks. Harry Camden was known and dreaded. And the cow-puncher gaped at the audacious questioner.

"That's Camden," he muttered.

Loring turned still more toward the cow waddie and still more away from Camden, but the latter could see that from the corner of his eye Loring was still watching him closely. And that right hand of Loring, carelessly resting on his right hip above the holster, surely had a meaning! Here was the very trouble which he had vowed he would avoid. Here was the very thing against which the honest sheriff had warned him.

But what could he do? Could he advance? Could he retreat? He could only wait for the catastrophe to develop.

"He's Camden, is he?" said Loring. "Well, then, he's the man I want to see. Because I understand that he has been circulating remarks about me. Very ugly remarks, my friend. Perhaps you have heard them,"

"No," gasped out the cow-puncher.

"You are too polite," said Loring. "Entirely too polite." He whirled suddenly back on Camden. "You know why I called you down here?" he asked.

"I dunno that I got any idea," muttered Camden.

"You havent? Think it over, Camden. I tell you everything you have said has been reported to me. Everything! And what I require, Mr. Camden, is a public apology, spoken so that all of these gentlemen will be able to hear you when you talk!"

He smiled as he said it, and flicked the ashes from the end of his cigarette, which was fuming busily in his left hand. But the right was still poised at the hip, the fingers working a little, fiercely, greedy to be at the butt of the heavy Colt which hung in the black-leather holster just below their tips.

A silence had followed the first speech of Loring. Now, hastily, softly, the spectators drew away from the line which ran from Loring to Camden, and packed in more closely on either side, making a human channel between the two men. To Harry Camden there came a passionate desire to take that slender form and break it in two. And there was a still greater desire to whip out his own revolver.

It might mean his own death, for he knew that in this quiet, composed man, with the cold devil in his eyes, there was more danger than in all that he had ever encountered before. But there was his strong resolve, there was the recent warning of the sheriff. He drew a breath and then answered:

"Stranger, I never seen you before. I got nothin' agin' you. What could make me want to spread any sort of lies about you?"

The breath which he had drawn was suddenly echoed on every side, and then a sort of groan from the doorway behind him, and the voice of his friend, Manners, saying hastily: "Harry, what in the name of heaven are you sayin'? He wants a fight, that's all he's askin' for!"

"Yellow, I see," said Loring calmly, as before. "A very yellow dog, it seems. What I wonder at, Camden," he went on, sauntering toward the big man, "is that you have been able to impose upon all of these people during such a stretch of time. There are men all around us who wear guns. How have you been able to pull the wool over their eyes? Will you answer me that, my friend? What tricks have you used? And what lies?"

He came squarely before Camden. The difference in their sizes was more shockingly apparent. And now that he was close, Camden could see the waspish malignancy of the smaller man. He was fairly trembling with it.

"Stranger," said Harry Camden bitterly, "I dunno what I'd ought to say. It looks to me like you was hankerin' for a fight. But fightin' ain't in my line till after the Jericho race is over and done with. After that, gimme half a chance to find you and I'll talk this here thing out with you! But to-day is no time."

"No time for you," said Loring with

a snarl. "No time for an underbred, overfed puppy to concern himself with such a trifle, but where the honor of a Loring is concerned, it is a very vital matter, I assure you. I ask you for the last time, Camden, if I am to have that apology?"

Harry Camden was silent. His face burned, and then grew white, for he heard a whisper on either side: "He's quittin'. He's bluffed down. He's takin' water!"

He, of all men! He who had been raised on battle, like any wolf!

"Very well," said Loring as cool as ever, "perhaps this will spur you on a bit and loosen your tongue!"

As he spoke, he raised his left hand and with the flat of it struck Camden across the face so heavily that the sound was like the clapping of hands together. And a white impress of the fingers stood out on Camden's cheek.

He hesitated for one instant, surveying the tensed, ready figure of Loring, whose hand was on the very butt of his revolver, now. Then Camden turned on his heel and walked past the face of Manners, who stood at the door, in an agony of shame for his big friend. But Camden paid him no heed. He strode up the stairs and disappeared from view.

CHAPTER X.

GRIM RESOLUTION.

"ON the whole," philosophized Mr. Loring, "one may divide people of this class into two categories: those who are bullies and will fight when they have to, and those who are bullies without having the courage to strike a blow when they are up against some one of their own strength. To the last category belongs this Camden. I suppose that you gentlemen will agree with me on that point?"

There was no answer, only a sick look of disgust and of horror on the face of every man, for in all the world the most fearful spectacle is that of a coward, and most cowardly, according to all their standards, had been the actions of Harry Camden upon this occasion.

Then a door slammed heavily in the upper part of the hotel and that sound served to waken one man into action. It was Manners, who started suddenly forward from the doorway toward Peter Loring. He came directly up to that destroyer of men.

"Loring," he said, when he came close to the other, "I dunno what it was that kept my partner, Camden, from breakin' you in two, which it looks to me like he could of done it dead easy. But he had something else in his mind. And the way that I look at it, partner, you and I are all fixed for an understandin' of just what it was that you claim that he said about you!"

Mr. Loring, as he looked at the other, surveyed him from head to heel with his usual consummate impudence. "Some one," said he, "has mixed trouble with this young man's gun powder. Will some friend of his come and take him away?"

"All right," cried Manners in a frenzy of shame and of rage at the other disgrace which he had just witnessed. "Maybe this here will waken you up!"

He flashed his open hand into the face of Loring. Then he reached for his gun.

So vast was the difference between their speed that he had barely gripped the butt of his weapon when the other's Colt was exposed. His own gun was never drawn; for the bullet of Loring ripped its way down the thigh of the younger man.

Manners, with an oath of rage rather than mere pain or fear, toppled forward on his face, struck his forehead heavily against the boards of the veranda, and lay still.

There was a rush for him, in which half a dozen men even made so free as to elbow Mr. Loring in passing. For his part, he paid no heed to the fallen, but straightway approached one of those

who had not been able to get in to Manners. He tapped him whom he had selected—a substantial-looking rancher of middle age—upon the shoulder and immediately copied down the name and the address of the other.

"Because," said Loring, "one never can tell. There may be some legal action following even an affair like this, although you yourself will be able to testify for me, I presume, that I did not make a motion toward my guns except after I had been struck. I fired only in self-defense, to avoid a cruel beating at the hands of a man much larger and stronger than I—a fellow like a madman, who had rushed in upon me!"

It happened that he had cornered the worst selection that he could have made. Now the man stared back at him gloomily and was brave enough to say: "Loring, I know you better'n you know me. Don't call me up on no witness stand, or else I'll tell how you tried to pick a fight with one gent and used him so dog-gone bad that his partner had to step in between you."

"You, too," said Loring, sneeringly, "seem remarkably interested in the affairs of Mr. Harry Camden. Who is this other young idiot?"

"His name is Manners. He's a gent that Camden stood by. That's why he'd stand by Camden."

"And Camden, I suppose, is a friend of yours?"

"I ain't sayin' nothin' about Camden," said the cowman. "Maybe he's a yaller skunk. Maybe he ain't. He ain't like the rest of us. Maybe he's got special reasons for actin' the way he did. But the way I feel about it, I'd rather be a dead man first—I'd rather be a dog-gone ghost!" With which, he stalked away.

No doubt all who were in the town of Jericho felt the same way about it. There was universal pity for young Manners, stricken in the midst of an attempt to revenge the lost honor of a friend; there was universal detestation for the coward, Harry Camden; there was universal hatred for Loring, by whom the tragedy had been brought about.

Not that the tragedy was brought to its ultimate end. Mr. Loring had fired with a good deal too much precipitation to bring about any such happy end. His very spitefulness, his very surety that he had the younger man at his mercy, had made him strive with a double effort to murder the youth on the spot; and that venomous passion, perhaps, was the reason that his aim was bad and that the bullet went astray. As it was, the wound was terribly painful and accompanied by a great loss of blood, so that young Manners presently lay in one of the lower rooms of the hotel, very white of face, very set of jaw, while a surgeon probed and examined the wound, and told him that no bone had been broken. He would recover as fast as his strong young constitution permitted.

When the doctor spoke, there was kneeling by the bed of her brother none other than Ruth Manners herself. For she had come up with her father for the sake of the week before the race. People usually tried to manage the affair in this fashion. Time was dated according to the race of such and such a year. In the single week at Jericho, there were more engagements announced than in a twelve month on either side of that period. For it was a time of excitement, of gambling, of the taking of chances.

To the great social event, therefore, Ruth Manners had come up with both her father and her brother, and now, as she kneeled by his bed, almost as white of face as was he, she heard him pronounced in no danger and the first effect was a faint moan of joy.

Afterward she thought of another thing, and, starting up with word that she would instantly be back again, she hurried through the thinning group of strangers in the room and went straight into the upper part of the hotel to find

the room of Harry Camden. It was pointed out to her at once, and her knock brought big Camden himself to the door. He regarded her with such a start and with such a smile of joy that even Ruth Manners half forgot the purpose for which she had come there, to wonder over him. Then she remembered what she had just seen, and the settled agony in the eyes of her brother as he haid lain enduring the pain of his wound.

"Mr. Camden," she said, "isn't this the proudest day of your life?"

He seemed so unused to the sound of her voice, and so delighted with that, and her nearness, that he hung over her for a time, still, before the smile faded from his face. He looked down at her with a bewildered face of sorrow.

"Something has gone wrong, I guess," he said in his mild, deep voice.

There was a swift relenting in her heart of hearts, so swift that she hardened herself and became more cruel than she would have been otherwise. And the storm of her anger broke out at him.

"Something has gone wrong? Not as far wrong as you'd like, I guess. You'd rather that poor dear Ned had been killed, for you. For you! Oh, you great coward! They'll never let you rest after this. They'll hound you and work on you until they drive you to another name and another country. But oh, you coward, you coward, to let him face that murderer—that Loring—that devil!"

Having flung out at him in this fashion, she relented with a quick falling of the heart, and because she feared what she had done and wished to escape from looking it in the face, she turned and fled down the hall as fast as she could go.

Camden went slowly and heavily back into the room. He began to wander back and forth in the little chamber, touching the furniture with his hands, or standing at the window and staring across to Jericho Mountain with unseeing eyes of pain and of sorrow.

He was there for a long time until there came at his door a firm-handed rap. He looked up and found the sheriff and Colonel Dinsmore both before him. And on their faces was the very thing from which he had fled. Surely these men should have understood that there was something remarkable. The sheriff at least, having already threatened him with what would happen if he so much as raised a hand, must now have known that his threat had taken effect. No, there was no understanding. There was only blank confusion and distress in both of their faces. And there was shame—shame that another man should have exhibited such cowardice as had been seen in Harry Camden on that day.

Still, he endured. A big black vein swelled in either forehead. His heart thundered with a slow, tremendous pulse like a sea washed with a monstrous ground swell. But he said not a word.

"Camden," said the colonel, "what on earth has happened my young friend? What has gone wrong?' Then he added, with an attempt at light-heartedness which only made the agony of the young man the more acute: "Cheer up, Camden. We all have our blue days and our hard knocks!"

Camden swallowed hard. It was difficult; it was very difficult. His whole nature cried out with a single voice and bade him destroy that detestable enemy, Peter Loring. But he kept himself firmly back.

After the race, that would all be very well. But even to repay brave and generous young Manners for the foolish and kind thing which he had done, he must make Crusader win and pay back to Ned a great sum of money for that small amount which he had invested in it, all in the blind confidence that the man whom he considered so great could not fail to win.

CHAPTER XI.

RUTH ENCOURAGES CAMDEN.

HE went downstairs again, at the last, wondering how he could face the townsfolk, even the children. Yes, the boys and the little girls worst of all, for they would not scruple to scream after him the ugly things which had been suggested by his conduct of that day.

He found where Manners was lying and tapped at the door, which was presently opened by the girl herself.

"I thought," said he, "that I'd like to see Ned and have a word with him." He added: "If you think it wouldn't do no harm——"

"He don't want——" began the girl impulsively. Then, as she saw a look of horror flash into his brown eyes—the steady, amber eyes of a brute—she flushed in sympathy. "What I mean to say is that the doctor has given orders. Very few are to see him until he gets a little better."

He shrank back from her. And again she was amazed. It had not seemed possible that so burly and huge a man should have such tender sensibilities, but he had perceived the very first hint of her meaning, and now he was crushed by it. All at once, as he skulked down the hall, she was overwhelmed by impulse and ran suddenly after him and caught at his hand.

He paused and turned his white, strained face back to her.

"I'm sorry," whispered she, "for everything that I've said. I know that there's got to be some explanation. I know that you aren't a coward, Harry Camden."

Then she fled back to the room. As she flashed through the door she had an impression of Camden standing exactly as she had left him, in mid-stride, arrested like a statue. She whipped the door shut behind her and leaned against it smiling, breathless, her heart racing she knew not why. Then she heard a very slow, immensely ponderous stride come back up the hall. She could trace its slow progress by the creaking of the flooring beneath it. It paused outside the door against which she leaned. There was then audible to the straining ears of the girl a long, heavy sigh. Then the creaking of the floor began again and diminished into the distance. But after that she knew, as plainly as if he had told her, that Harry Camden loved her.

But Harry Camden, poor devil, was beginning a week of the cruelest torment that any man on earth ever endured. It was not Loring, it seemed. He did not appear in the matter at all. But, having started the ball rolling by his expose of the giant, the entire town, or rather, all the young hot-heads and bullies in it, set upon Camden and began baiting him. He could not appear without receiving a volley of abuse. And they thought of clever insults and then cast themselves in his way in a public place in order to speak them. But to it all he returned not a word. He went every day as early as possible to the stallion and stayed with him, exercising him through the meadows at the foot of Mount Jericho, according to the rules of the race, which required that the horses should be conditioned in that fashion, under the eyes of competent judges. This was a povision wisely inserted, in order that no horse which was out of condition might be allowed to compete in the struggle, which had cost the life of more than one fine animal before this.

It was Crusader who pulled Camden through. Otherwise he could never have endured a tithe of what he had to suffer, but the great horse was a comrade to him. There could be no insults from the stallion. There was always sure to be only the lifted head and the shining eye to greet the coming of the real master of Crusader's soul. That companionship kept the very heart of the man from going sour with grief and with weakness and with shame.

And if he lay awake at nights conjuring up again the vision of the archdevil, Loring, then the thought of Crusader brought him sleep again.

Yet it was a changed Camden who sat on the back of Crusader on the day when the five-hundred mile race began. His face was hollowed and seamed, and his eyes were sunken. However, the crowd saw nothing. Crowds never do, and of all the sixty-five horses which danced and pranced at the post upon that day, there was a shout of applause for every single horse, and there was a small cheer for every rider with the exception, sole and single, of Harry Camden. And he felt it bitterly.

There he sat on the back of mighty Crusader and felt the greatness of his horse beneath him, and the warm of the sun was welcome upon his shoulders. The clear air allowed his eye to pass up the great slope of Mount Jericho and detect every shrub to the very top. Here was a day indeed, for the race.

There were literally thousands gathered at the start around the long, long line of the horses, and to each rider came separate friends, and eager admirers in groups. Perhaps the largest number were gathered about the Arabs, and especially the chestnut, Ali. But there was a crowd, also, around Jack Murran's bay stallion, Fury. And even around Crusader, in spite of what they might think of the horse's rider, there was a continual group.

"If he only had another man up in his saddle, I'd double the bet that I put on him; but since Camden showed yaller, I wish that I hadn't put up a cent!"

That was one of a hundred speeches which Camden heard and took care not to show upon his impassive face. For this must be endured as all else had been endured. The race was still to be run. But afterward? When he thought of what might come afterward, his heart swelled, and a sort of sweet pain came into his throat.

But here came some one to him at last. It was Colonel Dinsmore himself. He did not come near. He stood at a little distance. And his face was as expressionless as stone as he bade Camden have good luck and take care of the stallion. But never since the day of the shaming of Camden had the colonel once looked fairly into his eyes, as though he feared lest such a glance would waken all that was savage in his nature and make him tell the giant all that was in his mind about him.

The colonel was gone, and now, picking her way quickly, into the very circle where the big black stallion stood, came a girl in white, very pretty, very trim, though the blurring eyes of Harry Camden refused to allow him to distinguish her features. She came straight on to him. He felt his hand taken by slim, cool fingers. He heard the voice of Ruth Manners come clear and strong.

"Good luck, Harry Camden," And then, more softly: "I'm mighty sorry. I know everything will be set right. I know it!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE RACE IS ON.

THE crack of the starter's gun left Harry Camden sitting stupidly in the saddle, staring at the place where the girl had stood. Then he was roused by a loud laughter.

"Darned if he ain't gone to sleep!"

"Nope; he's only cryin'!"

For the tears, in fact, had rolled into the eyes of Harry Camden, and the sun glittered on them. Then he loosed the reins, and Crusader was away. The first mile was brisk running. It was always fast work. The tradition of the race was that the first mile should be well run out so that the spectators could see the lot off to a spectacular start. After that, they could pick their own pace, of course, and do exactly as they wished.

In that first mile, Camden tried the foot of the others in the contest and

found it good. He passed all except three—three fine thoroughbreds like Crusader, which, on account of the better start they had received, were well away in the lead. But outside of the four thoroughbreds, there was nothing to mention in the same breath at the end of the sprinted mile. For nothing that moves upon four feet can live with the thoroughbred over a mile. The brilliant antelope, even, is left far, far behind! And all other horses, the Arabians, the half bloods, the mustangs, were left ridiculously far behind. However, that first wild mile was only the glass of wine that started the feast. The real work was still to do. And there was plenty of it—plenty of it!

It was like a whole army campaign contrasted with a battle; such was this cross-country run compared with an ordinary race. Five hundred miles of desert and mountain! Five hundred miles of spongy desert sand and of impossible rocks and cliffs among the mountains!

The Brute had studied the whole matter out very carefully with Colonel Dinsmore as they sat beside the map. Every depression, every hollow on the course showed in that map, and they had decided between them what way Crusader must run. It was a beautiful problem, that course, for the shortest route was, of course, straight across the Jericho Mountains, over the Jericho desert, and so, in the far distance, two hundred and fifty miles away, to circle the Corimba Peak and start back again. But, unfortunately, that straight line carried a rider over the worst of the mountains and through the deepest and the finest sand. Therefore the whole task was to establish, first of all, just what going would be best for one's mount. The little, active horses, were apt to select the straight line, because they would rather use up strength on obstacles than on great distance. The leggy, fragile animals, and mostly the thoroughbreds and the nearly thoroughbred horses which were entered in the race, took a wide sweep across the Corimba foothills and so added immensely to their mileage, but they found in the long run that it paid them to avoid the terrible friction of a more direct repassage of the Corimbas.

As for the black stallion, Camden had determined to avoid the very highest mountains, and yet to keep close in, thus enabling him to avoid throwing away too many extra miles.

That was not all the planning that he had done. He had worked out a thousand small schemes, figuring adroitly just how far it was best to take the stallion every day, and at what a rate he should proceed, and how that rate should be varied, lest the stallion grew stale to the work, and what effect too much food had on him, and when and where it was best to feed him, and on how much water he could make a march. These were some of the questions which merely began the doubts and the self-catechism of Harry Camden. But his labors were well rewarded.

Never once did he push the great horse, and yet as they crossed the desert and reached the foothills of the Corimba Mountains, the leaders were first a desert-bred mustang, a beautiful and hardy piece of horseflesh, then an Arab mare brought from Arabia specially for this contest, and third was the big stallion, Crusader! And beyond a shadow of a doubt he had endured the desert going better than the other two. They looked at him sourly, the riders of those two horses, watching him move along with splendid ease and precision, never pressed, never urged by his master, but at the walk covering more ground than the average horse covers with a dog trot.

"We'll get you when we hit the mountains!" they assured The Brute, and he listened and nodded and said not a word in reply. He had no use for speech until a certain day came, and then he would care to speak to one man only.

Ah, that that moment should only be but five minutes hence!

And then, as they were laboring up through the foothills, a very strange thing happened, for a horse which had not even been in sight an hour before, pressed up suddenly among them. It went straight on by them all, keeping up a smart trot. And it was Peter Loring, riding erect in the saddle on a beautiful brown mare, marked with white. He gave Camden, as he went by, not so much as a haloo, but he said to the others: "Gentlemen, I hope you are not all of a feather up here!"

The others growled after he had gone by, and they followed him with glances as black as the looks which they gave to The Brute a little before.

He himself, on the stallion, did not attempt to pick up the difference between him and the flying mare at once. But he increased the pace of big Crusader and, in the gray of the next morning, which was w..en he usually began his march of the day, he had sight, once more, of the two white stockings of the horse.

Twice that day the mare was out of sight. Twice she came back again. So they rounded the Corimba Mountains, and came down gradually into the white heat of the desert again.

There are degrees of heat, even on the desert. There is the cool north wind which brings a breath of relief, and there is also, the burning south which shrivels whatever it touches. It was the south wind which blew now. It caught the horses and the riders weak from the labor and the nerve strain of that arduous crossing of the mountains. And it wrecked their nerves. They rode on through a smother of blown sand that sifted into the clothes and next to the skin of the riders and that kept the horses snooting to clear their nostrils of the grit.

Provisions had grown low in the scanty food packs of the men. The oats which they carried for their horses were exhausted. There was only the desert grass to keep them, and the widely separated tanks and springs for water, all, however, well charted on the maps which they carried.

And here horses began to lag terribly behind. The whole body of horses had come over the mountains in a bunch, each pushing on resolutely behind the others, all afraid of being distanced, and, striking the desert below, the weak ones went to the wall at once and were forced to turn back toward the green foothills, glad to be out of the ruck.

That noon, Crusader forged to the lead. To his right, a mile away, was the glimmering form of the brown mare with that light and expert horseman. Loring, in the saddle. Then the brown mare was lost in the rolling ground, and Crusader went on alone—in the lead!

It was no grave satisfaction to big Harry Camden. He felt that he had the race in his lap. He was confident that none of those horses, once put to the rear, could ever pass him again. So he let Crusader go on at a walk, steadily, without pressing that willing worker, only soothing him, now and again, with the touch of his hand or his voice when the big animal began to grow nervous with the strain of the work.

That night they camped at the foot of that huge, shapeless mass—Jericho Mountain. It had been hard to climb the farther and smoother side even with fresh horses at the beginning of the contest. This far more sheer slope, with a weary horse beneath the saddle, was sure to be a heartbreaker.

But they found excellent bunch grass and a clear spring, so that they fared well enough; and before the darkness had thickened, he counted here and there across the hollows a dozen sparks of light—the fires which the other contestants had kindled as soon as they arrived at their last camping place.

The last camping place it would surely be, for Crusader, as the big man knew,

could make the remaining distance on the morrow, weary though he might be.

And, in the first glimmer of the gray morning, he was in the saddle again, letting Crusader trudge up the slope. To the left, to the right, here and there, he made out other forms of horsemen plodding through the dawn, but he had no fear. They were desperate. By the nodding, lowered heads of the horses he knew that they would have to pause time and again before the upper crest was reached.

But Crusader held upon his way undaunted. His ribs stood out, now, and his neck was growing lean, but he still carried his head well up. If some of the spring had gone out of his step, it was hardly noticeable. There was still ample strength in him to defeat any of the others who rode against him. Ample, indeed!

For, as the sun reddened the eastern rim of the horizon, and then rose bold and clear, he saw the competitors already falling back behind him, drawing together in a closer group, and then straggling in a long-drawn-out bunch.

All falling back—no, yonder came one past the right flank of the others. From the top of a hill, Camden on Crusader saw the stranger drifting rapidly to the fore. Some cow-puncher making his last desperate bid on a failing horse? That must be it!

He plodded on for half an hour, and then he heard the crunching of gravel under hoofs behind him. He turned with a shock and a start in the saddle. And there, behind him, he saw none other than Loring riding rapidly up at a dog trot, for here the ground shelved into a level plateau.

On came Loring, and the brown mare beneath him seemed to go almost gayly. Certainly her ears were pricked sharply, and if she were blackened with sweat, it was not the sweat of exhaustion. Up and up came the lighter rider, and then, miracle of miracles, he began to pass Crusader!

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ATTEMPT ON THE BRUTE'S LIFE.

CAMDEN could not believe his eyes, but when he stared again at the mare, it was true. Marvelous indeed was the condition of the mare for one which had covered that five-hundred mile cross-country race. Her ribs were a trifle gaunted, to be sure, but not more than was to be expected. Her head was carried lightly and high. She stepped firmly, lifted her feet well up. One might almost have thought that she was beginning the race, instead of starting the last long grind of the final day's march. And with a chilling touch of gloom, Camden prefigured Crusader beaten. Crusader beaten, and all the nameless sacrifices which he had made were made in vain! And the money of poor Ned Manners was gone. And beautiful Ruth Manners, whose courage and whose fine heart had made her come to him and give him one Godspeed in the hostile silence or the derision of the crowd—Ruth Manners would be struck down by the same club of defeat!

All of this was in the dread of Camden. He looked at Loring. The rider, to be sure, showed more wear than his horse. His thin face was not attenuated, and a constant snarl was on his lips. Never had he seemed more wolfish, never more bitter and cruel.

He sneered as he went by, and then pointed to the top of the slope far ahead and high above, with other summits rolling back and back beyond it—surely a heartbreaking prospect. But not a word was spoken as they passed one another, like ships by night. Only a glare of hatred and of rage, then they went on.

And still the mare was forging to the front. Camden, with his heart turned to lead, tried to comprehend, but it was incomprehensible. There was nothing to be made of it. Light though the weight was which rested in the saddle of Sally Ann, and skillful though the rider might

be, yet there was a great voice in Camden which told him that even with such a handicap she could never have beaten Crusader. However, there was no use dwelling on possibilities. Here was an actual fact. She was pulling ahead little by little up the grueling slope of the mountain, picking her way lightly and neatly.

He had still hope. If he could come even within striking distance of the mare by the time she turned over the crest, Crusader would have more than a chance. Weary as he might be, and tireless as her energy seemed to be, yet on the long, smooth down slope on the farther side of the mountain and then across the long level at its foot to the starting point, the long legs and the tremendous stride of the stallion was sure to tell for his advantage.

And even Loring must know this.

Camden had loosed the reins on the stallion and let him work his own way along, only heartening him and steadying him with a word now and again, or perhaps picking out a more roundabout but less steep route up some difficult place among the rocks. And the great horse worked like the giant that he was, heaving himself and his burden up and up the slope. Twice Camden saw the leader turn in his saddle and look back to mark the tireless progress of the stallion. And after each backward glance, he urged forward the mare more fiercely.

He was afraid, then, and sensing the fear, Camden himself grew more confident, for he knew that fear is a load in the heart and a load in the saddle. Fear is the thing that turns flesh of man or beast into lead.

They had crossed the first and the sharpest of the rises of the mountainside, and on a little shelving plateau, with smoother ground ahead of him all the way to the round summit of Jericho Mountain, Camden halted the stallion and dismounted and loosened the girths to let the fine animal breathe. And the stallion, letting his head fall as soon as his master was dismounted, propped his legs a little more firmly and panted with heaving sides. Camden listened anxiously. There was not a rattle, there was not a sign of roughness. All was well with the great black if only he could have a few moments to recover from this sudden exhaustion that the race had brought him.

But Loring, well above, now, was still climbing like a madman, forcing his mare on and on, with never a pause or a breathing space. It was supreme folly for such a horseman to ride in such a way. Horseflesh could not stand it. But Camden, with a giddily beating heart, knew the reason. Fear was whipping Loring along, fear of defeat, fear of the loss of the prize which was so nearly won.

Camden looked beneath him. Far below he caught glimpses of the laggards —five, six, ten or a dozen of them altogether. But half of them would never finish the race that day. Never! They were working as slowly as snails at the enormous mass of the mountainside. For the pace which Crusader had set in the march across the desert had been truly killing.

But now the final stage of the upward progress must begin. And far, far away, now, was the brown mare, laboring along with the light form of Loring on her back. Would she ever come back to them?

At that, the heart of Camden leaped. He had to set his teeth and then, leaping into the saddle, he put the stallion up the slope.

He would have burst into a gallop, even up that terrific angle, for the great heart of the horse could not brook a leader so far ahead as the mare. For well he knew, wise old racer that he was, that this was not a mere pleasure jaunt. This was the sort of work a victory in which brought extra oats, and sweet apples, crushing deliciously under the teeth, and petting, and fondling, and

long days of delightful idleness in some green pasture. And more than all, there was the mind of this man in the saddle, willing him on and pushing him on with a mental force, like a great controlling hand. And the man's will was his will, and the man's hope was his hope, and the strength of the heart of Camden was the strength of the heart of the great stallion.

Yet he was reined in short and forced to take the upward way with short, mincing steps. Wise rider! For one upward leap was more exhausting than half a mile of such more careful travel! And now they were gaining, steadily, steadily, on the mare above them. Her head was down, she was plodding with a religious determination, but it was madness of the first degree to rush her up that great ascent with never a pause. Beyond a doubt, her master knew the folly he had committed, and was cursing himself.

Across the ear of Harry Camden broke a sharp report, like the clangor of two sledge hammers swung hard and brought face to face. And then a wicked humming, followed by a second hammer stroke.

The echoes rolled wildly around him. He did not know in what direction to take shelter, but one thing he did know, and this was that some one with a repeating rifle was firing point-blank at him. Another instant and then he was struck a rude blow on the left shoulder —a stunning shock, combined with a swift and seering pain.

CHAPTER XIV.

NECK AND NECK.

HE looked straight above him. Yonder was Loring, struggling toward the summit. He had heard the shot, for he had turned in the saddle, waving a derisive arm. He could not have done the firing. And then Camden caught the glint of winking steel in the sun.

At such a time the mind acts, not the body. There was no volition in the lightning draw which snatched the revolver out of Camden's holster and made him fire. All that he saw was that one blink of light and then a blur of shadow moving behind a shrub, but as he fired, he heard a scream, and a short, broad-shouldered man staggered out from the bush, dropped his rifle, and fell on his face.

Far, far above, Loring, turning again in the saddle at the last shot, saw what had happened and leaned suddenly over the horn of his saddle. But Camden, turning Crusader to the right, was instantly by the side of his victim.

It was the same man who had opened the door at the hotel and brought him word that Loring wished to see him. He was dead, or dying, for his face was a smear of red. The snapshot had gone home. And as Camden, regardless of his own wound, dropped beside the fallen body, the eyes flashed open, scowled up at Camden, and then the lips mumbled:

"Loring! He put me here. He was the one——"

That was all. The stare grew fixed. There was no struggle. Death came to him with no sting.

Camden closed those eyes to the glare of the sun. Then he lifted the body with his right arm and placed it in the shadow of the brush. But after that, he had his own wound to attend to. When he ripped his shirt open, he saw at once that it was no serious matter. It was a glancing cut off the bone of the upper arm. Terribly painful, bleeding fast, but easily bandaged.

That bandage he made of his shirt, knotting it swiftly. Then he was back in the saddle on the black stallion and heading once more up that endless slope. Not endless, now.

Suddenly he was at the crest, and there was the brown mare, not so appalling far in front. Astonishingly near, it seemed to Camden.

He spoke, and the great Crusader

swung forward in his stride. Here was galloping ground, and what would the mare do to the gallop of Crusader? Yes, she did well enough. She was stretching well over the ground, running hard and true, with no sway or swerve to her pace—a wonderful feat, truly, for so small a horse after so long a ride.

The slope grew sharper; the galloping was discarded. And again the mare gained. Now they entered the rolling foothills, and galloping ground again!

But now the long, rolling canter of Crusader began to tell. Slowly but steadily they pulled on Loring. And Loring, turning in the saddle, saw behind him a wild vision of a man clad in a shirt rent half to pieces, blurred across with bright crimson, his left arm swinging in a helpless pendulum at his side, but with his right hand and with his voice controlling the stallion and riding wonderfully well. And with every stride gaining, gaining!

A yell of rage, and then almost of terror burst from his lips, and he swung his quirt.

The mare responded. She was true blue to the last bit of strength in her sturdy heart. But how could she stand against the racing legs of Crusader? He swept on and on, closer and closer. Darkness was spreading in the brain of Camden. Twice he felt himself falling forward, faint. Twice he rallied, and then, just before him, he saw the straining body of the mare, and a little way off a great semicircle of men and women and children standing, with the town behind them. It was not a roaring in his brain, then, that he had heard. It was the yelling of that wild crowd, seeing such a finish as the Jericho race had never before furnished and would never furnish again—a driving finish after five hundred miles of terrible labor across mountain and desert—two horses side by side, then neck and neck.

There was a deep-throated shout from Harry Camden. It caught the stallion in mid-stride and flung him forward. And the shining black head slid under the wire in front of the straining head of brown. Crusader had won.

That was what smote against the ears of Harry Camden as he turned the big black horse back to the starting point. The crowd washed about them, fearless of the terrible heels of the stallion. Here was Colonel Dinsmore. Here was a white, pretty face—Ruth Manners making toward him. Here were volleyed questions—what had happened—had he fallen?

But yonder sat Loring, crushed in the saddle. And that sight cleared the brain of Harry Camden.

"The race is over?" he asked hoarsely.

"All over, lad!" cried the delighted colonel. "Come down here out of the saddle and——"

Camden came, but it was only to brush them aside with a sweep of his thick right arm. And from the grimness in his face they shrank back. He clove a way through the throng straight to the side of Loring. He reached up and with his one hand tore the man from the saddle and held him for a helpless moment in a terrible grip. The man was helpless.

"Loring," they heard him say, "that gent on the mountain lived long enough to tell me that you put him there. And I've lived long enough to win this race, and now there's a thing between you and me, Loring—how will you want to talk?"

As he spoke, he flung Loring from him.

There was no hesitation in that thin, yellow face. His revolver came out even before he had finished staggering. And twenty men could swear that the gun was clear of the sheath, or nearly clear, before Camden drew his own weapon. Yet when the two shots rang out, Camden stood erect, and Loring crumpled on his side.

The sheriff was there, one leap too late to stop the fight, but soon enough

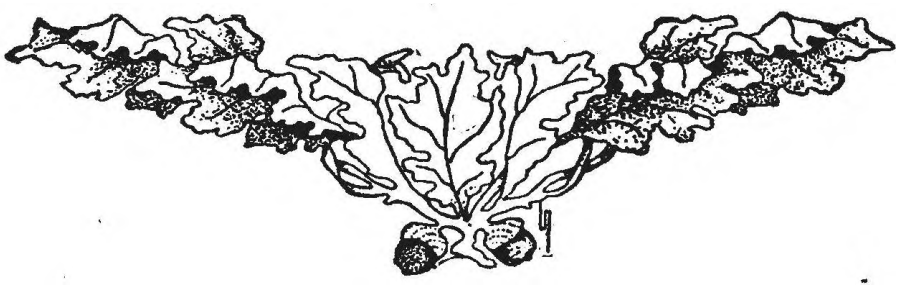
to snap his own gun into the ribs of Camden.

"Take my gun," he heard Camden say. "I'm sick of livin', I tell you, and so'll you be when you hear Loring talk—if he tells the truth before he dies! I wonder if he will."

And that was exactly what Loring did. Perhaps conscience wakened in him as death drew near. Perhaps it was fear of a last judge before whom he dreaded to stand with this stain on his heart.

He told the truth and the full truth that freed Harry Camden, and sent Mervin fleeing like a frightened rat for his life. He was never found. He disappeared from the face of the earth, and some said that the river must have caught him when he attempted to cross it with his horse.

Of that they never talked in the later days, Ned Manners and his sister, and his new-made brother, Camden. For one thing, they were too full of happiness to think of evil days. For another, they were too busy working the farm, which the money of Colonel Dinsmore had extended for them to twice its original bounds. But in a plot of the richest ground, near the house, so that he could come and put his head through the window whenever he heard the whistle of Camden, Crusader lived like a king. And, after all, as the colonel said, he was right royal.



SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK

THE Papago Saguaro National Monument in the Salt River Valley, Arizona, reserves a typical bit of the desert, as it was before the famous Roosevelt Dam stored up the water that made the desert bloom. Within its area is found a splendid collection of characteristic flora, including many striking examples of giant cactus saguaro and other interesting species of cacti, such as the prickly pear and cholla, locally known as "jumping cactus." This local name is derived from the ease with which sections break off, the thorny points giving the impression of actually leaping at the passer-by. Here and there are leafless palo verdes, and in the sandy washes are thickets of cat-claw or scrubby mesquite. The most generally prevalent plant is the creosote, a small, rounded bush of dark-green hue.

But the desert's chief exhibit is the giant saguaro, from which the monument takes its name. This cactus rises in a splendid green column accordion pleated and decorated with starlike clusters of spines upon the pleats. The larger specimens grow as high as sixty or seventy feet, throwing out thick, powerful branches which bend sharply upward, paralleling the main stock. In the spring, clusters of red flowers appear on the ends of the branches and the trunk.

Through the center of the park is a ridge of low hills, rising from the flat desert to a height of one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet. The rocks in the ridge have been worn by the elements, resulting in caves and some openings which extend entirely through the rocks. One of these openings, "Hole-in-the-Rock," is an aperture some fifteen feet high and twenty-five feet long, with an amphitheater approach to the hole on each side. It is a favorite picnic ground.

It's Knowing Where to Look

By

Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "Inside Out," etc.

OLD "Dad" Scott had spent the greater part of two days prospecting a little mountain stream that ran into Sundown Creek. He had turned his pack animal loose and made camp at the mouth of the little creek, then with pick and shovel had worked toward the head of the creek, carefully examining both slopes as well as the gravel in the bed of the stream. Stooped and wrinkled, gray beard concealing his rugged features, his movements were slow and deliberate; stiff muscles and rheumatic joints do not permit of rapid work. In his younger days he might have covered the ground in half the time, but he could not have been more thorough in his examination.

For more years than he could remember, the old prospector had suffered hardships and endured privations in the endless search of the golden fortune that seemed somehow to elude him. Once there had been a partner, old Ben Ellis, who had given up the fight and passed to his final reward two years before. More from habit than because he hoped to make the long-delayed strike, Dad had kept up the hunt alone. In all the years together they had uncovered a few encouraging pockets and had worked lean placers for just enough to keep soul and body together.

It was near noon of the second day on the little creek when Dad came upon the first "color," a trace of fine gold in the sand and gravel of the creek bed. With the feverish energy that ever comes with the appearance of gold in any quantity however small, the old man redoubled his efforts. When a little farther on he uncovered a little pocket among the rocks and took out half a handful of coarse gold and a nugget the size of a pea, he became fairly excited for one of his years and experience.

He was then near the head of the little creek, and the strip of ground he was exploring had narrowed to little more than two rods in width. In spite of his exciting discovery, he continued the search as methodically as before, covering the ground carefully and deliberately. He had found pockets before, pockets that apparently contained all the gold within miles so far as his ability to find more was concerned. This one might be like that, or it might be merely the leakage from something big—there was always hope of striking the grandmother of all pockets.

It was barely three hours after his discovery of the first color that old Dad

Scott thrust his pick into a crumbling ledge near the head of the little creek and exposed a gleaming vein of yellow —gold in such quantities as he had seen only in his dreams!

He stood looking down stupidly, scarcely able to comprehend. He had often imagined the elation he would feel at such a sight, but his senses had failed to react now that his dream was a reality.

"I—I wisht Ben was here," he stammered weakly, almost overcome by this trick fortune had played, casting wealth at his feet after withholding it all these years.

He sat long upon the ledge, feasting his old eyes upon the sight of gold, hefting the fragments of rich quartz. He did not comprehend the magnitude of his find nor conceive of the uses to which so much wealth could be put. His chief satisfaction lay in the fact that he had discovered it with his own eyes, had brought it to view for the first time by a stroke of his pick; and yet he was robbed of half the joy because there was no one with whom he could share it.

"Now, if Ben was here——" he began again, but stopped, half ashamed of his childish fancy.

Presently there dawned upon him the necessity of protecting his claim, and he began at once to erect a rude monument of rough stone to mark the point of location. When he had scrawled a location notice on a scrap of paper, he posted it by fastening it in place and weighting with small stones. He then paced off the distance that would include a claim of legal size and made insignificant heaps of stone to mark the four corners. He was reasonably certain that the single claim would take in all the paying ground on both sides of the creek.

It was sundown when he returned to his camp at the mouth of the creek. When he had made sure that his burro had strayed no farther than the grassy flat, he gathered fuel and made a fire. He set about preparing his supper of flapjacks, bacon and coffee, with as much composure as if the discovery of a bonanza were an everyday occurrence.

While he was slicing the bacon he heard a noise from the direction of the trail coming up the opposite side of Sundown Creek. He listened and presently made out the tap of unshod hoofs on the gravel, heralding the slow approach of a pack animal like his own. Soon the animal came into view, and through the gloom of twilight the old prospector beheld a man driving the beast.

"Hello, my friend," the stranger called when he had crossed the narrow stream bed with the trickle of water at the bottom. "I saw the light of your fire and concluded this would be a good place to camp for the night. Reckon you don't care if I throw in with you and cook my grub over the same fire?"

Under ordinary circumstances the stranger would have received a warm welcome, but Dad experienced a feeling of suspicion and jealousy at this intrusion which he could not hide, and grunted a reluctant consent to the stranger. Already the responsibility of suddenly found wealth was weighing upon the old man, for he was determined to guard his secret from all comers until he could reach the county seat and file his location.

Without seeming to notice the aloofness of the old prospector, the stranger slipped the pack from his burro and set about preparing his own supper. He was not old, neither was he very young. He was well beyond thirty, and the face that the firelight revealed to the old prospector bore the furrows of responsibility as well as the wrinkles about the eyes that come from frequent laughter.

"Prospecting?" he asked as he filled his coffee pot and set it on the coals.

"Uh-huh," Dad replied.

"Been at it a long time I reckon?"

"Ain't ever done much else."

"Like it?"

"When I'm lucky."

"You actually do find gold sometimes then?"

Old Dad Scott, cautiously alert, glanced at the stranger, bent over the fire, and hesitated a moment before answering. He had no intention of telling about his recent find, for the stranger might be pumping him for a purpose. Lone prospectors had been made way with and their claims jumped time without number.

"I been livin' on what I find," the old man replied.

The stranger laughed lightly. "Well, I'm just starting in," he announced, "but I'd hate to think I would keep at it fifty or sixty years without making more than a bare living. Afraid I'd have to strike it pretty soon or I would quit and hunt another job."

"Might strike it rich right off; some men is born lucky."

"I wasn't," the stranger returned with a quizzical smile, followed by a puckering of his brow and a short intake of breath that was evidently the interruption of a sigh. As if reluctant to go farther into the matter of his own affairs at the time, he fell silent and then turned and busied himself about his pack.

Old Dad Scott warmed somewhat toward the younger man now that he appeared to have no designs upon the claim up the creek or even a suspicion of its existence. The two men, veteran prospector and the other who was little more than a tenderfoot, ate their supper together, and as they ate they talked after the manner of men thus thrown together. They talked of the trails and water holes, creeks, ledges, and gulches, of the things that concerned them intimately. Dad became reminiscent and told of strikes of early days. Of the fortunes he had missed, seemingly by the breadth of a hair. The younger man drank this in eagerly, realizing the meagerness of his own experience.

"My name's McCammon," he volunteered in the course of their conversation. The old prospector would never have departed from his simple code by asking for the information, even had he had the curiosity to know.

"Must be a great thing to find a fortune that way, all in a lump," McCammon observed wistfully. "Just to think what you could do with ten or twenty thousand dollars, or maybe more—guess you've planned out what you'll do when you make your lucky strike?"

"I—I dunno; ain't ever thought much about it," Dad replied, somewhat staggered by the question.

"Well. I know good and plenty what I'd do with it," McCammon went on animatedly. "Say, did you ever have a sick wife and two kids looking to you for support and you feeling like you couldn't do half enough for 'em?" he asked in a sudden burst of confidence.

Dad shook his head. "Reckon I ain't got no kin," he said.

