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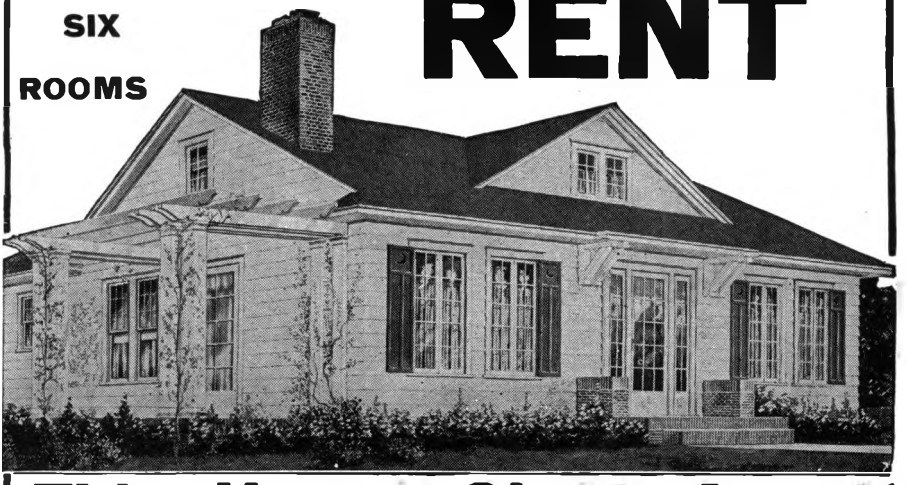

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EVERY WEEK

Vol. LVI Contents for October 31, 1925 No. 1

NINE STORIES IN THIS ISSUE

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IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

Moon Eye

By George Gilbert

In a plot to rob the prospective heir of one of the richest ranches in the West, two men concoct a plan so amazing as to be either impossible or infallible. The real heir, cheated even out of his identity, is placed in an astonishing position.

Not the Fastest Horse

By John Frederick

A rather plump and too-casual young man was the son of the erstwhile big landholder —now dead. The two wise men of the valley saw nothing to fear in him.

The Land Beyond the Mist

By Ernest Haycox

The ever-enthralling tale of the cross-country trek of our pioneer forefathers.

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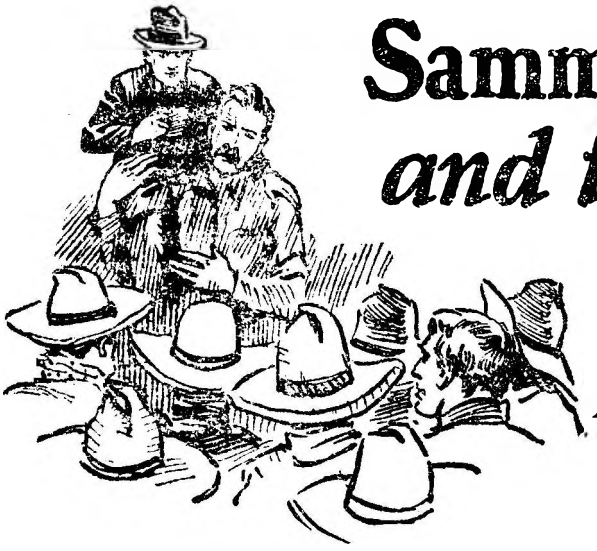


Sammy Gregg and the Posse

By

Max Brand

Author of "Gregg's Coach Line," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TORTURE BY FIRE.

TO understand the extent to which the mountains were shocked, one must consider what "Hobo" Durfee was, before the tragedy happened to him.

His nickname of Hobo had been honestly earned. He had been nothing but a tramp, a lazy, good-for-nothing scamp who wandered about the country inventing new methods for avoiding labor in any form.

This continued more than halfway through his life, but when he was forty years old, Hobo Durfee suddenly contracted what might be called the industry fever. Some said it was due to the fact that he had loaned a friend a dollar and that the man paid him back *two* dollars the next month. At any rate, Hobo Durfee never forgot. He laid the thought of that dollar of "interest" away in his memory, embalmed in myrrh and spikenard. And that even started his interest in accumulating money.

He began to put away every bit of it that he could lay his hands on. But he did not really have the courage to be a stirring thief. So presently he learned that his love of money was greater than hatred of work, and he began to work, steadily, earnestly.

He accumulated more and more money. In five years he had a shade over a thousand dollars in a bank, and then the bank failed! Durfee got his money out, because he was one of the first to call with a check when an evil rumor got abroad. But he never forgot how close he came to losing his money on that day, and thereafter, nothing in the world could persuade him to trust his money in hands other than his own. It was known that all his wages were turned into gold, and that all of that gold was hidden away in some secluded place on his own land.

For he had a little shack of his own and a patch of ground down in the river bottom. It was just as much as he was able to cultivate by himself. And on it he raised, during a part of the year, vegetables for the market in Munson, which was fairly near his place. No one else, in that region of timber and mines, had ever so much as thought of raising vegetables, and therefore his labor brought him quite a rich reward.

Besides, he was working on his land only a part of the year, and the rest of the time—even now that he was fifty-five years old—he approved himself a good cowhand in every sense of the term by his work on the cattle ranches. So that it was estimated that Hobo Durfee, in the last years of his life, must have laid up between five and ten thousand dollars in gold, all hidden some place on his little estate.

Of course that brought the crooks in a swarm, and for years they almost literally plowed the ground of the Durfee Ranch to get at his treasure every time he left his house. They never found it. Old Durfee was too foxy to leave his precious money without having it so securely tucked away that not even an eagle's eye could have located it. And so, after a time, the crooks left off trying and Durfee was in peace. A pretty well-deserved peace, too, as every one agreed.

The old man liked to talk to people about the money he had saved and about the good old foolish, happy, sunny days in trampdom. He liked to talk so well that he kept open house and would entertain any one who came by with food and chatter.

Well, in the West they appreciate hospitality. In a country where men know desert travel and the heart-stopping joy of coming in sight of a human habitation with smoke curling out of it, they put a high rating upon sincerely hospitable folks. And such a value was placed upon Hobo Durfee.

He grew a lot of strawberries in the spring of the year, and as they came ripe, he used to gather them and stew them into a delicious jam. That Durfee jam became famous for more than a hundred miles around. And literally hundreds and hundreds had taken a trip scores of miles out of their way in order to come at Hobo Durfee, sit by his stove, eat his pone and delicious strawberry jam, drink his coffee, and then go their way.

He was very happy when he was talking about the good old days when he never used to turn a hand at work. He had never stopped hating work. He had simply come to love money more! And when he began to turn to the subject of how he learned to labor and to save, the boys used to sit around and laugh at him a good deal. But he was willing to be laughed at. It was part of the game, and he liked company so well, and liked an audience so well, that he was very willing to have them laugh at him.

It would have done you good to see the red-brown face of that old chap with a grizzled fringe of whiskers more or less long, for he was not like most misers. The point was, some said, that the knowledge that he had a quantity of gold hidden away kept him bubbling

over with so much happiness that he just wanted others to hear about it. And so the door of his shack was never closed.

You must know all this to understand how old Hobo Durfee jumped up, one night, and laughed and nodded to some horsemen who had stopped outside of his shack and then had crowded into the doorway. There had been no other callers there on this day, and Hobo Durfee was warmed clear down to his boots when he saw so many forms of men outside his door.

He called out: "Come on in, boys! I've just finished up making some of the most sizzling good jam that you ever seen. And I'm just after finishing mixing up some pone and shoving the pans in the oven. And outside of that, I've got about five minutes to start the coffee. Which there ain't never been no better coffee than I make, and there ain't gunna never be none better never made."

Then a voice outside the door said: "Tell the old fool that we ain't come to eat his chuck to-night. And tell him it's something else we want."

Then the leading two men crowded in through the doorway and old Hobo Durfee saw that there was a mask on the face of each. A real hundred percent mask made of black coat lining turned into a sack and pulled down over the head with just a couple of big holes left for the eyes to look through and for air to come in. I suppose it was right then that Hobo guessed what was coming.