"Then you don't know just how a fellow feels about it," McCammon returned. "Guess I shouldn't be bothering other people with my troubles, but long as I've started I'll spin my yarn. Guess maybe I'm a fool for coming out here on a wild goose chase, hardly knowing gold when I see it, but I had to try it once.

"The doctor started me West a year ago when he told me my wife could not last long where she was. I struck Borderville and got a job in the smelter there; got just enough to make a bare living without allowing anything for comforts that a sick person would need. My wife's health has improved some, but she needs better care than I can give her on what I make in order to make a well woman of her.

"Oh, I'm not squealing about my luck, lots of fellows worse off, but I just wanted you to understand why a greenhorn like me would be driving a burro

over the hills poking into all kinds of unlikely places with the hope of turning up gold. I got some dope from two or three old prospectors; maybe they told me the truth, and just as likely they were stringing me along. At any rate, I think I would know raw gold if I stumbled on it.

"I got a vacation of two weeks from the smelter, and one week of that's gone without anything exciting happening; haven't seen a grain of gold to know it. Guess maybe it would have been better if I had gone in with some old-timer, only there wasn't anybody keen to divide with a tenderfoot like me.

"Yes, I sure enough know what I'd do with a chunk of money, and I can guess pretty near how I'd feel if I stumbled on a bonanza. But that's just half the fun; when I got back home and told the little woman about it——"

He stopped and looked away a moment, then as if ashamed of this outburst of confidence to a stranger, he made a commonplace remark and turned the conversation to other channels.

Dad Scott was silent. He wasn't right sure about this stranger, but it was well enough to be careful.

The two spread their blankets, one on either side of the fire, and were soon asleep. Dad did not sleep as soundly as usual and was astir with the approach of dawn. McCammon was up early, also, and the two prepared their breakfast together. When the meal was finished, both men packed their burros with their camp equipment and prepared to take up the trail, McCammon to the hills farther up Sundown Creek, and old Dad Scott in the opposite direction.

"Reckon you might have luck if you strike out to'ard them hills two-three miles t'other side o' the creek," Dad advised, determined to steer this new acquaintance away from the little creek where he had discovered the gold the day before.

"Thank you for the good word, old-timer," McCammon answered cheerfully. "It would have been about like me to fool away my time up this little creek here if you hadn't told me. They say gold is where you find it, but I guess you've got to have sense enough to look in the right place."

He slapped his burro and started up the trail. Dad waited until he was out of sight, then headed down the trail in the direction of the county seat. It would take him the most of two days to reach there afoot, and he was anxious to get there and file his location notice ahead of any possible contestant.

He walked slowly, lost in thought, for now that he had made his lucky strike he was disappointed that it gave him no more pleasure than the little pockets he had come upon in other years. Beyond the needs that might be satisfied with a few hundred or a thousand, he could conceive of no use to which he might put so great a fortune.

He had gone little more than a mile when he stopped and sat upon a rock, leaving the burro to nip the herbage by the side of the road.

"Now, if Ben was just here——" he muttered to himself as was his habit when deeply perturbed, and it was a disquieting problem that he must solve. "I reckon he'd say do the square thing an' trust to luck. Yes, I reckon that's what he'd say," Dad mumbled. "By rights half that gold I found would go to ol' Ben if he was livin'—an' him bein' dead it ought to go where he'd say. Anyway I ain't needin' more'n half. Maybe that young feller was a-lyin' about havin' a wife an' kids, but I reckon maybe he wasn't, I got to give him the benefit of the doubt. Ben would do that."

He sat silent for a time, his hands on his knees. Then he got to his feet stiffly, a new light of determination shining from his old eyes.

"Ben, ol' pardner, I reckon I know what you'd say to do, an' I'm a-goin' to do it," he muttered, barely above a whisper.

He swung the patient pack animal about in the trail and headed back toward the camp he had left a little while before. He moved with surprising briskness, belaboring the reluctant donkey in his eagerness to complete the task he had set for himself.

When he had reached the mouth of the little creek where he had camped he turned upstream and in a little while came to the place where he had erected the rude location monument. He scattered the stones and removed all trace of his operations of the day before, even replacing the disturbed gravel and stones about the ledge where he had uncovered the gold. His own tracks he obliterated as far as possible. Two of the corner monuments he destroyed; the others would not be noticed. The ground where he had found the gold looked as if it had never been disturbed by the pick of a prospector.

His task completed here, Dad returned down the creek the way he had come. Driving his burro before him, he took up the trail after McCammon. Within an hour he came upon the other man pecking away among the rocks of a ledge on the side of a hill overlooking Sundown Creek.

"Hello, old-timer," McCammon called cheerily when he looked up and saw the old prospector. "Thought you had gone the other way, but I'm sure glad to see you. Maybe you can tell me if there's any chance of finding gold in a place like this?"

"Reckon not," Dad replied, "but I might take you to a place where they is some sign if you don't mind throwin' in with me?"

"You—you don't mean go partners, even shares?" McCammon queried, his jaw dropping with astonishment.

"Reckon that's the size of it if you don't mind me bein' old an' no-'count the way I am. I—I ain't just what I was once; my back ain't stout, an' I need somebody to——"

"Will I? Well, I guess I will," McCammon hastened to assure him. "Your experience is worth more than all my muscle and awkwardness would be if I was twice my size."

"Found a little trace o' color in that little crick where we camped; like enough you'd hit on it if you'd gone that way," Dad imparted as they turned back.

"Not a chance, not unless I had fallen down and got some in my eye," McCammon replied with a grin.

"Mayn't amount to anything," Dad went on, "but I'd like to foller it up to the ledge. Slow work for me diggin' in rock an' heavy stuff." He continued to magnify his infirmities.

Not until they had reached the spot where Dad had found the first color, did the old prospector halt and direct his new partner where to dig. As before, a little fine gold was washed from the sand, enough to fire McCammon with zeal for the hunt. But now the search was pushed forward rapidly, McCammon wielding the pick where the old prospector directed.

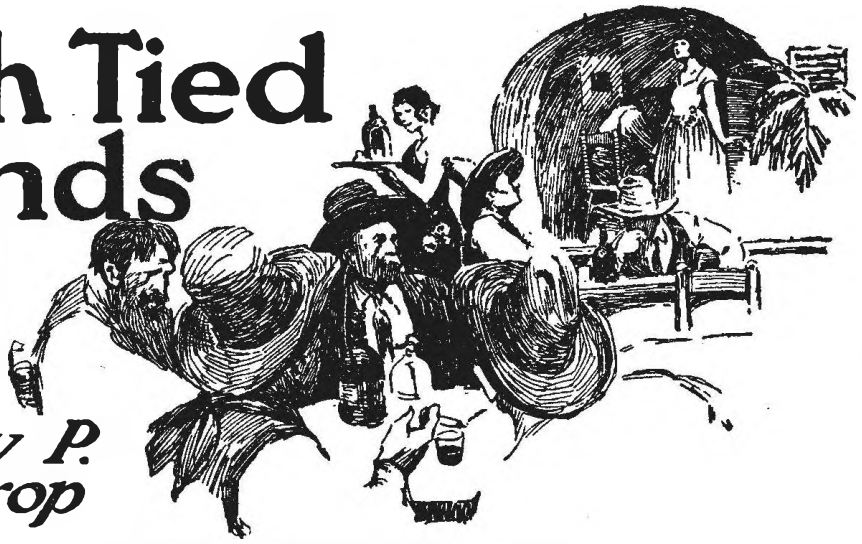
Dad was standing on the opposite slope two or three rods away when McCammon reached the crumbling ledge and thrust his pick to the eye in the loose material, suddenly exposing the vein of gleaming yellow gold.

The younger man stood there a moment in mute astonishment, then raised a yell that sent the echoes bounding from bluff to bluff.

Dad grinned happily. "Just like I'd have hollered—me or Ben—forty year ago. Reckon a man can't get no fun out'n a good thing 'cept he has somebody to divide it with, an' I figger this young feller is plumb truthful. He's actin' nat'ral."

While McCammon was dancing around and yelling with pure joy, groveling among the rocks in an effort to get a handful of the rich fragments, old Dad Scott set about gathering up the stones again, and began to rebuild the location monument.

With Tied Hands



By

Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "Tony's Good-luck Horse," etc.

A MOST striking fellow was "Ginger" Kearney. There was a distinction about him that made him stand out from the rank and file, and this appearance had a lot to do with earning him his nickname Ginger.

For one thing, his hair was red; not a flaming, vivid red, but a sort of a smoky, tempered tint, verging almost on burnt umber. This was not unnatural, especially in one whose father was Tipperary Irish, but what was really surprising was the color of his eyes. Where ordinarily one would expect to encounter those of blue, you found yourself gazing into a pair that were deep amber. Then another thing, his complexion was out of keeping with the shade of his hair. Not a freckle was in evidence on either his hands or his face. He would have been dark complexioned even had he been an indoor man—a trifle pallid perhaps, but still dark complexioned. As it was, an outdoor life since he had been able to crawl had tanned his skin to a healthy brown. Taken in combination with his well-knit frame, the whole effect was one of tigerish lithesomeness.

Ginger was a bright and shining light in his highly specialized vocation, that of a professional rodeo artist. He had started out as a broncho rider and bulldogger, eventually graduating into a trick rider and fancy roper. As such, his services were in great demand. His route as a rule followed a beaten path, beginning with the spring Fat Stock Show in Texas, and after describing a wide circle, ending in the Southwest.

During the winter months, Ginger usually secured a job on some ranch. This served to keep him in trim as well as to help stave off the proverbial wolf. Not that Ginger did not make plenty of money. He did in season, but it invariably vanished soon after it was acquired. He was one of the sort who was always open for a touch from some less fortunate rider. Some day in the future Ginger intended starting a bank account, but as yet, this plan had not progressed beyond the dream stage. You see he was only twenty-four, and the specter of a penniless old age had not yet begun to threaten.

One day—it was at a late fall rodeo—Ginger was approached by a perfect stranger. He was a full-paunched, saffron-hued, black-mustached individual, prosperous beyond doubt and unmistakably a don. Introducing himself as José Pequano, he said that he had a very attractive proposition to lay before Mr. Kearney.

Ginger, like so many who hail from the Southwest, held an innate distrust of any one obviously bred below the Rio Grande, especially when it came to a business proposition. But he nodded good-humored acquiescence, and the other broke into voluble explanation.

"It is the scheme most extraordinary," began the Mexican in carefully enunciated English. "At Escalado, which is my home, much tourists come, your countrymen for the most part. Soon they tire of what we have to offer. They are wishful to see what they call the wild West. And it is this that we plan to furnish—at a peso a head. We will stage a rodeo, señor. What crowds it will draw! We shall have many vaqueros as contestants. And you, señor, I wish to hire as a trick rider and fancy roper. Is it not one gran' scheme, amigo?"

Ginger was mildly interested at this prospect of an all-winter job, and José saw as much, so to make the proposition alluring, he enlarged upon his offer. He also desired, he said, that as well as doing trick riding and fancy roping, Ginger should act as arena director. None in his employ was competent, José averred, lacking the necessary experience. There would be an extra compensation attached to this he explained.

Ginger took the matter under advisement, promising to let the Mexican know by the following day. In the meantime he set afoot some inquiries as to the new promoter's responsibility. He had no desire to be lured below the line on some wild goose chase. A winter's job on a ranch was highly preferable. However, the inquiries served to establish the Mexican as responsible, and the upshot of it was Ginger sought him out that night at his hotel.

"I'll go you a round," he said laconically.

The Mexican beamed, produced a liberal contract, and a week later found Ginger domiciled in Escalado.

Now Escalado for the greater part of a century had been a sleepy Mexican village of narrow streets and adobe-walled houses, the abiding place of a few hundred slothful, indolent natives, half as many mangy, barking dogs and a horde of active and pernicious fleas. But when its northern neighbor clamped down the lid with such abrupt and startling force, José Pequano, who claimed Escalado as his home, but who was more or less of a cosmopolite and who did not allow his conscience to interfere with his quest for much gold, suddenly returned. Guided by his master hand and backed by his ample capital, the inhabitants chucked their indolent ways and became very busily engaged in reaping a golden harvest. Capitalizing Escalado's proximity to a tourist-thronged American border city, they transformed their town into a hectic pleasure resort.

During the old days the sound of music was but occasionally heard in Escalado and then it was the twang of a guitar accompanying a low crooned Spanish love song as some smitten cavalier serenaded his señorita. Now the whining blare of a half a dozen jazz orchestras was stridently in evidence. Once the long, dimly lighted, adobe-walled barroom of the inn had been a peaceful retreat where a *compañero* might doze uninterrupted. The "keno" at the game's conclusion was uttered softly and with much deference and the accepted formula at the bar, voiced in throaty Spanish was: "A little more *tequila,* señor. A thousand thanks, excellency."

Things had changed greatly. The long barroom was now ablaze with lights, the plain pine bar had given way to polished mahogany, the constant clink of glass on glass punctuated the whirr of the wheel and the reiterated chant of the gamekeeper was never still. It was a scene of reckless activity.

Like moths attracted by a candle's flame, the curious crowds came from

across the river to take part in the unbridled festivities. They fluttered about the forbidden flames, singed their wings to a pleasurable extent and—what was more to the point—left much gold. It was into this whirlpool of festivity that Ginger Kearney, hailed as the premier of gringo riders, came.

As he was not yet twenty-five, single and overflowing with the wine of life, you could hardly blame him for plunging with an abandon of recklessness into the gayeties by which he was surrounded.

But there were other ways of dissipating his easily earned salary. Life to him was made up largely of chances anyhow. So the "Cat hop in the box, boys; pays you two for one if you can call it," of the faro dealer; or "The little pill, she rolls, she rolls. A monkey can play it as well as a man," of the roulette keeper exercised a subtle fascination. Little cared Ginger that the bulk of his earnings returned by this roundabout route to the coffers of José Pequano. Existence was a sort of a grand merry-go-round anyway, and what was money for?

For a month or so, things drifted along in a highly satisfactory manner. Afternoons Ginger would direct the arena activities at the rodeo, doing his own stuff the while. After the lights were lit he would dine in solitary state, then begin his nightly flirtation with the Goddess of Chance. And thus, but for the intervention of Fate personified by a slip of a girl, things might have so continued until the following spring.

It was at the Café Palacios that the threads of his destiny became crossed. Ginger liked to dine there. Its cuisine was famous and its patronage extensive. Always there was music and always a corps of professional entertainers—of the very best.

This certain night a new artist made her appearance. She was a mite of a girl, dressed in white, with a great mass of blue-black hair coiled and pyramided atop her head, and eyes that were like great, limpid pools of darkness. There was no air of brazen self-confidence about her, nor yet even of assurance.

"Reminds me of a scared deer," Ginger mused, as she threaded her way through the tables toward the platform at the rear of the restaurant. "She's a beauty though, I'll hand her that. Wonder what's her line."

Presently she sang a haunting Spanish love song rendered in the mother tongue. It was something new, this rendition of a number in anything but English and it took the diners by storm. Applause, vociferous and prolonged followed. In a manner that was shyly diffident, the singer bowed her thanks and again obliged—this time in English. It was a popular ballad that she sang, a teasing, lilting song and the faint suggestion of an accent with which she slurred the words, made it indescribably charming. Once more her audience clamored for an encore to which she graciously responded. Again and again this was repeated. It was though her hearers were loath to let her go. At last with a little mute gesture she pointed to her throat, spoke to the orchestra leader, and began her final song without accompaniment.

Charming, haunting, touching, the more, sung thus without accompaniment, the old, old song "Silver Threads Among the Gold," seemed to clutch at the very heartstrings of her listeners. Silence, mute tribute to the singer, fell over the room. Richly clad women, unashamed, pressed handkerchiefs to their eyes, while their escorts stony-faced gamblers or cold hard men of the world, sat staring, silent.

Ginger Kearney proved no exception. He too sat as if in a daze, swallowing furtively at a little aching lump which persisted in forming in his throat. Was it something in the timbre of the singer's voice or was he thinking of his gray-haired mother long since gone to her rest? No matter. He was still dreaming when the singer left the platform

and started threading her way through the tables toward the dressing room.

Frankly it was in no way to the discredit of the Café Palacios that the management encouraged the entertainers to make themselves agreeable to the patrons at the conclusion of each act. It was good business and the artists, experienced professionals for the greater part, were fully competent to look after themselves. But the latest recruit either failed to consider this as a part of her duties, or else a sense of shyness held her aloof. Acknowledging the shower of compliments that deluged her from every side with a modest inclination of her head, but ignoring all offers of entertainment, she tripped toward the dressing room.

Notwithstanding the fact that the bulk of the diners were a cosmopolitan lot, some idlers, for the time being on pleasure bent; some professional seekers of Fortune's smile, and the balance easy-living soldiers of fortune, they were nevertheless all gentlemen. And as such, they respected the señorita's evident reluctance to accept the proffered invitations. She would undoubtedly have gained her dressing room undetained, if it had not been for the interference offered by one of a small party of four gathered at a table next to Ginger.

He had remarked the quartet upon their arrival. They were a swaggering crew, dressed in wide trousers and short jackets, profusely ornamented with braid.

"Rancheros from the back country," he had mentally classified them at first sight.

The acknowledged leader of the four whose actions bespoke him host, was a black-browed, loud-mouthed swaggerer with an exalted opinion of himself. From his manner and the scraps of conversation that drifted Ginger's way, he judged that the leader had been drinking not wisely but too well.

As the singer passed his table, this man half rose from his chair and barred her way with outstretched arm. "Ha!" he leered, "Eet ees thee song bird of my own country. Be seated, señorita and drink with us!"

The girl, a sudden light of apprehension clouding her eyes, drew back, then gathering her skirts, attempted to brush past the outthrust arm. This apparent repugnance to his forced attentions dismayed the Mexican not at all, in fact quite the contrary. With a quick, unexpected movement, he grasped her wrist.

"Caramba!" he growled, "Why so shy, leetle one? Am I then so ugly to gaze upon?" and he attempted to seat her by force.

Ginger, who until this time had sat quietly still under the spell of the girl's song, suddenly stiffened. His amber eyes which had harbored a pensive, brooding look, narrowed and hardened.

The girl, acute fright showing in her face, sought to pull away, but yet more forcibly the Mexican drew her toward him.

Then Ginger unlimbered for action With an easy bound, he gained her side.

"Let go the lady, hombre," he snapped.

The Mexican whirled and for an instant stared at the other as if puzzled by his presumptuousness. Then his natural arrogance, stimulated by the wine he had drunk, caused him to flame forth in sudden anger.

"Ho, ho!" he roared. "And who are you, peeg of an Americano to interfere with Vasco Gomez?"

"It makes no difference who I am," Ginger returned cooly. "But you just keep your hands off that girl, savvy?"

Vasco's answer was a characteristic one. With a sinuous movement so quick and so deftly executed that it took the diners who were now crowding forward, totally unawares, his hand swept downward and returned, grasping a gleaming knife. He stabbed with a sidewise, twisting stroke.

Possibly had Vasco been dealing with

one less cool or with one whose eye and hand had not been trained by constant practice with a snaky rope to gauge distance to a hair's breadth, the knife would have found its mark. As it was, his wrist was caught in a firm grasp. There came a quick, bone-twisting wrench, and the knife clattered to the floor. Ginger put his foot on it.

"That'll about finish your act, hombre," he said dryly, and dextrously shifting his grip to a firm collar-and-pants hold, propelled the Mexican in no gentle manner toward the exit. Halfway to the door he turned his captive over to a belated pair of restaurant employees, and contemptuously ignoring Vasco's companions who were following in his wake, returned to the table he had quitted.

The girl who had watched the affray with round, panic-stricken eyes, had at its conclusion sunk relievedly into the nearest chair. It was directly opposite the one Ginger had occupied.

Gaining the table, the young American rider stopped, embarrassed. The girl was studying him with frankly curious eyes. For a space he hesitated, then blushed. Verily this was his undoing, for when a man blushes, he is at a grave disadvantage. And Teresa Cordovez, for all she was but sixteen, fresh from the convent, and spreading her wings for her first trial flight in a world of strange happenings, saw and understood. Instantly she gathered the reins into her own small hands.

"Sit down, señor. I go instantly. But of a truth, first must I express my thanks."

Ginger dropped into the chair with some relief. "Aw, it didn't amount to anything, sister," he said.

"Oh, but nay," she demurred. "He ees one ver' weecked man. And you were so brave. But then," she sighed, "one should such theengs expec' from a gran' caballero. And how you can ride, señor!"

Ginger's gaze was distinctly questioning. "Tell me, señorita, how do you know what I——"

Teresa smiled delightedly. "Thees afternoon, amigo, at the rodeo. My, but thou art skillful and oh so fearless!"

So it began, the acquaintanceship of a wandering knight of the rope and saddle with a girl who, with her voice as her fortune, was beginning her battle with the world. Prolonging his rôle as protector, Ginger saw the singer safely to the *posada* where she boarded.

The next day it rained, and the next, so there was no rodeo. But both nights found Ginger seated at his favorite table within the Café Palacios, listening to the new entertainer, regretting the while the go-easy manner in which his season's wages had vanished, and wondering if there was anything in the saying that the Spanish were partial to redheads. Each night he saw her home. Had she not in a burst of confidence told him that she still feared Vasco Gomez? What would you?

Three days after the affair with Gomez, Ginger as arena director was scanning the list of entrants for the forthcoming events, when he ran across the Mexican's name. He thought nothing of it at the time. It had become quite the style for visiting rancheros to thus exhibit their prowess in the way of horsemanship. But if it had not been for a horse called the Mirinda Black, it is doubtful if Ginger would have come into direct contact with Vasco.

This was a bad horse—bad from a rodeo rider's view point anyway. He had been shown at several rodeos the season before and had been tagged as undesirable, so he was foisted off on José Pequano in a string of horses he had purchased across the border.

Setting aside the fact that he was a killer, the trouble with the Mirinda Black was that one could not make a show on him. Contrary to the universal opinion, it is not the wicked, savage-pitching animal a rodeo artist dreads to draw.

Let him jump high or low, sideways or straight ahead; let him sunfish or corkscrew or swap ends with the rapidity of a tumbler pigeon, polished riders have no fear of him, for on such a horse one can put up a showy ride, a ride that piles up points, and points mean purses. It is the mean, tricky horse, one that sulks, rolls, falls intentionally backward or never acts twice the same that they fight shy of. It is impossible to put up a showy ride on such a horse, and they are immeasurably harder to stick on. The promoters abhor such an animal as well. A minimum of accidents is what they consistently strive for, and there is no use tempting fate.

The Mirinda Black was one of this sort. The talent soon learned that he was not only an exceptionally hard horse to stay on, but there was scant chance of a point being made by riding him. So, as you will see, they studied out a manner of circumventing him.

Ginger spotted him the first day he viewed the horse *caviya.* "There's a dog for you," he commented to himself, and not wishing any fatalities to mark his reign as arena director, protested his use to José Pequano. But the promoter was obdurate. Little he cared whose neck was sacrificed so long as he gathered in much gold, and besides the advertisement of having a known killer among the horses to be ridden was worth many admissions.

"Much I should worry," he said negligently, overruling Ginger's protest. "It is a chance each rider takes. The horse he stay."

So Ginger had gone about thwarting José's bloodthirsty intentions in a quiet but none the less efficacious manner. A professional rodeo performer, if he is wise, studies each horse shown with as much intentness as a child does its lesson. He seeks to fathom the horse's disposition and familiarize himself with any marked trait, that he may turn this knowledge to his own use. If the horse is hard to make a show on, he puzzles out some method of working him for what is professionally termed a re-ride. That means to keep him from pitching, so a no-contest ride will be declared and another horse furnished, an animal on which, luck favoring, one may make a show. There are tricks in all trades you know.

As it happened, some studious rider the season before had hit on a sure method whereby the Mirinda Black might be eliminated. It was simply to flank-girth him up to the last notch and this took all the pitch out of him. His only desire then was to run. Ginger had passed this word around to the vaquero contestants, and they at once had taken advantage of it. Each day, upon coming out of the chute, the Mirinda Black had shown nothing but a clean pair of heels.

Now as luck—or possibly ill luck—would have it, the horse that Vasco Gomez drew that afternoon was the Mirinda Black. Naturally enough, Ginger hung back, waiting for one of Vasco's fellow countrymen to post him as to what manner of horse the black was. But to his surprise none volunteered this information.

"One of you-all better put a flea in that hombre's ear," he had suggested to a group of vaqueros, after waiting a space. "What's fair for one is fair for all."

As of one accord, the copper-hued riders had shrugged indifferently. Then one explained. "Small thanks would be our portion señor," he said, showing a set of gleaming teeth. "Of old we are weeth Vasco acquaint. He ees a braggart, what you call one gran' bluffer. Haf he not already boast that anytheeng weeth hair he can ride!"

This view hardly coincided with Ginger's sense of fair play. While he held Vasco in small esteem, he harbored no grudge against him and desired he should have an even break. So he walked over

to the saddling chute where the Mexican was busy with his rigging.

"You want to watch that hoss, hombre," he warned. "He's got more tricks up his sleeve than a circus juggler. He's one *mal caballo.* Flank him up tight as a drum though, and he'll run."

Vacco's method of showing his appreciation of this gratituous tip was as unexpected as it was ungrateful. When he recognized the speaker he blew out his cheeks in a grimace of rage and advanced a step forward.

"Caramba!" he bellowed loudly. "Am I then an infant that I should be told how to ride by a gringo? It ees not veree good that you interfere again in my affairs."

"All right, go to it then," Ginger retorted. "You give me a swift pain anyway. If that's the way you feel I hope he breaks your neck."

As he turned away from the incensed rider, Ginger rather regretted this outspoken wish. He really held nothing against the boastful Mexican and he did not care to see any one injured. Of course Vasco might ride the horse. It was not impossible; but unless aware of his tricky ways, one seriously courted a fall and perhaps a bad accident. Determined to prevent any chance of this if possible, Ginger sought his own horse which was standing saddled near by and motioned to a couple of vaqueros to assist him in riding herd.

The arena itself where the riding took place was a circular affair, formerly a bull ring. The pens and saddling chutes had been erected at one side. The horses were saddled and the riders mounted inside the chute.

When Vasco, not deigning to use a flank girth, clambered aboard the Mirinda Black, settled himself firmly in the saddle, and then tossed his heavy, high-crowned sombrero to one of his waiting compatriots, Ginger emitted what sounded very much like a groan.

"Cooked his own goose right there," he muttered, which as you will see was a very true prognostication.

Immediately the gate to the chute was flung open, the Mirinda Black left the alley like a streak. Not on a run as heretofore, but in a series of quick, bone wrenching cat hops. Possibly forty feet from the chute he pitched. Then on a space that might have been covered by a blanket, he staged an exhibition of plain and fancy bucking the like of which had made him famous. His enforced lay-off, the result of constant flank girthing, had only served to store up in him a greater reserve of nervous energy and to accentuate his wickedness. Weaving, twisting, swinging with a sort of a rocking-chair motion, calculated to throw the rider off poise, he would vary this at times by a constant sucession of straight-up jumps, which, by the way are the hardest thing a rider's frame is called upon to withstand. The Mexican had long since given up any idea of making a contest ride of it. His sole aim now was to stay with the black.

The spectators, subtly aware that something out of the ordinary was happening, craned forward expectantly, shouting advice and encouragement to horse and rider alike.

Vasco, his legs locked viselike around his steed, one hand clutching the neck strap, the other shamelessly grasping the pommel, was sticking like the proverbial leech. At last it seemed as though the black sensed that straight jumping was a futile way of trying to unseat the anchored man. So he resorted to one of the tricks for which he was notorious. Rearing backward at a dangerous angle, he threatened to topple. Heretofore this ruse had seldom failed. Invariably the rider would loosen in the saddle preparatory to quitting the horse when he fell. Then the black, changing tactics, would explode in a couple of dynamic forward jumps and send the rider flying.

But this time the black's feint caused no responsive loosening of the Mexican's

hold. If anything, some reflex action caused him to tighten his leg grip, and the black suddenly realizing that his bluff was called, made good the feint. Farther and higher he reared, at last toppling backward.

Ginger had been prepared for this eventuality from the moment the rider failed to loosen up. He knew the horse, you see. Keeping as close as possible, he was prepared to render aid. As the black fell backward, and Vasco's startled face, now a pasty, yellowish white, was turned upward toward the sky, Ginger sank the spurs into his mount. Sweeping forward, he bent low and curving a long arm about the Mexican's body, wrenched him from the saddle. It was a quickly thought out plan, devised on the spur of the moment and handily executed. Reining his horse clear of the black, who now went caroming off down the arena, he deposited the Mexican on his feet.

That the audience appreciated this almost superhuman feat was attested by the wild applause and the repeated cries of "Bravo! Bravo, Americano!"

But notwithstanding his narrow escape from being crushed into a broken, shapeless mass, Vasco displayed no gratitude toward his rescuer. Quite the contrary in fact. He turned to Ginger, who had now dismounted, and his face was puckered into a grotesque mask of rage.

"Peeg of a man!" he snarled. "Once too often haf you laid filthy hands on Vasco Gomez. Eet ees this time that I shall teach you better."

Ginger, familiar of old with the odd mental reactions often induced by the strenuous pounding of a vicious horse, made due allowance for the Mexican's excited condition.

"You ought to have kept off him, hombre, or else flank-girthed him tight like I told you. The black's too much hoss for you," he said evenly.

For a space Vasco glared, mouthing little incoherent words, hot rage curbing his powers of speech. "Swine, dog, insect!" he roared at last. "Can one who like a circus clown rides thee gentle *caballo* and performs infant's tricks weeth thee rope, tell Vasco anytheeng? Bah!"

For the first time Ginger became somewhat nettled. What provoked him most was the greaser's bland assumption that he could not ride. His features hardened a wee bit as his Irish came to the surface

"Listen, hombre," he said testily, "you better can that promiscuous shootin' off your mouth. If it'll do you any good to know it, I can ride that hoss with my hands tied and if you'll take a bit of advice, you'll dry up that yap and vamose, pronto."

Not waiting to see whether this suggestion was obeyed, Ginger turned and bent to pick up the reins of his horse. As he stooped, something hummed over his back, and he straightened up to see a knife quivering in the leather-covered wooden tree of his saddle.

For an instant it looked like red war with Mexico, but thinking better of his first impulse, Ginger rasped a few commands to the loitering vaqueros, and Vasco was ignominiously hustled away.

The affair made scant impression on Ginger Kearney. He took it all as a part of the day's work. Was not life one chance after another anyway?

But there was one upon whom this attempted assassination had left its imprint of terror. Of late Teresa Cordovez had become a confirmed rodeo fan.

"Ah, but I am so affright!" she had confided that night, when at the conclusion of her act, she sat at Ginger's table. "He one very bad mans. You mus' of heem beware, amigo mio."

Ginger smiled indulgently at her earnestness. "Shucks, kid, he's nothin' but a big windy. He's probably halfway home by now. What do you say we take a little pasear, sister? The moon's just fine to-night for a walk."

"I shall be mos' charmed, señor," re-

plied the girl, which duly explains their presence near the outskirts of Escalado some half an hour afterwards.

Who knows of what they talked? The glory of the night was very wonderful, and youth is always sanguine. Truly they were much absorbed, and it was this which prevented them from either seeing or hearing a little knot of figures that stole upon them in the darkness.

Ginger put up an interesting struggle, but one is at a terrible disadvantage when enveloped at the outset by a smothering blanket. As for the girl, her initial scream had been hushed at its inception by a hand roughly clapped across her mouth.

Fifteen minutes later the pair sat by the saddling chute within the arena, Ginger helpless, swathed like a mummy in ropes, the girl unbound, but nevertheless powerless.

Vasco Gomez, backed by two evil-faced *compañeros,* stood before them. "Ho, ho!" he taunted. "Soon weel the Americano peeg haf a chance to make good his boast. Eet ees not good for to talk too much weeth thee mouth. Vasco ees what you call from Missouri. He mus' be shown."

Trussed like a fowl, Ginger glared at his captors. Once he opened his mouth and then resolutely closed it again. Bandying words would get him nowhere he decided. So he let his brain function rapidly seeking to fathom the enemy's intent and if possible figure some way out of the difficulty. It was not himself that he feared for; he never for an instant considered his own predicament. The treatment which would be accorded the girl was what bothered him most.

"Wonder what his game is," Ginger muttered.

He was not long left in doubt. There came a drumming of hoofs, and like swiftly galloping wraiths in the moonlight, the entire string of rodeo horses swept from the pasture in which they were kept, on through a gate and into the arena. Behind them, urging them on was a rider, the third of Vasco's companions of the restaurant. Like soldiers trained by constant practice, the remuda headed at once for the pen that opened into the saddling chute. Closing the pen gate, the rider dismounted from his horse, and beckoning another to assist him, entered the corral with the remuda. Next came an excited flurry, attended by much waving of serapes and many shouted directions, and presently a horse cut off from his fellows was herded into the saddling chute. He was quickly barred in place. Then the rider climbed out of the pen, stalked to his horse, and commenced unsaddling. After a bit he came toward Vasco, dragging behind him his heavy saddle.

"All is in readiness, señor," he said.

Vasco grinned an evil smile and addressed Ginger. "Now gringo dog," he began, "you shall make good your boast. Have you not said you could ride thee black weeth your hands tied? Eet weel be my great pleasure to geeve you thee opportunity."

Vasco's plan was perfectly plain now. Seeking some method of avenging the insults he fancied the American had offered him, he had lighted on the diabolical scheme of forcing Ginger to prove what he had so rashly stated. It was a foregone conclusion in the greaser's mind as to what the ending would be.

He rasped a quick command in Spanish, and his companions set to work saddling the black. Soon they signified that all was in readiness. Then Vasco motioned toward Ginger.

"The rope you weel now ondo from all except his wrist. Ees it not that he can ride weeth his hands bound? Caramba! So he haf said."

The Mexicans advanced gingerly to the task of removing the bonds, not unnaturally expecting a terrific struggle. But the American submitted tamely to their attentions. Well aware that it would be hopeless to attempt to escape,

he resolved to husband his strength for the impending ordeal. · Quietly enough he submitted to their handling, at last standing free except that his arms were bound tightly together from elbows to wrists.

Then Vasco, a sardonic smile twisting his features, essayed a bit of humor. "Eet ees very good that you not make fight, señor. For thees, shall you make your las' adios to your amorita. Vasco ees not jealous—no not very. You may say your las' good-by. For soon the señorita leave with Vasco Gomez. He theenk he like to keep a songbird on hees rancho."

For an instant Ginger's amber eyes glowing with hate, seemed to shoot forth little pin points of lambent flame. Raising his bound hands, he took a menacing step forward. But realizing the utter futility of the action, he checked himself, half turning, and as he turned, a pair of arms were suddenly flung about his neck.

"Querido mio," a tearful voice murmured. "Thou are about to die, beloved."

"Forget it, kid," counseled Ginger, striving to make light of her fears. "I may get wrecked up some, but it ain't as bad as that. You're the one I'm worryin' about. That greaser means to—to——" He hesitated, fearful to express his thoughts.

Teresa Cordovez' eyes flashed. "Look, señor. It is a small bottle, beloved, but a very strong poison. One drop and I die. I am not afraid."

Ginger's eyes clouded, then cleared with the flash of a sudden idea.

"Can that suicide stuff, sister," he remonstrated gently.

Her arms tightened about his neck with a convulsive clasp. Ginger smiled tenderly down at her, then bent his head lower. "Listen to me, little one," he whispered. "You do as I say and you got better'n an even chance to make a get-away. When I come out on that bronc all those greasers are goin' to follow me to see the fun. That's human nature. When they get a little piece away, you duck out and beat it to the back of the arena. There's a room middle way where the saddles are stored. Expect you'll find the watchman either drunk or tied up. Anyway there's a telephone which is connected directly with José Pequano's bar. Give it a ring and you'll have help here inside of fifteen minutes. Now, little sister, if you'll give me a kiss, I'll show them greasers something about ridin'."

A long second afterward he gently disengaged her arms and turned toward the chute. "Let's go, hombres," he invited.

Possibly it was the self-confident air with which Ginger settled himself in the saddle, or again Vasco may have planned it from the first. Whatever the reason, just before the chute gate was opened, the Mexican took down a coiled reata from the saddle. He cut off a short length and looped one end about Ginger's ankle. The slack he brought under the horse, fastening the other end likewise.

"I haf no weesh that you fall too soon," he said with a wicked leer. The balance of the rope he thrust into Ginger's hands. "Perhaps the Americano weesh to do thee trick while he ride," Vasco sneered. "Who knows?" And he motioned for the gate to be flung wide.

The Mirinda Black took air with a succession of frame-wrenching jumps. As on the previous afternoon, he pitched straight ahead until some little distance from the gate. There he stopped for his final endeavor to unseat his rider.

With no choking neck strap to impede his efforts, he seemed a very demon of energetic viciousness. Weaving, twisting, sunfishing on a space the size of a blanket, he tested to the utmost Ginger's sense of balance.

Jolt! Jolt! Jolt! Pound! Pound! Pound! How mortal man with hands tight bound and no steadying strap to

ease the strain, could stand the incessant jarring was a mystery. Truly there in the moonlight Ginger proved himself a king among riders.

After minutes of this, as if at last aware that straight jumping would prove of no avail, the Miranda Black went to his knees, then suddenly recovering reared up and feinted his backward fall. It was the trick Ginger had been watching for. As the horse lunged upward, Ginger, using the rope which he still clutched in his bound hands, lashed him savagely across the head, beating him back to earth. Again and again the horse tried this trick, and again and again the unmerciful rain of blows forced him down.

Vasco, who had mounted a spare horse and was keeping close to the pitching black, bellowed his rage. Spurring closer he leaned from his saddle and grabbed at the rope, intending to jerk it from Ginger's hands.

Then fate intervened. In some inexplicable manner the whipping rope became hopelessly tangled about Vasco's arm. In a panic of fear at the consequences, he attempted to free himself. But instead, thanks partially to the action of the half-crazed black, he succeeded only in looping the rope about his neck. Ginger felt the tug as the horses drew apart and with a rapidity born of instant thought, took a half hitch around his saddle horn.

In vain the Mexican attempted to spur his horse closer to the other and thus ease the strain. His own mount, afire with nervousness, engendered by the black's frenzy, began in turn to jump. Once, twice, each time farther away he lunged. With the third plunge came an abrupt jerk and with a scream of fear, Vasco hit the ground.

It may have been the unexpected pull on the saddle horn, or perhaps ere this the black had been willing to admit defeat. One guess is as good as another. Anyway, at the precise instant the Mexican hit the ground, the black giving over his attempt to shake off his rider, began to run.

Ah, but that was a wild ride! Vasco's heavy body at the end of the taut-drawn rope seemed to weigh little more than a feather. Bumping, scraping, dragging, if anything, it added impetus to the horse's pace.

Ginger set his jaws. Bulkily dim in the blue moonlight, he could see the high walls of the arena rushing toward him. The wind whistled past his ears and the black's pace seemed to increase. Vainly he prayed that the horse might turn. But with nothing to guide the brute, Ginger realized that there was no chance. Closer and closer drew the wall. Ginger, closing his eyes, leaned well back in his saddle and awaited the impact. There was a sharp crack as the black's head met the arena wall—a sudden burst of stars, then darkness enveloped the rider.

Fifteen minutes later he opened his eyes and attempted to raise his head from the lap wherein it rested. A small cool hand pressed him back. It was a pleasant sensation.

"Lie thou still, beloved," a familiar voice ordered. "Eet ees Teresa who commands. Soon will help arrive. Haf they not said so over thee phone. Ah, but thou art hurt. I pray they breeng a doctor."

Ginger flexed his muscles experimentally, rubbed an ever increasing lump on his foehead, then grinned.

"Listen, sister," he said softly, "you may as well change your order. Unless you're going to reneg, a padre not a doctor is what we want."

The Love of Danger

By Max Brand

Author of "The Gambler," "Saddle and Sentiment," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

DANNY CADIGAN was a quiet youngster, distinguishing himself but twice during his school days—once when the windmill "ran away with itself," and again when a schoolboy put tacks on a seat in the schoolroom; but Danny was treated with the highest respect, and after the death of his parents the villagers came to hold him in high regard.

However, Danny did not remain in his home town. He traveled north and joined up with the cowboys of the Kirby Ranch. There he remained as chore boy until the coming of the famous gunman, Bill Lancaster. The latter, trying to bully Danny, lets himself in for a fist fight, and not daring to meet Danny in a fair hand-to-hand fight, brings the butt of his gun down on Danny's head and leaves him unconscious.

Danny is convinced that he will meet up with Lancaster again, and as he does not know how to handle a gun, he journeys to Chico Mountains to Uncle Joe Loftus, an old man who is supposed to be a wonder in the handling of weapons. He goes to Uncle Loftus, but the latter promptly orders Danny from his place.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIO GRANDE FOR CADIGAN.

THE invitation to depart was not uttered by old Loftus in the easy tone of one who can be profitably smiled at. There was a ring that sent a shiver down the small of Cadigan's back. Nevertheless, he did not depart—neither did he so much as turn around. He remained standing and confronting the hero of a past age.

"You hear me?" yelled Loftus.

"I hear you," said Cadigan gently.

"Then, darn your eyes," screamed Loftus, growing more and more excited as the conversation continued, "you know that you're mighty close to gettin' a slug through your head. Nothin' but the head. I don't shoot squirrels no other way!"

But Cadigan folded his arms and shook his head. "It ain't goin' to go," he said. "It ain't goin' to work, Mr. Loftus," said he.

"Why not? What ain't goin' to work?"

"This here bluff."

"My heavens, young man," cried Loftus, trembling with the strength of his fury. "Are you aimin' to drive me plumb wild?"

"No, sir, but I know something about you, and I know that you ain't the kind of a gent that'll shoot down a man, in cold blood. You've had your killin's and plenty of 'em, but you ain't never killed except in a fair fight, and you're too old to start in makin' up bad habits now. Ain't that right?"

"That's kind of half true," declared Uncle Joe. "I am gettin' old. Otherwise I'd of blowed the head off of a couple of you a long sight before I'd of

stood here chatterin'. Well, young man, what did you say that your name was?"

"Cadigan."

"Cadigan, dog-gone me if you ain't as cool faced a one as ever I see. You ain't goin' to fight and you ain't goin' to leave. Is that the way of it?"

"That's the way of it."

"Ain't you got no shame, young man?"

"Not a bit," said Cadigan.

"And you don't aim to do nothin' but hang around up here and spy on me and try to find out what I'm locatin' in the line of that copper lead that——"

"Copper?" exclaimed Cadigan, as the truth broke in on him. "Is that the reason that you don't want me around up here? On account of that copper mine? Why, Mr. Loftus, I ain't interested in copper, none!"

"You ain't?" sneeringly inquired the old fellow. "Money don't make no difference to you, I guess. Maybe you're a nephew of God, or something like that, that don't need no coin. Is that the way of it?"

"Right now," said Cadigan bluntly, "money don't mean a thing."

"Maybe you'll gimme a hint," said Loftus dryly, "about what *does* make a difference to you?"

"Sure, I'll let you know, right enough," said Cadigan frankly. "Keepin' alive is the main thing that I'm interested in now."

A light broke upon the face of Uncle Joe. "Ah!" said he. "All you're doin' is to run away from something?"

"I dunno that I'm runnin' away."

"What might you call it, then?"

"Well, the main thing is that I seen I needed help, and so I come up here to you."

Uncle Joe dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground and broke into a strange, cackling laugh. "Dog-goned if you ain't got me beat," said he. "You come up here to get *me* to help you?"

"That's it."

"Maybe you think that you can get me to go down and fight your fights for you?"

"No," said Cadigan, "but you could teach me how to fight."

This suggestion came to Uncle Joe Loftus in a different way.

"I see," said he. "If they corner you, you want to be able to give some sort of an account of yourself."

"That's right."

"How many is they of 'em?" asked the old man, showing a trifle more interest than before.

"They's only one."

"One! And you runnin' away? The devil, young man, I change my mind about you every two seconds. Dog-goned if I don't!"

"You see," said Cadigan in his usual gentle voice, "I've used rifles and I've used revolvers about as much as most folks. But I ain't never done no fightin', and I ain't never done no practicin' for fightin'. And this gent that I've met up with, he's about as bad as ten men rolled into one."

"Who might he be? They ain't much chance that I'd know about him, though. They don't breed the sort of men nowadays that a man would hear about livin' up here the way I do, gettin' a mite of news once a year!"

"His name is Lancaster."

"Not Bill Lancaster, young man?"

"Have you heard tell about him?"

"Am I deaf? Am I dumb?" asked the other irately. "Have I heard tell about Bill Lancaster? I'll tell a man that I've heard tell about him. Dog-gone my hide, are *you* mixed up with *him?*"

All the serious advice of Tom Kirby had not had the force which was put into the singular emphasis with which the old fellow uttered the two pronouns.

"I am," said Cadigan.

"Then—God help your soul, young man. Why are you hangin' around up here where Bill often camps out, you

might say. Why ain't you ridin' hell-bent south, where he don't never go, you might say. Why ain't you across the Rio Grande?"

These were the very words of Tom Kirby, and Cadigan was doubly impressed. And yet, there was still no thought of flight in his mind. And, the more formidable the thought of the great Bill Lancaster grew, the more determined was Cadigan to remain and face the music.

"I'm not aimin' to get away from him," said Cadigan as quietly as ever.

"That ain't why you want to learn some fancy tricks with guns?"

"No, sir."

"Lemme hear why it is, then?"

"I want to hunt down Lancaster."

Joe Loftus threw up both of his hands with a groan of amazement. "Hunt Lancaster!" he yelled.

"There was only one man in the world that could teach me enough to gimme a chance agin' Lancaster. I knew that man was you. Even in his best day, they say that Lancaster wouldn't of been no more'n a mouthful for Uncle Joe Loftus."

"Oh," said Uncle Joe without too much modesty, "I dunno about that. But do they still remember me down below?" He pointed, as though the inhabited world were an infinite distance beneath his place of abode.

"Every man of 'em knows about you, Mr. Loftus. Even me—I come from a mighty ways farther south. They'd all heard about you down there, too. That's why I come up here to you to get help."

"What sort of help, young man?" said Uncle Joe, greatly mollified.

"Teachin' about how to handle a gun."

"Here's a rifle," said Uncle Joe. "Shoot me that branch in two, yonder—that right-hand branch of that there little bush, over yonder."

"I can never hit it," said Cadigan to his soul, and he dropped upon one knee.

For a long five minutes he steadied his rifle upon the twig. For the light was dull, and the dusk was thickening. Finally he fired, and from the head of the slender shrub one side of the branches were cut away.

"That's it," said Joe Loftus. "You can shoot straight. You'd ought to make a name for yourself at one of these here target contests. You'd get all sorts of silver cups, I'd say!"

He turned and pointed in another direction. "Look at that tin can. Pull out your revolver and punch a hole through it, will you?"

Cadigan drew out his revolver. Something told him that he had not pleased the old fellow any too well with his first experiment as a marksman. He must do better this time. He certainy must not fail of his mark no matter what happened! So the heavy Colt balanced long in his hand. Then he fired and his heart leaped with happiness as he saw the can knocked whirling for a dozen yards across the mountainside.

He put up his weapon and turned expectantly to Loftus, wondering what sort of praise the prospector would select for him. But instead, Uncle Joe Loftus leaned upon his rifle and stared for a long time at the ground.

"I dunno," said he at the last. "I been hopin'. I been tryin' to figure out some way, but I guess that they ain't none. I guess that they ain't any way that it can be done! I used to disbelieve 'em when they said that a good shot was born and not made. But I guess that they was tellin' the truth."

"Is they no hope for me, Uncle Joe?"

Uncle Joe sighed and shook his head. "I've seen bad shots and bad shots," he said. "But dog-gone me if you ain't the worst. Gimme a gent that can't hit nothin'. I'd take a chance on doin' somethin' with him. I'd train him for speed like a lightnin' flash. But take a gent like you, that can hit *anything,* and they ain't a hope for him. Look here, and I'll tell you why. When I was in

my prime, son, I couldn't do no better for accuracy than you done just now. I couldn't do no better then. I dunno that I could even do as good as you for shootin' right now. Lemme see——"

He threw the heavy old rifle lightly into the hollow of his shoulder. He supported the barrel with a wobbling left hand, and the muzzle of the gun wavered crazily in a futurist circle. Only for an instant—then the gun exploded and the other twig disappeared from the head of the brush. The rifle of Uncle Joe was hardly lowered before a revolver glided into his ancient hand and exploded instantly. The tomato can, which now lay double its original distance from the place from which Cadigan had hit it, was tossed into the air and fell with a great clatter at a slight distance.

Uncle Joe Loftus put up his revolver, taking no time to exult over his performance. One might have thought that this was nothing or less than nothing to the old man.

"Well," he said, "it looks like I still could hit something! Just now and then."

He went on: "But as I was sayin', son, they ain't no hope for a gent that's slow—and hits the mark. Because he's gunna keep *aimin'*. And a gent that keeps aimin' is sure to make a bum fighter."

"What do you mean?" murmured Cadigan, bewildered.

"What I say, son."

"But don't a man have to aim if he wants to hit anything?"

"Aim?" said the strange old man. "Aim? Why, it's thirty year or more since I aimed a gun! Nope. Not in fightin' you don't take no aim."

"What *do* you do, then?"

"What do you do? You up and shoot a man dead, and that's all that they is to it!"

Cadigan shook his head. If this was the way of it, it was hopeless for him to even attempt to learn.

"How does a gent go about it?" asked Cadigan sadly.

"They ain't no trick to it," said the old prospector. "All you got to do is to start right in and practice a couple of hours a day and keep that up for a couple of years. And then, if you got it born in you anyways, you might make something of yourself, if you got any luck along with you. Because you need luck to get through your first couple of fights, no matter how dog-gone well trained you might be. That's all that they is to it, young man."

"Is they no hope for me?" asked Cadigan sadly.

"Nope. They ain't no hope at all. This here Bill Lancaster, even the way folks used to figger men, he would of been one of the best. He would of been a fighter in the old days, even. And you, son—darned if you wouldn't of been slow even among the worst of the worst clodhoppers that ever I seen. Darned if you wouldn't of been!"

And, with this, he turned and strode slowly back toward his shack. At the door he turned again toward the downcast figure of Cadigan.

"The Rio Grande, Cadigan. That's the best thing for you!"

CHAPTER VII.

A HARSH INSTRUCTOR.

UNCLE JOE LOFTUS returned from his morning trip with hammer and hope about the middle of the afternoon, very hot, very hungry, and disgustingly shaky about the knees. It was no longer a time when Uncle Joe could trudge about the mountains with a swinging stride, up hill and down, all day, without food, without water, even, and come home as erect as ever, with only his belt drawn a little tighter and his jaw set a little harder. Now he had to watch his strength carefully, like a general conducting an offensive campaign with a dwindling army. It would not do to waste men recklessly, in such

a campaign; and it would not do for Uncle Joe to waste his meager store of strength.

For, no matter how optimistically he viewed matters, he was forced to see that his days were numbered. He might have, say, ten years remaining to him. But those ten years would have to be divided. Suppose that it required another three years before he found the great lead—there would then remain to him only seven years during which he could enjoy the glory and the wealth which would flow in upon him for that discovery. But even those seven years would be shortened greatly if he did not take care to husband his resources.

So he kept these matters all in his mind while he was laboring among the mountains. He started early in the day, and he kept to his work until noon or a little later, for in the morning his strength was at its prime, but when the heat of the day came on, his powers faded rapidly. So he always avoided hard work of any kind in the middle of the afternoon.

Now, as he returned to his shack, shaking his head because of the way in which his knees sagged beneath his weight as he went up the slope, he heard the steady cracking of a revolver in the distance.

At one-minute intervals the gun exploded. It was like a signal, repeated constantly. So he went down the slope to make his inquiries. What he saw, when he came through the screening lodge-pole pines, was Cadigan walking up and down in the midst of a large clearing, with a revolver in his hand. He covered fifty paces, he wheeled suddenly, and fired the instant his gun came in line with a small white rock on the hillside. Then he proceeded slowly to the farther side of the clearing, wheeled, fired again, observed the result, and shook his head. For, every time, he missed!

Then he took his stand in the middle of the clearing, leveled his weapon, and opened a point-blank fire. And every bullet struck fairly on the face of the white rock! There was no doubt about it. When he had once obtained the range, or if he took his time at the mark, he was a deadly shot.

But how much time he needed!

He began to pace back and forth once more, and at the end of his walk still turned to fire at the rock, but the old prospector saw the dirt knocked up far, far away from the target. He was missing, and he was not missing narrowly, for his bullets were flying ten feet from the mark!

So old Uncle Joe Loftus sat down, hugged his knees in his skinny arms, and laughed long and silently. After that, he rose to his feet and said dryly: "I see that you made up your mind to take advice, young man. You aim to start practicin' for two hours a day?"

"For ten," said Cadigan.

"And keep it up for a couple of years?"

"For ten, if I have to," said Cadigan.

"Until when?"

"Until I can kill Lancaster."

"You don't aim at nothin' small," said old Uncle Joe mildly.

But in his heart he was deciding that, after all, there was something to this young fellow beyond the average of the youths of the countryside. He had a quality of patience which the prospector could appreciate the more because it was one of his own chiefest virtues and he liked it.

"Why," he went on, "d'you want to stay up here on the mountain to do your practicin'?"

"Because," said Cadigan, "it'll be harder for him to find me up here for one thing. Besides, it's cheap livin' here, and I won't have to spend nothin' much for anything except ammunition. But the best thing of all is that I'm pretty close to you, Mr. Loftus."

"What might you learn from me?" said the old man sullenly. "I ain't teachin' no school up here where the

folks can learn how to do murder fine and safe and easy!"

"Of course you ain't," admitted Cadigan. "But when a gent has too much knowledge, he can't help some of it overflowin' now and then. Y'understand?"

Uncle Joe could not keep from smiling. "Well," said he, "lemme tell you something. The best way to start out is to start just swingin' the gun without doin' no firin'! Look here!"

He stood up in the center of the clearing, a tall, gaunt form, the wind blowing his flannel shirt close to his body which seemed to be an arch of hollow ribs alone. And he whipped out his revolver and pointed it at the rock. He whirled around, pivoting on his feet swiftly, and covered the rock again with his revolver.

"D'you see, Cadigan? It ain't how many times you shoot. It's just gettin' in the habit of wishin' the other gent dead. And, every time you pull your gun, say to yourself: 'Lancaster!' Y'understand?"

Cadigan nodded, smiling faintly. This was indeed a clean-handed logic which he could easily comprehend.

"And when you point, point with your forefinger—pull the trigger with your second finger. That's the way. Mostly nobody can shoot straight—and fast! Most everybody can point straight—and fast as a wink. For why? For because a gent that's got a gun and is tryin' to aim is thinkin' mighty hard about what he's doin'. And thinkin' spoils shootin'. Does a cat think when it reaches out and sticks a claw into your hand? No, sir, that cat don't do no thinkin'. But you think about gettin' your hand out of the way, and that's why you can't budge it. No, sir, that hand of yours is tied right down to the spot, compared to the speed of the way that cat hauls off and sticks the claws in. That's the way you got to learn to shoot. You got to stop thinkin' about what you're doin'. You got to start in just killin'. The other things will foller along in line. But that's the way that you got to start!"

Such was the first and the greatest lesson for Cadigan, the most important of all that he ever received, and there were many of them. For the old man was full of his subject, and when he found in Cadigan the patience to execute advice as well as the humility to take it, he was willing to unburden himself of quantities of lore.

To him, gun play was no vulgar thing. It was an art almost divine in its possibilities. It was a thing over which he had brooded during a long lifetime, and which he still found complicated and wonderful. So that in speaking of gun work, the old prospector could only speak his information and his feeling by degrees.

It was the beginning of a regular course in instruction for Cadigan. Never a singing teacher worked over a pupil with more enthusiasm than did old Joe Loftus over this youth. And never did a singing teacher labor over the scales and all the dull tone work of a pupil more than Joe Loftus labored to perfect the technique of Cadigan.

"They's only one way with a gun," said Uncle Joe at least half a dozen times a day, "and all the other ways is the ones that dead men have used. Me, speakin' personal, I always used the right ways. And so I'm still alive. I've seen a lot o' mighty talented gents with guns. I've seen fast gents on the draw. I've seen gents that could shoot as straight as a string, but sooner or later, what happened to 'em all? They're dead, old son. They're all dead! Now, when I tell you take hold of that gun good and firm, but not too tight, I mean just that. Try it ag'in. Drop that gun into the holster and—the devil, man, is that the way that I told you to put a gun into a holster?"

"Does it make much difference how a gun goes into the leather so long's it comes out fast?" asked Cadigan, surprised.

"Everything about a gun makes a difference, old son. A gun that goes into the holster smooth will come out smooth. A gun that goes in fast and smooth'll come out fast and smooth. But a gun that goes in, slow or fast, with a jerk, will come out with a jerk, and a gun that comes out with a jerk, it sure can't shoot straight, and you can lay all your coin on that!"

Such were the lessons which Cadigan received. There was no question of mastering them perfectly. The exactions which the stern old prospector made were so great that it was like attempting to master oil painting. Perfection became a sheer impossibility. It seemed out of the question.

But the progress of Cadigan, even in the estimation of Joe Loftus, was astounding. Because, as he had promised, he actually worked with his guns for ten hours a day. And when the revolver was not in use at a target or going through a drill, it was still the constant companion of Cadigan. He used it as he went over its working parts. Every day it received a thorough cleaning, which was much needed after the work which it was given to do. And these daily tasks of taking the gun apart and assembling it again, gave him a feeling of perfect understanding of the weapon such as he had never had before. He finally came to a point after which he could assemble his revolver in the dark.

This was only one phase. All of the main work had to do with the actual drawing of his gun from a holster, in the first place, and its discharge at a mark. And ah, how bitterly discouraging were many of those days! In the heat of the afternoon, when old Joe Loftus returned from his work, Cadigan had to go through his paces beneath the eye of that stern taskmaster. And in those times, every move he made was wrong, it seemed! From day to day there was no progress. There was nothing in the way of a word of praise. It was always the sharp, snarling voice of Loftus pointing out errors.

"How many times do I have to tell you? Ain't you got no memory? Ain't you got no brains?" Uncle Joe would wail at him. "Dog-gone me if it ain't disgustin'. Eddication is what all you young gents need. Eddication is what you need, but heaven help them that have to do the teachin' of you! That is all I have to say."

And still the labor went on. It was not a week or a fortnight. For four bitter months he worked, as he had said, ten hours a day. And when his wrist was numb with the labor of handling the revolver, he had to turn to his rifle and work with it.

It was late in October before, on a day, Uncle Joe Loftus said, as he sat in the door of his shack: "You see this here can, Mr. Cadigan?"

"I see it," said Cadigan.

"Well, then, put that gun in your holster."

The gun was obediently disposed of in the required way.

"Now, Cadigan, this here can is Bill Lancaster. I'm gunna throw this here can away. If it hits the ground before you sink a slug in it, you're a dead man, Cadigan."

Cadigan sighed. "All right," said he.

The can snapped out of the hand of Uncle Joe Loftus. It shot behind Cadigan. He wheeled like a flash, the revolver snapping out of the holster, and the gun exploded—the can, in the very act of striking the ground, was caught by the big slug and hurled to a distance.

And the first word of praise escaped from the thin lips of Uncle Joe. "That's pretty near what I'd call shootin'," he said.

"This here can, Cadigan, is Bill Lancaster."

He picked up another. "Kill him, Cadigan!"

And he tossed the can high into the air, as hard as he could fling it.

It shot high up and hung in the sun, a winking, flashing disk of light.

"Shoot!" cried Lancaster.

And Cadigan fired. There was a clang far above. The can was dashed still higher, then fell straight down.

"Shoot!"

Again the gun exploded. And the can was knocked sideways through the air.

"Darned if that ain't almost shootin'!" sighed old Uncle Joe. "Here, now. Just walk this can up the hill."

He tossed another can to the ground, and Cadigan, whipping out his revolver, began to fire from the hip. Six bullets from his left-hand revolver struck the ground just behind the can and spat at it small showers of dirt which sent it rolling swiftly up the slope. Then four bullets emptied from his right-hand gun drove the can still higher. Every bullet had entered the soil a scant inch behind the can. He turned and faced the old man again.

"What's next?" asked Cadigan, as he began to load his revolvers for a fresh attempt.

"The next thing," said Uncle Joe, "is to sit right down here."

Cadigan, prepared for a hard lecture, sighed again and then reposed himself on the doorstep beside his tutor.

"Cadigan," said the old man, "you're a good hand with a gun. You shoot like every can was Lancaster. And if every can was Lancaster, Lancaster would of been a hundred times dead. Cadigan, you're as good a hand with a gun as I ever seen!"

Cadigan could only stare.

"Because," went on Loftus, "they ain't no fear in you. A scary gent, he can't have no luck with a gun. The first time I seen you, I seen that you had the makin's of a first-class shot in you. I could tell it by the way that you stood up here and looked into the eye of my rifle. You didn't change no color. I knowed then what could be made out of you."

"You kept pretty quiet about it," said Cadigan, grinning with joy. "Can I start for Lancaster now?"

"They ain't no man in the world that you couldn't start for now," said Uncle Joe gravely.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEND-OFF.

WHEN Dan Cadigan prepared to depart in the chill of the next morning, Uncle Joe came forth to see him off, and he brought with him two revolvers whose age was well expressed by the finger-worn appearance of the handles.

"What," said he to Cadigan, "might you say to them two guns?"

"I'd say," said Cadigan, "that they was old Colts."

"Take hold on 'em," said the old man.

Cadigan received them gravely.

"Try 'em," said Uncle Joe.

Cadigan looked about him for a fitting target, and as he looked and paused, three heavy-winged crows dropped out of the top of the pines and flapped across the clearing. Cadigan snapped up the guns and fired. The leader dipped its head and dove straight down into the earth. The second bird whirled in a dizzy circle and began to descend, squawking a harsh protest against fate. Cadigan blew out its life with a third bullet.

"Mighty sweet, straight-shootin' guns," said Cadigan.

"Fair to middlin', fair to middlin'," said Uncle Joe. "Do they look like other guns to you?"

"They're a mite heavier, and they're longer in the barrel."

"That's it, son. Just enough longer in the barrel to hit a mark ten yards farther off than the ordinary Colt. And them ten yards count, a lot of times!"

Cadigan nodded. "They got a nice hang to 'em," he said, slipping the guns back and forth in his hands from the palms to the finger tips. "They balance like they had a mind of their own."

"They do," admitted Uncle Joe.

"I've heard some say that them guns are *too* heavy. They ain't made for weaklings!" And he regarded the round wrists of Cadigan, corded with tendons of steel.

"They're just heavy enough," said Cadigan, "to make a gent know that he has something in his hands."

"Cadigan," said his friend gravely, "you got sense. You got more sense than even I give you credit for. Them are the guns that's been friends to me for these many years—darn if I hardly know how long! No, sir, they've gone to sleep with me and watched over me like a pair of bulldogs. They've never had the bark and bite at the same gent more'n once or twice together!" He chuckled evilly. "They was a long time," said he, "when I figgered that the day was sure to come when I'd be cornered and got."

He nodded, thoughtfully thinking back to those wild times. "And I always figgered that when I went down, I'd be pumpin' this pair of guns to the last half second. Well, Danny, I've turned old and rusty and they ain't much chance of me bein' got. Seems like them that used to hate me have took pity on an old, old man!"

He grinned again with infinite malice. "Howsomever, they ain't botherin' me none, and I guess that they ain't much chance that I'll be bothered none before I pass out in the next year or two."

"You have thirty years," said Cadigan tactfully.

"Don't be a fool, young man!"

"I heard tell about an Indian down in New Mexico that lived to be more'n a hundred and twenty years old. If a Indian can do it, why can't a white man?"

"Why," said the old man, grinning more broadly and more happily than ever, "I always said there was nothin' a redskin could do that a white man couldn't do better. You got sense, Cadigan. Well, to get back to them guns. I always have figgered them in the hands of some gent that knew how to fight, and that would die fighting, with his body drilled clean through half a dozen times, and his legs tore to bits, smashed into a corner of a room, maybe, and with a dozen gents shootin' at him—but still with a gun in each fist—fightin' back—still killin' to the last minute."

His voice had raised to a sort of shrill shout of fury as he painted his picture. Then, in lowered tones, he added: "That was how my partner, old man Jeff Gilky, died. I come in too late. But I seen five gents bleedin' bad, all wounded so's they'd never forget it, layin' around on the floor, and I seen three dead men that was lookin' at the ceilin' and wonderin' what it was all about, most like, while they dropped down below like buzzards out of the sky—dropped down to the devil like the murderin' skunks that they was!"

His voice trembled. Then he cleared his throat and added: "It ain't goin' to be my luck to die like that."

"You'll die rich, which is a pile better," suggested Cadigan. "You'll find the copper and you'll be one of the biggest of 'em all. They ain't goin' to leave you out of history, Mr. Loomis."

At this, the eye of Uncle Joe appreciably brightened, but he eventually shook his head sadly. "You hear this from me," he said. "They ain't nothin' worth a good death. I'd give all the copper there is for the sake of dyin' with my boots on the way that a man had ought to. And these here guns, Cadigan, they'd ought to go to a gent that's gunna die that way."

Cadigan started. "Am I sure to get bumped off?" he asked curiously.

"Sure. They ain't a chance of nothin' else. That's where you got the luck. You'll do things that'll start folks talkin' and you'll die while they're still talkin'!"

"Seems to me," said Cadigan, "that a gent might as well do somethin' and then sit down and think about it for the tail end of his life."

"Not them that got the real stuff in 'em," said the strange old man. "Not them that really want to work. That's the trouble with me. I was aimin', always, at reputation. I wasn't out aimin' to do what I could! I never was doin' that. I was always tryin' to get myself talked about!" He confessed it with a groan.

"Why, Uncle Joe," said the younger man, "they ain't no man in the mountains that's done as much as you done to hold up the law. Everybody knows that."

"Everybody is a fool," declared the prospector. "I tell you, Danny, because I know that you'd have your tongue cut out before you'd go talkin' about me to other folks. But I tell you that I never worked happy till I had somebody who could watch what I was doin' and talk about it afterward. There was a dozen times when I was sheriff when I could of gone straight after a gang of crooks. But I didn't do it. Because why? Because I didn't love danger, the way you do!"

"Me?" murmured Cadigan. "I don't love it! Love danger? I never heard of such a thing as a gent lovin' danger."

"It's a mighty wise man that knows what he's made of or why he does things. It's a mighty wise man, old son. Love of danger—well, it ain't so dog-gone uncommon, at that. It ain't common like love of booze, but it turns a gent just as crazy. Look at them gents that start gun fightin' and stay with it? I wasn't one of them kind. Pretty soon I felt my hand gettin' sort of shaky. Then I crawled off up here and got all by myself. Huntin' the copper? The devil, man, I ain't doin' nothin' but occupyin' my mind and tryin' to keep from thinkin' of the dog-gone coward I was to run away!"

He lifted up his thin face with a sigh, and his small eyes under their wrinkled lids looked over the heads of the great pines and on and on to the huge stone foreheads of the mountains, all pressed against the tender blue of the sky.

"Even if what you say about yourself is true," murmured Cadigan, struck with awe, "what difference does it make? Suppose that you just wanted to look big in front of other folks? Well, Uncle Joe, you got what you want. They all say that you're the bravest, the cleanest, the fastest, the straightest-shootin' gent that ever wore guns in the mountains."

A gleam of joy darted into the eyes of Uncle Joe Loftus like reflected light, and he clasped his bony hands together, trembling from head to foot. Still, he shook his head slowly as he answered Cadigan.

"It ain't no use. I know. You can cheat some folks or most of the folks while you're livin'. But after you're dead, then the truth comes sneakin' out and goes around whisperin' in the ears of folks. And they begin to cuss you first, and then they begin to forget you —and, Cadigan, what a devil of a long time a gent is dead compared to the mite of a time that he's alive! And now how can bein' praised for a minute compare with bein' plumb forgot for a hundred yeors?"

He went on drearily: "No, sir, I thought about myself, and not about my work. I thought about the advertisin' that I was givin' myself, and not about the help that I was givin' to the law. But them that love their work—why, they talk about what I've done because I'm still alive, but when I'm dead, what I've done'll die with me. But them that love their work, they do bigger things than they know about. And them that love danger——" He fell into a long, gloomy pause.

"Them that love danger?" prompted Cadigan gently. "Who are they?"

"Why, them that go explorin' up into the north pole, and thereabouts. Is it to find something worth while? No, sir. They ain't nothin' there but ice and snow. They tell you that they go

for a purpose. No, sir, they ain't got no purpose except to find danger. Every time they start, they're takin' a chance with their life. And it's because of the chance that they go explorin'. They like to roll the dice for the big stakes. Y'understand? And you're like 'em. You're follerin' Bill Lancaster. Why?"

"Because he used a gun when I was fightin' only with my fists, Uncle Joe."

"Nope. That ain't it. You're gunna foller him because he's mighty dangerous. And, some day, maybe you'll get him; maybe he'll get you. But if you win, you'll look around for something else that's just as hard to do, and when you find it, you'll light out on the trail. And when you finish that, you'll try something else. And finally, before you're many years older, they get you and corner you, and you'll die fightin' with them two guns in your hands—killin' a man every time you pull the trigger. Well, take the guns, boy!"

That was the farewell of Uncle Joe Loftus. He did not pause to shake hands, but turned his back abruptly and went into his shack, while Cadigan mounted his mustang and rode slowly down the slope. When he looked back he saw the old prospector issuing from the cabin with a pick over his shoulder and a hammer in his hand, his felt hat setting far back on his head, setting out once more on his quest for the hidden lead of copper.

CHAPTER IX.

CADIGAN'S TIMELY ARRIVAL.

ONE could not imagine William Prentis Lancaster—as his mother had baptized him—being anything other than the center of every scene in which he chose to show himself. Now, while the pig face of Sam Boswick flushed and wrinkled with rage and his huge muscles worked along his arms, and while "Duds" Malone and even Ches Morgan raised their voices in the debate, Bill Lancaster, sitting quietly at the window, was made the more prominent and the more instantly appealing to the eye by his very calm. If he had thundered loud enough to quell them all with his organ tones, he could not have been so thoroughly the most important item in the argument.

But, in the meantime, he chose to stare out the window, idly, as though this matter were entirely beneath his notice, and as though he were interested only in the black-green foresting of conifers which stood thick upon the hills around the town of Gorman. Over this he ran his eyes and noted how the fringes of trees on the rims of the hills pricked roughly against the sky, and how the white rush of the little creek hurtled down the slope, and how, beside the creek, the trail dipped into view and out again behind the trees until the creek itself flattened and widened into a soft-flowing, noiseless stream that ran through the very heart of Gorman and right under the window of the hotel where Bill Lancaster sat. The trail, too, widened at this point into a road deeply carved by the wheels of many a buckboard and wagon from the ranches bringing old hands to town and bringing new ones and fresh provisions out to the battle front of the range. But, although the glance of Bill Lancaster was passing leisurely over all this scene, he was not held by it. A wrong-headed pinto went up the trail sideways, bucking every inch of the way while a singing quirt lashed its flanks, but even this action picture did not touch deeper than the surface of Lancaster's mind. For he was giving his whole attention to the debate in the room.

The substance of it was that Sam Boswick, who had traveled clear to Kansas City to secure information on account of which they had been able to rob the P. & S. O. railroad train and come away with a clear twenty-five thousand dollars in profit, declared that he had put in treble or at least double duty upon this occasion and that he was accordingly due to receive at least two

shares instead of one. The objections of Ches Morgan and dapper young Duds Malone were that each of them, in the past, had upon occasion taken more than his share of responsibility and of risk during various of their exploits together, but they had never received an extra share of the money when it was allotted.

Their contentions angered Sam Boswick until he literally swelled with rage. He was one of those immensely powerful men who are usually found in circuses or sometimes in the vaudeville where they hold pianos suspended by straps which are gripped by their teeth alone! Or they lift huge leaden weights, or they support a tangle of eight or ten grown men. They are not always very large. Their muscles in repose look like loose fat. Their muscles in action cover their bodies with rigid knots of iron strength. And such was Sam Boswick. He had the face of a pig and a mind distinguished only for that sort of animal cunning which lives by tricks. But his impulses were so headlong and so steadfast and his might of hand was so great, and withal his bulky muscles could act with such astonishing speed, that he was known and dreaded for a thousand miles. Of the others, Bill Lancaster has already been described. Duds Malone was sufficiently described by his name—he was a slender youth with a pair of big brown eyes and a smile which made the hearts of girls tremble, and he dressed himself as gayly as a Mexican caballero; but the true organizer of the trio, the brains out of which their most profitable exploits nearly always sprang, was Ches Morgan, who had once been as honest as any man in the mountains until an unfortunate slip of justice had turned him wrong. Ches was driven into outlawry, and there he got the taste of the wild blood and loved it. He still looked as he had always looked, a grave-faced man with tired eyes and hair thickly sprinkled with silver. He had a rough, slow voice, and his pipe was constantly between his teeth. He had even been known to puff slowly at it while he drilled away with his rifle at a distant target—and a human target at that! It was Ches who put the case most strongly, and finally became the spokesman entirely for both himself and Duds Malone.

"Who asked you to go?" he said. "You said you was ready to take the trip and that you figgered that you could do pretty well in Kansas City. You knowed some folks there. If I'd been in your boots I'd of done the same thing. Why, Sam, when we all come out of Juarez on the jump that time in Augusta and they shot your hoss right out from under you, and I pulled up and give you a lift until we hit the river—I say, after I done that, did I ask for a double share for what I'd done for you?"

"I've heard about that a long time," declared Sam Boswick harshly. "But ain't I paid you double for that a couple of times, Morgan?"

"How come?"

"Ain't I backed you up three times when you was busted at poker?"

"Can money pay for them things, Sam?"

"Money can pay me for what *I* done," said Sam bitterly, "and maybe that's where the difference is!"

"Money," said Ches Morgan coldly, "ain't a particular good thing to live for."

"Maybe this here is a church or a Sunday school, or something like that?" grunted Mr. Boswick. "All I want is my rights, but I'm darned if I ain't goin' to have 'em! Quick!"

"I dunno that I see how you're gunna collect what you want."

"All I want is justice!"

"That's what every crook says!"

"Are you callin' me a crook, Ches?" And he glared terribly at the older man but Ches Morgan did not avert his glance. He continued to study his com-

panion steadily, and almost with an air of pity, so disinterested was his expression.

"I don't call no names," said Morgan calmly. "When it comes to that sort of talk, I let my guns speak for me. Well, Boswick, it looks like you ain't gunna be satisfied until you get a share as big as the chief gets."

This shifted the center of attention sharply toward Lancaster who, however, paid no heed to them.

"Look here, now," went on Boswick, lowering his voice. "They ain't no need to bring Lancaster into this here fix. You know and I know that Lancaster ain't done nothin' for us except to hang around. He ain't taken no share in nothin'. He's played safe and held back. He ain't even knowed enough to give orders. He ain't nothin' more'n a figgerhead, partner, and you know it! The main thing we got him for," he continued, even more boldly as the vacant eye of Lancaster, fixed upon the woodland beyond the window, betrayed no consciousness of the conversation which was proceeding so close to him, "the main thing we got him for was to keep us all hangin' together and keepin' the traces tight. But dog-gone me if he's been able to do even that! I ask you, free and frequent, partner, what right has the captain—if you want to call him that—got to a double share?"

"Ask him!" broke in Duds Malone with a wicked little smile.

Sam Boswick started. Bold and bad as he felt himself to be, it was plain that he had no desire to array himself against the taller man in single combat.

"Leave it up to Lancaster, this double share of yours," said Ches Morgan. "Maybe he can make it come out straight for you!"

"Well, old son, I'll try!" muttered Boswick, and he turned sharply upon Lancaster.

"Say, Bill!" he called.

The ear of Lancaster caught that voice well enough. As a matter of fact, he had been straining his attention for some time to make out everything that had been said in the room, and he had succeeded fairly well in spite of his abstracted expression and his half-turned back. But now, at the very moment when he was called, he was beginning to center a considerable portion of his attention upon a horseman whom he had been watching as the latter wound down the trail through the evergreens. It was at this moment that the rider turned out from the narrow trail onto the broader, rutted road and jogged his big-headed, ugly mustang straight for the town. Here Lancaster straightened with a start and a glimmer of cruel joy appeared in his eyes, for the odd familiarity of the stranger had clicked home in his mind, at the last. It was Cadigan, come within his reach at last. After these months of careful inquiry, after the hundreds of miles which he had ridden in search of the younger fellow, here was Cadigan at last come blindly home to him! Lancaster felt all the anger which had been roused in his breast by what he had overheard of the speeches of Boswick, disappear in a trice, and his mind was smoothed. Cadigan was his at last!

How much it meant, not one of the others could understand. Therefore he did not speak of it. But how much it meant to Lancaster could be comprehended by the fact that every one of the hardy three who were in the room with him would instantly have recognized that name.

The reason was that the entire cattle range and the whole lumbering and mining districts, wherever the famous name of Lancaster was familiarly spoken of, there the name of Cadigan was known also. For, just as the unknown four rounder becomes celebrated overnight because he has fought a drawn battle with the champion of champions, so the man who had stood up to terrible Bill Lancaster and struck him the first blow —the man who had dared bare handed

to assail this poisonous fighter, had become so widely famous and so much whispered about that people were beginning to regard him as almost a greater man than Lancaster himself!

The disappearance of the unknown was also a pleasant part of the mystery. For why should he have run away? Why need he have turned his back upon the others? Nevertheless, Cadigan had disappeared from the face of the earth. Some muttered, darkly, that perhaps Lancaster knew far more than he cared to reveal, concerning the most convenient disappearance of the young waddie.

In the meantime, Lancaster had been constrained to support his reputation by touring around the range ceaselessly letting all men see that he was ready and willing to meet the man he hated and whom it was so falsely said he had wronged. This boldness helped him a great deal and bolstered his falling reputation. But nothing could make up for the disappearance of Cadigan entirely. He had either been murdered, or else he had gone away for a purpose, and when he appeared again he would make himself felt at once. Such was the general opinion. As for the meeting between Cadigan and Lancaster, it was never reported correctly. Even the cowpunchers who had witnessed the thing were not able to converse about it in agreement with one another. For, after all, the whole matter had been excessively simple. Only the change in Cadigan himself had been so remarkable. He had swelled to a new stature in the fight.

And, telling of the battle, they could not help concentrate upon Cadigan. They could not help speaking as though what he had done were really far more remarkable than the facts of the matter.

Such was the way in which the battle between Cadigan and Bill Lancaster had been noised abroad, making the name of the former as much a household word as was the latter. And therefore it was that Lancaster grinned with delight as he saw his foeman, grinned like a cat when it is about to leap on the bird, a smile full of blood hunger, without mirth.

He turned, then, to Sam Boswick as the latter repeated his question for the third time with some irritation.

"Look here, Lancaster, I wish that you'd tell me what *you* think is the right way out of this here. Do I get two shares or not?"

"Why," said Lancaster, "did you ever get two shares before this here?"

"Nope."

"When you started off for Kansas City, did you tell the boys that you wouldn't make the trip and try to use your friends in this here game unless you got a double share?"

"I dunno that I said just that," said the pig-faced man gloomily.

"Well," said Lancaster, "it looks to me like a gent that breaks the laws of the gang, or tries to break the laws of the gang, had ought to get punished in some way. What have we got to do to make Boswick know that we ain't to be fooled with?"

"Punished?" thundered Boswick. "Me?" And he swelled like a poisoned toad until the buttons of his best creaked against the cloth, so wild was he with his fury.

"I said punished," said Lancaster grimly. "But maybe they's two things that'll help to let you off. The first is that before to-day you gents ain't ever thought of punishments for them that busted the rules of the gang; the second is that you *have* worked mighty hard at this here game. Well, old son, I dunno but what you're pretty lucky to get off!"

"And the extra share?" muttered big Boswick, rather awed in spite of himself.

"D'you take us for fools, Sam?" roared Lancaster.

Boswick swayed a little from side to side, like a bull about to charge, but

charge he did not. The red flag of insult had been waved in his eyes, but at the last instant a thought like a bullet passed through his brain that he was about to seek trouble with the most dexterous gun fighter in the mountains. So he paused, breathing hard. Lancaster, as if to show how little he considered the quarrel or the strength of his recent judgment, turned toward the window.

"Look out at the young gent ridin' by," he said. "You've all heard of him, I reckon. See if you know his face!"

"Lancaster is showin' himself worth his salt to us!" murmured Duds Malone to old Ches.

"Salt? He's worth his weight! Who's the kid, Lancaster?" he added, looking down from the window.

"A darned bum hoss he's ridin'!" exclaimed Malone.

"Well, friends, that's young Cadigan. Does it look like he could have trimmed me, the way some of the liars say that he did?"

The others grunted to themselves: "Cadigan!"

And the youth, hearing his name mentioned by several voices at once, looked up to the window and saw three men looking down at him with a peering interest. And behind them, in the shadow, was a gloomier countenance half lost in the obscurity. Lancaster!

CHAPTER X.

"SORT OF DUMB AND SIMPLE!"

IT was a pleasant and a timely interruption for the men in the hotel. Sam Boswick, thinking matters over very seriously, felt that he had taken too many liberties with the mighty reputation and the still mightier facts of Lancaster's prowess. He wanted an opportunity for retreat. He wanted to give up his own defiant position as gracefully as possible, and this little interim, so thoughtfully furnished by the newly chosen captain of the trio, gave him the needed pause during which he could readjust himself to the situation. And, after all, it was perhaps better, he decided, that the new captain should have his way. During the brief year through which the three of them had tried to work together, they had recognized the powers of one another and the possibilities of their coöperation. Duds Malone had the invention and the daring of the devil himself; Ches Morgan was a gun fighter second in lightning skill and accuracy only to Duds Malone himself and fortified with a great deal of knowledge of the mountain-desert, both the people and their ways, to say nothing of the country in which they lived. As for Sam Boswick, he had his own type of courage and of brute cunning, which often succeeded even in important matters like the train robbery; he had, besides, a convenient gift—the immense power of his hands! But, with all of these interlocking gifts, there were great hampering troubles, particularly jealousy and the lack of one controlling authority where each felt himself quite capable of playing the part of a leader. It was on this account that they had asked the great gun fighter to become their leader, simply that his decisions might give them unity. This day had offered them the first taste of his quality, and all three felt the relish of it.

Such were the thoughts of Sam Boswick as he watched the upturned face of the boy drift past him beneath the window. Then all four recoiled, with exclamations from the three followers of Lancaster.

"Why," said Ches Morgan, summing up the opinion of them all: "He ain't no more'n a kid! You could tie him in a knot with one hand and spank him with the other, old-timer!"

Lancaster merely shrugged his shoulders. He said graciously: "I ain't got any bad grudge agin' that kid. He's lied a lot about what he's done to me, but then he has brains. And I admire a gent with brains. They way he

dropped out of sight and hid himself so's nobody could find him sure enough was smart. You got to admit that, boys! If it wasn't that they's been so much talk, I could let him off, but the way it is, dog-goned if I don't have to kill him. You see for yourself how it is. If I didn't salt him away, they's some folks that'd never stop talkin' about me pretty scandalous!"

This speech he uttered with a sort of sad gravity, as a statesman might regret an unfortunate necessity of public interest which called for the head of a political rival. The others, however, voted down his proposal and drowned him with noise. It was Duds Malone who spoke first, joyous as a mischievous fox when it sees a goose far from water and with clipped wings.

"I'll take this here, Cadigan," he announced happily. "This here is a job that I'd ought to do. He ain't worth your attention, chief. Why, darned if he don't look like a mama's boy! He ain't finished bein' coddled, hardly!"

The voice of big Sam Boswick rolled heavily in upon him: "What elected you for this here party, young feller? I'll take this Cadigan on and finish him up brown. It ain't gun work that he needs. Any fool could see that guns ain't what he would be hard to clean up with. What the story says is that he's stood up to Bill, here, with his bare hands, and started to give Bill a trimmin' that way until——"

Ches Morgan, clearing his throat violently, recalled Sam to himself and he desisted.

"I'll match you," said Duds, "to see who gets the first crack at him. That is, if the chief will let us have a crack at him at all. He's Lancaster's meat, of course, but I'd like to have a hand at him first."

In spite of the overbearing nature of Lancaster, he was a wise and politic man. And while he was willing to risk himself mightily, he had no desire to throw himself away when another was willing to be the sacrifice. Besides, if a lesser man than himself—if a man like Boswick or like Malone—disposed of Cadigan, it would make the importance of that youth disappear, whereas if he were destroyed by Lancaster himself, the youngster might remain much of a hero in the eyes of many men. There was another thing which prevailed upon Lancaster. He remembered the odd change which had come over the face and the eyes of Cadigan when he rose from the bunk to fight on that historic occasion not many months before. It still made the blood of Lancaster run cold to think of it.

He said quietly: "If you boys want your fun, I ain't standin' in your way. Toss a coin to see who takes the party."

The coin was tossed. It winked in the air.

"Heads!" called Malone.

But, when it spatted in the palm of Ches Morgan, tails were uppermost; Boswick had gained the first right against young Dan Cadigan. He clapped his sombrero on his head with a grin and shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Besides," said Boswick, grinning, "I need a mite of exercise, and punchin' a bag is kind of tiresome!" So he made his exit, swaggering a little.

In the meantime, Cadigan had put up his horse in the stable behind the hotel and entered the building itself. On the register, scrawled heavily with clumsy writing, he drew out his own name.

"Daniel Cadigan——" spelled the proprietor, adjusting his glasses and reaching for the key of the room at the same time. Then he drew himself hastily up. "Hey, young man, you ain't Dan Cadigan?"

"That's my name, mister."

"Not him that fought Lancaster——"

"Me and Lancaster have fallen out, you might say," said the stranger mildly.

The proprietor pushed his glass onto his forehead and blinked at Cadigan with

infinite interest. His loud voice, in the meantime, had taken electric effect upon the half dozen loungers who were in the room. They had stiffened in their chairs near the stove, for it was a raw autumn day. They no longer watched the steam rising from their trousers as they dried, or the frost thickening upon the windowpanes. The battery of their eyes turned steadily upon the newcomer.

"You're Cadigan!" gasped out the host again. "Why, Lancaster is——" He paused, anxious lest he should be betraying secrets.

"Lancaster aims to be right here in this hotel, don't he?" said Cadigan.

"Why——" began the host, tortured with curiosity and with fear commingled.

"That's why I come," said Cadigan.

They were all on their feet, by this time, watching the man who dared to hunt down Bill Lancaster. They saw a man with the thick neck and the deep chest of a mine laborer, but with long arms and with long, slender hands and feet. Ordinarily they would have given him only a casual glance and put him down as a fellow of stodgy build. But what they knew of him made them examine him with more care, and what they saw meant to them, plainly, speed of hand and speed of foot, plus more than common power.

And when he went up the stairs with the proprietor, their tongues were loosed behind him. Cadigan heard the beginning of their murmuring gossip. But he paid little attention to it. He was too busy wondering at the manner of the host which told him that he was a marked man, and a man marked for great and respectful attention. All of this was a new mode of treatment to Cadigan. He was accustomed to careless words flung over the shoulder to him like bones flung to a dog to keep it quiet.

He was brought to the best room in the house saving that one which was already occupied by Lancaster and his companions. The proprietor busied himself opening a window and moving the chair aimlessly about in an effort to make his guest more comfortable. In the meantime, he was fairly swelling with words which finally burst out.

"Are you really come along here to—to get—Lancaster?" He uttered the last word as one might have uttered the name of an angel, or a fiend. And he found that Cadigan was regarding him mildly, with a faint smile upon his lips—not a secretive expression, but rather the smile of a happy child.

"I dunno," said Cadigan. "I just dropped in to talk things over with him."