He saw that he didn't have a chance. His gun was clear across on the far side of the room. And I suppose there was no particular desire in Hobo to *get* the gun, at that. All he wanted to do was to make people happy. And besides, what could they get in his house except jam and pone and coffee—which he offered them just as freely without *any* sign of a mask or a gun?

"Well, boys," said he, "you're mighty welcome to anything that you can see around here. Just look around and help yourselves. But I guess that you ain't gonna see nothing much worth carrying away—unless it's some of my cans of jam—or maybe the new saddle blanket."

"Leave off the guff, will you, Hobo, you old fool?" said one of the men. "We ain't gunna do any of the looking to-night. You can do the looking for us!"

You can wager that poor old Hobo Durfee was hard hit by that. But he blinked at them for a time and tried to smile around the well-chewed stem of his corncob pipe.

"All right, boys," said he. "I guess that I know how to take a joke!"

"Joke?" said another fellow, squeezing his way into the house, "you chuck out the coin, old bo, or you're gunna find that this here is the hottest joke that you ever laid hold of in your life. And don't you forget it!"

It took the smile from the lips of Hobo Durfee and he stood rather weakly, looking from one black mask to another.

"Show him what we mean," said some one tersely.

It was done in an instant. They seized upon Durfee, who made no resistance to such numbers, and they stripped off his boots. They then opened the fire box of the stove and carried him up to it until the heat burned his socks and he uttered a yell of pain and terror.

They took him away from the fire at once.

"All right, Durfee," they told him. "You show us where the money is or you see what you get!"

When poor old Durfee saw that they actually meant what they said, he was silent and stared at them. He simply could not believe. No matter what the first part of his life had been, the past

fifteen years had been so flooded by kindliness that I suppose it was impossible for the ex-hobo to understand that this brutality was really intended—or that there were creatures in the world capable of it.

At any rate, he maintained that silence until they caught hold of him and actually thrust him up to the fire box so close that his socks caught fire.

He screamed in earnest this time and they brought him away and demanded with a snarl if he were ready to give them what they wanted. But he was not ready! And they pushed him up to the blazing wood until his feet——

But Munson saw those feet afterward, and it is better to leave that part until later.

According to the approved story, Durfee fainted after one of the applications of the torture. But they threw a half bucket of cold water in his face and waited for him to come to. Then they began again, and he stood the fiendish cruelty until the fire had actually——

But this is unspeakable!

All that one can say is that when he finally surrendered he was too far gone to walk. He was too far gone to creep. He had to be stimulated with whisky, and after he had half a pint of that under his belt he was able to whisper to them and they carried him with them out of the house and they brought him to the old shed where he kept his horse.

It had once been a house. The shed was built up around the last standing parts of the chimney and a portion of the north wall. Inside that chimney, which no one knew about, by reaching down half an arm's length and removing a few loose bricks, they found an aperture, and inside that aperture they found the treasure of Durfee.

There were nothing but twenty-dollar gold pieces. And there were three hundred and eighty-seven of these. Which made exactly seven thousand, seven hundred and forty dollars that they looted from him.

There were six of them, altogether.

No, just at the end a big man came galloping up and when he found what they had been doing, he cursed them and said that he was through with them forever. But they pointed out that the business was done and that he might as well share in the profits and forget about it.

Which he did.

So that the total was only just a shade above eleven hundred dollars per thief, and for that small sum they sold their souls, certainly, into the deepest part of purgatory.

CHAPTER II.

ANNE COSDEN TAKES CHARGE.

THEY left old Durfee lying in the horse shed, and that was what saved his life and brought danger to the gang. Because he managed to drag himself onto the bare back of his horse and he rode on into Munson. Or, rather, the horse took him there, for when Jack Lorrain found him in the night, Durfee had slid unconscious from the back of the old gelding and lay in the street before his feet, and the horse stood above his master with his head dropped wearily, looking uncannily as though he were grieving for the thing that had been done.

Jack Lorrain, as he said afterward, thought that it was some drunk who had taken too much liquor and he was about to go on past, when something about the patience of the old horse standing there over its master and waiting for him to rise touched the heart of Jack. And he decided that a man who was worth the trouble of a horse, in this fashion, must be worth the trouble of another man, also.