"They ain't gunna be a fight, then?" said the proprietor, fairly aching with disappointment.

"I guess not. I hope——" said Cadigan. "All I want out of him is an explanation how he——"

"An explanation!" bellowed the proprietor. "Out of Lancaster?"

"Sure. Of how come that he forgot himself and used a gun on me when——"

The host backed toward the door with awe and some terror in his eyes. "You might drop in on Mr. Lancaster," said Cadigan, "and tell him that I'd like to have a chat with him—when he's got time!"

The host issued hastily through the door and fled down the hall; on the way he encountered an iron hand which brought him up short. It was that Hercules among men—Sam Boswick, his fleshy brow now gathered in darkness.

"Where's the room where you put up that young skunk, that Cadigan?" he inquired harshly.

"Third door right down the hall. But what——"

"He's been spreadin' a lot of talk about me," muttered the other, and strode on down the hallway.

The host cast one glance of agonized curiosity behind him, saw the door to

the bedroom opened and shut behind Boswick, and then rushed on to inform the curious who were fast gathering in the lobby that a catastrophe of the first water was about to take place in the hotel.

"He talks like a kid—sort of dumb, sort of simple," breathed the proprietor. "He's gunna ask Lancaster for an—an explanation!"

There was a universal gasp.

"But Lancaster'll never get to him, because big Sam Boswick has gone in to finish him up!"

At that, they made a sudden rush for the stairs, where they would gather and listen and wait for the first noise of combat. Already they could hear the bull voice of Mr. Boswick.

CHAPTER XI.

BOSWICK GOES AFTER CADIGAN.

WHEN Boswick entered the room, he found before him a figure even less imposing than that which had passed under the hotel window a few moments before, for a seat in the saddle, even on a most inadequate horse, is sure to lend a certain dignity to a man. It was a handsome face, in a boyish way, and the eyes of a boy, too, dim and gentle, looked out at him from it. But Sam Boswick never wasted much time and attention upon faces. He had to do with the might of hand and arm, and that might he looked for now in Cadigan. But the big, round throat of Cadigan looked soft and smooth—far other than the heavily corded neck of Boswick. And the shoulders of Cadigan were not ornamented with bulky knots of muscles like the shoulders of Boswick. Moreover, the seal of strength is placed upon the foreheads of mighty men; it sat upon the bull front of Boswick, but in Cadigan it did not appear.

For these reasons, whatever of suspense had remained in the mind of Boswick—remembering that, after all, this man had actually dared to stand up to Lancaster hand to hand—that suspense was now dissipated and a broad grin of brutal contempt formed upon the mouth of the bully. As for that other and famous encounter with Lancaster, it had been accomplished, beyond a doubt, only through the accident of a lucky chance blow just as the battle began. But Boswick could see that there was before him a ludicrously easy conquest. How cheaply was he to magnify his own repute!

"You're Cadigan?" he asked, when he had finished his scrupulously easy and insulting survey of the other.

"I'm Cadigan," said the younger man gently. "Who might you be, partner?"

"One that ain't heard no good about you," said Boswick darkly.

"You ain't?" murmured Cadigan. "Well, I'm mighty sorry to hear that!"

It staggered Boswick, in spite of the low estimate which he had already formed of the other. But such downright "crawling" as this was beneath all imagining! Some of his astonishment and his scorn showed in his face; he made no effort to repress it. But Cadigan seemed unable to read it. He remained standing, waiting for the other to sit down comfortably, waiting to hear this first rude remark explained in more detail with a faintly apologetic smile upon his face and his head canted a little to one side. He reminded Boswick of a faithful dog which has heard a stern word from the master and only hopes that it will not be followed by a blow.

"What I've heard," said Boswick, "is that you're a dog-gone slick liar, Cadigan."

Cadigan shook his head and frowned, rather in bewilderment than in anger. "I dunno that I ever done much lyin'," he said quietly. "I hope you don't mean that, mister——"

"My name is Boswick," said the man of might.

"Boswick?" repeated Cadigan. "Bos-

wick?" Then he started a little. "It ain't likely that you're *Sam* Boswick?"

"That's me," said Boswick, his pride touched deeply.

"The Sam Boswick that lifted the sack of junk iron onto the scales in Tucson when——"

"I done that little trick," said Boswick.

"Why," said Cadigan with a happy smile, "I'm mighty glad to meet you, Mr. Boswick!" And he advanced with an outstretched hand. The motion was so genuine that Boswick almost stretched out his own hand to meet that of the younger man. But he recollected himself in time and folded his arms sternly.

"I ain't shakin' hands," he said, "till I get the straight of this here matter." He paused and cleared his throat.

"I'll be glad to explain," volunteered Cadigan. "I'm sure that there's some mistake, Mr. Boswick."

"H'm!" growled out the Hercules. "You ain't the Cadigan, then, that's been goin' around the country tellin' folks that you licked Lancaster—Bill Lancaster? Except that he done a dirty trick——"

"Oh," said Cadigan amiably, "I never told nobody that I licked Lancaster."

"You didn't?"

"They didn't seem to need tellin'. They seemed to know."

Boswick roared suddenly: "Are you sayin' that to my face?" For he was glad to have something on which to base his wrath.

"It's true," said Cadigan.

"Look here, Cadigan. Lancaster is a friend of mine."

"I'm mighty sorry to hear that."

"And I'm here to tell you that if you say you done up Lancaster—you lie, Cadigan." He added, when Cadigan merely blinked at him: "You hear me? I say you lie!"

"It looks to me," said Cadigan, "like you come here huntin' trouble with me."

"I ain't ever turned my back on a fight, son. Can you say that much?"

And Cadigan walked to the door of his room. "Would you mind steppin' out into the hall with me, Mr. Boswick?"

"I can talk plenty right here, son!"

"You see," said Cadigan, "by my way of bringin' up, it ain't right to fight a gent in your own house—or your own room."

Mr. Boswick looked upon him with utter amazement. This, to be sure, was a novel way of avoiding trouble. He could hardly believe his ears, and he stared dubiously at the other. What he saw was a strange transformation taking place in Cadigan. It seemed to him that the other was growing inches taller and that his whole body had expanded. But the greatest change was in his face. It reminded Boswick of one thing only—the face of a boy suffused with joy in the school yard when he sees that his chance is coming in the game.

"Fight?" thundered Boswick, tearing himself away from his observant mood. "The devil!" And he struck full at the face of Cadigan.

He missed by chance, it seemed. Cadigan, in stooping, seemed to have slipped half toward the floor. Surely no speed of foot could have accounted for the maneuver. The thick arm of Boswick shot over the shoulder of his enemy. Then Cadigan stumbled in and drove his fist into the ribs of the larger man.

It seemed to Boswick that his whole side caved in. It was like the falling of a wall against him, squeezing out his breath as from a collapsed bellows. Then two arms went around him; closed about him like red-hot steel being shrunk into place. Boswick tore at those grappling arms. It was like tearing at two ribs of rock and trying to pluck them from the side of a mountain.

Still the pressure continued, greater and greater. His very back seemed breaking. And Boswick, frantic with

fear, hurled himself toward the floor. He merely succeeded in giving up his footing, for he found himself heaved into the air, lightly. The door was kicked open, and he was cast into the hall like a stone from a sling.

He lay where he fell, more appalled in spirit than broken in body. Above him leaned the conqueror. His fingers twisted into the hair of Boswick's head and twisted his face up cruelly to the light.

"Did Lancaster send you?" asked Cadigan.

"No—yes!" groaned out Boswick.

"Good!" said Cadigan. "If you'd come on your own account—I'd of broke you in two and throwed the halves away. But now—you go tell Lancaster that I'm waitin' for him. Understand?"

So, with one hand, he raised Boswick to his feet and flung him down the hall.

And Boswick, passing the stairs, saw it crowded with horrified, astounded faces. That moment repaid Boswick for all the pain which he had given others. For all the shame which he had inflicted on other men, now shame was equally heaped upon his own head. And in the agony of it, he bowed his face and rushed on into the room where Lancaster and Ches Morgan and Duds Malone were waiting for him.

He flung himself into a chair and leaned over the center table, his face buried in his hands, groaning.

"What's up?" cried Malone.

"He's a devil!" gasped out poor Boswick. "He—he's ten men rolled into one! Duds, keep clear of him!"

"Keep clear of him, Duds," echoed Lancaster scornfully. "I don't need no help to fight my own fights. You boys stay here and take it easy. I'll go out and——"

He was distinctly uncomfortable, but there was nothing else for him to do. Certainly, when he dealt with this strange youth a second time, there would be nothing but gun play between them, and the devil take the slower man!

There was a groan from Boswick as he shifted in his chair and raised his stricken face. "He's busted every bone in my body. And he's chain lightnin', Duds. He moves quickern' a flash of light and hits harder'n a ton of stone fallin' a mile onto your head!"

Duds Malone loosened the bandanna about his throat and then turned to Lancaster. "You stay here," he cautioned. "I tossed a coin for this here chance, and I aim to take it. Lancaster, that gent may be able to hit harder'n Boswick, though it don't seem no ways possible, but if he knows how to handle a gun, then I ain't got any eyes in my head for tellin' a fightin' man!"

He strode from the room, slammed the door behind him, and at the head of the stairs looked down to a jumble of men standing on the landing and in the lobby below.

"Where's Cadigan?" asked Malone of them.

"Cadigan? He's just gone outside—what might you be wantin' of him?" asked the proprietor.

"I'm gunna ask a question," said Malone gayly, tilting his hat farther back on his head, "that Sam Boswick didn't have a chance to put."

And he passed down the stairs, across the lobby, and out into the sunshine of the afternoon.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

ALASKA PETITION RECEIVED

THE petition to Congress for the creation of a separate territory of South Alaska, sent from the recent convention of delegates at Juneau, was received a short time ago by the Speaker of the House and referred by him to the insular affairs committee.

Peg Leg Checks Out Twice

By F. R. Buckley

Author of "Peg Leg Hoists a Storm Signal," etc.

TO begin with, it was a misunderstanding about this same identical Acacia City Hospital that had kept me out of Acacia City for seventeen years. At this distance of time, I don't see why I should go into details of the misunderstanding, except so far as to say that during the misunderstanding I was perfectly in the right, as usual. Entirely aside from the fact that Doc Brewer was in my regiment during the Civil War, he *is* the best medical man within forty miles of Three Pines; and while not wishing, as was alleged, to boss everything in sight, I thought it my duty to keep on pressing his claims after, as well as before, Doctor Clark had been appointed medical director. It is not true that I pulled out a revolver at a meeting of the board of trustees. Nothing of the kind. In tendering my resignation, I simply put my hand on my hip, which is a commonplace attitude enough, and remarked that anybody who pulled any more nasty cracks would have a chance to test Doctor Clark's clumsiness for himself. That was all. And even if there had been any further remarks, which there weren't, I hope I am better mannered than to threaten a business meeting of leading citizens with a firearm. What I had in mind was a chair.

Considering which events, and which slanders, I guess even the average reader will appreciate how humiliating it was for me, the sheriff of Three Pines, aged seventy-four, and with a reputation in the neighborhood, to wake up after my fight with Alamo Hutchinson, and find myself not only in Acacia, where I had vowed I'd never set foot or peg leg again, but actually occupying a bed in this same hospital; with this same Doctor Clark, attended by a dish-faced orderly, bending over me and saying cheerfully that I couldn't live.

"Poor old fellow," says this monumental ass, shaking his head until his long ears flapped. "Simple concussion, but it'll do his business, I'm afraid. Bullet just grooved the top of his head. Shown no sign of consciousness since he was brought in?"

"Not a twitch," says the orderly.

"Well," says Clark, letting go of my wrist, "perhaps it's as well. He was as proud as Lucifer, and he was getting past his work. Hadn't done anything toward catching these White Ghosts, or whatever they're called, had he?"

It was a good job he had turned away to the next bed before he said that; because if his nose had been anywhere near me, I should certainly have sunk my teeth in it. Talk about unjust accusations! Why, in the three weeks

these three White Ghost bandits had been operating, they had never once pulled a trick outside of Acacia City itself, which is Bob Cole's bailiwick, and not mine at all. And at that, I'd have got after them, if Bob Cole, being a friend of Doctor Clark's, hadn't especially requested me to mind my own business. Yeah, I tell you, if anybody had put a thermometer in my mouth at that moment, he'd have thought I was a kettle.

"How's this man been to-day?" I heard Clark ask, over to my right.

"I'm fine, doctor," says a deep bass voice feebly.

"So'm I," says an equally feeble tenor from the bed on my other side.

And then: "When can we get out, doctor?" said the bass and the tenor together, in a kind of feeble chorus.

"When I think you're well enough," says Clark snippily.

"I'm well enough now!"

"So'm I!"

"I'm sorry to have to disagree with you," says Clark in a sarcastic manner, "but, after all, when you insisted on sticking bowie knives into each other, you more or less proved yourselves incapable of managing your own affairs. You will both be here for another week, at least."

"A whole month lost!" moans the bass.

"Shut up!" says the hospital orderly.

"Is there anything else, orderly?" asked the medico, after a haughty silence; and, being told there wasn't, took his welcome departure. It was immediately after this that I began to think everything might, after all, be for the best. Because the orderly, while lighting the oil lamps in the ward, as it was nine thirty or so in the evening, began to talk to the bowie-knife specialists so intimately, and the feeble bass and tenor to answer in such strong, healthy voices, that it instantly appeared to me that something was abnormal. And the punching of abnormalities back into shape is my principal duty as sheriff.

"Didn't it work like a charm?" says the orderly.

"You're a smart lad, Carl," remarks the tenor, sitting up in bed and rolling himself a cigarette.

"No, it ain't that so much," says the orderly, sitting on my bed, where my peg leg would have been if some fool hadn't hung it and my gun belt on the other side of the room. "It's just that I've had experience with doctors. They always go by contraries—to show how much more they know than you do. If you-all hadn't howled to be put in the big ward where you'd have company, Clark'd never have put you in this private room, you bet your life; and you know he was goin' to discharge you last Tuesday, only you started claiming you were cured. It always works. Since he thinks you ain't got any money, he'll prob'ly advise you to take a sea voyage."

The bass voice chuckled. "Well," it says, through a noise like the throwing off of bedclothes, "I still need a couple of hundred dollars for my first-class passage. Let's go."

The orderly took a look at his wrist watch, and yawned. He also pulled a revolver out of his white linen hip pocket, and spun the cylinder around with an expertness which seemed peculiar in a nurse.

"No hurry," he says. "She ain't due at the crossing until ten twelve, and it's only five minutes' walk. I should think you'd want to enjoy Mr. Gar--field's company a little longer. 'Tisn't every day you get a sheriff where you can pull his whiskers."

He improved the shining hour by tweaking my chin beard; but did I open my eyes or stop breathing stertorously? Not much.

"Is this really the celebrated Bill Garfield?" asks the bass voice. "There don't look to be much of him."

"Never you mind looks," says the or-

derly, in a meaning tone that made me regret I couldn't bow to him, "he's been right there in his day. You boys didn't know Alamo Hutchinson, did you?"

"Uh-uh," says the tenor.

"Well, Alamo weighed two hundred and ten," says the orderly, "and, gun, knife, or fists, he was a guy the three of us would have had our hands full with. Well, this old devil killed Alamo this afternoon, just outside town here, and if Alamo had fired just half an inch higher, Garfield would have got away without a scratch."

The bass took a long drag at his cigarette, and blew smoke into my face.

"Well, anyhow," says he comfortingly, "he's dead now."

"As good as. But at that I don't trust him," says the orderly. "I guess I'll just try puttin' my thumb on his eyeball before we——"

Was it close? It was close. Because whatever control a man may have over his breathing and his impulses to jump out of bed, he cannot help wincing when somebody sticks a good rough finger in his eye. And the orderly had my right lid pulled up, and was just laying his revolver on my chest so he'd have the other hand at liberty to test me with, when, comparatively close at hand, there sounded the shriek of number seven's whistle. Number seven is the night mail train from Los Angeles to Longhorn City; and, judging by the hasty way the orderly let go of my eye and grabbed his gun again, he and the bass and the tenor had business with it.

"Your watch must have been wrong!" snarls out the tenor.

"There's still time!" gasps out the orderly; and without further remarks, or any more delay than was necessary for the other two to yank Colts from under their mattresses, the trio hopped out of the window and down the fire escape.

Need I state that, having retrieved my gun belt and peg leg, I tucked my long hospital nightshirt into a pair of trousers, and followed them?

Perhaps I should seize this moment, by the way, to remark that the orderly's account of my accomplishments, though very complimentary, was by no means complete. He had entirely overlooked one of my most important characteristics, which is the ability to make better speed with one leg and a prop than many people do with the original equipment. I say this in all modesty, and I freely admit that the three men ahead of me in this case made me pretty nigh burst myself to keep them in sight. In fact, if they hadn't been handicapped by their nightshirts, which they wore loose and flapping while I had mine tucked into my pants as aforesaid, they might have left me behind. They had apparently gone to bed with their boots on, you see, and the streets of Acacia, in addition to being pitch dark and deserted at this hour of the night, are paved with sharp-edged stones. But what with one thing and another, the race came out about even; so that when they got to Geogehan's Crossing two minutes ahead of the mail train, and prepared for action by slipping pillow cases over their heads, I was not more than five yards behind them. I was even closer than this when number seven stopped at the water tank: so close, in fact, that I only had to stretch out my arm to touch the guy who was jumping for the locomotive steps. And since it was his obvious intention to cover the engineer and firemen with a gun, if not actually to shoot them in cold blood, you can bet your life I did touch him. On the back of the head—with a revolver barrel. He fell. And I took out, at the best of my speed, after his two companions, who were running back, one on each side of the train, toward the open door of the mail car.

Well, after considerable thought, I can't remember, out of all my fifty years

as a peace officer, a more unpleasant period than the five minutes that followed. You see, in order to simplify matters for himself, the bandit I was following opened the ball by a pot shot at the mail clerk, who was standing in the doorway of the car. After I had knocked the bandit down, sort of pinning him into place by the application of my peg leg to the small of his back, the mail clerk reappeared with a buckshot-loaded riot gun, and started making the night air hiss around *me!*

I suppose this must have struck the bandit I'd knocked down as rather too much to be borne; because just as I reached the mail car, with the idea of catching the clerk's ankles and spilling him on his fool back, my second victim arose and fell on me from behind. In addition to which, the bandit who had been on the other side of the train got suspicious of all the fireworks, dodged under the couplings, and joined our merry throng. My preference being for mat work, I threw myself violently backward, bearing my two assailants with me; and there we rolled in the sand, all three of us, nightshirts and pillow cases flying, fighting for each other's throats, while the mail clerk, his riot gun empty at last, blazed away at us with an automatic pistol.

I tell you, it's a good thing that not more than one man in fifty can hit what he aims at with a hand gun. This mail-clerk jasper was still shooting at me, as the worst looking of the trio, and so, naturally, he did me the favor of putting a bullet into one of my adversaries, just as the beggar got his knee on my chest. His rolling off was a great relief; and I celebrated it by sticking at least half of my right-hand revolver down the gullet of his surviving partner, who seemed to choke on the morsel, for some reason. He choked so severely that I felt it my duty to pat him on the back of the head with the other gun. After which we had peace, partly owing to the mail clerk's not knowing which end of a new clip went into the pistol first.

"What is it?" says an oily voice from behind me, as I collected my scattered limbs and arranged them in a vertical position.

I turned, to find about fifty passengers standing around in a semicircle. All the men were able-bodied, and a lot of them were holding nickel-plated guns in their hands—the kind that shoot straight as a string for seven dollars and sixty-five cents, pay the postman.

"What is it, eh?" asks the fat man who had spoken before.

It was a perfectly reasonable question, but at the moment it irritated me something fierce. That groove Alamo Hutchinson had dug along the top of my skull had started bleeding again, and my headache hadn't been improved any by the evening's entertainment.

"It's a sheet-and-pillow-case party," I therefore said with some asperity. "And now, in the name of the people of the State of Texas," I says, exhibiting my star pinned to my belt, "suppose you-all pick up these gentlemen by the head and the feet, and——"

"You mean me?" asks the fat man indignantly.

"Who else am I pointing this gun at?" I asked him, simultaneously moving the muzzle to indicate three of his fellow passengers. They were so obliging—the engineer and fireman attending to the bandit I'd stunned by the water tank—as to carry my three prisoners back to the hospital; and then they took a rather hasty departure.

As for me, I guess I must have more or less fainted, because, just as had happened earlier in the evening, I awoke suddenly to find the face of Doctor Clark right close to mine, and to hear him saying, in that sad and solemn voice I knew so well: "Ah, me! He's gone, I fear!"

Pushing him ungently aside, I got up.

We were in the three-bed ward again; and if you'll believe me, they had laid those three great hulking thieves on the beds, while I had been deposited on the floor. Bob Cole, the town marshal, was there, among others; and I don't wonder he couldn't meet my eye.

"We thought you was dead, Bill," says the great gaby.

"Yeah," I remarked, "so it seems. And I'll tell you, it's gettin' kind of monotonous. This is twice within two hours that my life has been pronounced extinct. Have you examined these three prisoners, Mr. Cole?"

"Y-y-yes, Bill."

"And you find you know them, don't you?"

"Y-y-ye—well, one or two of 'em look kinda like——"

"This one," I remarked, pointing at the bass-voiced jasper, "I saw through my eyelashes some time ago, to be James Draper, described in bulletin four hundred and eighteen, State of New Mexico, and wanted for train robbery. This other guy is an escaped convict from the same State; and if my memory don't deceive me, this here eyeball-scrubbing orderly is wanted for homicide in Hoke County. And all three of them," I continued, turning my withering eye on Doctor Clark, "have not only been lying in this hospital while us poor officers have been searching high and low for them, but have actually been sallyin' forth at night as White Ghosts, and committing further crimes with the institution's bed linen for a disguise, and their alleged illness furnishing them an alibi!"

"Ah," says Doctor Clark, turning a bright blue and getting his voice all mixed up with his tonsils. Bob Cole became a brilliant scarlet; some of the patients who had dropped in laughed so much they got pale; and altogether, the ward was a blaze of color, a pretty rainbow effect.

"Well," I said, stumping over to the ex-orderly's little desk, and sitting down, and taking up the telephone, "I suppose, doctor, that you'll consider me an obstinate old man, and probably figure that all this business, including my having been brought in dead on two separate occasions, is just my way of carrying the point I raised at that board meeting, some time ago. However, you're wrong. I bear you no malice for pronouncing me dead. Why should I? It's brought me three and two is five, and a murderer ought to be worth five hundred—call it a thousand dollars in rewards, and I sincerely thank you. But while your brand of diagnosis was all right while these poor fellows on the beds had nothing the matter with them, you got to remember they're seriously hurt now. I can answer for that. And I think they ought to have really competent medical attention, don't you? In fact, as the officer in charge of them, I'm bound to see they get such. Follow me?"

Silence means assent, doesn't it? And he didn't say anything.

"Hello, central!" I therefore said into the transmitter. "Give me nine eight. Yes, nine eight. Doc Brewer. And say, hurry it, will you? I've been waiting a long time for this call. . . . Yes, I have, too! . . . How long? Why, seventeen years!"

INDIAN SCHOOL GROWS

THE population of the Indian Training School at Chemawa, Oregon, is growing. In 1916 seven hundred and fifty Indian boys and girls were in attendance. In 1923 the number has grown to nine hundred, according to Harwood Hall, the superintendent.

Men Who Made the West

BUFFALO BILL

by Erle Wilson

THE May day was fading to dusk along the old Salt Lake trail when Frank McCarthy gave orders for the wagon train in his charge to make a halt for the night. All the way from Fort Leavenworth on the Missouri to Plum Creek on the South Platte, the big prairie schooners had ploughed their way and men and animals were tired out. It was with a sigh of relief and a stretching of cramped muscles that the wagon master and his assistants climbed down from their seats and the guards dismounted from their horses.

Making camp was quick work with these experienced travelers, and soon the weary drivers were sleeping beneath the big swinging ships which they had piloted across the prairie. Over a glowing fire the cook was preparing dinner, while a short distance away three guards kept vigilant watch over the cattle. A large herd it was, too, which was being sent by the United States government to General Albert Sidney Johnston's army advancing across the plains to fight the Mormons. But everything was quiet and serene as descending darkness snuffed out the lingering glow of the vivid western sunset.

Suddenly the air was torn with a blood-curdling shriek. At the familiar sound of the Indian war whoop, the camp was galvanized into activity. The plainsmen grabbed their trusty six-shooters just as Frank McCarthy's orders rang out sharp and clear.

"Fire! Let the redskins have it, men!"

A heavy volley of shots checked the advancing enemy. But the red men's bullets had already found deadly marks in the bodies of the three guards, and the frightened cattle were rushing pell-mell through the camp. Another shot of the Indians hit one of the drivers in the leg, and he dropped to the ground. All around arrows were falling thick and fast. There was no time to lose.

"Boys, make a break for the river," yelled McCartthy. "The bank will serve as a breastwork."

Picking up their wounded comrade, the men obeyed orders and started to wade down the river, which was a shallow stream at this point.

"Fort Kearney is thirty-five miles west of us," said their leader. "Stick close to the bank and we'll try to make it."

In the scrambled retreat no one remembered the youngest member of the wagon train, a brown-haired lad of eleven. Gamely he tried to keep up with the men, but gradually their long strides outdistanced his short ones, and he

lagged behind. But young as he was, the boy was accustomed to the life of the plains. He had been brought up on hard knocks and was used to looking out for himself. By the light of the moon he could just keep the last of his comrades in sight. Suddenly he heard a slight sound in the bushes on the bank above him. Glancing up he saw a Sioux brave peering down, his war bonnet silhouetted clearly against the sky.

Quickly the lad raised his rifle to his shoulder, took aim, and fired. Six feet of Indian toppled over the bank. Soon there was the sound of feet swishing through the water as the men hurried back to find out what had happened.

"Who fired that shot?" questioned McCarthy.

"I did," answered the lad.

'Well, I'll be durned if Billy Cody hasn't killed an Indian," exclaimed the wagon master, who had reached the boy's side to find him standing over the dead redskin. "Not bad work for a kid," he complimented the youngster.

So proud were the men of their young comrade's feat that when they reached Fort Leavenworth the story was repeated time and again. It came to the ears of D. R. Anthony, who published the Leavenworth *Times,* and he sent a reporter around to interview the hero. The next day the newspaper published the story of the "Youngest Indian Slayer on the Plains," and the public read for the first time of the bravery and daring of William Frederick Cody, later known around the world as Buffalo Bill.

Buffalo Bill! There's a lure in the very words. They stand for red-blooded adventure and breathe the dauntless spirit of the men and women who went West. And indeed this was the Cody heritage; for among these courageous pioneers were Buffalo Bill's parents. The Cody family lived on a farm in Scott County, Iowa, near a town called Le Clair. Here it was, on a cold, dark February morning in the year 1846, that William Frederick was born. When he was a small lad his father decided to go to Kansas, which was soon to be opened for settlers as a territory. So the whole family, from the oldest sister, Martha, to the baby brother, Charles, set out, the caravan consisting of an old carriage, three wagons, and some horses.

At Weston, Missouri, Bill's uncle, Elijah Cody, ran a trading post, and here the emigrants stopped for a visit. Bill was enchanted at this new world, where Indians, frontiersmen, and soldiers of fortune all met, and was sorry when the family took up the trail again headed for Fort Leavenworth. But this latter place proved to be even more exciting. Thrills went chasing up and down the lad's spine as he watched the dragoons engaged in saber drill, their swords flashing in the sunlight. Across the parade ground artillery forces rumbled, and the infantry marched and wheeled. Traders in buckskin coats, wearing coon-skin caps on their heads, hobnobbed with Indians in blankets and feathers.

But Isaac Cody's restless spirit kept the family moving on, until finally he established a camp near Rively's trading post on the Kickapoo agency. Here it was that young Bill, under the tutelage of Horace Billings, an uncle from California, took his first lessons in riding and shooting. A number of wild horses had escaped from the reservation at Leavenworth, and the government offered ten dollars a head for them. To Horace Billings this horse chasing was play. So day after day Horace and young Bill roamed the plains, lassoing horses. At night they camped, cooking their bacon and boiling their coffee over a fire, and later slept soundly, rolled up in blankets. By the time his roving relative moved on, Bill had acquired much useful knowledge about how to conduct himself on the plains.

And he had need of it. For when he was ten years old, the boy went to work for the pioneer firm of Russell,

Majors & Waddell, whose huge wagons journeyed from St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco, California, carrying freight two thousand miles across the plains and mountains from the East to the far West and back again. When Bill applied for the position, Mr. Majors told him that he was too young, but finally was won over by the lad's air of self-confidence, and gave him the following contract, which all of his employees were required to sign.

"I, William Cody, do hereby solemnly swear before the great and living God that during my engagement with and while I am in the employ of Russell, Major & Waddell, I will not, under any circumstances, use profane language, that I will not quarrel or fight with any other employee of the firm, and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and shall direct all my acts so as to win the confidence of my employers. So help me God."

Bill's job was herding cattle, and his salary twenty-five dollars a month. But these were hard and grueling days for the Cody family, and the money very welcome. The slavery question was being agitated at this time, and Bill's father had announced himself as an abolitionist, making a speech to this effect at the trading post. When he finished his talk a proslavery man sneaked up behind him and stabbed him in the shoulder. From that day to the time of his death, Isaac Cody was hunted. To get away from his enemies he moved to Grasshopper Falls, and later, in Lawrence, Kansas, joined the Free-State men who protected him. When Isaac Cody died in 1857, Bill, at the age of eleven, became the provider for his mother and sisters.

Then it was that he was detailed to ride with Frank McCarthy on his expedition and killed his first Indian. And this was just the beginning of the many exciting adventures that went to make the life of Buffalo Bill the most thrilling personal chronicle of the West. The boy's next job was that of extra hand for Lew Simpson, one of the most expert and trustworthy wagon masters who ever guided a train across the plains. Lew was just starting out with ten wagons for Salt Lake, and Bill was given a mule of his own to ride. The lad felt quite grown-up and important.

Perhaps some of the men thought he was too self-confident for a mere stripling, and one day a couple of big roughnecks started to give him a thrashing. As they did so, a blond giant of twenty rolled himself out from under the wagon where he had been resting and came forward.

"What are you trying to do to that kid?" he asked, a steely light in his keen, blue eyes.

"Oh, we were just teasing him a bit. We ain't going to hurt him," one of the men answered uneasily.

"No, you aren't going to hurt him," the blond giant replied meaningly. "If you want to fight anybody, here I am."

But the men were not anxious to mix up with "Wild Bill" Hickok and walked surlily away. This was the beginning of the friendship that existed between the most noted six-shooter the West ever produced, and Buffalo Bill.

The old trail to Salt Lake City was a strenuous and dangerous route, but no man knew it better than Lew Simpson. Starting his train at Leavenworth, he guided it through Kansas northwestwardly, crossing the Big Blue River, then over the Big and Little Sandy, coming into Nebraska near the Big Sandy. The next stream of importance was the Little Blue, along which the trail ran for sixty miles, then crossed a range of sand hills and struck the Platte River ten miles below Fort Kearney. Then the course lay up the South Platte to old Ash Hollow Crossing, thence eighteen miles across to the North Platte, near the mouth of the Blue

Water, where General Harney had his great battle in 1855 with the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians.

From this point the North Platte was followed, passing Court House Rock, Chimney Rock, and Scott's Bluffs to Fort Laramie. Here the Laramie River was crossed. Still following the North Platte the trail crossed the river at Old Richard's Bridge, and onward to Red Buttes. Crossing Willow Creek, it ran on to Sweet Water, past Cold Springs, to Hot Springs and Rocky Ridge, through the Rocky Mountains and Echo Cañon and then on to Salt Lake Valley.

At South Platte River Lew Simpson's train made camp. The country around was alive with buffalo, and one day the camp was almost ruined by a stampede of the bison, which not only badly frightened the men and animals, but also did much damage to the wagons. Upon investigation, Simpson found that the trouble had been started by a train of Californians returning from the West, who had made a dash after the buffalo, thus causing them to rush wildly through the train.

The journey proceeded without further mishap, however, until the train made camp again within eighteen miles of Green River in the Rocky Mountains. In order to water the cattle it was necessary to drive them one and a half miles to Hahn's Fork, a stream one hundred and fifteen miles east of Salt Lake City and well within the Mormon territory. Late one afternoon Simpson and his assistant, George Wood, and young Bill Cody, started with the cattle over to the creek. Coming back the men observed twenty horsemen approaching ,and were alarmed until they observed that the strangers were white men. They were not yet in view of the wagons, and so could not signal their comrades in case of danger.

When the strangers got within calling distance their leader rode forward and said: "Hello, Simpson. How are you?"

"Hello, yourself," Simpson answered. "But I don't believe I know you," he added, closely observing the stranger whose face seemed somewhat familiar.

By this time the strangers, who were all armed with double-barreled shotguns, rifles and revolvers, had surrounded Simpson and his companions, covering them with their weapons.

"I'll trouble you for your six-shooters, gentlemen," said the leader suavely.

"We'll give them to you in a way you don't want," responded Simpson.

"If you make a move you're a dead man," returned the leader.

"What are you?" asked Simpson.

"I am Lot Smith," replied the man.

"What? The leader of the Deanites?" questioned Simpson.

"Yes," answered the man calmly. "That's who I am."

"Lying spy," flared out Simpson, suddenly recognizing the man before him. Some time back on the journey this man, disguised as a teamster, had spent two days in his camp. Now he had returned with his Destroying Angels.

When they reached the camp Simpson found that all of his men had been disarmed by Smith and his followers.

"What are you going to do?" he asked Smith, perceiving that he was entirely at the mercy of the Mormon.

"You are loaded with supplies for Sidney Johnston," replied Smith. "To be sure that they reach that gentleman and his army, I'm going to burn your train."

"And my men?" questioned Simpson.

"I'm going to turn you adrift. I'll let you have enough provisions to last until you reach Fort Bridger," said the Mormon, giving orders to have one wagon hitched with six yoke of oxen and packed with the necessary supplies.

So the disarmed men were sent out into the wild and hostile country. When they had traveled some little distance

Simpson turned to see dense clouds of smoke rising from his wagons. And for an hour or more there were loud explosions as the ammunition of the captured train was destroyed. When they reached Fort Bridger the wagon master learned that two other trains had been captured and burned by the Mormons, making seventy-five wagon loads or four hundred and fifty pounds of supplies, mostly provisions, which never reached General Johnston's command.

That winter was spent at the fort, for Simpson knew that it would be hopeless to start back East at this season. In the spring he was made brigadier wagon master in charge of two large trains, and four hundred extra men, bound for Fort Leavenworth. The two trains traveled fifteen miles apart. One day he called George Wood and Bill Cody to him and said: "Saddle your mules, boys. I want you to ride with me to overtake the head train."

George and Bill obeyed orders, and joined Simpson. On a big plateau, back of Cedar Bluffs, the trio were attacked by Indians, who rode out at them, sending their arrows on ahead. Quick as lightning Simpson called out: "Kill your mules, boys." Then making a barricade of the dead animals the men sheltered behind this, firing at the Indians, who circled around them. Each man was armed with a Mississippi yager and two revolvers, and they made the bullets fly as the redskins approached.

Time and again the enemy attacked, and then held council in the manner of Indian warfare. Finally darkness settled down. But hostilities did not cease, for during the night the Sioux set fire to the short prairie grass, hoping to burn out the white men. As this didn't succeed, they resumed the attack early in the morning. The battle was raging furiously, when along about ten o'clock across the plains there resounded several loud, sharp reports crackling through the air like rifle shots. Simpson recognized the big bullwhips of the wagon masters of the second train, and never was a sound so welcome. The Indians seeing that help was at hand for the enemy, turned and fled.

The old Salt Lake trail soon became familiar ground to young Bill Cody as he traveled across the plains with the big freight wagons. The summer of '58 he spent in Fort Laramie with a construction gang. The old frontier post, which was established by a fur-trading company in 1834 and bought by the U. S. government in 1840, was the most famous meeting place of the plains. Here the greatest Indian councils were held, and the most celebrated Indian fighters congregated. Here it was that young Bill saw for the first time the famous Kit Carson, whom he watched with fascination as he talked to the Indians.

There were nearly three thousand Sioux, northern Cheyennes, and northern Arapahoes at Laramie, and as Bill Cody played with the young braves he picked up some Indian words himself. He also made the acquaintance of the Sioux chief, old Rain-in-the-Face, a friendship which saved his life the following year when he and Dave Harrington were trapping for beaver up on Prairie Dog Creek.

Bill broke his leg, the oxen strayed away, and Dave had to leave his companion while he chased the cattle. For twenty days the crippled lad lay alone in the snowed-in dugout, his rations by his side. It was during this time that the hut was entered by a party of Sioux out on the warpath. And Bill's scalp would probably have been added to the collection had he not recognized old Rain-in-the-Face, and reminded the chief that his children had been his playmates the preceding summer.

At this time young Bill couldn't write his name. His lessons had been learned in the school of life itself, and while

he was accomplished in riding, shooting, and trapping, the three "r's" had been neglected. Returning from one of his expeditions from the West, he went over to Fort Leavenworth one day with his mother to collect his pay. A large sum of money was due the lad, and he, feeling very happy and affluent, was astonished on the way home to see several large tears rolling down his mother's face.

"Why, mother, what in the world is the matter?" he asked solicitously.

"Oh, Bill," she sobbed, "it breaks my heart to think that you had to sign the pay roll with a cross."

So Bill got busy learning to write. And Mr. Majors of the pioneer freighting firm relates that on every wagon sheet and wagon bed, every tree and every barn door, he used to find the name William F. Cody scrawled in large uncertain letters. These were young Cody's writing lessons, and his persistency is illustrated by the fact that his signature soon adorned every available spot in Salt Lake Valley.

It was about this time that the pony express, the most unique and romantic mail service ever organized, was established by the firm for whom Bill worked. By using the telegraph to St. Joseph, and running ponies beyond, news was carried from ocean to ocean in ten days. To meet the demand of this fast mail route over the barren plains and through the dangerous mountains, nearly five hundred horses and one hundred and ninety riders were employed. Two hundred and fifty miles a day was the distance traveled by the pony express, and no idling of either man or beast was possible.

The horses chosen were half-breed Californian mustangs, animals as fleet and sure-footed as a mountain goat. The riders were all of lithe, wiry physiques. They were also men picked for their bravery, coolness in moments of great personal danger, and endurance under the most trying circumstances of fatigue. The pony express stations were scattered over wild, desolate stretches of country two thousand miles long, and the trail was infested with bad men, road agents, and hostile savages who roamed in bands ready to murder and scalp. For this dangerous and exciting work the riders received one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month.

Although Bill Cody was only fourteen years old at this time, he had proved himself capable of holding a man-sized job, so he was taken on as a pony express rider, being the youngest employee in this hazardous undertaking. So day and night, in sunshine and storm, through rain, hail, snow, and sleet, young Bill rode. Sometimes his route was across the level prairie, but oftener it was a winding trail hugging the brim of awful precipices or the crest of a dark, narrow cañon.

One day as Bill was riding through a ravine, a man sprang out at him, covering him with a six-shooter.

"Hands up!" yelled the desperado of the plains.

Young Cody complied, as the outlaw had the "drop" on him. But Bill was quick of wit, and ever on the alert. The bandit had been careless enough to approach his pony from the front. Suddenly Bill, by an oft-practiced trick, made his pony rear. The animal's forefoot struck the man a hard blow in the head, which knocked him senseless. Bill dismounted and bound his man. He knew that hidden somewhere in the bushes the desperado had a horse, and he soon located the animal. Then he ordered the prisoner, who had recovered consciousness, to mount his horse, and ride ahead. Bill was late reaching the next station, but he was not cast down. For not only had he saved the mail pouch, but he had brought in a robber as well.

Bill was laid off for a short time after this, and then went to Fort Lara-

mie and looked up the famous Slade, who was agent of the line there. Slade gave him a job, his run being from Red Buttes to Three Crossings, a distance of seventy-six miles. At the stations the express rider must always be ready for emergencies. One day as Bill rode into a station, giving the well-known "coyotte yell" there was no answer. Dismounting he found that the rider who was to carry the mail pouch to the next station had been wounded by Indians and was unable to undertake the trip.

Stopping only long enough to change horses, Cody offered to go on to the next station, a distance of eighty-five miles. At the end of the line he turned without rest to make the return trip. This made one continuous route of three hundred and twenty-two miles out and back again, without stopping. During this noted ride, Bill rode twenty-one ponies, and had to his credit the longest trip ever made by a pony express rider.

This unique service grew more and more proficient, however, and President Lincoln's inaugural address was carried across the continent in seven days and seventeen hours. The pony express paved the way for the wire, the stages, and the railroad, before its trail became grass grown and it passed into history. The bugle call of the Civil War cut short its career, and the riders, who, with whip and spur had pushed on their fleet ponies in the interest of peace, went off to drive their steeds into the thick of battle. Bill Cody, however, had promised his mother that he would not join the army, and so it was not until after her death that he became a member of the Red-legged Scouts, a local company commanded by Captain Bill Tuff.

This company had for its special duty the protection of Kansas against raiders like Quantrell, bandits such as the James boys and the Younger brothers. These desperadoes conducted a guerrilla warfare against the Union settlers, robbing banks, raiding villages, burning buildings, looting and plundering. In the spring of '63, however, young Cody left the scouts to serve the Federal government as a guide and scout with the Ninth Kansas Cavalry. In spite of the fact that he was only fifteen years old, Bill Cody was one of the most expert frontiersmen, guides, and scouts in the United States, and he gave valuable service along the old Santa Fé trail where the Kiowas and Comanche Indians were stirring up trouble and making things lively.

In 1864 Bill enlisted as a private with the Seventh Kansas Volunteers at Leavenworth, and in March the regiment was sent by steamboats to Memphis, Tennessee, to join the command of General A. J. Smith. Cody was immediately recommended for membership in a picked corps to be used for duty as scouts, messengers, and dispatch carriers. One day General Smith sent for Cody.

"I want you to go into the Confederate lines as a spy," he said, opening up a map of the country. "I believe General Forrest's command to be in the neighborhood of Okolona, Mississippi, two hundred miles south of Memphis. Now your job is to locate this command, and get all the information concerning the enemy's strength in men and equipment that you can."

"All right, general. I'll do my best," Cody replied cheerfully.

"If you are captured you'll be shot as a spy," the general reminded Cody, as he was turning away.

"I've been on too many Indian fights to be frightened by that," Bill replied. "Being shot is pleasant compared to the tortures that the redskins can inflict."

So disguised as a Tennessee boy, and imitating the Southern dialect, young Cody started out on his mission. The first time he encountered a big plantation he stopped and tried out his disguise on the overseer. Finding that it

worked successfully, he went on with renewed confidence. In a few days he met a large body of Confederate troops, and was admitted into the lines. Some days later he rejoined General Smith's command, with a very valuable and accurate report of the enemy's numbers and position. In fact all during the war Cody passed in and out of the Confederate lines many times as a spy and as a dispatch carrier without ever meeting with disaster.

It was during the war, while he was on a month's furlough, that Bill Cody went to St. Louis. There in picturesque Old Frenchtown he met Louisa Frederici, with whom he fell violently in love. At twenty Cody in his blue uniform was very handsome. His clean-shaven face was ruddy with health, and his body lithe and graceful. He moved and talked well, and it is not surprising that the emotion he felt for the young girl should have been returned. Evening after evening Bill and Louisa sat out on the piazza, listening to the locusts singing in the maple trees or to the strum of a banjo through the lamplit dusk. And before he went away the young soldier had extracted a promise that when the war ended, Louisa would become his wife.

At the close of the war, Bill Cody was free to return to his old calling. The chief business of the consolidated army was in the West where the Indians were a real menace. When General William Tecumseh Sherman was placed at the head of the peace commission, Cody acted as scout upon the expedition which this official made to the border. The camp of the hostile chiefs of the Kiowas and Comanches was three hundred miles southwest of Leavenworth, in the great buffalo range and in the midst of the trackless plains. Bill Cody was familiar with the country, but without his aid Council Springs would have been difficult to find, and the conference with Santata, Lone Wolf, and Kicking Bird might never have taken place.