So he went to the quiet form that lay in the dust and seized him by the shoul-

der, and the body was just as limp as drunkenness to his touch.

Jack Lorrain was again on the verge of passing on, but he decided to take a look at the "drunk" so that the boys could laugh about the thing the next day. He scratched a match, accordingly, but what the light of that match showed him kept him speechless until the flame pricked the tips of his fingers sharply. And then a roar broke from the lips of Jack—a roar that rang and reechoed through Munson and brought men tumbling out of houses all around. And when Lorrain had gathered quite a crowd, he lighted another match and showed them what he had found.

They picked up Hobo Durfee with a womanish tenderness and they carried him into what had once been Mortimer's saloon, famous for iniquity until big Chester Furness, the first day he came to town, shot Mortimer and treated the boys over the bar, leaving gold on the bar to pay for the drinks! Gold for a dead man!

The saloon was somewhat less celebrated, now, but truly it was hardly less wicked, and what transpired inside of its walls would have filled many a chapter in a wild history every day. It was filled with carousal even at that moment, but the procession silenced them suddenly and completely.

They gathered with drawn faces and looked at the frightful thing before them. And all at once every one became as busy as they were silent. Some dozen mounted horses and rushed away in varying directions to find Doctor Stanley Morgan. And some heated water and brought it. And one youngster newly in from the East, offered a flask of fine old brandy such as had not been seen in rough Munson town for many a day.

Others cut the clothes from the body of Hobo Durfee. Others washed him. Others prepared his bed in the back room of the saloon—piling it thick and soft with blankets, and clearing all the rubbish from the chamber and all the dirt from the floor.

Here the doctor arrived, just as Durfee began to groan his way back to consciousness, and by the doctor's care the feet were thoroughly dressed before consciousness fully returned to Hobo. And all agreed that it was a mercy that his sleep had lasted until that dressing was completed.

In the meantime, the boys of Munson wanted to know what would become of Durfee, and they were assured that he would never walk again without the aid of a pair of crutches.

To the men of Munson it was a sentence almost worse than death, and they quietly interchanged glances. He was not much of a doctor. He would hardly have dared to set up for anything more than a veterinary in any other part of the world. But his opinion about such a matter as those feet was not to be doubted.

In the meantime, Durfee had regained consciousness completely. But the doctor had put enough opiates on his feet to keep him from torment. He was merely weakly drowsy, and kept turning his head slowly from side to side and staring at the faces around him in terror and in horror which would gradually melt away as Jack Lorrain or some other, sitting by his bed, patted his hand and would say: "Buck up, old-timer. You're all right now. We're gunna take care of you. Steady along, old buck. There ain't nothin' to be skeered of, Hobo. Nobody but your friends here!"

So Durfee would manage a faint, incredulous smile and then shake his head and frown while he closed his eyes and seemed to be trying to think back to the confusion of troubles which had closed around him.

After a time they tried to press him for a little information. But he could only say: "Seems like I had a sort of a

fallin' out with some of the boys—I dunno about what. I disremember exactly what the argument was all about. They was het up considerable, though."

That was all he could say, and the doctor decided that it would be wise not to press him too much that evening.

Half a dozen volunteers decided to sit up turn and turn about with Durfee through the night and another half dozen mounted horses and rushed furiously out to the little Durfee shack in the bottom land.

They descended into the damp, cool air of the river side. They came to the cabin and found all neat and orderly there, with the lamp burning steadily on the table.

Only there was a faint cloud of bluish smoke hanging in the corners of the room, and when they opened the doors of the oven, they found four big pans of pone burned to a crisp.

Then, with lanterns, they went over the ground outside and very quickly they decided that some one had been there before them. A party totally indifferent to the condition of Hobo's garden. For his choicest patches of ground had been trodden and torn by random tramplings of hoofs. Being experts at this business, they very readily decided that seven horses had been there.

"What were seven riders doing here," they asked one another, "interrupting old Durfee while he was bakin' his pone?"