In March, 1866, William Frederick Cody and Louisa Frederici were married and their honeymoon was a boat trip up the Missouri River to Leavenworth. As the slow, old boat plodded along, stopping to take on wood, or unload freight, Bill's young wife got her first glimpse of the great West. And she must have fallen in love with the great stretches of prairie, the winding roads, and the picturesque wagon trains, for she took her place beside her husband and played a real part also in the winning of the West.

After a short visit at Fort Leavenworth, the young couple rented the Golden Rule House in the Salt Lake Valley. And although the Golden Rule House was a typical frontier hotel, patronized by people going to and from the plains, the life was too tame for Bill Cody. He soon sold out and set forth for Saline, Kansas, where the Kansas Pacific Railroad was building a line on toward Denver. Out in this country one day he met his old friend, Wild Bill Hickok, who was scouting for the government.

"Why don't you get a job as scout, Cody?" Wild Bill asked him. "The government needs men like you."

"By jinks, I think I will," Cody responded.

So during the winter of '66 and '67, Cody scouted for the government between Fort Ellsworth and Fort Fletcher. While on this job he was sent to Fort Hays, a new post on the south fork of Big Creek. Here he met General Custer, and acted as his guide to Fort Larned over a country without trails. When they started out on this trip, Cody was riding a mule. The general, mounted on a horse, noticed this and said:

"I want some speed on this trip, Cody. What are you riding a mule for?"

"She's a good animal," Cody replied

cheerfully, as he rode ahead at the side of the general. All during the day, whenever the general wasn't noticing, Cody spurred his animal on. Then when she was making good time, he'd pull her in. The general was soon hard put to it to keep up with his companion, and when they reached the fort his horse was flecked with foam, her nostrils dilated, and every hair reeking with perspiration.

The next morning after greeting the general, Cody innocently inquired: "How's your horse, general?"

"She's dead," the general answered crustily. "But I'll get even with you, Cody, the next ride we take," he added with a smile.

While he was scouting for the government Cody met a contractor named Bill Rose, and the two men got the idea of starting a town of their own. So they bought up some land for a dollar an acre, and with the help of a saloon and a grocery store, started a village which they named Rome. Cody was all enthusiasm, for the railroad was building a line through his property and he had visions of himself as a millionaire. With high hopes he went to St. Louis, collected his wife and baby, and with them journeyed out again across the plains in a wagon train.

When Rome was almost in sight, Bill could hardly control his joy.

"Our town's right over there," he said to his wife, as they reached the end of the journey.

And then Bill stopped. For there wasn't any town. The hundred or so shacks and tents which he had left upon this site were there no more. Only the saloon remained.

With a crestfallen countenance Cody entered the saloon.

"Where is Rome?" he asked the bartender.

"Oh, the town's all moved away about a week ago," the man explained. "The railroad started up a better town over by Fort Hays and let it out that it wouldn't come anywhere near here. So everybody pulled up stakes. This is the only place that is left."

So the rise and fall of Cody's Rome was of short duration, and he went over to Fort Hays and resumed his scouting for the government. Fort Hays had grown overnight from a bare stretch of prairie to a mass of tents, shacks, and frame buildings. Here in the old Perry Hotel one met army officers, famous plainsmen, gun toters, and man-killers. Up and down the streets, which were nothing but openings between rows of shanties and tents, passed soldiers of fortune, college professors, and hunters. In the gambling dens men flicked cards silently for hours at a time, and in the dance halls toneless pianos gave forth such tunes as "Arkansas Traveler," and "Money Musk" morning and night. In Fort Hays men quarreled and fought and killed twenty-four hours a day.

The plains around were alive with buffalo, and Bill Cody spent much of his time on his horse, Old Brigham, killing the bison. He soon acquired great skill as a buffalo killer. So deadly was his aim that his rifle, an improved, breech-loading, needle gun, which he had obtained from the government, was known as "Lucretia Borgia."

At this time the Kansas Pacific Railroad was extending its line right into the heart of the buffalo country. Twelve hundred men were employed in construction work, and as the Indians were troublesome in the neighborhood, it was difficult to get fresh meat for the workers. One day the head of the firm of Goddard Brothers, who had the contract for feeding the men, sent for Bill Cody.

"Will you take a job as hunter for the railroad?" he said. "I need twelve buffalo a day, and you are the only man I know who can fill this order."

"Sure, I'll take the job and fill the

order, too," Cody replied. "If you'll pay me five hundred dollars a month."

This was agreed to, and so Bill Cody became the crack buffalo hunter of the West. Every day he journeyed miles out upon the plains, accompanied by his butcher, "Scotty," and trailing a light wagon to haul the meat back to camp. Sometimes he traveled day and night to procure the necessary provisions for the workmen of the railroad. But he always lived up to his contract and the men never went hungry.

One day as he and Scotty rode into the camp, the wagon piled high with buffalo meat, they met a section workman, who, at their approach, began to sing in a loud, booming voice:

Buffalo Bill, Buffalo Bill,
Never missed and never will,
Always aims and shoots to kill,
And the company pays his buffalo bill!

Like magic the nickname traveled around the camp, and from that time on Cody was known as Buffalo Bill. This unique bit of nomenclature made its way back to Fort Hays and the officers and soldiers adopted it. In fact, the name has never stopped traveling. All around the world it has gone, repeated by men of every nation, by cowboys and kings, by schoolboys and presidents. It is one of the famous names that has come out of the West, and will never be forgotten.

But after the true fashion of the frontier, Cody was not to have this title without fighting for it. Over at Fort Wallace there was a man named Billy Comstock, who was also a famous scout and buffalo killer. The officers at that fort were anxious to pit Comstock against Cody, so a shooting match was arranged between the two men. The contest was to start at eight o'clock one morning and last for eight hours. The title of "Buffalo Bill" was at stake, and would go to the man who killed the greatest number of buffalo from horseback.

Soon huge posters announced the exciting contest all the way to St. Louis, from which place a special train was to be run.

Grand Excursion
to
Fort Sheridan
Kansas Pacific Railroad
Buffalo Shooting Match
for
$500 a Side
and the
Championship of the World
Between
Billy Comstock—the Famous Scout
and
W. F. Cody—Buffalo Bill
Famous Buffalo Killer for the Kansas Pacific Railroad.

A large crowd of plainsmen, soldiers, and excursionists from St. Louis were on hand to witness the contest, which entailed some effort on the part of the spectators as well as the participants—for the buffalo were not chased out into an arena and killed. A sight of the famous "runs" meant miles of trailing far in the rear of the hunters until the sound of the guns announced that the shooting had commenced. Within a mile of the starting point, however, Buffalo Bill sighted a herd of nearly two hundred buffalo, and the spectators excitedly assembled on a hill from which point they could watch the entire operation of the "run" as the onslaughts were called.

Referees were appointed, their watches set together, and the two hunters were given a certain time from the moment they ran their horses into the herd to kill as many of the great, hulking bison as possible. Comstock and Cody struck their mark. The referee waved a hand.

"Go!" he called.

The riders plunged forward on their eager horses, the referees hurrying behind, and the crowd watching with bated breath.

The large herd of bison were grazing, and didn't notice the hunters until they were upon them. Into their midst the two men rode, separating them. Billy Comstock took the right half, and Buffalo Bill, riding Brigham and carrying Lucretia Borgia, took the left. The two halves started in opposite directions. Comstock began firing as he worked his way swiftly to the rear, dropping three buffalo in their tracks. But Lucretia Borgia was silent.

"What's the matter with Buffalo Bill?" somebody asked.

Buffalo Bill had a method of his own, however. Instead of attacking the herd from the rear, driving it before him and scattering it, he worked his way ahead and slightly to one side. Then quickly he swerved, and, riding straight past the bison, fired as rapidly as his gun would permit. The hunters at that time didn't have automatic rifles, and firing was slow work, as they shot, then reloaded their weapons.

"Crack! Crack!" went Lucretia Borgia.

The leaders of the herd dropped, stopping the rush of buffalo from behind, and causing the whole herd to hesitate. Again Buffalo Bill circled, and came back against the herd, his rifle dropping buffalo after buffalo, the animal always falling in a place that stopped the progress of the other bison.

"Thirty-six — thirty-seven — thirty-eight," counted the spectators, watching Buffalo Bill with wild-eyed admiration.

"Time!" called the referee.

During this first part of the match Comstock had chased three miles and killed twenty-three buffalo, while Buffalo Bill, in a radius of three hundred yards had dropped many more.

The hunters paused for lunch, and then started out again. Now, the herd was smaller, and the shooting was swifter. As Buffalo Bill was finishing up the last of his bison, Comstock was desperately trying to keep the remainder of his herd from escaping. Suddenly the buffalo swerved and plunged at him. Comstock quickly turned his horse and escaped. His referee, however, was not so lucky. Before that unfortunate gentleman could flee, his horse was lifted high in the air on the horns of a bull buffalo, and he was thrown fully thirty feet.

During the latter part of the match Buffalo Bill won the loud applause and unstinted admiration of the spectators by riding Brigham without bridle or saddle. And when the hunt was over and the dead bison counted, Comstock had killed only forty-six to Buffalo Bill's sixty-nine. So did William Frederick Cody win the title of champion buffalo killer of the world.

When in May, 1868, he ended his career as professional buffalo hunter, he had killed with his rifle, four thousand two hundred and eighty bison in eighteen months. Many of the heads of these buffalo were mounted by the railroad company and sent to the principal cities of the road where they may be seen to-day in the stations.

Buffalo Bill now resumed his vocation of scouting, serving under General Sheridan in his campaign against the Indians in western Kansas, Colorado, and what is now New Mexico. In these campaigns Buffalo Bill, called by the Indians "Pahaska," which means the "long-haired man," won new laurels as a dispatch bearer.

One day he set out from Fort Larned carrying dispatches to Fort Zarrah. As he was traveling through the wild and desolate country he was captured by a band of Indians, and led across the Arkansas River to their camp. There Buffalo Bill found the old Indian chief, Santata.

"What are you doing here?" the old brave asked. "And where is that Buffalo meat that General Sheridan promised us?"

"That's what I'm here for," answered

Buffalo Bill, ever quick of wit. "I came to tell you that the meat is on the way. It will be here soon."

The old chief was suspicious, but he let Buffalo Bill go. The scout had hardly got out of sight, however, when he turned to see a party of Indians in hot pursuit. Evidently they had decided that he was lying. Faster and faster Buffalo Bill rode, the Indians hot on his trail. When he reached Pawnee Fork, about two miles from the post, he sighted a government wagon. Denver Jim, an old scout, was with his party.

"Let's have some fun with those Indians," he said.

So the soldiers quickly dragged the wagon into the bushes, and, hiding themselves, waited for the approaching redskins. As the enemy rode by, still in pursuit of "Pahaska," they got a volley of bullets from the ambush and were glad to turn their horses around and make an escape.

When Buffalo Bill arrived at the fort he found that the commandant wanted to send some dispatches to General Sheridan at Fort Hays, and none of the scouts were willing to undertake the trip. So he volunteered and started out for the post under cover of the darkness. In spite of the fact that the country was infested with Indians, he completed the trip in safety, making the journey of sixty-five miles in eight hours. The same day he started for Fort Dodge with further dispatches, a distance of ninety-five miles. There he ran into Dick Parr, chief of scouts.

"The commandant wants some dispatches taken to Fort Larned," Dick said, "and none of the men will volunteer to go. I hate to ask you, Cody. I know you are dead tired. But you're the only man with nerve enough to undertake the job."

"Give me a fresh horse and I'll take the dispatches," Cody said.

"We haven't an available horse at the post," Dick replied. "The best I can do for you is a government mule."

"Oh, all right," agreed Cody.

So Buffalo Bill mounted his mule and rode off, urging the animal along as fast as he could. After riding some thirty-five miles, along about dusk he reached Coon Creek where he dismounted and gave the mule a drink. As he was preparing to resume his journey, the contrary animal jerked away, and plunged down the valley with more speed than Buffalo Bill had ever dreamed him capable. Buffalo Bill had no choice but to follow on after, just out of reach of the animal, growing more footsore and angry with every mile.

Suddenly the soldiers at Fort Larned heard the sharp report of several pistol shots about a half mile away. Rushing out to investigate the matter they found Buffalo Bill, very red of face, standing over a dead mule and swearing violently.

"That was the durndest animal I ever met," he said vehemently. "She made me walk all night long. But she'll never get away with that trick again. She's gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds. And I tell you, boys, she was a tough customer. It took six bullets to send her there."

The next night Buffalo Bill rode sixty miles more, from Fort Larned to Fort Hays, having traveled three hundred and sixty-five miles in fifty-eight hours, and making an unsurpassed record for himself as a dispatch bearer.

A little later when the expedition against the Dog Soldiers who were infesting the Republic River Region was under preparation, General Sheridan sent for Buffalo Bill.

"Cody," he said, "I'm going to appoint you guide and chief of scouts of the command."

The Dog Soldiers were a band of Indians who would not enter into any treaty and refused to go on a reserva-

tion. The name was derived from the French word "cheyenne," meaning dog. It was in October that the fifth cavalry under Major General E. A. Carr, began the march to Beaver Creek country. During this campaign the soldiers found tracks in the sand showing that two white women had been captured by the Indians. An attack was made and one of the women, a Mrs. Weichel, the wife of a Swedish settler, was rescued. The other white woman, Mrs. Alderdice, was killed by the squaw of the Indian chief, Tall Bull.

But her death was revenged when Buffalo Bill put a bullet through the chief's heart. However, the famous scout was much prouder of the Indian's big, yellow horse than he was of the killing of the chief. This horse he named Buckskin Joe, and it was this mount that the Grand Duke Alexis rode when he came West for a buffalo hunt.

At this time the plains were the Mecca of several foreign noblemen who had caught the lure of the great West. Lord and Lady Dunraven from England and Lord Finn from Australia came on a visit to Fort McPherson, and were entertained by Buffalo Bill and his wife in their cabin, which had been built by the soldiers. A little later the Grand Duke Alexis arrived. The climax of each trip was reached when Buffalo Bill took the royal visitors on a buffalo hunt.

So elated was the Russian nobleman over the feat of killing a buffalo that he presented Buffalo Bill with a big fur coat which he wore. Not satisfied with this expression of his gratitude he telegraphed to New York and had a set of sleeve links and a scarf pin studded with diamonds and rubies made for the famous scout. Each piece was in the form of a buffalo head, as large as a silver half dollar.

Honors came to Buffalo Bill thick and fast during the time that he was stationed at Fort McPherson, with the rank and title of colonel. At this time Cody was chief United States detective for the army, as well as scout and guide. One day General Emory said to Cody:

"I've decided to make you justice of the peace, colonel."

"All right, general," Cody replied. "But I know as much about the law as a government mule does about bookkeeping."

However, although he was short on law, he was long on common sense, and with the aid of the "Statutes of Nebraska," Buffalo Bill married couples and settled disputes to the complete satisfaction of the community.

But the business of being judge was only a side line, being interrupted many times by scouting expeditions. The Indians were still causing trouble, and Buffalo Bill was still on the job. When General Carr received a telegram that the Indians had made a dash on the Union Pacific, killing several section men and running off the stock of O'Fallon's Station, Buffalo Bill accompanied the expedition that went to the rescue under the command of Major Brown. On this trip the famous scout was introduced to Colonel E. Z. Judson, a short, stout man, wearing a blue military coat, and ornamented with about twenty badges of secret societies and gold medals. This was the beginning of a firm friendship between the two men.

Judson was a novelist, writing under the name of Ned Buntline. He became greatly attached to Buffalo Bill, and gained the scout's permission to write some of his thrilling experiences in fiction form. And it was through his stories that the East first heard of Buffalo Bill. So enthusiastic did the public become over the adventures of the famous plainsman that Buntline got the idea of writing a play in which Buffalo Bill could act as the original of the character. He wrote to Cody telling him that a large fortune awaited him, if he would only come East and go on the stage.

It was about this time, too, that Buffalo Bill was elected to represent the Fort McPherson district in the State Legislature, and so had the privilege of adding an "honorable" to his name. But somehow that idea of acting on the stage before an audience appealed to the plainsman. So he resigned his jobs as scout, colonel, justice of the peace, and as a legislator, and sold out his possessions. And one day late in the year 1872, as the old stage pulled out of the post, Buffalo Bill, his wife and babies, accompanied by Texas Jack, were passengers.

And so for several years Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack turned actors, touring the country in such plays of western life as "Life on the Border," "Buffalo Bill at Bay," "From Noose to Neck," "Buffalo Bill's Pledge," and "The Red Right Hand." This famous scout, who could ride any horse in the country, beat any Indian, and tear a hole in a dollar flipped in the air before it touched the ground, was a victim of stage fright upon his first appearance. But he soon recovered, and although the lines he spoke were not those written by Ned Buntline, they seemed to make a hit with the audience. And when it came to shooting down redskins, in which feat the plays abounded, Buffalo Bill was in his element.

In 1876, when the Sioux war broke out, however, Buffalo Bill closed his road show and reported to General Carr of the Fifth Cavalry for duty as guide and chief of scouts. It was during this campaign that the world was horrified by the massacre of General Custer on Little Big Horn, June 25, 1876. A short time after this Buffalo Bill fought his famous duel with the Indian chief, Yellowhand. It happened this way.

General Merritt got an idea that he might be able to cut off the advance of eight hundred of the Dog Soldiers, who were trying to turn into the heart of the Big Horn country, there to join the hostile bands of Sitting Bull. So his troops prepared an ambush along Warbonnet Creek, just before the renegade Sioux and Cheyennes reached that spot. The plan worked out splendidly. The Indians showed up on the hill and the soldiers were just getting ready to open fire when a wagon train appeared in the distance.

In hot pursuit of the train started some of the Indians. Then Buffalo Bill, with twelve or fifteen scouts, started after the redskins, driving them away from the train. It was at this juncture in the proceeding that an Indian chief, decorated with paint and feathers, rode out from his braves, and paraded up and down, pounding his chest and gesticulating wildly. Buffalo Bill turned to Little Bat, his interpreter, and said:

"Who is that chap? And what does he want?"

Little Bat listened to the chief's guttural phrases and then replied:

"That is Yellowhand, who thinks himself a great chief. He says that before this battle starts he wants to fight a duel with Pahaska.

"Oh, he does?" asked the scout. "All right. I'm ready."

So, with a yell, Buffalo Bill jabbed the spurs into his horse and shot out from the lines. Just as the famous scout pulled his trigger, his horse's foot went down in a gopher hole. The shot instead of hitting the chief, hit the redskin's horse. When the dust had cleared away a bit from the fall, the scout and the Indian chief were right at each other, grappling and wrestling, twisting this way and that. Suddenly Yellowhand brandished his tomahawk aloft, yelling in fury. But Buffao Bill was too quick for him, and, drawing out his old bowie knife, plunged it through the redskin's heart. Then almost before he knew what he was doing he had "lifted the hair" from the dead Indian and was waving the scalp in the air.

"The first scalp for Custer!" he yelled.

With that the Dog Soldiers and the Fifth Cavalry closed in combat, with Buffalo Bill still waving his gruesome battle flag and crying: "First scalp for Custer."

Soon the Indians were getting the worst of the encounter, and started to run for the hill. The Fifth Cavalry pursued, chasing the fleeing redskins over the hill and on toward the Red Cloud agency. By this time night had settled down, and so had the Indians. The fight was all out of them, and they were as meek as lambs. Buffalo Bill was talking to General Merritt when an interpreter rode out and asked him if he'd talk to old Cute-nose.

"Who's he?" questioned Buffalo Bill.

"He's the father of Yellowhand."

"I wonder what he wants?" puzzled Buffalo Bill, as he entered the tepee of the old chief.

"He says he'll give you four mules and some beads for the scalp and war bonnet of Yellowhand," explained the interpreter.

"You tell him I wouldn't trade that scalp for forty mules," replied Buffalo Bill.

After this Indian campaign, Buffalo Bill returned to the stage, this time at the head of his own show. And he carried with him some real Indians from the Red Cloud agency, who appeared in a regular Indian war dance on the stage. The enthusiastic reception of this venture put another and bigger idea into the head of the famous scout, who, although he had made good on the stage, had remained at heart a plainsman, with the plainsman's voice and bearing, and a plainsman's love for the great open spaces of the West.

"I want to carry the real West to the East—the prairies, the Indians, the old stage coach," he said to his wife. "And that can't be done on a small stage. I want cowboys riding and roping, and doing crack shooting, and everything just as it is out here."

And so was born Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, the famous outfit that toured the United States from ocean to ocean. The first presentation took place in Omaha, in May, 1883. And it gave a true, clean picture of the plains, with the thrills of following the old trail. In the grand entrance were depicted the picturesque features of western life, the Sioux, the Arapahoes and Cheyennes in war paint and feathers, leading the van. There were shrieking war whoops, and dashing cowboys and soldiers. And there was Buffalo Bill himself, a spectacular figure upon his big, white horse, who entered the arena, made a salute from the saddle, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to introduce you to the rough riders of the world!"

For three years the wild West toured the United States with success. And then one day, at the end of a performance, an Englishman hunted up Buffalo Bill and said:

"That is a wonderful performance of yours. Here in America it meets with great appreciation, but you have no idea what a sensation it would be in the Old World."

So Buffalo Bill chartered the steamship *The State of Nebraska,* and in March, 1886, set sail for another continent. In the big London amphitheater, one third of a mile in circumference, the wild West showed. The performance began with the hour of dawn on the plains. Wild animals were scattered around, and the Indians were sleeping in their tepee. As the dawn broke, the redskins came out of their tents and went through a solemn war dance.

Then a courier appeared, announcing the approach of hostile tribes. There was a wild scramble for mounts and weapons, and a sham battle occurred. Next there was a buffalo hunt, and some fancy shooting. And then an Indian village was blown out of existence by a western cyclone.

The Prince and Princess of Wales and Queen Victoria witnessed this performance in a special box placed on a dais of red velvet and lavishly decorated in honor of the royal guests. The audience at this performance also included the Kings of Saxony, Denmark, and Greece, the Queen of the Belgians, and the Prince of Austria.

One of the leading features of the wild West show was the Deadwood Coach, which had a thrilling history. This old stage was built in New Hampshire and sent by water to San Francisco to run over a route infested with road agents. Numberless times the unlucky coach was held up and robbed. Finally the driver and passengers were killed, and the coach was abandoned on the trail. Afterward it was brought into San Francisco by an old stage driver and placed on the Overland route. But its bad luck held. Again the driver and passengers were massacred, and again the coach was abandoned. Then Buffalo Bill bought it for his show.

After a performance in London of the wild West show the Prince of Wales requested Buffalo Bill to allow him to ride on the front seat of the old coach beside the famous scout as driver. This request was granted, and when the coach started around the arena the Kings of Saxony, Denmark, Greece, and Austria were riding inside. Buffalo Bill, always boyishly ready for a joke, had told the Indians to whoop it up as they never had before. Then he sped around the arena, the old coach lurching crazily and the yelling savages following behind. When the hectic ride stopped, most of the kings were under the seats.

The Prince of Wales turned to Buffalo Bill and remarked: "I bet this is the first time you've ever held four kings."

"No," replied Buffalo Bill, "I've held four kings before. But this is the first time I've ever acted as the royal joker."

When the wild West show gave a performance in Rome, one of the boxes was occupied by an Italian nobleman, the Prince of Sermonetta. At the end of the performance he said to a friend:

"I doubt if the cowboys who ride the bucking bronchos are as expert as they seem. The ponies have been trained to buck."

Buffalo Bill heard the remark and talked to the nobleman, telling him that the cowboys were only doing what they were accustomed to out on the Western plains.

"I have some wild horses on my estate," replied the prince insinuatingly, "which have never been ridden."

"If you'll have them brought to the arena some afternoon during the performance, I'll be glad to have my men take a try at them," replied Buffalo Bill.

This experiment was advertised all over Italy, and a big crowd was on hand for the exhibition. The horses were taken out of the cars with much difficulty and amid much excitement. The arena was cleared. Six cowboys entered calmly with their lariats. Quietly and warily the cow-punchers went to work. Deftly they threw their lassos, wound them around the feet of the horses, threw the animals, and held them down. Then they saddled and bridled the wild animals, and rode each horse quietly around the ring, drawing up to salute at the nobleman's box.

When Buffalo Bill returned home after his European triumphs he was accorded a warm and enthusiastic welcome, the following interesting description of his advent being published in the New York *World*:

The harbor probably has never witnessed a more picturesque scene than that of yesterday, when the *Persian Monarch* steamed up from quarantine. Buffalo Bill stood on the captain's bridge, his tall and striking figure clearly outlined, and his long hair waving in the wind; the gayly painted and blanketed Indians leaned over the ship's rail; the flags of all nations fluttered from the masts

and connecting cables. The cowboy band played "Yankee Doodle," with a vim and enthusiasm which faintly indicated the joy felt by everybody connected with the wild West over the sight of home.

And indeed, Buffalo Bill was always glad to get home, glad to hit the trail again for the far West which he loved. There on the Dismal River he had bought a tremendous ranch in partnership with Major North, the former commander of the Pawnee scouts. In 1894 the Carey Irrigation Act was passed by congress, giving a million acres of land to each of the arid States. Colonel Cody was the first man to receive a concession of two hundred thousand acres from the Wyoming State land board. He immediately formed a partnership with George T. Beck, who proceeded to Wyoming. A site was located, and the line of an irrigation canal surveyed. The town laid out along this canal was called Cody.

Shortly after this the Burlington Railroad sent a spur out from the main line with Cody as the terminus. And in 1896 Colonel Cody, still alert on the trail, located the route of a wagon road from Cody into Yellowstone Park. A little later he went to Washington and while there saw President McKinley, to whom he explained the possibilities of this road of eighty miles, the only one entering National Park from the East.

"It would be the most wonderful scenic road in the West," he told the president.

President Roosevelt ordered the building of this road, which is now the favorite automobile route in the park.

When on the tenth of January, 1917, Buffalo Bill said good-by to his comrades of the trail and started out on the last and greatest adventure, the whole world mourned the passing of this noted scout who had played so great a part in the winning of the West. Long throngs of people stretched for blocks around the Colorado Statehouse where his body lay in state. Messages of condolence came from the lowly and the great, from bell boys and kings. There was moisture in the eyes of many of the bareheaded watchers who saw the flag-draped casket pass on to its last resting place, a big, riderless, white horse following behind.

Buffalo Bill was laid to rest atop Mount Lookout, with the wide stretches of the plains at its feet. But his spirit will never die. Every year in his memory the people of the Wyoming town that bears his name and the cowboys of the neighboring ranches, hold the Cody stampede during July. This annual exhibition of horsemanship and cowboy prowess brings many visitors to the little town backed up against the purple Rockies, which still seems filled with the picturesque personality of its famous founder. And during the three days of the stampede the Main Street of Cody is a surging mass of life and color, as cowboys and Indians ride through the thoroughfare.

This summer, on July Fourth, the Buffalo Bill Association, of which General Pershing was chairman, erected at the Cody entrance to Yellowstone Park an equestrian bronze statue of the great scout. The bronze Buffalo Bill on his Western horse is silhouetted against the sky on a great granite terrace hundreds of feet high, as though he were reining up his mount on the old South Fork trail. To one side of the statue rises Rattlesnake Mountain, while on the other can be seen the snow-capped peaks of Cedar Mountain. And a stream of water has been directed into a channel at the base of the terrace as a reminder of Colonel Cody's interest in irrigation.

So Buffalo Bill, gazing westward to the Rockies, hits the trail once more. And whoever in the future journeys the old Wyoming road to Yellowstone Park will there meet again the famous cowboy, one of the most beloved and courageous of the great men who went West.

His Dog Understood

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Buck Seldon's Dog," etc.

EVERY miner in the vicinity of Cold Deck took off his hat to "Hap" Tucker, for Hap had nerve. The previous owners of the Big Nugget claim had met with mysterious ends. A half-breed owner had simply wandered away and never been heard of. His rights had been acquired by Tom Dolan. Tom had been found dead in his cabin with a bottle of moonshine half consumed. The coroner's jury jumped at conclusions and the members later decided as individuals that perhaps moonshine had not killed Tom after all, for Tom had been on the "wagon" for three years.

Next came Jud Dobson. Dobson was found shot to death. Evidently he had been wounded either by his own hand or by parties unknown. There was evidence that he had attempted to write a message on the oilcloth table covering, but nothing could be made of it.

The Big Nugget claim, so called because the biggest nugget in the Cold Deck country had been found there by the original locator, had been ordered sold to the highest bidder. Miners wanted none of it. The group stood around waiting for somebody to bid. Presently Big Mike Kupoff came forward.

"The Nugget's a hoodoo," he growled out, "but I bid one thousand dollars and maybe unload it on some sucker later."

"A thousand dollars? Why, that'll hardly pay my way up to Cold Deck and back."

All eyes turned. A poorly dressed woman stood there with a frightened expression in her eyes. A small boy, startled no doubt by the rough-bearded men about, clung to her skirt.

"And Jud said it'd make us rich. Jud said he wasn't afraid of the hoodoo." She sobbed slightly.

"Flapjack" Meehan snapped out: "I bid five thousand dollars on the Big Nugget!"

As painful as it is to record it, Hap Tucker had fallen from grace and was slightly intoxicated at that moment. However, his mind was clear and he knew exactly what he was doing. First he looked at the widow, then the frightened child. Neither was prepared to cope with the struggle for existence. Hap cleared his throat.

"I came in to celebrate, and I've got fifteen thousand dollars' worth of gold in my pokes. For once in my life I'll celebrate right. The Big Nugget is worth real money or nothing at all. I bid, and I make my bid in a loud tone

of voice. I bid fifteen thousand dollars for a half interest in the Big Nugget. The other half Jud's widder can keep. What's more, I ain't afraid of no hoodoo, and I aim to work that claim and declare dividends."

Hap Tucker disappeared and presently returned with his gold, which in due time was turned over to the widow. And that was the reason why Cold Deck was a hundred per cent strong for Hap Tucker. Flapjack Meehan had taken him aside and told him exactly what he thought of him.

"You've been in the hills a long time, Hap, and nobody better than an old sour dough knows how you planned for a good time in the States on that gold. Then you up and soak it all in a hoodoo mine."

"Don't praise me, Flapjack; I'm a selfish cuss. I didn't do it for the widder, nor the scared kid, I did it just because doing such things makes a feller feel so dog-goned good inside," said Hap seriously. "All my life I've been that way."

"It says, 'cast bread on the waters and a whole lot of loaves and fishes will return,'" replied Flapjack, who was something of a backslider as far as the Scriptures were concerned.

"It don't mean real loaves," explained Hap. "It means that swell feeling you get inside of you. It don't mean that I can go up to the Big Nugget and strike a pocket and get my fifteen thousand back. I'm going to work the Big Nugget just for the fun of licking that hoodoo, and, besides, I got to eat. Say, Flapjack, can you stake me to a thousand dollars until I get going? I gave every cent I had to the widder."

"Sure!" said Flapjack, and the money was forthcoming.

Thereafter Hap Tucker disappeared from Cold Deck, except once or twice when he dropped in for a chat, and, incidentally, for grub. It was apparent the "swell feeling inside" was making up for a lot of ill luck at the mine. Tucker was thinner and wore a worried look, but thus far his happy disposition was carrying him through. Then he failed to show up for a month. It was Flapjack who journeyed to the Big Nugget mine, well armed. Tucker was hollow-eyed and nervous.

"How's things, Hap?"

"I'm going to whip this thing yet," he declared. "I can't figure it, but sometimes it gets so quiet here I feel like yelling. I feel things are happening to me all the time, and yet I never see anybody. Can you believe it, I went to sleep the other night eating my supper. Didn't wake up till three in the morning, and then the presence of something aroused me. I'd get out, only that——"

"Only what, Hap?"

"I hate to be licked!"

"Where's your dog?"

"He quit me; wandered off. I followed the tracks to the mouth of the mine, and they just disappeared. He didn't go into the drift, either. I can't figure it."

"Come on down to Cold Deck and visit us a week and pull yourself together. Leave everything locked up carefully and see if anything visits the place while you're gone. There's a vaudeville crowd coming down on the next steamer to put on a show. We've got some good movies, too!"

The girl act had retired amid applause. The curtain lifted and a number of dogs occupied the stage. They hopped around performing various clever acts on their hind legs. Direction came from behind the scenes, but for some reason the audience went cold on the act. Applause came from different quarters of the house, but it lacked the whole-hearted enthusiasm spectators in the States had given the act.

"See that big dog, Jack?" whispered Hap to Flapjack. "He turns down his

ears once in a while; so do the other dogs. That jasper behind the scenes don't seem to know he's putting on a dog act before men who spend the biggest part of their lives with dogs. That Jack dog now——"

At that moment the manager, dressed in evening attire, came onto the stage and seated himself. "Jack," he snapped out, "My pipe!" The dog vanished and returned with the pipe. "Now, my tobacco, it's in the side pocket of my overcoat!" Without hesitation the dog brought the tobacco. "And now a light, please, old man!"

From the stage fireplace the dog knocked a living coal with deft movements of his paw. The manager picked up the coal with tongs and lighted his pipe. "And now, Jack, my paper!" The paper was brought from the table. "That is all, Jack. I shall call you if you are needed."

The dog dropped to his master's feet and closed his eyes. Presently one eye opened and the crowd chuckled, for there seemed to be a roguish humor in the gleaming eye. From the manager's viewpoint the act was ruined by the dog's action, and his heel lifted slightly and ground downward on the dog's tail. Only one man in the crowd saw this. The dog whimpered and accepted the punishment without moving from his position, evidently knowing what to expect if he did. His eyes closed, then opened as a man leaped onto the stage.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the manager furiously.

Cold Deck saw Hap Tucker aroused for the first time. The most dangerous man of all is the good-natured individual thoroughly aroused.

"I saw the dirty trick you played on that dog," cried Tucker. "You're in the wrong country to get away with that stuff. Up here we know dogs. And when dogs droop their ears and tails there's a reason, and we know what it is. I need a dog! Come, Jack!"

There are some men who can approach any dog. Perhaps the reason for this is that dogs know character. Hap Tucker slipped a small rope through Jack's collar and started to leave the stage. One hand held the leash, and the other was conveniently near the butt of his forty-four. The manager was breathing heavily from anger, but he knew an infuriated man when he saw one, and he wanted none of Hap Tucker's rough and readiness just them. His faultless figure moved to the front of the stage.

"Is there an officer in the crowd?"

Reluctantly Cold Deck's marshal stood up. He was out of sympathy with things, very much so, but law is law, and order is order.

"Hap, you can't get away with that dog!" he shouted. "That's not your property!"

Tucker held the leash in his teeth, drew his forty-four so there would be no mistake as to his attitude in the matter, then tossed a poke of gold at the manager's feet.

"You're right, marshal; so I'm buying him!"

Hap Tucker backed away, his forty-four covering the manager. He knew no one in the crowd would argue the point. Not until he was well in the hills did he pause to consider.

"Jack, old socks, you may not know it, but you sure wrecked me financially. There was blamed near a thousand dollars in the poke, but I sure feel fine inside."

As he swung along the trail he broke into a whistle, the first in weeks. "I guess," he muttered finally, "that what was wrong with me, was I needed a dog, but he'll pay for himself in companionship—all dogs do, and some of 'em pay more."

On the ridge above the Big Nugget a wolf howled suddenly. Jack, a dog of the pavements rather than the wild, bristled and braced himself against

Tucker's legs. In the contact there was a queer mixture of apprehension and wonder, yet an offer of protection.

"Just an onery wolf, Jack; you'll get used to 'em," explained Hap Tucker.

The cry was repeated, different, with a note that chilled even Tucker's blood. Jack answered. In it was all the savageness of his ancestors. Tucker drew his gun and looked about. His heart pounded in his ears, and there was fear in his heart—fear of the supernatural. Once before he had heard that cry. Some strange instinct told the wolf of death or impending death.

Tucker caught sight of the gaunt form on the ridge and fired. It vanished silently, but the whine of the bullet as it glanced from a boulder came through the moonlight night. There was a light in his cabin as he came into view. This was not expected. He secured Jack to a scrub birch and crawled along the dump with drawn revolver. Presently he peered through the window. The visitor was stretched out on Hap's bunk asleep, the fire in the fireplace almost out. Tucker entered.

"Hello, stranger!"

There was no reply.

"Hello!" he shouted, then bent close. "Dead!"

There was no sign of a wound. The air was heavy from lack of open windows. Hap opened the door and made a closer examination. There were no wounds. Death had been peaceful enough. Evidently the stranger had stopped for the night. Nearby stood a washboard pack from which several articles had been removed. He had also cooked himself a meal. A pipe had fallen from his hand to the floor.

"Another case for the coroner," he muttered. "This thing is getting me. Well, I've got Jack now. Of course this old fellow might have died from exhaustion. He ate a big meal from the looks of things, and—— I've got to mush back to Cold Deck."

Not only the marshal and other officials, but a self-constituted committee of miners visited the Big Nugget next day. The old man was identified as a prospector who spent long periods in remote localities.

"Natural death," with personal reservations, was given as the cause of his demise. The personal reservations were aired by the jury afterward, and the camp generally.

"It don't just happen so many people die at the Big Nugget when there's so much room in Alaska to die in," said Tubby Willows. "Hap Tucker sure has nerve to stay."

There was a grimness about Hap Tucker that interested the camp. Incidentally he bought himself another forty-four. The hardware dealer tried to interest him in an automatic pistol, but Hap shied violently.

"I've heard the loads stick sometimes, then what do you do? Ask the other fellow to wait until it gets to working? I use forty-fours for weapons, and legs to get about with, and dogs for companionship. Come on Jack!"

The vaudeville act had gone down the river to other camps, minus a good dog. Cold-eyed miners had taken the dog manager aside and advised him that if he expected to reach what he called "God's country," all in one piece, he had better change his training methods.

"Make 'em perk up their ears natural-like. When a dog drops his ears and humps up, it means only one thing, and that's the thing we don't stand for hereabouts. Kick a dog and the first miner will give you two kicks in return."

This advice, pounded home by a bewhiskered giant, had made a deep impression on the manager. His reply had been a series of nervous, "yes, sirs!"

In the depths of the Big Nugget Hap Tucker toiled, driving deeper and deeper into the mountain. At night he would grin as he seated himself in his chair.

"Jack," he would say, "my pipe! Now

my tobacco and a light, too, Jack, if it's not too much trouble. All right, Jack, that's all. Dead dog!"

Jack took as much delight in this nightly farce as did his master. The deftness with which he fished a coal from the fireplace was a never-ending source of admiration to Hap Tucker, and Jack did it all with ears and tail erect and a light of pride in his eyes that gave Hap Tucker that "great feeling inside."

Then one day he emerged from the mine with the dog at his heels. In a pan he carried some dirt that he nervously washed. The last of the gravel had hardly spilled over the edge when he became a madman.

"Struck it!" he yelled. "By gosh, I've struck it rich. I'm glad for myself, but I'm gladder for that widder woman and the scared kid. A million years ago, maybe, an old river ran along there and the gold's been waiting ever since for us to come along."

Then abruptly he stopped, for instinctively he knew that eyes were upon him. Cautiously he resumed his work, attempting to appear natural, yet at the same time seeking to locate the watcher.

"I'll clean out that pay streak," he promised himself, "send the widder her share, and shake this place. I'm getting sick and tired of feeling cold around the shoulders on warm days, but I won't be drove out until my work is done."

A half hour later the night air carried the pleasing odor of a well-cooked meal. This was a night of celebration, and the sky was the limit. Jack took a place across the table from Hap Tucker and attempted to remember his table manners as he dined. Hap washed the dishes while Jack groomed himself generally. Then he cocked an alert head sideways as Hap took his seat.

"Jack, my pipe! Now, Jack, my tobacco, and say, old sport, bring me a light, will you? Now turn in yourself!"

A footstep sounded, and a miner entered. "How goes it, Hap?"

"Great, Sam, what brings you here?"

"Headed up this way and brought your mail."

"Mail? I never get any mail!"

"Don't, eh? Well, what do you call this?" He handed Hap Tucker several packets, and then turned to go.

"Better stay for the night, Sam."

"Can't do it. Got to get back to Cold Deck. They's a dance on and a lot of lady tourists in town. And, say, you remember that widder woman? Well, she's up, too. You ought to see her, dolled out and right pretty now that she's lost that tired look. S'long!"

The first letter was from the dog-show manager. It was lengthy, but Hap got to the important paragraph without delay.

"You boys changed my way of handling dogs considerable. I'll admit I could have killed you that night, but later I learned things about dogs in this country and what they mean that I never knew before. I'm training young malemutes and taking an act of the North back with me. I'd like to buy Jack back if you're willing. Name your price!"

Hap Tucker looked down at the sleeping dog. "They don't make that much money in this world," he said softly. "So I can't name the price. I'll tell him so in a nice way, and he'll understand now, I guess."

The next letter was from the "widder woman." There was something about the letter that stirred an almost dead sense of romance in Hap Tucker's being. The letter was sensible and strictly business, but Hap had renewed her faith in mankind. Others had tried to "do" her, but Hap had gone out of his way to help, and with it had removed the sense of charity.

"I know now," it concluded, "that you bought a worthless mine to help a beaten woman, and I am returning to

Cold Deck to repay what I regard as a loan in part."

There was an informal snapshot of a pretty woman in a garden and a little boy climbing a fence. "Good heavens," Hap mutered, "she looks different than she did. She figures to bust up this partnership, eh? Huh, Jack; this partnership is just getting started."

The door opened suddenly and Jack leaped at an intruder. A pistol spat viciously and the dog crumpled to the floor. Hap Tucker's own weapons were too far away, so he elevated his hands. "Kupoff!" he cried, dumfounded. "What does this mean?"

The big Russian, who had come to Cold Deck from no one knew where, grinned. "It means you were a fool to bid against me that day. It means there will be another mystery, soon. I'm one miner in the North who knows what the Big Nugget's got. I know, because my own mine told me."

"Why didn't you bid and buy it?" queried Tucker, sparring for time. There was a coldness about the Russian's movements that hinted at grim moments ahead.

"Buy! I didn't have the money, then. And to have bid, except as you did, would have aroused suspicions. They might have wondered if my nearness to the Big Nugget had something to do with the fate of the others. I couldn't bid, you see, for miners are terrible when aroused. I'd have gotten you the other night, only the old man was in your place. I didn't know. This time I make sure!"

At that moment Hap Tucker cast caution to the winds and leaped. The pistol did not crack as he expected. Instead the Russian dropped it and met him bare-handed. No man in camp could have beaten him in brute strength contest. He gripped Tucker's arms and twisted them until the bones cracked, then bound him hand and foot. Through it all he was careful not to strike a blow or leave a bruise. With a heavy intake of breath he dropped Tucker onto the bed and then sprinkled a heavy powder onto the fire.

"Five times I have lowered the drug into the chimney from the cliff above as a man drops a baited hook into a pool with a fish pole. You are a brute for resistance. The old man died, but you—there will be no marks of a struggle. You will have—just died—pleasantly. And I shall not be the one to find you. I never come up here. I mind my own business!"

Tucker understood. Kupoff would doubtless head straight for Cold Deck and remain there. His alibi would be perfect. The powder he tossed onto the fire sent up a heavy smoke, but burned slowly. It was not unpleasant, and Tucker felt drowsy. Jack stirred slightly and growled.

"Dead dog, Jack!" whispered Tucker hoarsely. Jack was his only remaining bet, now. The dog obeyed. Several minutes slipped by, then: "Jack, old man, my pipe!"

In the darkened room the dog located the pipe and tobacco. "Poor devil, you got a glancing blow on the head from that bullet, but your old mind is working just the same. Now, Jack, a light!"

With pounding heart Tucker watched the dog slowly approach the fireplace and knock out a live coal. In a series of quick dabs he knocked it across the floor. Then the test came.

"Up here, Jack, on the bed. That's the stuff. Give it here, old fellow!"

The lips bared until gleaming fangs glistened in the firelight. Cautiously the dog caught up the coal and dropped it onto the bed. The heavy odor of burning blanket filled the air, a flame leaped up, and flickered as if in doubt. Tucker strained until one of the strands binding his hands was above. It was agony, but the rope glowed and parted strand by strand until with a last mad jerk his hands were free. He opened

a window, then dashed the contents of the water bucket onto the bunk and into the fireplace.

The steam pluming upward from the chimney must have warned Kupoff that something was amiss. He waited at a safe distance for the fumes to do the work, then he planned to return and remove all trace of bonds. Jack was to have gone the way of other dogs—into the river.

The Russian ran forward, and from the gloom of the cabin a dog leaped with bared fangs. His mighty fist knocked it from his throat. At almost the same instant he caught sight of Hap Tucker. The good-natured expression was gone from his face. His scorched flesh had changed him to one hundred and eighty pounds of fighting manhood. Kupoff fired almost at the same instant that Tucker's guns flashed. Tucker dropped in his tracks, and with a cry of triumph the Russian rushed forward to finish his work. From the ground came angry jets, then silence. The Russian lay where he fell, while forty feet away a dog licked the wounds of a fallen master.

Flapjack Meehan, on the way to the post office with mail, stopped dead in his tracks. Many strange things had happened in Cold Deck at different times, but this was the first time a dog had come into camp with a blood-stained hat in his mouth.

"Huh!" Flapjack grunted. "That's that show dog Hap Tucker helped himself to. Let's see; his name's—Jack! Here, Jack! Come on, old sport; you don't seem to know just who you are looking for."

After several moments of gentle words Flapjack approached the dog and took the hat. A second later he was on the jump for the marshal's office.

"More trouble at the Big Nugget," he announced. "Hap Tucker's dog came in with Hap's hat."

The marshal left the office buckling on his guns. Behind him a deputy was organizing a posse to bring up grub and be ready for orders. Tubby swung in behind Flapjack, and from the distance they saw "Rough" Rhodes hurriedly kiss his wife and leg it at top speed to join them. Rhodes liked to be in on everything and therefore he kept a keen eye on Flapjack Meehan and his partner.

Not a man in camp could say: "I told you so," when the posse came upon Kupoff's body, for the Russian had played such a careful game, had always been in town during periods of foul play in the vicinity of the Big Nugget, so that no one suspected him. Even then most of them figured it was a sudden gun fight between Kupoff and Tucker.

Jack beat the men to Tucker's bedside. The man lay breathing heavily, but he was conscious. His hands dropped beside the bunk and found the dog's head and fondled his ears. "Jack, old sport, you understood what I wanted when I gave you the hat and told you to take it to town. You see, Flapjack, the old boy didn't know who to go to; he's no friends in town, and that's what made it hard, but it's difficult to fool a dog. They know a lot more'n we give 'em credit for."

Tucker slumped back exhausted. Flapjack had examined gunshot wounds all his life, and now he stepped forward and rendered first aid.

"You're hard hit, Hap, but you'll pull through so far as I can see. It'll take good nursing. The doctor will be here pretty quick now, and we'll scare up a nurse." And Flapjack donned a professional expression. Inwardly he had serious doubts.

The marshal entered. "Say, this Rooshian must have been somebody in his time. Here's a report on the Big Nugget written down in Rooshian. I had one of the boys translate it. You've got a mighty big thing here, Hap. In

his cabin we found a lot of assaying equipment and bottle after bottle of queer chemicals, powders, and the like of that. He had the figure of a man drawn against a dirt bank and from the looks of things he'd been practically shooting at all different angles. You was lucky."

"Lucky!" Just then Hap Tucker did not feel very lucky, for he was dead in several places, and he didn't care much whether he lived or not, except when Jack came and looked down at him. "Yes," he muttered, "and he blazed away with two guns, too. First time in my life I ever was hit with a bullet; then I got two at the same time. Hanged if they didn't knock me down, but gosh, I sure was mad. They got me all riled up, and I didn't wait to get up, but blazed away from the ground. The bullets made me mad, but the thing that made me the maddest was the way he treated old Jack."

"Take it easy!" warned Flapjack, who recognized signs of dangerous collapse.

"Wouldn't mind dying," he muttered. "Had a lot of fun doing things for people. Say, Flapjack, do you suppose good men and good dogs mush the same trail in the Beyond?"

"Sure, they do," whispered Flapjack, "but you aren't taking that trail just yet." Flapjack bent closer. "He's gone! Where's that infernal doctor?"

Tubby Willows raced to the door and looked out. "Doc Riley's coming. He's about a half mile away." He waved his arm frantically and the doctor broke into a run, with a husky miner dragging him along on each side and a third bringing up the rear with the doctor's all-important black bag.

He was panting as he bent over Hap Tucker. "I'm afraid I'm too late, but I——"

Cold Deck had quieted down after its latest bit of excitement. A new stampede was on in the vicinity of the Big Nugget. Within the private dining room of the New Deal Café three men chuckled over a dinner.

"Best joke you ever played in your life, Flapjack," said Doctor Riley.

Flapjack grinned. "Queer, but when men are real hard hit by a bullet they sometimes get the idea they don't want to live. The shock takes the fight out of 'em. Well, I put it up to the widder Dobson that old Hap needed nursing by a pretty nurse, and he needed it bad. And she liked to fall all over herself because it was her chance to square accounts with Hap. We went in and Hap says: 'S'long, Flapjack; I'm dying. Don't want to live.' 'S'long' I says 'Don't forget to write.' Well, old Hap figures there's something wrong, or I wouldn't be so willing for him to cash in, so he opens his eyes and sees the widder, all dolled up and looking sweet enough to kiss. 'Oh, howdy,' he says, then grins and takes a deep breath. And that's all!"

"Not quite all," said the doctor. "I was out to-day, and I'm betting before Hap is well, I'll be dragging along a preacher and a couple of witnesses."

MORE FARMS IN CANADA

THE number of farms occupied in Canada has increased from 511,073 in 1901 to 711,090 in 1921, according to the agricultural census bulletin recently issued by the government. The acreage of occupied farms in 1921 was 140,887,903 acres. The area of improved land in 1921 was 70,796,548 acres, and the area of unimproved land was 70,118,355 acres.

Object: Adventure

By Courtney Riley Cooper

Author of "White Riders of the Range," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

KENT McGREGOR goes West to learn the business of a cow hand. His father and mother have been pioneers of the West, and they have left him a small fortune which he wishes to invest in a ranch. But he does not want to be a tenderfoot ranch owner, so he hires out as a hand to the Bar Diamond Ranch in order to get experience. When he arrives he finds that the owner of Bar Diamond is Ollie Davis, a young girl whose parents are dead. She seems to fear her foreman, "Squinty" Marsh.

Squinty at once takes a dislike toward Kent, and resolves to punish him with work so exhausting that he will become discouraged and quit Bar Diamond. He sets Kent at the hardest task, that of pitching hay on top of the stack, while the whole crew is set at work pushing the hay up to him to wear him out. But Kent survives the first day and sets out to beat the whole gang the second day. He is overcome at the last and sprawls, unconscious, in the bed of yellow hay.

Kent is unable to get up out of bed; "Dummy," the cook, nurses him and applies liniment. That evening is the "shindig" at the community house, and Kent, after the others have gone, gets up, dresses, and rides out in the direction of the dance, although every motion of his mount tortures his sore muscles.

He discovers a forest fire in the direction of Old Baldy, and rides hard to the community house to give the alarm. Later, when the fire has been put out, Kent is accused of having started it and of cutting the telephone wires. He is taken to jail by the sheriff.

Ollie goes bail for him, and then fires him, acting through fear of Squinty Marsh. Kent goes to Jim Shugg, who holds a mortgage of over twenty thousand dollars on the Bar Diamond Ranch, and arranges to buy the note. He goes East for his securities, and when he returns, a week later, he gets a telegram that Jim Shugg will be in Parshall, a stop beyond Hot Sulphur.

When Kent alights from the train there is no one in sight but the huddled figure of a man. The fellow accosts Kent and offers to accompany him to Jim Shugg, then bits Kent over the head and makes off with the securities. Kent is left, wounded, lying face downward in the cinders of the station platform.

CHAPTER XIV.

SQUINTY TESTIFIES.

IT was a blinding flash of light which finally brought Kent McGregor to his senses, to struggle impotently for a moment, then to drop back, weak and staring as the light, temporarily extinguished snapped on again, and a voice came from above:

"Here! Here! What're you tryin' to do? It's the marshal. What's happened to you?"

Kent raised his aching head, and shielding his eyes with one hand, stared past the blaze of the light into the dim features of a man with a star prominently displayed on his overcoat. For the moment he was still dazed, thinking of nothing except the blow that had felled him, at last, however, to come to a realization of what had happened, and with clawing hands to grasp at his coat. Then, with a gasp, he merely fumbled. Where there had been crinkling stiffness was now only a gaping hole, and shredded cloth, hanging awry. Seizing the light from the hand of the other man, he turned it hurriedly upon the ground about him.

"They're gone! Gone!" he exclaimed.

"You mean you've been robbed?"

"Yes. Bonds. I was coming here to meet Shugg, the money lender. I had bonds in my coat. Twenty-four thousand dollars' worth. They're gone!"

"But who could have robbed you?" The enormity of it, to a man who had never, in his official life, done more than direct befuddled tourists, or aid in the subjection of a celebrating cow-puncher, was almost too much for his understanding. "There couldn't have been any one here to rob you."

"But I tell you they're gone! I had them sewed in my coat. I was bringing them here to Jim Shugg."

"Jim Shugg ain't here."

"He is, I tell you. I got a telegram from him this morning. On the train. He's over here with a relative who's sick."

The marshal shook his head. "Jim Shugg ain't got any relatives here, and he ain't been here for months. I ought to know. I owe him money. Talked to him on the phone about it this afternoon."

"But——" Then realization began slowly to filter through the pain-tortured brain of the injured man. That telegram! That man in the darkness with the faint features—strange, but even with the flash light extinguished, Kent could gain a fair view of the marshal's countenance. While the other man—— "Somebody robbed me," he went on. "Met me here at the train and said that Jim Shugg had sent him to take me to where he was staying. I thought I caught something familiar in his voice, and got suspicious. He acted queerly. Then he knocked me down."

"You say you recognized him?" The marshal had pulled a piece of paper from a pocket and with stubby pencil in one hand, flash light held under an arm, was attempting to make notes. "What did he look like?"

"I didn't say that I really recognized him. I couldn't see his face. He had his head down in a sheepskin coat and his face covered with blacking or dark grease. I could only see the whites of his eyes. But that voice——"

"Tell me what it sounded like."

"It wasn't the sound—it was just a tone now and then. He spoke gruffly, like a man trying to disguise his usual speech. Maybe that was it—maybe I'd never heard it before at all."

"But where could he have gone?" The marshal looked about him hopelessly, at the whole expanse of the tumbled hills, extending for miles about him. This was a little too much—that it should not be safe for a man to step from the night train in this quiet town of the hills. It meant more work for him at nights; he'd never thought of guarding passengers before. At last he said:

"Well, I reckon I'd best take you over to the town hall and get a doctor to sew up that head. Then we can sort of figure out——"

"Forget my head!" exclaimed Mcgregor. "Let's get after this bandit! Telephone around the country—let people know!"

"I'll have to get somebody down to the telephone office first," came the nonplused answer of the marshal. "They shut up here at nine o'clock. Can you walk? Come on over to the hall. Doc Billings lives right next door. I'll wake him up. Then I'll start after the other."

There was nothing else to do—no means by which McGregor could instill more haste into the utterly flabbergasted man. Staggering, his head paining him almost into unconsciousness at times, he followed the little man with the big star who had taken Kent's bag and was leading the way to the little shanty which served as a combination shelter for the volunteer fire equipment, jail, when there happened to be a prisoner, and town hall. There the marshal fussed about, dragging forth two chairs upon which Kent could stretch himself,

then with much banging and calling, aroused the doctor next door. Following which, he poked his head into the door to detail his activities, then disappeared again. He did not return until long after the doctor had arrived and was well into his task of taking the three stitches necessary to close the gaping wound above McGregor's left temple. Then he bustled in with an announcement of his progress.

"Still trying to get Hot Sulphur. Wires've been grounding pretty bad lately on account of the wind. Just a bean-pole line 'tween here and there," he explained. "But I ain't been loafing."

"Well, for one thing, I found out about that telegram. Just as I said in the beginning, Jim Shugg never sent it. Jim Shugg ain't been in town. Bet I've waked up ten people and asked 'em, among 'em the station agent. He says the telegram was there waiting for him when he got down to work this morning, with a silver dollar wrapped up in it and a note which just said 'Please send.' He's new to this country and he didn't know Jim Shugg from a hole in the ground. So he took the dollar, laid aside the change for when the man should come in again, and sent the wire. But of course the fellow that ordered it never showed up. So that's looked after. I've found out something more; that the fellow who did it hit off in the direction of Hot Sulphur. I found the tracks of his hoss, leadin' off from where he'd tied him over by them box cars. Guess I'll go back to the telephone office again—better connections there, since the wires have been cutting up so much."

He bustled out of the office again, while the doctor bent anew to his task.

"Whoever did this evidently didn't care whether he killed you or not," came his verdict as he began the application of bandages. "He evidently used a short, sharp-edged piece of steel, held in the cup of his hand, to judge from the cut. Your hat probably saved you from a fractured skull. Of course, you haven't any idea who did it?"

Kent McGregor answered in the negative, a statement, however, which belied his inner thoughts. A definite theory was taking form in his mind, one which pointed out the crime as being distinctly between two men. Yet, as he thought of it, the matter presented its difficulties. Had this been done by Jim Shugg or an accompilce, would that man have consented to the use of his name in a telegram? And certainly it was not done by Shugg himself. Nor was it accomplished by the man whom Kent McGregor would have liked to have fastened it upon. There was too much stockiness about the man with the blackened features, for the assailant to have been "Squinty" Marsh. Who else then? Kane? Green? Lee? Jason? With something of exasperation McGregor remembered that he had not catalogued the men sufficiently to be able to recognize any of them in the darkness of night; they had been negative creatures to him, passing like the people of a gruesome dream. Besides, he had seen them only in work clothes and without the bulkiness attendant upon the heavy sheepskin which his assailant had worn. But Squint—or Jim Shugg—was in this somewhere. How, he did not know. He only realized that the thought obsessed him; he paid the doctor from untouched funds in a trousers pocket and said good night to him. Then, in spite of his pain, he paced the floor; Jim Shugg or Squinty Marsh, Squinty Marsh or——

Then the marshal returned.

"Now, there's no use of that, young fellow," he said, laying a calm hand on McGregor's shoulder. "No use at all. Everything's done that can be done. There ain't anything more to be accomplished until morning. I've gotten through to Hot Sulphur Springs, and

I've spread the word there, as well as sending it down to the sheriff at Langdon. They're telephoning every ranch house, waking up the folks, and givin' them as much of a description as I was able to scrape together. So that's looked after. The sheriff's coming up to Hot Sulphur in the morning, and he wants us to meet there if you're able and go over the whole thing with him and the district attorney. So the best thing you can do it try to get some sleep. Come on in here, and I'll fix you up with a cot. Always keep a few here —and blankets."

He bustled ahead into another room then, and Kent followed, acceding to his advice. There was nothing more to do now. He could give no description of the bonds until he could call for that self-addressed letter at the post office at Hot Sulphur and obtain the serial numbers. He could aid not at all by remaining awake and going over theories. Resolutely, aided by fatigue born of pain, he strove to force the thing from him and sleep. In this he succeeded to a faint degree; the hours passed fitfully, until dawn, and an awakening to the sound of clattering steps in the adjacent room. But it was not the marshal.

"Just thought I'd step over an' see how bad yuh was jiggered up, as the sayin' goes," came a welcome voice, and Kent McGregor looked up into the worried features of "Shorty" Smith. Then, doubling like a jackknife, the cowpuncher knelt beside Kent's cot. "Who do yuh s'pose done it"

"I don't know." Slowly Kent was coming into a fully wakeful realization of what had happened. His bonds were gone. The fortune that was to have been his foundation in this Western country and which he had hoped would result in the salvation of Ollie Davis, had disappeared in the hands of an unknown thief. It might never be returned. He groaned with the thought. Then with the realization that he was attempting to answer a question by the friendly Shorty Smith, he looked up. "I don't know, Shorty. But I've got an idea. Jim Shugg was the only person that knew about it."

"Nope, thet ain't true." The lank cow-puncher grinned. "Jest about ever'body knew it. Ole Jim Shugg was so tickled t' think thet he was goin' t' get out o' thet jamboree without the trouble o' foreclosin' on the property an' then havin' t' sell it again thet he jest ran circles aroun' hisself, as the sayin' goes, tellin' ever'body about his good luck with the Eastern sucker. So 'tain't thet."

Kent McGregor smiled grimly. "So, he called me that, did he? Well, it rather looks like he was right." His hands wandered vaguely to his side, a habitual action for the last few days in his constant feeling for the safety of his possessions. "I—I guess he was right. I suppose they even knew the train I was getting in on."

"Yep. Jim tole it all. He was jest a-bustin' with information, Jim was."

"Then it could have been almost any one. But I still have my suspicions. I've thought of only two persons—Jim Shugg or Squinty Marsh."

Shorty scratched his chin. "Don't see how it could of been Squint," he answered. "Cause, jest as luck would have it, as the feller says, me'n Squinty was sort o' hooked up last night. If he done it, he must've come over here in an *aro*plane, because him an' me rode out o' Langdon t'gether after the train went through, an' went as far as the community house side by each. That's how come I happen t' be here. I'd stuck aroun' so long in Langdon thet I didn't want t' make the whole ride back t' the ranch an' when I got t' Hot Sulphur I jest figgered t' stay there. Then I heard all these here rumors an' seen the night marshal runnin' aroun' like a chicken with his head off an' I heard yuh was

hurt, so I called up Ollie, thinkin' it mighten not be bad fer her t' know it." Then he grinned as he added: "Knowin' too thet yuh wouldn't objec' t' a little sympathy. She shore sent gobs o' it—afore she switched off sudden an' begun talkin' t' me like I was the marshal or somethin' an' askin' descriptions. Guess ole Squint had heard the telephone ringin' from thet shack o' his out behind the reg'lar house an' come over t' see who was callin' up at thet time o' the night. But she done pretty well while she was at it. Thet girl shore thinks kindly o' yuh. She's the one thet ast me t' git up early an' come over here in case yuh was hurt bad."

It pleased McGregor and pained him, all at the same moment. Pleased him that she should be sorry—pained him with the knowledge that the help he had hoped to give her could not be forthcoming. All of a sudden too, he realized that he was in a poor state of affairs. His money was gone. With that, his plans had departed. There would be no outlook now for a ranch in the future. He mentioned the fact to Shorty. That person rose and walked the room with scraping feet for a long time.

"Reckon it won't kill yuh," he said. "Thet is, if yuh ain't above workin' fer a livin'. I heard about ole Squint chasin' yuh off the place up there. An'——" he grinned again—"I been kind o' lonesome lately. Hay shore gets heavy when yuh're pitchin' it all by yuhrself. So I spoke t' the ole man. Course we didn't know nothin' about all this here bond business then—thet was before I heard all o' Jim Shugg's shoutin's. But the ole man took pretty pertlike t' yuh comin' over there, an' I guess it'd still hold good."

"I'd be glad to go there. It'd at least give me a chance to earn a living. It's either earn one out here or go back East again. And"—he said it with a finality of determination—"I don't intend to do that. If Squinty Marsh or any of his gang got that money, I mean to stay here until I find it out—if it takes twenty years."

"Thet's the right sort o' sperrit," said Shorty. "But I don't see how Squint could of done it. It might've been some o' his gang. Still, thet'd be takin' a lot o' chances, seein' yuh'd naturally suspect him."

"I can't help it though. It's only natural."

"Yep. Reckon it is. Huh!" Shorty glanced out the window. "Gettin' pretty light. Reckon yuh'd better be risin' an' shinin' an' throwin' out a leg, as they used t' say when I was in the navy durin' the recent neighborhood scrap. The train'll be here pretty quick."

In confirmation of which, the marshal appeared through the doorway, sleepy-eyed and mumbling about his multifarious duties. Kent rose and dressed, Shorty and the marshal standing about as if in readiness to aid him, should his injuries produce weakness. But a night of rest had aided materially. Outside of a throbbing pain which still persisted in his temples, and the twinges of the wound with the every movement of his head, there was little bad result from the blow which had felled him. For that matter, Kent hardly noticed it. The physical hurt was the least of his misfortunes. There was something deeper—a dream gone astray, plans torn to nothingness by a shadow in the night. Slowly he dressed and went forth to breakfast in the company of his gangling friend. Then at the station Shorty said to him:

"Reckon I'll ride over with yuh." Shorty had for some minutes been studying the grim lines of the other man's countenance, the gauntness, the hollows under his eyes. "I can get one o' the boys t' bring Ole Bad Lands over fer me sometime t'-day. Yuh ain't lookin' any too pert."

"I can get along all right." Nevertheless, it brought a certain relief when

Shorty overruled his objections. Far better that Shorty should be beside him talking than the flustered marshal. The train puffed in and blustered out again, getting up steam for the climb over the slight divide arising between the two towns. A half hour passed. They were in Hot Sulphur and bound for the district attorney's office, where the sheriff from Langdon had preceded them.

Again there were questions and notations. Shorty Smith returned from the post office with the letter which Kent had mailed to himself, containing the list and denominations and serial numbers of the bonds. The district attorney noted them carefully.

"That will help if disposition is attempted around here or even in Denver," he said. "But I'm afraid in a robbery of the size of this one that the thief will go farther than that!"

Then there were more questions, more theories. Into the office came Jim Shugg, hands rubbing feverishly, the perspiration pouring from his brow. Time after time he wrote at the dictation of the sheriff and the district attorney, the words of the telegram which Kent had received, only at last to bring the verdict that in not one of the experiments had there been the slightest similarity between his writing and that of the message which the telegrapher at Parshall had found awaiting him on the previous morning. Wtih fat, trembling lips, he denied any connection and bemourned his loss of the sale of the note—to say nothing of the interest and the fact that he had planned to buy the bonds below par. At last he shuffled from the office, and the district attorney turned to McGregor.

"There's one other man I understand you've mentioned as——"

A knock at the door interrupted. The marshal answered it, gurgled an attempt at a greeting, then with sudden perturbation hurried back into the room and sat down. The sheriff rose, with ill-concealed interest. Kent McGregor remained seated, staring open-mouthed. Squinty Marsh, hat pulled over his narrow eyes, right hand bandaged, cold lips more colorless and thin than ever, stood in the doorway, to survey them for a moment, then to come stalking forward.

"I understand there's been some talk about me!" he began. It was a statement to be greeted with silence until Kent McGregor took upon himself the burden of a reply.

"Has it been warranted?" he asked. The man disregarded him, merely raising a long arm that he might point a gnarled finger in the general direction of Shorty Smith.

"That man there knows where I was last night."

McGregor smiled thinly. "You've four men working for you, Squint. And, if you don't object to me saying so, I wouldn't trust you or any of them any further than——"

But the lips had parted in a sneering smile. "Thought yuh'd say somethin' like thet. An' if I wasn't the man I am, I'd walk out o' this office. But when yuh've got t' do things in this world, yuh've got t' do 'em." He paused, then, and reaching into a pocket of his coat, brought forth a crumpled bit of paper, which he straightened, then tossed to the table. It was torn. It was smeared.

"Is that yuhrn?" he asked.

Kent McGregor could only sit staring. It was the disfigured first fold of a five-hundred-dollar Liberty bond!

CHAPTER XV.

BETWEEN JORDAN AND KENT.

ONE by one they took it, to examine it, and then compare it with the list of the bonds which were represented in Kent McGregor's letter to himself. It was one of the four smaller denomination; even the smear and a slight

tear across the face of the serial number could not prevent identification. Squint Marsh grunted.

"I never thought I'd get myself cut up doin' a thing fer yuh!" he said churlishly.

"It was a perfectly natural suspicion," McGregor answered heatedly. "Where did this come from?"

"From the Bar Diamond."

"But——"

"His name's Kane, if yuh want particulars."

"Kane! Kane!" The memory of the man's voice came back to McGregor with a sudden realization that this gnarled, enigmatical man was speaking the truth. The tone of the voice, seeping through careful attempts at concealment; tones which even at the time had struck McGregor as familiar. Kane! Kane, of Squinty Marsh's gang, as McGregor had more than once called the surly group of men working under this strange being at the Bar Diamond! Yet here was Squinty Marsh, bringing in the evidence against him—and hinting that it had not been obtained without a struggle. Squint's voice came again: "Well, yuh-all goin' t' stand there starin' at me? I said thet Kane stole them bonds."

"But how"—McGregor was on his feet—"where did you get hold of this? How did you find it out."

The man surveyed him, as if wondering whether to cease his information with the plain statement already made. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "Came into my cabin. This mornin'. Jest before dawn. He knew thet I didn't like this—didn't like yuh," he corrected, turning his almost imperceptible eyes upon McGregor. "Guess thet's why he thought he could get away with it. Told me what he'd done an' said he thought yuh'd recognized him. Wanted t' sell me some o' them things, half price, so's he could get out o' the country. I told him I didn't do thet sort o' thing an' him an' me got in a tussle. I got hold o' the bunch o' bonds an' tried t' pull 'em out o' his hand. Then he cut me with a knife an' thet's all I got. After thet, he tore through the door an' saddled up an'—well, thet's the last o' him. By the time I got dressed, he was off an' gone!"

"Which way?"

"Don't know. Didn't see. It was still dark, an' I couldn't tell nothin' about the direction on account o' the mornin' wind. Soon's I got out, I woke up the boys an' Ollie. But they hadn't heard nothin'."

"Prob'ly hit fer the hills." It was Shorty edging into the conversation. "He wouldn't take the risk o' makin' a break along the county road. Anyway, it's closer over t' Wyomin' by the hill route."

"Then we'd better see what we can do about heading him off!" McGregor was moving toward the door. "I'll get a horse somewhere——"

"Yuh with thet head?" asked Shorty.

"Forget the head! I'm after that man."

"Yuh're sort o' after my heart too!" said the lank cow-puncher as, forgetful of the pain that it might cause, he whacked the other man on a shoulder. "Come on, if it's a hoss yuh want. I got t' get one too, seein' Ole Bad Land's over Parshall way. Yuh goin' t' lead us, sheriff?"

"Yeh. Get back here as soon as you can."

They moved forward then, to preparations, the sheriff to hurry to the city hall for rifles, the men to the livery stable to the hurried saddling of mounts. At last six men galloped away from in front of the district attorney's office, the attorney himself, the sheriff, the marshal, Shorty Smith, Squint Marsh, again taciturn and stoical, and Kent McGregor, while on the sidewalk the population of the little town, with Jim Shugg mourning in the center, stood in ex-

cited watchfulness of the biggest event that had happened in Hot Sulphur in years.

Out to the open country and the higher succession of hills they went, where the progress necessarily grew slower, as the band, taking a short cut, headed for the Wyoming trail, where they would scatter, according to the sheriff's idea of the quest. Shorty Smith, legs dangling beyond short stirrups, rode beside McGregor and nodded his head toward the gaunt figure of Squinty Marsh, ahead.

"Wouldn't it beat yuh now?" he asked. "T' think o' him turnin' anybody up. Yuh never know what a feller is till yuh find out, now, do yuh!"

"It nearly floored me," confessed McGregor. "It wouldn't have been such a surprise if he had turned informer on anybody else. But on one of his own men!"

"Yeh." Then Shorty rolled his tongue in his cheek. "Wonders never cease, as them tourist fellers has a habit o' sayin'. Jest the same, it kind o' seems thet maybe thet conference mighten not been jest the way Squint tole it. Maybe now, they was together on it an' Kane seen where he was caught or somethin' like thet an' he had t' get out anyway, an'—still," he concluded with boyish trustfulness, "there ain't no sense lookin' a gift horse in the jawbone."

"Besides," argued McGregor, "all that doesn't explain the torn piece of bond, or the cut on Squint's hand."

"No it don't," agreed Shorty. "I reckon the ole skinflint's tellin' the truth, though I shore do hate t' confess it."

Following which, there was little more conversation. The going was harder, through a burned-over section of country. Higher, higher they went, at last to reach the plateau region in the vicinity of the old and little-used trail to the Wyoming line. The sheriff, taking the lead, stood in his stirrups and from his point of vantage, surveyed the tumbled country below him.

"No use of us bein' together any longer. Better split up in pairs an' go different directions. "You," he glanced toward McGregor, "better stay where you can get back to town easily if you give out. Shorty, you stay with him. Take a sweep down toward the Bar Diamond and around in the forestry. That'll keep you pretty close to houses. Squint and I will head toward Wyoming on the right, and the marshal and the attorney stay to the left. That satisfactory to everybody?"

It was. Soon the little posse had divided, to swerve to their various routes of search. McGregor and Shorty were left alone, taking the back trail. McGregor shook his head.

"Afraid we won't find much this way," he said. "If Kane wanted to get away, he'd be far beyond this by now."

"Mebbe so," answered Shorty. "Mebbe not. First place, he might be scared to ride in the daytime an' be stickin' around in the timber, figurin' they'd be lookin' fer him farther on. Then, on the other hand, as the sayin' goes, we might run on t' a hoofprint thet would tell us whole bookfuls."

But their steady examination of the trail displayed no mark of horse or man, in spite of a scrutiny that extended to every possibility of a trail. An hour passed in which Shorty Smith became less and less talkative, slouched in his saddle or leaning from side to side as he studied the ground, or merely riding, as in a lethargy, his eyes in the distance. As for Kent McGregor, he was all activity. He couldn't help getting a thrill out of it all. He was on a posse, hunting for a highwayman—something that he had wanted to do all his life. It was almost repayment for the loss of the bonds; a horse under him, the wide mountain country for his field, a 30-30 rifle in his hand, and the possibility at any moment of a shot from the distance

beginning the battle of a desperado for his life. It was almost like a dream come true!

But arrayed against this was the galling and constant reminder that he was paying everything he possessed for this excitement, to say nothing of a price over which he now had no control—the happiness of Ollie Davis. For she, although she might not know it, was even more concerned than he. This had been his hope for her happiness, for a way out. And it had failed.

Kent strove to remember everything that he ever had read concerning woodcraft. Time after time, he dismounted, to study a broken bit of brush, or a swath in high grass; only at last to draw a laconic observation from Shorty:

"Don't think we'll find no surprises thet way. Too much cattle movin' aroun' fer us t' get much out o' a busted bush or knocked-down grass. We got t' run onto a trail as plain as the nose on yuhr face. An'," he added, "I don't see nothin' like thet."

"But he certainly couldn't have gotten out of the country," said McGregor.

Shorty grunted. "Mebbe not," came his reply, "but it's a big country." Then, for a long time they rode in silence, at last to reach an eminence from which they could see the county road, and upon it, a slumped figure jogging along in a decripit buggy. Shorty rubbed his chin. "What say we turn off fer a minute," he asked. "It's the ole man. I always git cur'us when I see him wand'rin' around'."

Kent nodded; they had found little to interest them upon the trail they had taken. Soon, with heads bent against the brush, or horses threading through jack pine, they were making their way for a short time to the lower country, and the figure of the white-haired man, driving stolidly along the road with his rattletrap conveyance and flea-bitten horse. Shorty waved a hand and pulled rein on their mounts.

"Howdy boss," he said, and Kent caught in the tone something of the real attitude of this lanky, philosophical cow-puncher to the mysterious little man. There was reverence in that greeting, and respect and loyalty and a certain amount of love—like a boy being jocular with his father. Neil Jordan peered, then smiled.

"Oh, hello, Shorty. And this"—he looked toward Kent. Then: "Oh, it's you."

Shorty grinned. "Yep; what's left o' him," he said. "Pore ole Trouble here, shore has been knockin' agin' bad luck, as the sayin' goes. I reckon yuh've heard the latest?"

The man nodded. "That's why I hitched up. You weren't there to do it for me," he added petulantly, and Shorty playfully raised an arm over his face as if to avoid a blow.

"The telephone kept me awake half the night." He turned to Kent. "You lost everything, eh?"

The younger man tried to smile. "Except what I had in my pocket, a small checking account and a one-thousand-dollar bond that I left in Cleveland."

"Which'd be somethin', if I had it," said Shorty. "All depends on how a feller looks at things, as the sayin'——"

Neil Jordan interrupted. "We'll leave out the sayings right now, Shorty." Then again he addressed McGregor. "Is there any clew to the robber?"

"That's the strange part of it. We know who did it." Following which, he unfolded the tale of Squinty Marsh and his assistance in the robbery, to which the older man listened with quizzical interest. Eyes narrowed, shoulders humped, he leaned over the dashboard of the ancient buggy, flipping his whip vacantly, and hearing the story with the appearance of one undergoing mingled emotions.

At last he said: "Humph! Of course you believed him? There was

nothing else to do but believe him, was there? No," he repeated, as if in self-argument, "there was nothing else to do. How much did you say Kane took? Twenty-four thousand? A good deal of money." Then suddenly he turned. "Shorty," he said quickly, "it won't do any good for everybody to be standing down here in the road, talking. Suppose you get back up on that hill and keep your eyes open."

It was an evident dismissal, and the lank cow-puncher accepted it with a grin. He wheeled his horse; a moment later he was crackling through the brush to his point of vantage. Neil Jordan looked sharply at the younger man.

"Is it true that you were bringing out that money to take up the mortgage on the Cavern place?"

"Yes sir."

"Why?"

"Well——" and he hesitated slightly, "It looked like a good investment to me."

The older man's voiec snapped out: "Is that the real reason?"

Kent McGregor smiled. Between him and this man, he felt, there existed an invisible bond, of what nature and texture he did not, could not know, yet one which drew them instinctively together. There had been an evidence of it on the train on that day when Kent was making what he believed to be a triumphant entry into a country of conquests. It had come out through the conversations with Shorty Smith, and the recitals of instance after instance of a kindly interest on the part of this white-haired, prematurely aged man, looking with almost childish hope upon a young man from the East to work some sort of miracle. It was as though they had known each other for years, instead of now undergoing only their second meeting, and Kent, following a sudden impulse, touched his horse lightly with his spurs that he might move closer to the decrepit buggy.

"No, Mr. Jordan," he said seriously, "that wasn't the reason."

"Then what was it?"

McGregor faced the question squarely and answered it honestly. "I feel I can tell you," he said. "It's because I'm in love with Ollie Davis."

Then came a silence as the kindly eyes of the older man centered upon those of the earnest youth who faced him, eyes which bore deep into the soul of Kent McGregor and evidently found it able to stand the test. He raised and lowered the broken buggy whip, flecking in cogitative fashion at the few flies buzzing about his ancient horse. At last he said: "Made up your mind pretty quick, didn't you, youngster?"

"In point of time, yes," came the answer. "In point of happenings, no. I figure this way, Mr. Jordon: two persons can think they know each other for years and not become as closely affiliated as two other persons who have only seen each other for a few days. It's the happenings that count, the chances for persons to see each other under stress and——"

"I suppose you had plenty of opportunity for that?"

"Yes sir."

"And what does Ollie think about all this?"

"She didn't know that I was doing it—about buying into the place, I mean. I felt that she wouldn't allow me."

"Why?"

"That's the question I've asked myself a thousand times." Kent had become suddenly vehement; then again boyish, again impulsive, going to a man he felt he could trust. "Mr. Jordan—what could prevent Ollie Davis from marrying?"

"From marrying?" The man looked up. "I don't know."

"Why should she say that she never could have the right to marry any one even to love any one? That she was not fit to——"

"Who's said that?" There was outraged vehemence in his voice. "She hasn't!"

"But she has. Perhaps in not as many words—but in import. The girl's haunted, like a person with a ghost at her elbow. I suppose I haven't any right to ask you these questions, but all this has made me desperate. I feel that I've got a right to know a few things, Mr. Jordan," he added heatedly. "I've given everything I possess in the world in this fight—whatever it is. A person shouldn't be forced to gamble in the dark when he's trying to put forth the best that's in him. What hold has this Squinty Marsh over her?"

The man hesitated. "Why—why—nothing. Except that her father rather left her in his charge."

"But how? Legally?"

"No."

"Has he any claim or part of that ranch?"

"No. No!" The old man flared as if it had been a personal affront. "That ranch is Ollie's. It's been hers ever since she was a baby. It didn't even belong to her father. Ollie could have thrown him out at any time she wanted to. It came to her through—through a gift," he added.

"A gift? I thought——"

"The money to buy it, I mean. The place was purchased for her by a—a very dear friend of the family. It was put in escrow in the First National Bank of Hot Sulphur, the deed to be delivered to her when she became of age. She got it. That's all there is to that. Squinty Marsh or no one else owns one inch of that land."

"But you said he's her guardian."

The man looked away. "After a fashion. He'd been there several years and her—her father, I suppose, thought it best to suggest that Squint have a hand in her affairs."

Kent leaned from his saddle. "Even to a point of threatening her?"

"Just what do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say, Mr. Jordan. By holding this shadow over her."

"Shadow?" It was as though he were trying to deny a palpable thing. Kent went on.

"Yes—shadow. Thought you knew. Some way," he added with a peculiar inflection, "I believe you do know. I'm merely arguing for myself now. If that girl has a shadow in her past, I feel that I have a right to share it. I love her, Mr. Jordan. I loved her enough to go risk every thing to help her; now that I've lost that, I—I—well, it's only made me love her the more because she is farther away from me. But I haven't given up hope, nor the fight—I mean to keep on fighting for her until I win. But I need help. Why should Squinty Marsh be able to frighten her half to death by telling her that he will brand her so that no decent woman will speak to her?"

"He said that?" The man's face was livid.

"That was only the beginning. I overheard it; she doesn't know. They talked about a confession that her father had made. Something about her birth."

There was no reply this time; the man was merely sitting there, hunched in the buggy seat, his teeth grinding. McGregor went on.

"Is there a secret about her? Not that I care personally. I go on what a person is, not what the past may be, or the parents. But I want to know—because she's eating her heart out about it. What kind of a father was this man, that he should tell his daughter on his deathbed that she had no right to parentage, that she was an outcast."

Only a shrill whistling sounded for a moment—the whip being drawn swiftly through the air by an excited man, venting his emotions. At last:

"So that's what he told her, eh?"

"I can't say for the words; only the sense of it. That she has no parentage,

that she was an outcast child, and that evidently she could not go to respectable society or the man she might love with a clean record."

"That's a lie! It's a lie, I tell you!" The little, white-haired man had risen now, eyes glaring, whip raised above his head. "Whoever says that is a thief of character, a—a——"

"Then what is the truth? That's what I want—the truth!"

The man sank slowly to his seat. The whip dropped listlessly upon the dashboard.

"I—I can't tell you," he said slowly. "It's—it's getting late. You'd better join Shorty. You're wasting time."

"But——"

The man looked at him sharply. "I can't tell you!" he snapped out.

The interview was at an end. Embarrassed, almost apologizing for his curiosity, Kent McGregor laid the rein against his horse's neck and turned him toward the trail leading through the brush. Soon he was atop the ridge, riding, silent, morose, beside Shorty Smith, once more upon the quest of the brigand who had stolen his fortune. And down on the road, a rattletrap buggy, drawn by a flea-bitten horse, moved stolidly along, the reins listless in the hands of a white-haired figure that sat slouched upon the worn seat, a study in dejection.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE CAVERN.

IT was not until they had progressed nearly a mile that conversation began between the two, and that when Shorty Smith, raised in his stirrups, sighted the top of a small house in the valley and broke the trail to go in that direction.

"Might as well show yuh the castle in case we get separated," he said. "This here's where the ole man lives. Better head out from there; never no tellin' what's li'ble t' happen on a jamboree like this, an' yuh might want t' come back alone."

They swung down the hill then and through a stretch of bottom brush, at last to come forth into a meadow leading to the little house which served as the home of Neil Jordan. There Shorty dismounted, ambled into the house, remained within a few minutes and returned, with two hastily wrapped parcels, one of which he passed to Kent.

"Bread'n bolognie," he explanied. "Posse er no posse, I jest can't he'p gettin' hungry."

Then he led the way back to their work, explaining to Kent the various landmarks by which he might guide himself to the house in the event that anything should happen to separate them. After that, it was a matter of riding, and for Kent McGregor of studious thoughtfulness. The thing to which he had looked as an aid had only developed more mystery—what he had told Neil Jordan evidently had been news to the old man; it had excited him, frightened him. He had proclaimed it a lie—yet he had been able to offer no satisfactory rebuttal.

At last he said to Shorty: "Do you think that Mr. Jordan knows much about Ollie's past history?"

"Much?" The lank cow-puncher turned in his saddle. "Ever'thin'."

"Then why won't he tell it? Why will he allow things to go on that are working to the discredit of that girl and to her unhappiness, when, if he knows, he could end the whole thing?"

The other grinned and rubbed a lean hand across his freckled face.

"Ain't thet a question now?" he asked. "Yuh can't prove it by me, as the sayin' goes. But I reckon there must be some reason."

"There must be," agreed McGregor, but what, he could not decipher. That there was a connection between the two, a deeper bond than mere old-time ac-

quaintanceship, he was sure. The man was vitally interested in the girl; McGregor looked back proudly to the memory that the man's eyes kindled with approbation when Kent had confessed his love for her—almost a paternal expression, McGregor thought. But why, then, did he not do something to end the domination over her by the thin-eyed Squinty?

Kent strove to put the thoughts from his mind. His was another duty at the present moment, of neglecting no effort that the trail of Kane, the bandit, be discovered, of forgetting not a single glance, of overlooking not a track. But so far, there had been little of this to claim his attention.

The trail now was steadily leading upward, as skirting first to the left, then the right, Shorty Smith and his companion strove to cover the ground leading from the forestry above Cavern Ranch and including any possible route which the man might have taken following his quarrel with Smith. But there was nothing—not a hoof track, not an indication that humans, other than themselves had passed that way.

Higher they went—into the blackened stretches resultant from the recent forest fire. Then they turned away, taking the straight trail downward, moving more swiftly now as with the apparent knowledge that their quest was in vain, passing through the last of the blackened area, into a new trail. There Shorty Smith drew up short. He allowed the breath to blubber over loose lips, with an outburst of surprise. Then, unfolding himself, he swung to the ground, stared a moment, moved a few steps, then with a quick glance toward his companion, mounted hurriedly.

"Hosses!" he said. "Hoof marks! See 'em?"

"Yes. Leading off that way." McGregor pointed to the right. The cowman nodded.

"Yeh. Three er four of 'em. Made at different times. I wonder——" Then he was silent again, trailing his horse through the underbrush, to look about him, locate the tracks, then again move forward.

Suddenly his tension relaxed. "The bunch from the ranch," he said, and pointed ahead to where three horses could be seen, reins loose, standing beneath a clump of pines. "See? Over there by the cavern!" Then he shouted: "Hello up there!"

Kent followed his direction, to see far to the right, a beetling protuberance of rock, deep with shadows and dark, erosive cuts, and far at the base, a jagged hole, evidently leading to a more capacious carving of the granite deeper within the hill.

"Is that the cavern that the ranch is named after?" he asked.

"Yeh. Don't look like much on the outside, but it shore opens up. Nobody goes in there much. A step-off er somethin' at the back end. A spring runs through it. Humph!" he grunted as he surveyed again the scene before him. "Looks like we've stepped int' somethin'. One o' them hosses is Kane's!"

"Kane's? Then they must have——"

But Shorty had shouted again: "Hello! Where are yuh? Members o' the posse talkin'. Who's ahead there?"

There was a moment's delay. Then a muffled: "Hello!"

Following that came another wait. Then, eyes wide with astonishment, a man crawled forth from the cavern, Green of Cavern Ranch, to be followed quickly by the man whom Kent had known as Jason. Their faces were smudged and clothing dirty as with contact against wet earth. For a moment they merely stared, too frightened, or surprised, it seemed for speech. Then Green found his tongue.