And Jack Lorrain, who was one of the party, said solemnly: "Boys, I hate to think it—I ain't gonna really think it till I'm cornered—but I got a hateful sort of a lingerin' suspicion that them burned feet of poor old Hobo's ain't no accident. It was done to him on purpose by them gents that rode in here over his garden!"

No one answered Jack. Because it was a little too horrible for them to speak about. For though there has always been plenty of brutality in the West, following the frontier, yet it has been brutality of the "man to man" type. The Indians were never able to establish any precedents with all of their efforts!

However, the searchers did not discover the plundered cavity in the chimney in the horseshed. They returned to spread a vague rumor of horror through the town of Munson.

In the morning, people had come from a distance to learn the facts as soon as old Durfee was able to relate them, and among others, there were some celebrities recently come down from Crumbock. They came with the others to the saloon and with whispers in the front room they were told about the condition of the sufferer in the back room. They were Hubert Cosden, millionaire even before he struck it rich on the Crumbock Lode—and little Sammy Gregg, who had pushed through the celebrated stage line from Munson to Crumbock, nearly a year before. People said that Sammy was himself worth more than a quarter of a million, now, what with the stage line and little investments here and there among the mines, made at the advice of his friend, Cosden.

With them came big Anne Cosden riding a strapping black horse on which she had kept pace from Crumbock with the stage, doing the hundred miles in a day and a half—a hundred miles of terrible ups and downs in thirty-six hours! One might have thought that she was tired out, after such a performance, but she was not! Or at least, she seemed to forget about it when she saw a sick man.

In ten seconds she was in charge of the room and Hobo Durfee in it. And before the first minute had elapsed, she had a bucket of hot soapsuds and was giving that floor the first scrubbing of its short but eventful life. She

washed it until it dried white. And then she washed the walls. And when she was ended with that, she sent little Sammy Gregg forth to get wild flowers, and these she distributed around the room in any receptacles which she could get out of the saloon.

And, about half an hour after these changes had been made—with the windows of the room opened, and the doors opened also, so that a refreshing wind could pass through, old Durfee opened his eyes and said in a tremulous voice: "Dog-gone me if spring ain't come ag'in."

And then he saw the girl and flushed. He was not used to be tended upon by ladies.

"Of course it's spring," said Anne Cosden, sitting down beside his bed. "It was just about a year ago in the spring, too, that I came by your house and you asked me in to have pone and strawberry jam."

"Ah," said Hobo Durfee, abashed. "I disremembered for a minute. But I guess that you're Miss Cosden, and——"

A wave of pain struck him. He stiffened and fought out the battle.

"Lord, man," said Anne Cosden, "groan and that'll let some of the corked-up pain out of you. When I was a youngster, I used to take pride in not making any noise when I was hurt. I was always spilling off a horse, you know, and breaking a collar bone, or something like that. But after a while I found that it did a *lot* of good just to lie back and *shout* when something hurt me!"

Old Durfee chuckled. He had forgotten his pain. And little Sammy Gregg, noiseless as a shadow in a corner of the room, really worshiped big Anne Cosden.

She flashed a glance at him and moved her lips in a whisper which the sick man could not hear, but which said plainly to Sammy Gregg:

"Will you please get rid of that goose look?"

Then suddenly old Durfee was saying: "I'm beginning to remember! It sort of begins to work back into my mind—I see 'em standin' there outside the door of my cabin. And—oh my Lord, they got all my money! They got fifteen years that I can't never live no more and they put them years of my life in their pockets."

Anne Cosden, with a consolatory murmur, put her hand on the hot forehead of Durfee, and at the same time a slight nod brought Sammy Gregg instantly to her side.

"You know shorthand, Sammy. Now he's about to talk—and you get every word down."

"Paper——" said Sammy helplessly.

"Darn it," said Anne Cosden, "write on the floor, if you can't do any better!"

CHAPTER III.

MUNSON IS UP IN ARMS.