"Yuh scared us. We didn't know what'd happened."

Shorty nodded. "Where's Kane? Yuh got his hoss there."

Jason nodded churlishly. "Yeh, we got his hoss. That's all, though. We was lookin' in the cavern. Thoughten he might be there."

"You didn't find anything?" Kent had ridden forward now.

"Not a scratch."

"Still, he must be somewhere around here, if you found his horse."

Green stroked his chin. "Thet's what we thought. But we changed our mind. We ain't foun' hide ner hair of him."

"Where else could he be?"

"Might've tooken the steep trail," said Green.

Shorty Smith nodded. "Thet's what I was thinkin'."

McGregor looked toward his companion. "The steep trail?"

"Yeh, it hits right up over ole Baldy. A man ridin' it on hossback's as plain as the nose no yuhr face; mebbe thet's why he let go o' his hoss. Where'd yuh fin' the pony?" he asked of Jason.

"Over by the cliff. Down a piece."

"Then I reckon thet must be it. Yuh ain't got a line on him nowhere aroun' here?"

"Nothin'."

Shorty looked at the sky.

"Trouble," he said, "I reckon mebbe yuh better be hittin' back t' the castle. I got a notion I might not have such tough luck if I took a skirmish over the Steep Trail."

"But where could that possibly lead? For him to give up his horse and——"

"Catch a freight train out o' Rollinsville," supplied Shorty. "These here mountains, they're deceptive. When yuh're ridin' up the divide on the train, it seems like yuh're way over East, don't it? Well, yuh ain't to East as yuh think yuh is. By goin' straight over this steep trail, yuh hit right down on the Moffat Line, again. See? Thet's what he's li'ble t've done, seein' he'd want t' get t' Denver with them bonds."

"But can't I go with yuh?"

"Nope. I wouldn't trust yuh—not thet I ain't got faith in yuh!" he added quickly. "But this here's more'f a ride then a feller who'd been bunged up the night before ought t' take. I'll hit 'er alone. Yuh wend yuhr way back t' the castle an' tell the ole man I'll be along when I get back."

But McGregor shook his head. "I'll go back after a while. I want to look through this country a bit."

"There ain't nobody here." It was Jason who had cut in. "We've been out since early this mornin'."

"I know. But I've got an idea that either his horse got away from him, or he was hiding out during the daytime. Anyway, I'm going to poke into every crack and cranny around here."

"It won't do yuh any good." Green had spoken this time. "We know the whole country, an' we've looked."

"Thet's about right," said Shorty. "But do as yuh please." Again he glanced at the sky. "Better not stay out too long. Somethin' goin' t' turn loose here by the time night sets in. Either rain er snow."

"Prob'le rain," said Jason with a glance upward. "Worse'n snow. It'll be colder."

McGregor wheeled his horse. "Well, I'll stay as long as I can," he announced. Then, as Shorty Smith started away: "What time will you be back?"

"After I've rid the Steep Trail. Hate t' move off sudden this way, but I got t' cover practical all thet groun' afore dark an' save the night fer comin' home in. If he's up there, I'll see him. There ain't much of no place t' hide, except from a distance. S'long."

Then he was off at a canter, while for a moment, Kent McGregor sat irresolute, wondering just what direction to take. At last, annoyed slightly that the other men did not leave him, he turned to them. "You looked well in that cavern?"

"Yeh, there ain't no place t' look, except straight back."

"Are you sure?"

"I said we looked, didn't I?" came with some aspersion from Green. "Thet ought t' be enough."

McGregor did not answer, but wheeled his horse and started again on the search, taking a direction slightly to the left of the one which he and Shorty had ridden, at last to turn around with something of surprise as he noticed that the other men still were behind him.

"I'll do this alone," he said, nor could he give a reason for his actions, save that the memory of these men was an unpleasant one, a bitter one; they had been his enemies before; he felt that they would aid him but little now. Green stared.

"Don't yuh want no help?"

"No. I want to poke around by myself. You've said there was no one here. So what help could you give?"

They halted their horses and stood looking churlishly at him. Finally, with an eye-to-eye signal, they turned, and slowly moved away at a direction leading toward the ranch houses of the Bar Diamond.

He was glad to be rid of their company, and the reminder of his agonies of the first day of his stay at Cavern Ranch. He felt that they would be but poor allies at best; Kane had been a member of their crew; certainly if they could aid him to escape, he felt, they would do it. That he had stolen a fortune did not interest them; especially since he had taken it from a man for whom they felt no friendly spirit. Nor could he know, that once out of sight, they moved swiftly, as if by common consent, to the deep woods, and there, dismounting, climbed the rocky ridges to an eminence, from which they could watch the entire whole burned area, and the lone horseman who rode there.

As the afternoon progressed, more and more Kent McGregor realized that it was useless. Hunger crept upon him and he ate the few supplies which Shorty Smith had given him, then began anew his examinations and his search. It availed nothing. Here and there be found a hoofprint, which might be from the horses of Kane or of Green or Jason or Shorty Smith—but that was all.

Into gulleys and cañons and draws he poked, investigating patches of willows, stretches of deep woods. All to no avail. The sky grew darker, the wind in the trees above began to whine dolefully—at last, rain spat against his face. But he continued his search—a man expending his every energy for the return of every possession.

The rain continued, soaking him, chilling him; with intermediate flights of steellike sleet which stung his skin and forced him into long headlong journeys which only carried him in useless circles —excursions which drew him farther and farther away, at last to bring up short with the realization that dusk was falling, and that he had progressed far from his staring point.

He turned swiftly. He was cold—he was hungry. His clothing clung to him with icy fingers, causing his skin to crawl beneath. The storm was becoming more bitter now, the sleet and small hail increasing, the wind heightening and growing colder. Kent, huddled over his saddle, suddenly straightened with an idea.

"If I can get to that cavern," he mumbled. Then more resolutely than ever, he forced his horse onward, while the day grew darker, and the pines about him more shadowy. A mile—a mile and a half passed—then a filmy thing appeared in the gloom. He slowed his pace. He had come to the vicinity of the cavern. Soon he was afoot and searching along the blackened cliffs for the aperture that would spell at least comparative warmth and shelter. Forward, then back, then forward again he went, at last to halt with an exclamation

of gladness. Only vacancy yawned beyond his outstretched hands as he reached a ragged circle in the rocks; a moment later he had tethered his horse and was within, giving stolid thanks for the comparative comfort.

Dried brush crackled under his feet, where twigs and broken bits of bark and tree branches had drifted within on the breast of the fierce spring gales, and he bent quickly, to break a few of them in his hands, and then, groping, with mincing steps carry them back through the blackness, that he might take them out of the path of the wind. Ten feet, fifteen, then he halted, fearful of the step-off of which Shorty Smith had warned him, and with misgivings, searched for his matches. One side of the box was dry, giving a striking surface, and he bent to his task. A match flared and went out; another, a third and fourth. At last there was a blaze.

Twig to twig he built the fire, and watched it hopefully, anxiously, as smoldering and blazing, smoking and seeming all but extinguished, it struggled for life. At last came a flame, sufficient to give a faint illumination to the great chamber, and Kent hurried for more fuel. Soon he was back, doubled on the dry floor, taking comfort in the crackle of the flames and at the same time, listening with something of curiosity to the trickle of water from far in the depths of the big hollow. An hour passed, in which the fire blazed strong, augmented as it was by a heavy log of almost solid pitch which Kent had found near the entrance and lugged within. His clothes began to assume a semblance of dryness. He walked to the entrance—hoping. But the storm had not ceased.

"Useless for me to go out and get wet again," he mused. "One time's as good as another to get back."

He returned to the fire, and to curiosity concerning the great space in which he had taken shelter. That trickle of water continued to sound, luring him to explorations. At last, breaking a knot from the pitchy log, he held it to the flame and watched it ignite into a smoking torch. Then, with his illumination held well before him, he moved to the rear of the cavern.

Twenty feet, forty feet, then he retreated suddenly. The ground had opened before him, revealing a pool beneath into which the water dripped from the opposite wall. A step more might have meant death and Kent shivered with the thought of it. But even as he did so, he continued to stare about him, wondering vaguely why his torch should flare so strangely into long-drawn flame as with suction; he seemed to feel a coolness against his cheeks, as though of passing air. He looked up. And stared again. He saw a hole—a cavern within a cavern, the opening leading from a sort of a drop in the roof of the big space, where the place rounded low, almost even with his head before it reached the ledge of the step-off. He could reach it easily by stretching an arm. This he did, with a vague, boyish plan teeming through his head of some day coming back here and exploring to see just where it led.

Then his thoughts took a sudden offshoot. Back there, sitting at the fire, he had looked at the walls, rapidly smoking, and reflected that perhaps this was the first time that a fire, or a light had ever been within this great aperture. And if this were the case, had the place ever been gone over thoroughly, once the first person had fallen into that step-off? Did any one know of this opening above, save perhaps one person—and that the man whose horse Green and Jason had found wandering the blackened country? Strangely athrill, Kent McGregor moved back to the fire for his rifle. Then he went again to the second opening, but there, standing at a new angle, he halted precipitously. From here, something could be seen pro-

jecting. He leaped, extending a hand to catch at it, and drag it downward. For it was a crude ladder. Then, his voice queerly rasping, strange sensations running up and down his spine, he called to the darkness and the resounding echoes of the cavern.

"If you're up there Kane, you might as well come out. Or I'll shoot you out."

There was no answer. Again and for a third time he called. Then McGregor, the pine knot clutched in the forward hand, together with the rifle barrel, steadying himself against the ladder only with his knees, started upward.

"You hear me Kane?" he called again. "Come out of there!"

Only silence. Higher—higher—and to the second level. There was a moment of blank survey. No scowling criminal awaited him; only another great chamber, the reflected light dancing from the walls, and glittering upon something grayish and green, which ran, like an ugly stripe along its whole far wall. A greenish-gray stripe—and upon the dirty floor, where the seep water flowed, a pick and a spade; drills and a sledge. McGregor gasped.

"Gold!" he said. "Gold!"

It was gold—or at least something precious in that heavy stripe, where picks and drills and sledges had made their impression. Gold—and some one had been there before. Gold! He stood amazed, as his eyes surveyed the walls, the heavy line of the vein standing forth preëminent in its rocky fastnesses.

And then his rifle arm flexed, only that it might become as iron. His teeth gritted, that they might not chatter. His eyes strained, staring, as they centered upon something at the far end of the gloomy cavern, something which caused his flesh to crawl and his nerves to jerk as though under electric tension; a mound, finished except at one end, smoothed part of the way so that it could hardly be distinguished from the sodden floor itself—a mound with a spade lying where it had been dropped, evidently by some one in fright, and at one edge, protruding, as if the buried thing were struggling for liberty, was the hooked, clawlike fingers of a human hand!

CHAPTER XVII.

SELF-DEFENSE AND ESCAPE.

KENT McGREGOR'S rifle clattered to the earthen floor. With swift steps he moved forward, stood an instant in unwilling appraisal, then, forcing himself to his task, went to his knees. Above him was a rift in the rocks, and there he stuck the pine knot, watching for only an instant until assured of its safety. Then, disregarding the spade in his excitement, he pawed at the dirt with fast-moving hands, clawing it away from the arm until he had reached the shoulder, then moving as swiftly for that space where he knew lay concealed the face of him who lay buried. A moment later, a gray-faced man leaned back from his task, shaking hands inert upon his knees, eyes fixed.

"Kane!" He gasped out. "Kane! They were burying him when we came up! That's why they were in here—why they were so scared when they came out! Burying him!"

But why should they hide the body of a criminal? Why should they—then Kent glanced about him again, at those tools, that streak of greenish-gray in the stone, the projecting edge of that ladder, leading from below. He gasped, with a score of realizations flooding in upon him, all at once.

This man, with the projecting, clawlike hand—dead apparently since some time the night before—despite the blackening of the soil which had covered his face, had the telltale mark of a bullet in his forehead. Killed within a few hours evidently of the time when he had committed the robbery! Now, he felt he knew. It was the burying of one criminal to hide the work of others!

So for a time he only sat there staring, watching the black smoke curling from the meager illumination; his mind a torment of thoughts. Revelations were flooding upon him. All of a sudden he could see why Squinty Marsh had not wanted him upon this ranch; why he cared for no one but his own men. Because, unknown to Ollie Davis, to any one but themselves, they had discovered this hoard, the indications of which were scattered throughout the whole country, to be centered, at least, in its beginning, in this cavern. This was why he had made Ollie Davis subservient to his every wish, holding over her whatever power might have been given into his hands on the death of her father: because he wanted to be in a position to some time take this place for his own, its acres counting for nothing, except that they held hidden deep in their hills the treasure he coveted. As suddenly, Kent saw a dozen reasons for the stealing of those bonds, which, in some way had led to the death of this man, who lay half buried before him. For, if those bonds had not been stolen, then the control of this ranch would have passed into his hands, and out of those of Squinty Marsh forever. But by their disappearance——

He did not believe the stories now that Squint and the flabby Jim Shugg were the bitter enemies they were supposed to be. He saw something more sinister: a plot between the two men, one to deteriorate the place, the other to lend money upon it, until there came the time when it must pass out of the hands of its rightful owner. Into this dovetailed the happenings of the past: the accident to the reservoir, with its attendant sun-destruction of crops, the wandering away of cows, to calve in far places and lose their offspring, the delays in the rehabilitation of the water supply—and, worst of all, the burning of the forestry. Squint had done that! McGregor saw it now—Squint and his gang, manufacturing evidence to the contrary to fill a triple purpose: to take the blame from himself, to place Ollie Davis in a position where she could not retrieve the ranch which held a hidden treasure, and to rid himself of an objectionable person, who, with superior intelligence, the heightened curiosity of an Easterner and an enthusiasm for the place to which he had come, might at any moment spoil their plans. Grimly McGregor went over those events—the sound of hoofbeats in the night, ending suddenly; the finding of the horse in the corral, the evidence of those severed telephone wires. There was no need for wonderment as to who the man had been—it was Dummy; it could have been no one else! Dummy who had sneaked to the forestry, Dummy who had left that horse in the corral, to be used as evidence against McGregor when, waiting until the fire should gain good headway, Dummy should hurry forth, leap upon the animal's back, and ride to the community house.

And so it had turned out, with only the difference that it had been Kent who had made the ride; the rest of the plot had worked exactly. But—and Kent saw it with a little thrill of triumph—the very thing which had been designed to send him away, and to free Squint Marsh from a possibility of interference, had worked to his undoing. For that plot had meant determination upon the part of Kent McGregor, and it had led to the death of one of the plotters—this man with the clutched hand.

Why the brigand should have paid with his life for his part of the scheme, McGregor did not know. He could only realize that Squinty Marsh—and he thought of no one else—could not allow Kent to buy into this ranch. That Squinty Marsh, working he felt sure, with Jim Shugg, had realized that it would accomplish nothing to refuse to sell that note, inasmuch as McGregor would have accomplished his ends by

other means, for a note is a note, and its payment cannot be refused. Therefore the robbery, the disappearance of those bonds. Then——

What had happened then, Kent did not know. He could only kneel there, staring down into the contorted features of the dead man and wondering what strange turn of events should have made it necessary for one man of a gang to kill another. That it was a gang, he felt sure, a gang of desperadoes, cowards, fighting a woman! His blood boiled.

But suddenly it went cold, for there had come a creaking of the wooden ladder leading from below—such as only the heavy pressure of some one, striving to creep upward, could create. A trapped feeling permeated the man; impotent, he knelt there, hands on knees, staring, wondering what he could do. Then it came again. Another step had been taken upward; a step in a slow progress designed to conceal itself in the trickling of water from the subterranean stream and the howling of the storm without. Kent McGregor turned his head slowly, guaging the distance between himself and the ladder. He glanced at his rifle, lying beyond reach, and with a sinking feeling of hopelessness, knew that he could not reach it. To move now—to make even a sound, would betray him, and give to the creeping enemy a warning to again slink below, and there, at the mouth of the cavern, lie in wait to shoot him down when he descended into the light of the fire. Now, Kent thought, there was the possibility of an investigation merely to be sure that he was really above, that he had not climbed into the upper cavern, then come down again. So he waited—listening for another sound from the ladder, head turned, arm stretching slowly, cautiously toward the pine knot in the wall, eyes measuring the distance between himself and the aperture—waiting. Then action!

There had come the almost imperceptible knocking of metal against wood; Kent knew what it meant. A rifle, being raised. His trembling fingers clutched at the pine knot, and his muscles gathered their every atom of strength for one terrific effort. Then, as the ugly muzzle of a rifle raised slowly above the ladder end, followed by the tip of a hat and the sight of a hand, McGregor jerked the pine knot from the wall, leaped from his couched position, seizing his own rifle on the fly, and, oblivious of slower means of descent, sprawled through the aperture. He fell upon the creeping figure of the ladder, and they went downward into a struggling heap to the floor, there to strike against a second form, evidently waiting at the bottom.

There were outcries, gruff commands and curses, as for a moment three beings in half shadow, for the fire was dying, struggled and clutched and struck madly. At last, McGregor, using his rifle in short, jabbing club strokes, broke a clearance for himself, and with the every bit of speed his being could summon, leaped for the cave entrance.

A shot crackled harmlessly after him as he reached the bluster of the storm. There had been no time, he knew, for his assailant to take anything approaching a fair aim, and McGregor gave no chance for another effort. Quickly he swerved to the right, and oblivious of the beating spray of the storm, the slapping of low-hanging tree branches, the dangers of pitfalls, or tumbled rocks, ran until he was breathless. Then, in a tangle of willows, he fell face downward, that he might temporarily recoup his strength.

There had been no time for him to reach his horse; the animal must remain behind now; McGregor did not know the hills sufficiently, nor was he versed enough in the art of night riding, to attempt to risk such a journey, especially with pursuers behind. That they would

take to their mounts, he knew, just as he knew instinctively that these assailants, although he had gained no more than a glance at them in the frenzied, momentary struggle at the bottom of the ladder, were Jason and Green of Cavern Ranch, and who now, to judge from the sounds far in the distance, were cursing their horses and quarreling, one with the other, as they strove to take his trail. McGregor pressed himself flatter against the ground, waiting, and striving to suppress his labored breathing.

As he lay there he heard the crackling of underbrush, and sounds of horses, snorting with fright as they were forced through dangerous territory in the frenzies of a mad search. Closer, closer they came, while, like a trapped animal, McGregor lay in his place of concealment, struggling with all his will power to refrain from leaping to his feet and making another effort at escape—an effort which he knew would only lead the enemy straight upon his trail. To within a hundred yards they approached, fifty, twenty-five; then with a gasp of gratitude, Kent heard them move away again, farther, farther, until the sounds of the horses were only faint things in the shrieking of the storm. Then and only then, did he rise, and with stumbling steps, sometimes lurching for long stretches at a half run on the steep descents, sometimes with aching ankles and wavering body, to proceed with snaillike slowness over the stretches of jagged rocks and treacherous, slippery boulders which blocked his path, veering always downward and westward toward the only haven he knew.

It was a well-defined journey, in spite of the blackness of the night and the lack of trails. To keep always downward and yet straight ahead—he could do nothing, as Shorty had explained to him that afternoon, but reach the bottom of the valley, where, with grades at each side to hold him to his course, he would gradually "trickle," as the cowpuncher had expressed it, to the ranch house of Neil Jordan. That the journey was to be miles in length, Kent knew. But he essayed it with new strength, born of the fever of excitement. He was the bearer of news—news that would awaken this whole country to the character of certain men upon whom it had looked for a long time with curious eyes. News concerning the plot against the Bar Diamond Ranch and the girl who lived there, concerning the identity of those who, he felt sure, were the real instigators of the robbery which had taken from him his entire fortune, news about a murderer! Nor could any name come to his mind in this connection but that of Squinty Marsh, he of the weird-appearing head, the slitty eyes and the narrow, cold mouth—he who had walked into the office of the district attorney, and with a grandiloquent gesture announced that he had discovered the identity of a bandit. Kent McGregor was beginning to understand many things now for the first time.

What had happened, to lead to the killing of Kane, he did not know. For that matter, he wasted little time upon conjecture. To his mind, it was not beyond Squinty Marsh to kill a man merely to provide an alibi, and to relieve suspicion, once he had learned that Kane had run the risk of discovery. And McGregor saw too a reason for the hiding of the body—to lead to the theory that Kane had disappeared, carrying the bonds with him, thus providing an excuse for the lack of their return. Without those bonds, there could be no recovery of the note, and without its recovery, sooner or later Cavern Ranch must pass into the hands of those who desired it for their own secret ends! This was news—this he felt, was the beginning of the downfall of an enemy who had arrayed himself not only against an innocent man seeking a home;

in the West, but against the girl whom that man had come to love!

So Kent McGregor proceeded hastily, nor even felt the bluster of the storm, the clamminess of his clothing, the bite of intermittent sleet against his face and eyes. He only halted now and then that his every sense might be directed to his surroundings and to the thought of his pursuers. But no suspicion came, no sound of voice, no snorting of horse borne upon the night wind, no clinking of hoof upon rough-surfaced ground Again and again he moved forward, following the dip of the valley—then, tired, his lips hot and cracking from the steady surge of overheated breath, his heart pounding from his exertions, thrilled at last at a sight before him. A light was gleaming in the distance—a haven awaited him a half mile or so ahead, in the home of Neil Jordan. What news he would carry to the little white-haired man this night!

Onward he pushed, for a third of the distance, with only a faint halt for rest. For another third—and half dividing that; only to suddenly halt, his nerves screaming in sudden fear. Had that been a sound, off to one side, of a horse moving in sudden restlessness? McGregor halted suddenly, brushing a fevered hand against his brow, and loosening his hat where constant pulling had tightened it against the bandages which protected his injury of the night before. The breath of the storm felt good on his brow; he raised his hat higher, pulling it sideways to free the pressure from the wound. Then he gave his attention again to his surroundings.

But there was only silence. McGregor straightened, with a feeling of relief; it had been only his imagination. Only a vagary of his mind, a sound of the storm. He went on, another fifty feet, suddenly to realize that he had walked straight into the beam of light from the window of the "castle," and that something was again moving, over there in the darkness, as though taking a sudden spurt into a position from which a victim could be aligned in silhouette against the light—and then a shot!

Rather a whistling scream which passed just above his ears, tearing his hat from his head and lifting the hair of a temple, the sound of the explosion itself muffled and sounding far away in the close crash of the bullet. McGregor reeled with the ghastly surprise of it, only as suddenly to stumble; then, his mind working with fevered haste, he plunged to the ground. If they would only believe his ruse—if——

But an instant more, half concealed there in the slimy grass, his every nerve atangle, his hopes rising only that they might drop again told him that his hopes were impossible. There had come the swish of heavy bodies moving through the high grass; horses coming forward. Then a voice:

"I tell yuh I dropped him. I had him straight against the light."

"But there ain't no use takin' chances. Lay the rifle against his head an' pull the trigger. That's sure."

McGregor writhed. He grasped tight at his rifle and with taut fingers released the safety. Then, shivering with expectancy, half turned on his side, his rifle raised, he waited—waited until he could see the black shadow of a horse moving toward him, followed by a second. Then he pulled the trigger, and working the lever with every bit of speed he possessed, fired again, at the massed shadow, rather than a specific target. There came a shout, the sound of a rearing horse, then a crash, as the beast came to the ground. Then came the quick spatting of rifles, fired harmlessly and at random. Then a voice:

"No use now—get on here! Thet hoss o' yourn's done fer. Get on—quick!"

"I'll finish him first! I'll——" A dim form staggered forward, while Mc-

Gregor, squirming to the deeper darkness of the grass, waited, his fingers itching at the trigger, yet loath to move against human life. The advantage was on his side now: to reach him they must cross that zone of light. And if he must aim to kill—but that voice came again, frightened, urging. There seemed no escape.

"I tell yuh, get on here! Get on—the ole man'll be here in a minute——"

"We'll have t' run if we don't get him!"

"We'll have t' run anyhow! With thet horse down!"

There was silence for just an instant, while the man in the grass waited, waited for flight or for progress. Then came the crunching of leather, an involuntary grunt of a horse taking a double load, and after that, only the swishing of grass and the crackling of brush as the enemy faded into the darkness. For a long time Kent did not move, fearful of some new ruse that again would place him in jeopardy; but there was only the steady sound of retreat, growing fainter, farther away, until at last, there was only the whine of the wind and the splatter of sleet and rain against bending meadow grass. Kent rose, and with tight-clutched rifle, moved swiftly for the house, careful now to keep in the shadows.

Then, as he crept slowly about the house, he wondered why there had come no sound from within, no intimation that the shots had even been heard. He wondered too as he passed the window, what could have happened to splinter the pane.

Then he rushed for the door, swung it wide, and stood for an instant aghast, his fears verified. It was that shot—when the figures of the darkness had aligned him between themselves and the brightness of the old lamp upon the table.

Neil Jordan lay on the floor, where he had fallen from his rocking chair beside the table. And from beneath one arm, a blackish red streak was moving slowly along a crack of the wooden flooring.

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

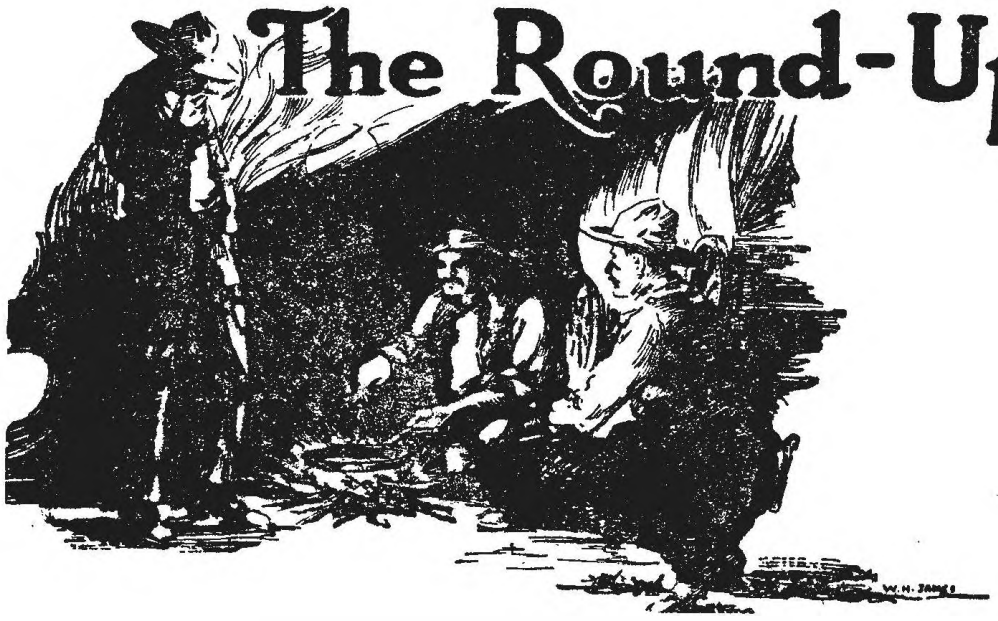
WERE SOME INDIANS VEGETARIANS?

SKELETON remains of what appears to have been an ancient tribe of vegetarian Indians are being studied at Los Angeles, California, as a result of excavations made near Coalings, Fresno County, by S. M. Purple, a geologist. He says they belong to Indians of primitive types. The shape and condition of the teeth showed their possessor lived on grass and herbs.

FIND ANCIENT TOOLS IN CALIFORNIA

DOCTOR WILLIAM BRYAN, director of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, recently announced the discovery of prehistoric implements which may substantiate the belief of scientists that five petrified human skeletons found a short time ago near Los Angeles, may date back to the later Pleistocene era, ending twenty-five thousand years ago. The relics consist of a petrified bone awl, about two inches long, and a rudely fashioned quartzite palm ax.

The Round-Up



SPEAKING of swimming, Rolland Bradly, of Medford Hillside, Massachusetts, contributes this: "I always read every issue from cover to back, advertisements and all. I saw as how the followers are arguing back and forth about animals swimming. I want to say right here and now that you have been misinformed when you were told that a pig could not swim without cutting his throat. I was born and raised in Arkansas, and there are times out there when a pig has to swim or drown, and they *swim,* believe me. During high water, an old settler told me that he saw hogs get off rafts and swim around, picking up floating acorns and other bits of food, until they had enough to last them for twenty-four hours. Then they would swim back to the raft. He said nothing about their cutting their throats. I myself have seen hogs swim for a hundred yards, and never saw one even so much as scratch his throat."

On the same topic, comes Mrs. J. Holt, of San Pedro, California. Mrs. Holt, she says: "Decided I'd get into the debate about rabbits and pigs swimming. Now, I have never seen a rabbit swim, but believe me, a pig can swim, can shake a mean hoof in the water, and he can do it without cutting his throat. When I lived in Oregon, we had a pen of five pigs, weighing from one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and ninety pounds. When the back of their pen was washed away, they swam out of the pen and through the water for two hundred and fifty yards to high ground. They went across a stream that was twenty-five feet deep and had quite a swift current.

"In closing, let me say that we sure do like the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and the only kick that we have in regard to it, is that we have to wait a whole week till the next one comes out."

Well, I guess that ends all our doubts about pigs swimming. Thanks to you both for the information. But don't tell us that a chicken can swim, for it can't, now there! If some one digs up a swimming chicken, well, we'll have to go out and cut out bein' an authority on aquatic sports among animals.

The following letter comes from J. Wilfer, who lives in Idaho.

"DEAR BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: Ex-

cuse an old-timer for shoving in among you young folks, but I should like to ask that guy over there by the wagon wheel if he really considers that automatic pistol he's wearing superior to this old revolver of mine?

"I guess I was born pretty near about the same year as Peg-leg Garfield was, and I wouldn't be surprised if anybody with sharp eyes found a couple of notches on my gun, which is a .45 Colt Peacemaker—the good old single-action. However, I'm broad-minded, and if there's anything to be said for those young machine guns, I'll listen with both ears."

Buckley, you great big long-haired shootin' author, this is your chance. Give this lad and all the others both ears full. They say we have been doin' quite too much talkin' about horses.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Buckley's off!

The approved way in which to start a talk about handguns is with the remark that the first pistol was made in Italy, about the year 1535; but I never could work up much enthusiasm for the information—or for the gun, which was three feet long, weighed twelve pounds, took half an hour to load, and then wouldn't go off, in spite of the beautiful engraving on its barrel. In fact, to make a clean breast of it, I can't work up any enthusiasm for any old firearms—not even for Colonel Colt's sacred cap-and-ball guns with the Walker rammer. Exactly how many rifles, revolvers, and automatic pistols I own, is a sore point with me, because I'm well aware that I shouldn't have half the number; but the oldest of the collection bears date 1889—the Vetterli-Vitali Italian army rifle, which I bought out of a junk-shop for five dollars, and remodeled at a cost of fifteen, because it was, and is, a first-class modern weapon in spite of its age; and about the best deer rifle I have come across. It takes a center-fire shell, smokeless powder, with a .41 caliber brass-jacketed bullet; muzzle velocity somewhere around two thousand feet a second; has a magazine—five shots; bolt action.

However, this is supposed to be about hand guns. More particularly, about the automatic-pistol versus revolver controversy—which is a delicate subject. To delay entering upon it as long as possible, and also with the idea of giving justice where justice is due, let me go back and tip my hat to one antique gun that really did interest me. It wasn't so very antique at that; but it certainly belonged to the Dark Ages of these United States—when killing was a necessity, and not an art. This gun consisted of nothing but a pistol-butt, a hammer, a trigger, and a tube—it wasn't a barrel—just the length of a ten-gauge shotgun shell. To operate, one was supposed to put in the shell, close the breech, put the contraption against one's enemy's waistcoat, and pull the trigger.

That was all about *that*.

It's a far cry from such an implement, to the double-action revolvers and the automatic pistols of to-day; but there is a thread of connection. The shotgun shell gun was designed, not to hit anything in particular, but to deliver a fatal shock to whatever it did hit. The .45 caliber lead-bullet guns of to-day are—though much improved—followers of this tradition. They are designed primarily to hit something at comparatively short range—but to drop that something with one shot. At the other end of the scale, we find the big German Mauser pistol, shooting a light-metal-jacketed, high-velocity bullet, and sighted up to 1,500 yards; on the principle that it is bettter to wound your enemy slightly, and prevent him from getting close to you, than to let him get close and then knock him out completely.

After a good many years of argu-

ment, this latter idea has been generally accepted by military men, for application to army rifles; but in my humble opinion, it does not hold good for handguns. A pistol or revolver is carried for use in an emergency. In an emergency, what one craves is action. And for producing an immediate effect, the heavy, slow-moving, half-inch, half-ounce bullet with its sledge-hammer blow, is supreme. It may be noted, in passing, that the military riflemen, carrying their application of the long-range-slight-wound theory to extremes, have found that there is a point where the two conflicting theories combine. They assumed that if a round-nosed bullet, at two thousand feet a second, would make a slight wound, a pointed bullet at three thousand feet a second, would make a still slighter. They found, on actual test, that the pointed bullet at high velocity, did worse damage than the old low-velocity expanding bullet. On impact, it stopped revolving on its own axis, and spun end over end like a broken buzz saw.

Which reminds me that some of the high-velocity pistols will shoot expanding bullets, which might, at first glance, seem to give them shocking-power comparable to that of the large-caliber guns. The only drawback is, that the expanding bullets won't expand. They depend, for their expansion, on the explosive effect of air, compressed inside a hollow nose, by the great speed of the bullet at impact. But the velocity of pistol bullets is not sufficient to compress the air to bursting point

Well, to get back to pistols versus revolvers, after all, the side one takes in the argument depends on circumstances plus personal taste. In the desert or on the prairie, I should follow the example of a good many better men. and plump for the old reliable .45 Colt single-action—with a five or six-inch barrel for belt-carrying, or a four-inch, if I wanted to use a shoulder holster. Probably if I was used to carrying the gun on the right-hand side of the belt, I should use a four-inch barrel in that case, too, but I'm an addict to wearing the weapon on the left, butt forward; so that the motion of pulling it is similar to the action of drawing a sword. It seems to me that, though time is lost reaching across one's body to the butt, time is saved in drawing and firing. The motion is continuous in one direction, whereas the draw from the right hand must consist of three distinct movements, unless one fires from the hip. I have often thought of having a holster made, for right-hand wear, open all down the front, and with a spring clip holding the gun in place, the idea being that one forward sweep of the hand would carry the gun out of the holster and train it forward and upward. Made-to-order holsters cost money, however; and I've no need to draw quickly. I never had a target rush me yet.

Returning to the pistol-versus-revolver argument—for the third time—my own preferences would be: for general outdoor use—the single-action .45 revolver, because of its entire reliability and effectiveness under trying conditions. For extremely dangerous conditions, a short-barreled double-action revolver, in a box-fit holster worn plumb in front—right on the belt buckle, where there's no question of having to fumble with the opening of one's jacket. The caliber of this gun, too, would be .45. The .38 will kill; so will the .32; so will the .22 long rifle cartridge—if they hit right. But there's no question about the .45. If it hits at all, it suffices. And if it misses, its roar is apt to gain the man who is firing time for another shot.

It is among city people, it seems to me, that the automatic pistols come into their own; city people and target shots. The automatic, being flattish in shape, is easier to carry inconspicuously; the small varieties fit the vest-pocket like

the old derringer, and fire up to ten shots. Then again, automatics have always struck me—contrary to the general impression—as being much safer than revolvers, considered as house-weapons. A revolver is either loaded or unloaded; if it is unloaded, it cannot be made ready for use within a reasonable time; if it is loaded, it can be fired by any child or fool who can pull the trigger. An automatic pistol can be fully loaded; but in order to fire it, the slide must be pulled back and released before pulling the trigger does any harm. The process takes only a second; but the average child lacks strength to work the slide; and the adult who knows enough to work the slide, generally knows enough not to touch the weapon unless he intends to fire it.

My own favorite gun, in my own particular circumstances, is the .45 automatic Colt, with partridge sights. It's a good target-gun, in the first place; accurate, and without the terrific recoil of the revolvers of the same caliber; and the ammunition is cheap, when bought through the National Rifle Association. Then again, one feels that one is using a practical weapon—which is not the case when one practices with .22 caliber handguns. Finally, it is a safe and effective weapon to leave in a bureau drawer.

On the other hand, I've a .38 Smith and Wesson special, with a six-inch barrel, that I would hate like sin to give up; the most perfectly balanced revolver, with the smoothest double-action I ever——

Well, there goes my allotted time, and nothing settled about the pistol-revolver controversy, even in my own mind. I think the hardest thing for a gun crank to talk about, is guns. One has so much to say, that one doesn't say anything.

However, the subject's now open to the meeting. If any of the boys want to argue it at the Round-up—why, I'll referee and keep the peace.

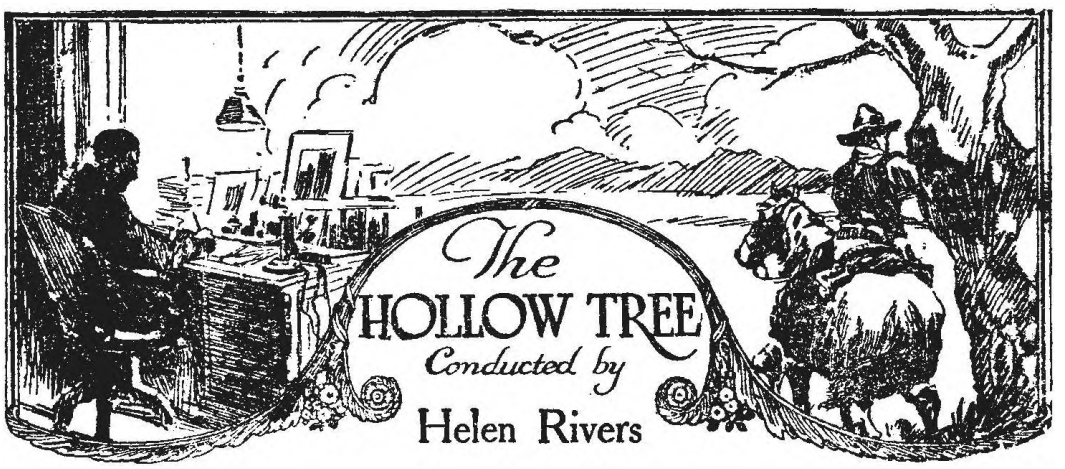
Well, gents, Buckley has spoken. What do you say?

BIG LAKE TROUT

ENORMOUS lake trout are taken in Lake Athabasca in northern Canada. The trout in this lake and the lakes near by run from fifty to eighty pounds. They are mostly taken in nets, of course, but may be caught on rod and line in deep fishing. They fight hard and afford good sport to the angler who does not insist on fly fishing. Tens of thousands of pounds of these trout are now shipped all over the world by the Canadian canneries.

TWO DIE IN SNOWSLIDE

TWO men were believed to have perished on March 29 when fifty men were caught in a snow slide near Bridal Veil in Provo Cañon, near Provo, Utah. All but two were rescued. The men were at work clearing the road of a débris caused by a slide the day before, when the snow crashed down. A bridge across the Provo River at Bridal Veil was wrecked, and a part of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad tracks was covered with tons of snow.



Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

WE'VE ridden some distance this dazzling August morning and though we got an early start, thinking to beat the sun, it stole up on us and seems to be concentrating pretty much on Monte and me. We're moving along slow and deliberatelike, but we both have our eyes on a cool, inviting spot ahead, a spot where there's plenty of shade with green grass and a cool stream near by.

While Monte contentedly browses I'll see what the Gangsters have to say to us to-day.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am just a plain old cowboy and have no schooling, but I have a good ranch in Texas and one in Oregon. They are large ones for this day and time, a one-hundred-and-eighty-thousand-acre one in Texas, and sixty-three thousand acres in Oregon. My home is in Texas, and any one that would like to pay me a little visit any time now or later is sure welcome. The only drawback is that I am a bachelor, and have no women to wait on you unless the foreman will let his wife and girls do it. But if there is a family or a brother who wants a vacation tell them to write me and I will make them more than welcome. I am twenty-eight years old, and am always lonely for company. It will cost them nothing so long as they are just square shooters.

TEXAS JACK DALTON.

Care of The Tree.

"Aeria" Findley, Sulphur Springs Station, Tampa, Florida, wants to hear from sisters seventeen years old in any State, "especially from motherless girls like me," she says.

"If any one wants to know about Canada or Newfoundland write me and I'll do my best," promises "Bud" Collett, No. 4713 Dover Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Any brother on a ranch need a man about thirty as companion or helper? If you do get in touch with Highland Jack, care of The Tree. Brother Jack says he can cook and is pretty handy around a place.

Sisters who want real newsy letters from England write to Flora Barclay Young, Rylstone, Cliff Place, Bispham, Blackpool, England. She lives in a "well-known, bright, and breezy holiday resort."

Another English sister, Alice Hoyland, would like letters from America. "My dad was ill for a long time before he died and I never got much chance to go about and make friends," this Gangster writes. Letters will reach her at No. 151 Whitham Road, Broomhull, Sheffield, England.

"I'm just a lonely widow in my

forties," Mrs. Evelyn H. Smith tells us, "who would be so happy to receive some big fat letters from other women, and who would have a jolly time answering them." Her address is No. 8 Manhattan Avenue, New York.

Harriet Estes wants to know if some twenty-year-old sisters will fill her mail box. She lives at No. 1597 Jack Street, San Francisco, California, and would like to hear from distant States.

Letters from real people from Texas to California and in foreign countries are wanted by H. M. Allen, care Ziegler, 728 Barry Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. He says he'll answer all.

Get your pens ready, brothers, and spread some cheer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a railroader working out of Chicago, and I'm somewhat of a drifter for all my youth. I served thirty months in the United States air service, twenty-two months across. Dad, mother, and my only sister died during the flu epidemic of 1918, so I became a wanderer, a boy without anything definite in view except to forget. I wonder how many of you have ever tried to forget a sorrow like that? I'm sure your efforts have been in vain. I have some spare time, and any one who writes me on almost any subject will get an answer.

BOB L.

Care of The Tree.

Step right forward, some of you sisters who want a pal across the pond.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am twenty-two years old and would like very much to hear from Gangsters in Mexico or in New York, or from a real ranch girl, if any would care to write to me. I'm going to see a real rodeo at the British Empire Exhibition, and it will be doubly interesting to me because I have learned so much about the West from the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. It's a ripping magazine, and The Hollow Tree is always friendly and cheerful. Yours in anticipation,

UNION JACK.

I'll forward letters to Union Jack.

"I've been in the navy, have farmed, herded sheep, punched cattle, trapped, hoboed, and made a great many cross-country hikes and auto tours through the western United States. Is anybody interested? Come on, Gang, swap experiences. I'll assure every one who writes a prompt answer," says Ray Bolmann. His address is 669 Holton Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

A. E. Pope, Box 565, Winter Haven, Florida, wants to hear from Gangsters all over the world, especially sign painters. He'll be glad to give any information about his State.

"I have my button. Have you?" says Mrs. Bertha M. Buckley, Box 543, Ocean Park, California.

Remember, Gangsters, twenty-five cents in stamps or coin sent to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, will bring you either the button style to be worn in the coat lapel, or the pin. In ordering be sure to state which you want.

Eduardo Hoffman is planning a trip to South America and hopes some Gangster who'd like to make the trip with him will write to him. He's eighteen years old and his address is Neoga, Illinois.

The Wistful Kid, a mountain boy of seventeen, would like to correspond with Westerners his age. Write to him in care of the Tree.

"If any one wants to know the best hunting and fishing places in Oregon, Washington, and California I'm right here to give information," writes Russell Taylor, 1876 Irving Avenue, San Diego, California.

Julia Stahl, fourteen-year-old sister of the Tree, wants lots and lots of letters from girls her age, anywhere.

A Texas Gangster, Margaret Dillard,

is suffering acutely from an empty mail box. Can any of you seventeen-year-old sisters relieve this condition? Send letters to No. 79 Gillis Street, San Angelo, Texas.

More cheer needed, brothers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am very lonely and unhappy. I have my father, mother, three sisters, and five brothers to support; have done so since I was fifteen years old, and I am now eighteen. I work at the largest hotel in Superior, and the hours are long. It would cheer me up a lot if The Gangsters would write me, and I will answer all the letters I receive. KERMIT WICK.

Twenty-first Street and Avenue, Superior, Wis.

DEAR GANG: I am twenty years old and have lived on good old Puget Sound most of my life. I am strictly an outdoor man, and I have done lots of hunting, fishing, and camping out.

I'd like to exchange letters with any one anywhere. I can give information about farming, logging, hunting, and fishing on Puget Sound. Two hour's walk from here there is good deer and bear hunting, and it is only one hour's ride on the boat to Seattle, so a person can enjoy the city, or virgin forest, any day. I don't think there is a better place on earth to live. If there is I'd like to see it.

LEO ARMSTRONG.

P. O. Box 513, Charleston, Wash.

It's about time for Monte and me to be getting on before he literally eats his head off. One last look into the Hollow before we start. Well, if we didn't pull out a poem. It's from a sister whose letter drew over three hundred replies.

TO THE HOLLOW TREE GANG

I wish I were able to write to you all,
It's more than I can undertake,
Yet I don't want a single one of you to think
Our Hollow Tree club is a fake;
We try to live up to our motto "be kind,"
And send out a word of good cheer,
To all who need sympathy, comfort, or joy,
All through the long days of the year.
So even though I cannot answer each one
I want all the leaves on our Tree
To know I received all their letters, each one,
And I'm just as pleased as can be;
I hope I have done just a little to help
To banish some clouds in the sky,
So wishing all Hollow Tree members good luck,
I'll finish by saying good-by.

LAURA KOLBE.

I guess we'll have to forgive her; eh, sisters?

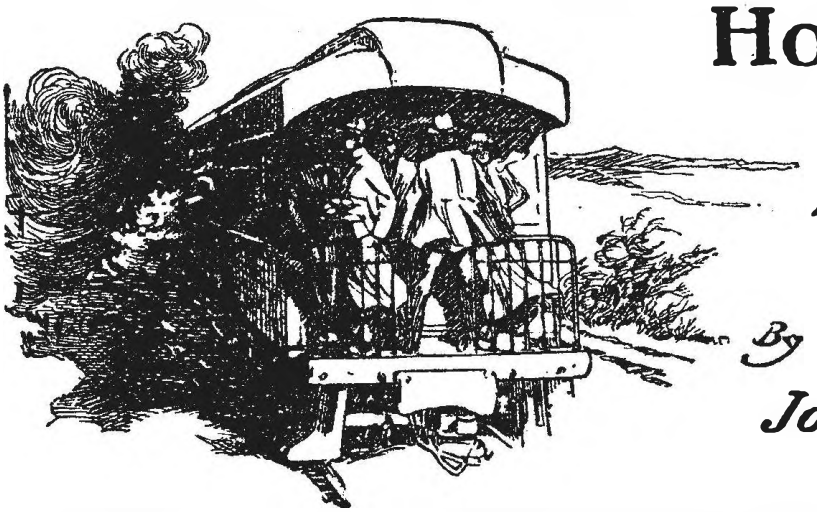
CHIEF OF SHASTA TRIBE PASSES AWAY

"BOGUS TOM," the oldest Indian citizen of Siskiyou County, California, recently died at the age of one hundred and five years. Bogus Tom's civilian name was Tom Smith, and he was born in 1818. He was chief of the Shasta tribe of Indians and at one time was chief of all Californian Indians. As chief of all California tribes he appeared in 1852 at Sacramento, when peace treaties with the government were signed.

CATTLE MALADY BARS EXPORTS

BECAUSE of the foot and mouth disease prevalent in sections of California, hay and straw exports are prohibited. A vessel which a short time ago left Tacoma, Washington, for the Hawaiian Islands, carried an immense cargo of hay from Washington and Oregon fields. On account of the embargo on hay and forage in California, Northwest ranchers have been enabled to pull themselves out of tight financial situations. The demand for hay was smaller than for years, with a falling price. Now the major part of the hay crop has been disposed of, with prospects of all surplus being contracted for by Hawaiian feeders.

Where To Go and How To Get There



By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE NATIONAL PARKS OF CANADA—ALGONQUIN PROVINCIAL PARK

THIS immense public playground, known as the "park of a thousand lakes," is perhaps one of the most easily accessible of the wonder places on this continent, some of which are separated from the large centers of population by long distances, so that, like the finest fruits, they are often out of reach. Algonquin Park, however, while it is just as wild and rugged and untamed as the far-distant ones, has the added advantage of being in the heart of the eastern and middle-western sections of the United States and Canada.

This great refuge of enchantment covers nearly four thousand square miles in the Highlands of Ontario, about two hundred miles north of Toronto, and is served by the Canadian National Railways from all parts on both sides of the border. It is a forest-clad territory in every sense of the word, a virgin wilderness of primeval charm, with an endless variety of limpid lakes, nearly fifteen hundred of them according to the count, rushing streams that grow into big rivers before reaching their journey's end, spreading out into lakes at various points dotted with numerous green islands, or contracting into narrow waterways that course through millions of acres of pine and balsam and spruce.

The fisherman and the canoeist are perhaps the ones who enjoy this park more than others, for the canoeist can travel hundreds of miles in his light craft over tranquil tree-fringed lakes connected by deep, still water channels, while the game fish that abound in many varieties of species and of remarkable size, attract anglers from all parts of the continent. From the various stations of the Canadian National Railways, which runs through the park by a route of magnificent scenery, access may be had to many fine canoe routes, camping places and fishing streams, while those who plan to camp under their own canvas may step into a canoe right at the door of one of these little stations and after a short

paddle find an enchanting site, unmarred by the hand of man, yet within easy reach of the park stores and hotels, where they can camp undisturbed, except for the light footstep of a wild animal, the splash of sportive bass or trout, or the song of birds.

Good roads are being constantly extended through the bush, and the opportunities for those who hunt with the camera to get good pictures of wild life at close range are many, as one cannot walk for half an hour from camp or hotel without coming across the natives of the woods. The busy beaver is particularly industrious and prolific here and has followed the numerous rivers for hundreds of miles, until he is now to be found in sections that he had never favored in former days. This, of course, is due to the fact that he is fully protected, as the whole territory of the park is preserved as a breeding ground and sanctuary for wild animals. Besides the beaver, there are otter, mink, marten, fisher, raccoon, lynx, fox, ermine, muskrat and some of the larger fur-bearing animals. Moose are quite numerous and may often be photographed as they are feeding, while deer are so abundant that they overflow the boundaries and replenish the hunting grounds beyond, where many an exciting hunt takes place each year.

The days are unusually long here, with warm, balmy sunshine and in the evening a glowing wood fire is comforting, as is also a good blanket on one's bed, for the nights are cool. No one is permitted to hunt or to take firearms into the park, but there is good hunting close by, near the edge of the park, which is not fenced in, and is a natural breeding ground for all forms of wild game. The fees of guides are regulated by law, so that there is no overcharging for this service. Licenses of course must be obtained, both for fishing in the park and for hunting on the outside, and are supplied by the superintendent.

Small islands and parcels of land of not more than two acres may be leased for camp or cottage sites, subject to the park regulations. Complete camping and canoe outfits can be rented on arrival and all provisions are carried by the stores, so that it is not necessary to burden one's self with luggage or equipment other than clothing, as every requirement can be met with at the outfitting stores.

Those who want to be in the wilderness and yet enjoy all the creature comforts and social companionship can find all they desire in the hotels, while there are groups of log cabins for family parties, with central lodges where they may dine on their return from the long tramp or the fishing trip, and many comfortable camps where the visitor is always welcome.

CAMPING OUT IN ARKANSAS

DEAR MR. NORTH: My pal and I are going to Arkansas to camp. Which county is best for camping? Please suggest clothes, grub, traps, firearms, fishing tackle. What is best for shelter—shack or tent, or what? Are licenses for trapping, hunting, and fishing necessary? CORWIN GARDNER.
St. Louis, Mo.

You will find a good country for your purposes in the Arkansas Ozarks, in the western part of the State. I would suggest trying along the upper White River, Little Red River, Ouachita, Buffalo Creek, or on the Arkansas bottoms—on the bottoms you would do well to have a small shanty boat—and trip along down, say from Muskogee, Oklahoma, or Fort Smith, Arkansas. For clothing, army or other outing clothes, woolen knickers, spiral puttees, long stockings—cotton and woolen—heavy shoes, laced boots, rubber boots for use on the bottom lands, brimmed hat, heavy woolen and light cotton shirts, for use according to various weather conditions. Then you require a cooking outfit, woolen blankets and canvas waterproof tarps. Choose the kind of grub you are accustomed to

eating at home, in so far as practicable. You will probably have to figure on raw materials to the extent of two pounds per day per man. A squirrel rifle and bird shotgun—a 25-20 rifle and a double-barrel 20 gauge shotgun—will be serviceable. For fishing tackle, take a bass casting rod, free-running spool reel, seventy-five yard line, bass fly rod, with automatic reel, enamel line, bass flies, baits, lures, and bait hooks. For shelter, a wall-tent, seven by nine, with a small cook stove would be useful, or you could build a shack of poles, cvering it with roofing paper or felt. Very often you can find a board shack or old house that will serve your purpose. You need licenses for hunting and trapping. Apply for particulars to State Game and Fish Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas.

MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

MURPHY, A. E., or **AGNES.**—Please send me your new address. Charles Heath, P. O. Box 31, Attalla, Alabama.

BROWN, ARTHUR FRANCIS.—He has not been heard of since 1912, when he was seen in Manchester, New Hampshire. He is blind, and usually travels alone with a cane to guide him. He sells pencils and cards. He was born in Burlington, Vermont, in 1895. He has a brother, Edgar Bryant Todd, or Brown, who has been missing since 1909. Their mother is anxious to hear from them, and any helpful information will be appreciated. Mrs. C. Brown, Route 2, Downingtown, Pennsylvania.

WILSON, IVEY.—She is seventeen years of age, and was last heard of in the Washington Children's Home in Seattle, Washington, in 1915. Information will be appreciated by her brother Elmer Wilson, Astoria, Oregon.

FROST, ARTHUR.—He has been missing since 1915. His uncle is anxious to hear from him. Arthur Turner, R. F. D. 3, Erie, Pennsylvania.

BEATTY, JOHN.—He married Sarah Burton, and in 1906 they left Buffalo, New York, and went to England. In 1909 he returned to Buffalo, while he left his wife in London. She has never heard from him since. He is about sixty-five years of age, and it is believed that his relatives live in Chicago, Illinois. His wife, who is living in Australia, is anxious to hear from him. Send information to Mrs. John Beatty, care of this magazine.

JACKSON, WILLIE.—He is forty-five years of age, and was living in Phoenix, Arizona, about five years ago. Any information will be appreciated by Ed Buffaloe, Palacios, Texas.

FERNANDES, TONY.—He is twenty-five years of age, and was last heard of in June, 1920. His mother is anxious to hear from him. Mrs. J. Fernandes, Box 431, Fresno, California.

DICKSON, JACK.—Please write to me. I am worried. Grace.

ALLEN, ALEX CONRAD.—He is a sailor, and is stationed on a boat that belongs to the Pacific fleet. I received your letter sent from Bremerton, Washington, on December 26, 1923, after three months' delay. We left the old address about three years ago. I answered your letter at once, but it was returned. I am anxious to hear from you. Jessie M. B., care of this magazine.

FULLERTON.—My name is Richard Fullerton. I was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, about 1904 or 1905. I am sure that my last name is Fullerton, but I am not certain about the first name. When I was about one year of age my father took me away with my sister, Eva. We went to Methuen, Massachusetts, where he left me to board, after paying my way for one week. The name of the family was Berryman. He left with my sister, and I have never heard from him since. I would like to hear from my parents or their relatives. Richard Fullerton, 24 Channing Avenue, Providence, Rhode Island.

McGINNIS, GEORGE.—He is tall and slender, with fair complexion, and is fifteen years of age. Please write or come home. Mother, Box 331, Baker, Montana.

RUBAGE, ED.—He left Albany, New York, about seven years ago. When last board from he was working in a lumber camp in Michigan. He has dark hair and eyes, and is five feet eight inches in height. Mr. Rubage's mother died on December 6, 1923, and his relatives are anxious to get in touch with him. Please help in finding him and send information to Mrs. J. Hanner, 119 Willow Street, Rensselaer, New York.

BURKHARDT, FREDA.—Please write to Grace Barry, Box 597, Pierre, South Dakota.

SMITH, JIM.—He is fourteen years of age, and was living in Huntsville, Alabama, with his aunt when last heard of. His brother would like to hear from him. R. L. Smith, Coachella, California.

DOLIN, MARGIE, of Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts. Please send your new address to Walter G., care of this magazine.

PERRY, Mrs. MELVIN.—Please write to Miss Bobbie, 1610 North Sixth Street, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

COGHILL, IAN DELOS.—His mother is anxious to hear from him and will welcome information. Mrs. A. C. Coghill, Box 427, Omaha, Nebraska.

THIELE, FREDERICK.—He is fifty-eight years of age. He was born in Germany, and was last heard of in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1901. He is a fisherman, and is believed to have a partner named Merchant. Please send any helpful information to his nephew, Frederick Thiele, Seaman's Mission, 64 Hudson Street, Hoboken, New Jersey.

COLLINS, CHARLES.—He worked for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, Michigan, in 1922. His daughter, June, is anxious to secure his present address. H. V. C., care of this magazine.

MACOMB, WINIFRED.—There is a letter being held for you at General Delivery, Detroit, Michigan. No matter what happens, I love you. Please write. Mother. You can write in care of this magazine, if you wish.

WILLIAMS, MOLLY, or **MARY.**—Please communicate with your sister Louise, 547 Second Avenue, San Francisco, California.

JOHNSON, WILLIAM B.—He served with the Eighth Cavalry at Fort Bliss, Texas. His old army pal is anxious to hear from him. John A., care of this magazine.

TIMMONS, CHARLES.—He lived in Medford, Oregon, before the war. Please write C. Bishop, 330 West Vine Street, Stockton, California.

WELLS, WILBOR ORVIL.—Last heard of in 1907. His brothers and sisters are very anxious to hear from him, and any one knowing his present address will confer a favor by writing Edward Wells, Route 3, Malta Bend, Missouri.

THOMPSON, NORA and **TED.**—Last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. Please write J. D. Prather, Station D, St. Joseph, Missouri.

JAY, IRENE.—She is eighteen years of age, and lived in Fort Worth, Texas, a short time ago. Her present address is desired by S. Rozell, U. S. S. "Moody," No. 277, San Diego, California.

SMITH, CHARLES.—He was a corporal at the Base Hospital at Waco, Texas. Please write your old buddy, Sam Moore, 507 Fairview Avenue, Lansing, Michigan.

BOX, FLORA.—Last heard of in Oklahoma in 1923. Her present address is desired by R. Corona, 532 North Sixth Street, Martin's Ferry, Ohio.

DELLMETER, WILLIAM, also known as **YORK.**—He left Birmingham, Alabama, the first part of 1921. His present address is desired by his friend, Harvey McCoy, 19 West Main Street, Columbus, Ohio.

HAWK, ORTON LEWIS.—He is sixteen years of age, five feet four inches in height, with hazel eyes and brown hair. He was in Texas in January, 1924. His mother is worried about him, and will welcome any news. Mrs. Lulu Frost, Cruce, Oklahoma.

SHEAR, RAMONA.—Please write. We are both at home. Ted and Albert, of North Carolina.

HOWARD, FREDDA.—Formerly a nurse in the Golden State Hospital, of Los Angeles, California. Please write J. H. W., care of this magazine.

HULCE, LEON.—Please write and let me know where you are. I am living in Portland, Michigan. Ben.

NAGLE, WILLIE.—I have found Mamie and Charles. I am sorry, but it does not worry me. Write me in care of this magazine. Sister Kitty.

HOITT, HAZEL, formerly of Lynn, Massachusetts.—Her present address is desired by Carl Cone, 293 West Eleventh Street, New York City.

MITCHELL, ARTHUR.—He was last heard of about ten years ago. His cousin, Verne Powest, is anxious to hear from him. Address, Box 1207, care of Miss E. Davis, Casper, Wyoming.

EFFIE.—Please write and send your address. Howard.

CARLSON, ANDY.—Last heard of in British Columbia in 1905. He had been in Alaska, and was planning to go again. Send information to Ed Johnson, Box 418, Deer Lodge, Montana.

BLACK, JOHN E.—He is also known as Charles Gold. He was in California in 1912. Please write Dollie, care of this magazine.

MURREY, CHARLES.—Please write your old pal of the Cherry Valley Logging Company. Joe, care of this magazine.

WARD, DAVID.—He is about sixty-seven years of age, medium height, with dark-brown hair and gray eyes. His mother will appreciate any information. Mrs. Farley, 10 Elm Street, Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

MINKS, NELLIE or **ELLA.**—She is five feet seven inches in height, with dark hair and blue eyes, and is about forty years of age. She was living in Appleton, Illinois, in 1906. Please write your niece, Mrs. Betty Oldenburg, 321 Elliott Street, Kewanee, Illinois.

FOLEY, JAMES.—He is seventeen years of age, and was adopted when he was eight years of ago from the Harrison Avenue Home in Boston, Massachusetts. Please send information to his sister, Anna Foley, 57 Tudor Street, South Boston, Massachusetts.

CLARK, GEORGE and **ROSE.**—Last heard of in Spencerport, New York. Their present address is desired by Beatrice, care of this magazine.

DANIELS, WALTER, of Kennett, Missouri.—Please write your daughter and send her your correct address. Mrs. Lucille Neathery, Holly Ridge, Louisiana.

GRAHAM, EUGENE EMILY.—He is eighteen years of age, and joined the navy in Indianapolis, Indiana, in September, 1921. Everything is all right at home. Please write for your mother's sake. Your uncle, Edman Waggoner, 313 College Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

MEYERS, MARGUERITE, who lived with Mrs. Vana Young near San Pedro Park, San Antonio, Texas, in 1919. They are both asked to communicate with me at once. Sergeant L., care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—I would like to get in touch with a young lady who worked as a telegraph operator in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, in the fall of 1922. I do not know her name, but I heard she had gone to New Orleans, Louisiana. She loaned me money when I landed in town without a cent, and I would like to repay her for her kindness. H. D. P., care of this magazine.

WOODS, AUGUSTAVE.—He left his home in Virginia many years ago. His present address is desired by Maude Linder, 1004 South Harwood Street, Dallas, Texas.

SMALL, ELIZABETH.—She married John Kistler in 1919. Her home is in Baltimore, Maryland, but she is believed to be living in Vancouver, British Columbia. Send information to E. V., care of this magazine.

STAFFORD, JOHN A.—Last heard of two years ago in Nebraska. He is five feet tall, with brown eyes and hair, and is bald-headed. He is a barber by trade. His heartbroken mother will be glad to receive any helpful information. Mrs. M. A. Stafford, 875 Sill or Lill Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

BEALL, BEATRICE.—She was living in Indiana about seventeen years ago. Please write Mrs. J. Hoevy, Route 1, Box 230, Aurora, Colorado.

COLLIER, HERMAN F.—He is twenty-one years of age, five feet six inches in height, with blue eyes and brown hair. His last address was Clarkia, Idaho, where he worked for a lumber company. His mother is anxious to hear from him. Send information to Katherine Collier, Durand, Wisconsin.

RICE, KENNETH WAYNE.—Please write to your mother, Mrs. Leo Pixley, 15 Antoine Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

G. W. C.—Please write or come home. We would be so glad to see you. We are all well. Alice is moving to South Dakota this week. I have other important news for you. Mame, of Minnesota.

VIOLA.—Please write, for we are anxious to know if you are quite all right. Father, 799 Broadway.

SCHWARTZ, JAMES.—Please write at once. Everything is all right. Address, Mae, 1004 East Jefferson Street, Louisville, Kentucky.

RICKARD, WILLIAM MARTIN.—He worked in North Dakota about eight years ago. I have heard that he is in California. Send information to his old friend, P. J. T., care of this magazine.

BURKET, PAT.—An old friend of your mother would like to hear from you. Mrs. Clara Shaw, care of this magazine.

ALLISON, FRANK GARLAND.—My mother died about thirty-eight years ago, and we were placed in a Catholic orphanage in Los Angeles, California. Our names were Alice, Nellie, and Frank Allison. It is believed that our father may be going under the name of Harry Thornton. We would appreciate any information that would help us to find our father or his relatives. Mrs. W. J. T., care of this magazine.

ASSMUS, FRITZ.—He was born in Germany and came to the United States when he was seventeen years of age. He is forty-eight years of age. He was married in South Bend, Indiana, on June 2, 1904, to Lucy Lyon. He left his wife in 1910. He is a painter and cabinet maker by trade. His stepdaughter would like to hear from him. Freda Assmus, 1923 Madison Street, Chicago, Illinois.

DAUGHERTY, Mrs. MAGGIE.—She is five feet four inches in height, with blue eyes and light hair, and was living in Missouri in 1917. Her brother will appreciate information. Willie Cooper, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

GOLDIE, McA.—Please write and send your address. We have moved. Jane Wilson, care of this magazine.

SPLAINE, JACK.—He has blue eyes and light hair. He left Duluth early in March for California. His present address is desired by E., care of this magazine.

BAIRD, CAPTAIN M.—Last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. His present address is desired by F. H. Larmon, Camp 20, Fontana, California.

ROBERTS, JOHN NELSON.—He is sixty years of age, a machinist by trade, and was working for the Northern Pacific Railroad about twenty-five years ago. He married a girl named Clark, at Brainerd, Minnesota, and they had one son named Allan. Send information to C. A. Roberts, 85 Queen Street, North Bay, Ontario, Canada.

GREEN, C. E.—He has a daughter named Florencee, who is in the show business. He was last heard of in Davenport, Iowa. His address is desired by Homer Meachum, 1218A N. Prairie Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

BROWN, GEORGE NORMAN.—Last heard of in Seattle, Washington, in 1910, when he was on his way to Alaska. He is about fifty years of age. His son will appreciate any helpful information. Arthur Norman Brown, Box 12, Moravia, Idaho.

OGLE, Mrs. HARRY.—Please write your old friend of the Good Samaritan Hospital. I have good news for you. Mrs. J. A. McKinnon.

RODGERS, WOODBRIDGE A.—He was discharged from the army in 1870, and left his home about fifty-five years ago. He was last heard of at Ten Mile Hill, South Carolina, where he was working for a man called Colonel H. His sister is anxious to hear from him. Send information to M. Smith, 36 Pospect Street, Georgetown, Massachusetts.

MARSHALL, JOHN WINTHROP.—He is twenty-five years of ago, five feet eight inches in height, with dark curly hair. He left Portland, Oregon, for California about two years ago. His brother would appreciate information. Hallet Pat Marshall, care of this magazine.

PINCHASIK, LOUIS.—He was known in 1914 as Louis Perryn. He left home in November, 1914, and was last heard of early in 1915 in Dayton, Ohio. He is twenty-eight years of age, five feet four inches in height, with dark-brown hair. His parents are grieved over his absence, and will welcome any information. Samuel Pinchasik 176 Newport Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

SMITH, WILLIAM R.—He is five feet seven inches in height, with blue eyes and brown hair, and is forty-eight years of age. The top of his left ear is missing. He was discharged from U. S. D. B. at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in July, 1922. He is asked to write or come home at once, as his wife is heartbroken over his absence. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Flora Smith, 318 Delaware Street, Leavenworth, Kansas.

WATKINS, JOHN F.—He is twenty-one years of age, five feet eight inches in height, with dark complexion. His former home was in Fargo, North Dakota. He has been missing since January, 1924. His present address is desired by his wife, who is worried over his disappearance. Mrs J. F. Watkins, 1131 North Wells Street, Chicago, Illinois.

WEEKS, GEORGE M.—Last heard of at Big Creek Mine, Camp 61, Fresno County, California. He wrote that he expected to go to Arizona or Mexico. His sister is anxious to hear from him. Send information to Mrs. E. A. McCulley, 616 Pine Street, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

LUSTER, ROBERT M.—Last heard of about twelve years ago in Big Valley, Canada. He is sixty years of age, and weighs about two hundred and twenty pounds. His nephew will appreciate information. R. Luster, 417 South Twenty-ninth Street, Herrin, Illinois.

ROGI, or **ROGGI, GAM.**—Last heard of in Spokane, Washington, in 1912. Any one who can give information about this man will confer a favor by writing his father, G. Soraggi, 200 First Street, Eureka, California.

ATTENTION.—It is important that I hear from some of the boys that belonged to the Fourth F. A., at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, or the Eighty-third F. A. at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Frank Brand, Box 47-26302, Jefferson City, Missouri.

TOPPING, Mrs., or **MOWBRAY, Mrs. LESLIE.**—They lived in Seattle, Washington, in 1918. Please send information to Ruth K., care of this magazine.

CHRISTIE, ELIZA.—She married Charles Ehratrom in 1919, and they had one son, Leroy. They were living in Sioux City, Iowa, about two years ago. Her sister is anxious to secure her present address. Mrs. Margaret Powell, Box 233, Osseo, Wisconsin.

NEIR, ROBERT.—Your old pal of Douglas, Arizona, would like to hear from you. H. D., Box 641, Fort Benning, Georgia.

McCARVILL, JOHN.—He came from Prince Edward Island, and was last heard of in Colorado. He is a blacksmith by trade, and is about sixty-nine years old. His sister, Catherine, is anxious to hear from him. Mrs. Bryon Munson, P. O. Box 95, East Pepperell, Massachusetts.

WERLEY, HARVEY.—He is five feet eight inches in height, and is about thirty-one years of age. He was stationed at Camp Eustis, Virginia, at one time. Please write to Gladys W., care of this magazine.

WILLETS.—Sixteen years ago Samuel and Evangeline Willets were adopted from the orphans' home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by a Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Redman. We were three and five years old at the time, and were told that our parents had lived in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. We are very anxious to hear from our parents or their relatives. William Redman, 1913 Warwood Avenue, Wheeling, West Virginia.

SCHMITZ, LEO.—He is the son of Anton Schmitz, and disappeared on the 2d of July, 1923, when he was working on a farm near Nebraska City. He is five feet eleven inches in height, with light-brown hair and light complexion. His father is anxious to hear from him, and will appreciate any information. Anton Schmitz, Route 1, Fort Creek, Nebraska.

FRANKARSKY, FRANCOISE.—She is five feet tall, with blue eyes, black hair, and a light complexion. She has a high-pitched voice, and is of German descent. It is believed that she is working in St. Louis, Missouri. Her present address is desired by J. L. Buck, 41 Fales Street, Central Falls, Rhode Island.

AUSTEN, MINNIE.—She lived in Gary, Indiana, then Chicago, Illinois. She has two sons, Ernest and Tamar. Please write to J. M., care of this magazine.

BOATMAN.—About six years ago I heard that a man from Peace Valley, Missouri, was trying to find my grandfather, Karl. I would like to hear from him in regard to this matter. Mrs. A. B. H., care of this magazine.

CONKERN, or CORKERN, WILLIAM, KATE, ELIZABETH, PETER, and MARGUERITE.—They live in a small town in Canada. Their nephew would like to hear from them. Gilbert Walton, Station 30, Rockhill, Connecticut.

MAKANE, HOMER, and SNELSON, CLIFFORD.—Homer was stationed at Camp Pike, Arkansas, and Clifford at Camp Grant, Illinois. Their old buddy would like to secure their present address. Chauncey Yarger, Douglass, Kansas.

LEADBETTER, G. W.—He is forty-two years of age, and was last heard of about twelve years ago in New York City. His brother is anxious to hear from him. Please send any helpful information to G. Leadbetter, 5 Washburn Street, East Lynn, Massachusetts.

BROOKSHIRO, MATTIE ROBERTSON.—My mother's maiden name was Mattie Robertson, and she married Seth Wade Brookshire. They lived in Texas. My father took me away from her, and I have been told she left Texas with a family named Williams. She was later heard of in Missouri. I would like to hear from her or any one knowing her present address. Mrs. B. F. R., care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—I would like to find my father. I was born in Montana, and brought to Detroit, Michigan, when I was eighteen months old. My sisters and I were raised under the name of Berrette. Send information to Mrs. F. H. Miller, 244 High Street East, Detroit, Michigan.

WATTS, THOMAS DUDLEY.—I have heard that my grandfather died in Missouri several years ago, leaving a large estate. He has three grandchildren living in Illinois, but they have been too poor to investigate the matter. Any information will be thankfully received by Melvin Watts, care of this magazine.

FULLER, ISABELLE and JUSTIN.—My mother's maiden name was Porter. We were separated from our mother in Glens Falls, New York, when we were nine, seven, and five years of age. We were left with a man by the name of George Pratt, of Riverside, near Charleston, New York. After a short time I was taken away by Silas Bennett. In 1902 my brother and sister left Mr. Pratt's home, and I have never been able to find them. I would like to hear from them, and will appreciate any information. I would also like to hear from my Aunt Mary Porter, who married Albert Mason, in Massachusetts. Walter Fuller, 560 Wolcott Street, Waterbury, Connecticut.

CASEY, JOHN and DOUGLAS.—They were born and raised in Illinois. John is about sixty, and Douglas is sixty-five. Their present address is desired by L. A., care of this magazine.

VOYLES, GEORGE.—He left Evansville, Indiana, about twenty years ago. I would like to hear from him. Also George Norris, who lived in Georgia about fifty years ago. R. R., care of this magazine.

JENSEN, AXEL.—He is six feet tall, about thirty-two years of age, and is of Danish descent. He has a scar near his right eye. His present address is desired by F. J., care of this magazine.

HARRIS, LLOYD, or PITTS, EDWARD.—Last heard of in Idaho in January, 1923. Please write to Floyd Fritz, Iowa Park, Texas.

GRAF, STELLA and CARL.—Please communicate with me at once. Marguerite is in a convent here. Address 725 Gary Street. Norman.

GILES, EDWARD, MARIE, and EDITH.—They are six, eight, and thirteen years of age. They were taken away by their father, Dug Giles, on the 10th of March, when their mother was ill. Mr. Giles is about forty-three years of age, six feet tall, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. He is a little round-shouldered, and his hair is turning gray. It is believed that he took the children to Lebanon, Oklahoma. Their mother is ill with grief, and any information will be a blessing. Ella Ward, 1017 B Street N. E., Ardmore, Oklahoma.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from any member of Company E, Three Hundred and Twenty-fourth Infantry, or Company A, Thirty-fifth Battalion, U. S. Guards. W. A. Gatlin, care of this magazine.

ROACH, JACK, MARGUERITE, WILLIAM, THOMAS, and EDWARD.—They formerly lived in the mining district of Alabama. Any information will be appreciated by their sister, Ellen Roach Walton, Station 30, Rockyhill, Connecticut.

WISE.—My name is Mary Wise, and I have a brother, Lester Wise. He is nineteen and I am twenty-one. I was adopted when I was eleven months old by a family named Bethard. They took me from the Allen Country Home in Lima, Ohio. I would like to hear from my parents or their relatives. Mary Wise Penrose, 236 Eleventh Street, Toledo, Ohio.

EDWARD, BILL.—He is six feet in height, with dark-gray eyes and dark complexion. He is requested to write to Miss Mower, 448 North Minnesota, Wichita, Kansas.

SOLLTOW, JOHN and ELLA.—Last heard of about forty-four years ago. John was in Denver, Colorado, at the time. Send information to Mrs. Maude Witteman, Route 8, Carthage, Missouri.

DOYLE, JIM.—He is married, and it is believed that he lives in Pennsylvania. Patrick Doyle, his brother, and his niece, Mary, would be happy to hear from him at 1450 West Sevententh Street, Chicago, Illinois.

TUTTLE, FRANK, and his wife.—Their present address is desired by Frank Wancura, Route 3, Ludell, Kansas.

JAMES, WALTER HERBERT.—Last heard of in Portland, Oregon, about sixteen years ago. He was expecting to go to Japan. Send information to Edna, care of this magazine.

CLARKE, Mrs. C. A.—Her maiden name was Isabella Aitken, and she formerly lived in Orange, New Jersey. Her brother, James, is anxious to hear from her, care of this magazine.

ASKINS, VERNIL.—He is twenty years of age, with blue eyes and light-brown hair. He was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in November, 1923. He is asked to write to M. Steed, 310 North Cheyenne Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

VECCHI, JOSEPHINE, or WILLIAMS, MAE.—She is five feet tall, with bobbed hair, and was last heard of in Boston, Massachusetts. Send information to Mrs. William Young, care of this magazine.

EVERSON, HARRY.—He is twenty years of age, with dark hair and eyes, and was in Fairmont, West Virginia, Dallas, Texas. Their present address is desired by B. G. R., Thornton, West Virginia.

HANNAH.—There is very important business. Please let me hear from you at once. Samantha.

PRICE.—I would like to hear from the relatives of Catherine Price, who married Robert Ebden, of Wellington, England. They came to the United States and settled in Iowa. One sister, Mrs. Ellen Price Phillips, also came to this country, but her address is not known. Mrs. James Porter, Route 2, Box 7, Harrington, Delaware.

MEADOWS.—I would like to hear from the relatives of Thomas and Hannah Meadows, who left England for the United States about forty-seven years ago. H. E. L., care of this magazine.

RITCHESON, GEORGE BUFORD and ELLA.—George was last heard of in Corpus Christi, Texas, and Ella in Dallas, Texas. Their present address is desired by R. G. R., care of this magazine.

MORGAN, ANDREW.—He is about fifty-eight years of age. He married Martha Taylor at Witts Springs, Arkansas. They separated in 1884. Any information will be appreciated by his son, M., care of this magazine.

TAYLOR.—I would like to hear from the father of Eva Taylor. Mrs. G. H. Castle, 225 Twenty-fourth Street, San Bernardino, California.

BRIGGS, B. WAY.—He is an iron worker and bridge builder, and formerly lived at 925 Mariner Street, Norfolk, Virginia. Please send your address to your old friend of Norfolk, who is free now. Pennsylvania, care of this magazine.

C. O. M.—If you write at once, you can obtain valuable information. "You know who," meant you. We love you and want you. M. A. M., of Virginia.

WEISS, JAMES R.—I have good news for you. It is very important. Please write at once. Mme. Anderson, 1124 Mecanic Avenue, Galveston, Texas.

FOY, FRANK.—He lived near Madison, Wisconsin, when he was a boy. He has not been heard of for about twenty years. He is interested in horses, and usually works on ranches. His mother is old and failing rapidly, and his sister is very anxious to find him. Mrs. Annie Lease, 3417 Sherman Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin.

POWERS—VAN ALSTINE.—I would like to find out what year Jane Powers married Peter Van Alstine. It is believed that they were married near Albany, New York. Please send information to Mrs. C. B. M., care of this magazine.

WOODS, MABEL, and **GROSBY, WILLIAM** and **JANE.** I would like to hear from them. Also John and Edith Stokes. Arthur Woods, Box 520, Walla Walla, Washington.

LARSEN, GEORGE WALDO.—He is an ex-soldier, blacksmith, and artist, and a collector of rare paintings and old prints. He was greatly saddened by his war experiences, and left Chicago, Illinois, in 1920, for Washington, with the intention of going to Alaska. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated by his broken-hearted sister, Mrs. Muriel McGuckin, Cedar Oak Farm, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

SCHWAB, ARTHUR H.—Last heard of in New Hampshire. Please write to your brother, Clarence Schwab, Box 149, Peru, New York.

HUTCHINSON, WALTER.—He left Los Angeles for Bisbee, Arizona, in 1913. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated by G. W. Hutchinson, Box 427, Huntsville, Ontario, Canada.

WILSON, W. J.—Please write your old friend, A. J. Creed, Jr., 3435½ Ninth Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

WEBB, Mrs. ELEANOR.—She was living in Rosebud, Montana, in 1920. Her sister would be happy to hear from her. Mrs. Hugh Carney, Libertyville, Illinois.

McGUFFEY, WILLIAM HENRY.—He wrote me from Sacramento, California, in May, 1915, that he was going to San Francisco, and from there to Alaska, and I have not heard from him since. He is thirty-four years of age, with blond hair, and weighed about one hundred and seventy pounds. He is an electrician by trade. I am worried about my son, and information will be appreciated. Mrs. S. Gifford, 818 Poplar Street, Abilene, Texas.

RUGGLES, FRANK.—He left Massachusetts about twenty-seven years ago. His sister is anxious to hear from him. Mrs. L. Walker Ladwig, care of this magazine.

BAUMAN, HELEN.—She lived in Atlantic City in 1914. Please write to your old friend of Washington. C. C. Campbell, Headquarters, Nineteenth Infantry, Honolulu, Hawaii.

DENNISON.—I was born on the 5th of May, 1901, in New York City, and was placed in the Foundling Hospital under the name of Raymond Dennison. I was later adopted by a German family by the name of Wolf, and have carried that name ever since. I would be grateful to any one who could give me information about my parents or their relatives. I do not know my father's first name. At the present time I am stationed at the Central Fire Station, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, as I am still in the army. Please send any information to Raymond Wolf, in care of the above address.

WEAVER, DAVID.—He is believed to be the last surviving member of the old Montana gold prospectors who blazed the trail westward in 1864. His niece would like to hear from him. Edith Cook, Route 8, Box 20, Topeka, Kansas.

ALLENDORF, EDWARD.—He is five feet eight inches in height, with dark complexion, blue eyes, and black curly hair. He weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. It is believed that he is living in St. Paul or Minneapolis, Minnesota. His present address is desired by R. C., care of this magazine.

HERTZFELDT, RALPH.—He is five feet nine inches in height, with ruddy complexion and blue eyes, and a scar on his lower lip. Send information to C. C., care of this magazine.

STENSTROM, LEWIS.—He is thirty-two years of age, with light complexion, and is about six feet in height. He has a sister named Edna. Their present address is desired by their uncle, Joe Isaacson, 216 MacDonald Avenue, Richmond, California.

MILLER, DOROTHEA and **ARRA.**—Please write to me at once. I am worried about you. Rozella Miller, 147 South Washington, St. Paul, Minnesota.

HAWKINS, JOHN J.—Last heard of in Panama. Please write your old pal, Overland Jack, 207 Virginia Avenue, Fairmont, West Virginia.

STAPLES, HORACE.—He is thirty-five years of age, with light-brown eyes and brown hair. He is five feet nine inches in height, and was living in Napa, California, in July, 1918. His sister would like to hear from him. Mrs. Goldie Johnson, Klickitat, Washington.

OUDERMAN, JOHN.—Will you please come home or write to me at once, as I must see you. Mrs. Ouderman, Harvard, Illinois.

McARTHUR, GEORGE.—Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan, about four years ago. Your wife and baby would like to hear from you. Evelyn is four years old now, and she keeps asking for her daddy. Mrs. McArthur, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, HELEN.—She is tall and dark, and was last heard of in Washington, D. C. Please let me hear from you, for I do love you. J. Rooney, care of this magazine.

STEIN, JOHN WILLIAM and **EDITH.**—They were sent to Colorado about two years ago. Their niece would like to secure their present address. Helen Kattestaart, Oakdale, California.

HOLLISTER, ELMER.—Last heard of in the Presbyterian Home in Brooklyn. Any information will be appreciated by his half sister, Mrs. A. M. Toohig, 529 Warren Street, Brooklyn, New York.

MITCHELL, HOWARD.—He left home in 1904, when he was eight years of age. I have been told that he was picked up by the police and sent to St. Mary's Convent in Port Jervis, New York, and later adopted by Mary Ward, of East Orange, New Jersey. Any authentic information about my son will be greatly appreciated. Mrs. Mitchell, care of this magazine.

GARDNER.—Information is wanted concerning the relatives of William Gardner, who lived on Twenty-eighth Street, near Third Avenue, New York City, about twenty-seven or thirty years ago. This is a very important matter, and any information will be appreciated by J. B. R., care of this magazine.

FRITZ.—A man who went by the name of George Fritz died recently in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and his pal, who was with him at the end, is anxious to locate his relatives. He was sixty years of age, five feet eight inches in height, weighed about one hundred and forty pounds, and had blue eyes. He was of Irish and German descent, and it is believed that his mother came from Ireland. It is also believed that his home town was Janesville, Wisconsin, and he had a sister that married an Englishman by the name of Freet, or something similar, who was a civil mining engineer. He was a Catholic. He had a tattoo mark of a woman snake-charmer on his right arm. He served in the navy three times, but it is not known under what name he enlisted. This is a very important matter, and any helpful information will be greatly appreciated by Jack Brown, 106 Vine Street, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

KNIGHT, JOHN.—He left New Haven, Connecticut, to go overseas during the war. We believe that his number was 254,973, Royal Field Artillery. It was reported that he was killed at Arras, France, on July 25, 1918. He went under an assumed name, but we do not know what it was. He is a little over forty years old, with blue eyes and dark-brown hair, and a gold front tooth. He had a buddy named Frank Clark, but we have been unable to locate him. Any helpful information will be greatly appreciated, for his mother is very ill. Please send all information to Mrs. Berquist, 283 Main Street, Bisto, Connecticut.

MIXON, A. O., or **SHANON.**—In the summer of 1916, my boy, A. O. Mixon, suddenly disappeared from Wilmington, North Carolina, leaving a letter with the message that life was no longer bearable. A bundle of his clothes was later found by the wharf, but his body was not recovered, and I never believed that he committed suicide. A year after the war I met an old acquaintance of his, who told me that he met him in France on his way to the trenches, and that he was going under an assumed name. The friend could not remember the name, but did recall that he belonged to the Rainbow Division. Another friend of the family received a letter from a man by the name of Shanon, and he believes that the latter was from my son. I have advertised in the American Legion publication, but never received any reply. I am old and almost helpless and I need help, so any information would bring comfort to a lonely man. L. S. Mixon, Goulds, Florida.

CLARKE, or **STEVENS, JOHN.**—In the year 1853 or 1854 John Clarke was sent to a store on Smith Street, Brooklyn, New York, by his mother to purchase some groceries, and he never came back. He was seven years of age, and he had a small amount of money rolled up in his hand to pay for his purchases. His mother was living on Butler Street, near Court Street, Brooklyn. Many years after this boy disappeared he wrote to a New York evening paper asking some question about voting. He said that having been separated from his parents when he was small and adopted by a family by the name of Stevens, he wondered if he should vote under the name of John Clarke or John Stevens. If John Clarke is still living he would be about seventy-seven years old. His sister, Margaret Clarke, is dead, and the search is being continued by her daughter. His relatives are anxious to receive any helpful information, and they would like the Stevens family to know that he was not a homeless boy, but a member of a prosperous family, who have suffered by his disappearance. Mrs. R. Clarke Peters, care of this magazine.

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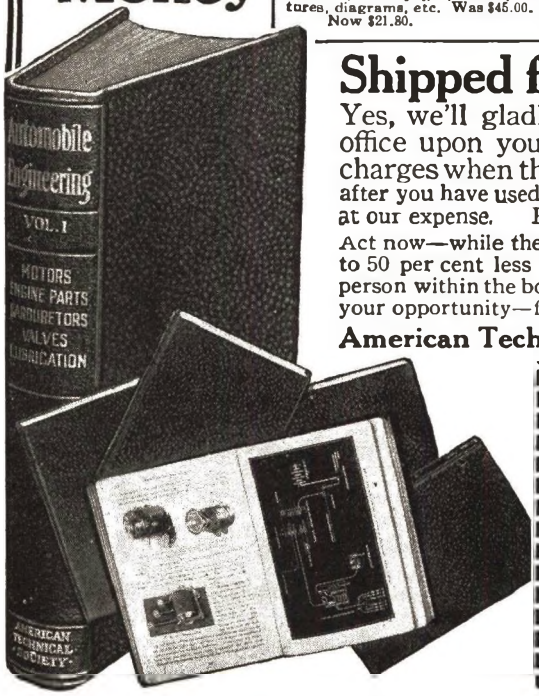

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