THIS was the fashion in which old Durfee told his story, slowly, stretching his tale over more than an hour, for often the horror of the thing that had happened would rush back upon his mind and stop his speech. But always Anne Cosden, sitting beside him, soothing him, letting him groan when he would, letting him speak when he would, sympathetic, gentle, filled with intuitions of the right manner of persuading him to talk, drew the story forth in every detail. While, in the corner, unheeded by the sick man, little Sammy Gregg writhed and listened and writhed again and, while his teeth were set, his rapid pencil took down the words of the sufferer.

He had a little memorandum book which served him. Presently the memorandum book was filled—with the questions of the girl, and the responses of the sick man. And then he took out old letters and scrawled upon the backs

of the sheets and on the outside and on the inside of envelopes, the utterances of Hobo Durfee which were to bring death to so many men!

One might not have realized, looking in upon this scene, that Justice was no longer a blind goddess but was opening her eyes and beginning to prepare to strike, while that rapid, cunning pencil made the swift signs which could be re-interpreted as speech.

The thing was ended. Old Durfee lay exhausted, but happy at last now that the tale had been told. For, just as the girl had told him, some of the pain seemed to pass into the groans and the words with which he had expressed himself.

Then Anne Cosden, stifled with anger and grief, with tears in her eyes and with her square chin thrust forward, nodded jerkily to little Sammy Gregg, saying as clearly as words: "Now go out and let the world hear what we have heard!"

So Sammy went softly out and faced the dense crowd which waited, in a deadly silence, in the outer room of the saloon. Not a word had been spoken out there. Not a drink had been tasted. But every man had a pair of revolvers belted around his hips and most of them leaned upon rifles, and in the street each man had left his fastest and strongest horse.

At the nod of Sammy, and seeing the paper in his hand, they followed him forth from the saloon. They gathered again in the street around him. But he was not tall enough to let all their eyes find his face, and therefore stalwart Hubert Cosden caught him up and perched the little man upon one of his broad shoulders.

From this position, Sammy read forth his account, giving each of the questions of the girl, and each of the answers of poor Durfee. And there was not a whisper from that crowd. But every crook in it, and there were many of them there!—felt like an honest man when he thought of the horror of it all.

They came to the end of the document. Sammy Gregg was reading out of an envelope, crowded with charactery.

"Miss Cosden: "Did you recognize any of their voices?

"Durfee: One of them I thought I did. I ain't quite sure.

"Miss Cosden: Who was that?

"Durfee: It was him that come the last. It was the seventh man.

"Miss Cosden: And who did he seem to you to be?

"Durfee: I disremember. A name come into my mind at the time, but it's slipped out again.

"Miss Cosden: Don't try too hard to remember. It may pop back into your mind again. What sort of a man was he? Tall or short?

"Durfee: Oh, he was considerable of a tallish sort of a gent.

"Miss Cosden: "Young or old?

"Durfee: Sort of betwixt and between.

"Miss Cosden: And what did he say?

"Durfee: First I thought that he was gunna take my money away from them.

"Miss Cosden: Did you think that one man could take the money away from six?

"Durfee: I dunno. He was sort of a leader with them.

"Miss Cosden: What did he say to them?

"Durfee: He cussed them out considerable and said that what they had done was an outrage, you see. That was when I begun hoping.

"Miss Cosden: And then?

"Durfee: One of them up and said that now that they had turned the trick and got the money that so many others had tried to get and failed, that the chief might as well take his share.

"Miss Cosden: But did he take it?

"Durfee: Yes. I heard them countin' the money out and I heard it go crashin' and jinglin' into his wallet, I guess! I turned my head, and I seen him take it and I squinted hard to make out his face——

"Miss Cosden: Didn't he have on a mask?

"Durfee: No, there was no mask on him. But there was a sort of blackness runnin' around in front of his eyes and I couldn't make him out clear!"

"Miss Cosden: Was there anything else about him that struck you?

"Durfee: Nothin' but his hoss.

"Miss Cosden: What sort of a horse was it? Or could you see it in the night?

"Durfee: I couldn't of seen it if it had been any other color. But it was a gray hoss and mighty big and upstanding, sort of. It looked like a fine hoss. I could tell that much! A hoss that could carry a big man, too!

"Miss Cosden: I think you're tired, now.

"Durfee: I'm sort of hankerin' for a little sleep."

Sammy Gregg lowered the envelope. "That's the end of it, boys," said he. "There wasn't any more, after that. He quieted down. And I came out to you. But I wonder if any of you think the same thing about the gray horse that I'm thinking?"

There was an instant of scowling silence which showed that a good many had a thought but that they were unwilling to speak it. Then Jack Lorrain broke out: "I'll tell you what I thought about—a gent that used to play a lone hand, but they say that he's been mixing up with some of the other crooks, lately, and letting them do part of his work for him. The rest of you know who I mean. He's a big man; and he'd be the leader of the gang; and he rides a gray hoss that's about as well knowed in these parts as the rider is knowed. I mean, Chester Furness!"

And there was a sullen roar of assent.

Then another in the rear of the crowd shouted: "Then let's go and hunt him up!"

There was another shout; a movement toward horses stopped by the thunder of Hubert Cosden: "You'll never get him, that way!"

They paused, itching for action.

Cosden went on: "I've seen gatherings like this before. A hundred well-armed and well-mounted men all set on getting some scoundrel. Though we've never had scoundrels quite as black as these seven! But it always ends up the same way. We get hot under the collar. We jump onto our horses. We ride like sixty through the mountains with no particular end in mind. And, the next day, about half the boys have tired their horses; there's no real clew before them; and most of them troop off back to town and to work. The rest stay on a few days longer, perhaps. They hear a couple of rumors—ride to hunt them down—find nothing—and then they go home and say that it's the business of the law to handle these affairs, after all. But there is no law here. If we had a sheriff, we wouldn't have affairs like this one of Durfee. There is no law except such law as we make with our own hands. And I say that the time has come for us to adopt new tactics. Do any of you agree with me?"

They agreed. A good deal of their flare of enthusiasm vanished as he mentioned so many hard-faced facts.

"But what do you suggest, Mr. Cosden?"

"I suggest that we have one man to direct all of us. Better to have one head, even if it's a poor one, than to have fifty heads all wanting to do different things!"

Anne Cosden came out to tell them to make less noise, for her charge was now asleep. But she remained to listen to

the most exciting part of the scene that followed. Big Rendell, the storekeeper, walking with a frightful limp because of his battered hip, uttered his advice in a roar that had to be heard:

"Gents," said he, "I know the man to plan the work for you. He ain't a fighting man. But he's a man with brains. He can't throw a rope, or handle a knife, or shoot with a gun. But he's got a head on his shoulders. I mean him that brung the first big herd of ponies from Texas; which was something we all said couldn't be done. I mean him that pushed through the Munson-Crunbock stage, after everybody else had tried it and failed. I mean my friend, Sam Gregg! He's the man for you!"

Anne Cosden could not help smiling as she looked at the five feet and eight inches of which Sammy Gregg was composed—and the thin face, which the sun could never entirely turn brown—and the nervous, eager body with which he had been furnished by nature and never improved by exercise. Sammy Gregg seemed immensely embarrassed and shook his head, and Anne Cosden waited for this crowd of proved men—killers, many of them, rough frontiersmen nearly all of them—to burst into a roar of laughter at the jest.

But to her bewilderment, they did not laugh. They did not seem to take it as a joke, at all. And she was more amazed than ever when she saw them nodding to themselves, gravely, and muttering. Until Jack Lorrain said:

"That's what I call good sense, Rendell. There's enough of us to shoot the guns and ride the hosses. We need a gent to sit back with a good head on his shoulders and tell us what is the next best trick for us to take. Here's Sam Gregg that has done what nobody else could do. I say, let's have Gregg to tell us what is what. He's our general, I guess. And we'll keep him off of the firing line, if we can. He'll be headquarters for us. What you say, Sam? Will you take the job of doing our thinking for us?"

Sammy Gregg was most reluctant. There were twenty better men than he among them, he declared. And then—he saw the astonished, almost thunderstruck face of big Anne Cosden, and his own color grew hotter still.

"But," said Sammy Gregg, "I've sat in the shack of old Hobo Durfee. And I've had his pone and strawberry jam, the same as most of the rest of you. And if you want me to take charge, I'll do it. And I'll do my best to bring in the whole seven of 'em, dead or alive—but mostly big Chester Furness with a rope around his neck. He's been my bad luck ever since I came here. We landed on the same day. And my first job was to try to bring up a herd of horses from Texas. And you all know how that herd was stolen by Furness. Then I tried to open a stage line, and it was the robberies of Furness that nearly ruined me. Now it's my turn to try to get him, and I'm going to do my best.

"If you want me for the job, say so; and I'll take half an hour to think it over and then tell you what looks best to me!"

There was no doubt about the heartiness of the response. It was a true, old-fashioned, Anglo-Saxon throated cheer.

And Anne Cosden fairly staggered back into the room where her patient was stirring fretfully in his sleep. For to Anne, little Sammy had never seemed more than an imitation man before this day.

CHAPTER IV.

SAMMY'S PLAN.

THEY gave Sammy Gregg what he wanted—time to think out a plan, and he went off by himself and sat down on a stump behind the hotel and

embraced his skinny knees with his thin hands and pondered his problem, and watched a pair of busy hens foraging among the seeds which the grass had dropped, under the surveillance of a lordly rooster with a red-helmeted head and a cuirass of curious greens and crimsons and rich purples.

Sammy, watching this kingly fowl, thought to himself that there were men like it. There was Chester Furness, for instance, filling the eye utterly, big, handsome, stately, sure of himself. But he, Sammy Gregg, was surely none of these.

A shadow whipped across the yard. The hens ran together in a huddle, squawking. Even the big rooster cowered, and spread his wings, and stretched out his neck foolishly to scan the sky above him.

That was a hawk sliding through the sky above them, already away, and tilting out of sight behind the head of the nearest tree. There were men like that hawk, too. Swifter than others, armed by nature more than other men, keen, alert. And that strange fellow, Jeremy Major, was one of these.

Or was Jeremy Major a type? Was he not rather a unique?

At least Sammy Gregg knew that *he* was neither rooster nor hawk. He was simply plain, common, or garden humanity. He was just the average height—or was he a little under it? And he was just the average weight, or was he a trifle lighter? And he had no strength of body or no skill of hand, and he had no strange talents, like Jeremy Major and other men. He had only common sense.

Perhaps, indeed, he differed in one respect from most people. He could give himself wholly to a task which he had at hand. He could pour brain and soul into his labors with a perfectly focused intensity. And other men, by the very wealth of their powers, were apt to give only a quarter of their strength and a tithe of their time and attention. So he had struggled up a little beyond the mass of men. At least, his bank account was considered fatter than theirs.

Yonder lay poor Durfee, a ruined man because of the treasure of some seven thousand dollars which he had put away. But Sammy Gregg, still far under thirty, was master of a competent fortune! Not that he prided himself upon what he had done. No, for he took all very humble. It merely showed him that the constant use of even the smallest means may eventually carry one to the top of the mountain. And now, most astonishing, most shocking to all that he had ever expected of himself, he was appointed to construct the plan of a man hunt. Seven human lives were the goal of his endeavors—he who could not ride a bucking horse, or shoot a gun, or read a hundred feet of the plainest trail.

But those rough-handed fellows who could do all of these things—they themselves had chosen him!

It was only for a moment that he contemplated the strangeness of his work and his place in that work. Then he lost all thought of self, and his mind was rapt in the contemplation of the problem. It was more than an hour before he called together the leaders among the men—the well-known figures who were familiar to cow-punchers and miners alike.

More than one of them, no doubt, envied him his eminent position on this day and would be willing to scoff at his schemes. He must win their trust and confidence first of all. So he stood with them at the corner of the street and laid his plan bare.

It was more complicated than they liked, he could see that, but the longer he talked the more willing they seemed to agree with him. In the first place, he decided that the seven, having drawn together, would never content them-

selves with one such act as the robbery of poor old Durfee.

Big Furness was not the sort of a man to assemble forces merely because there was a handful of money like this in the offing. His own gains in the trade of highway robbery must now be mounting to the scores and scores of thousands. And if he called together seven men, it was never for the sake of robbing a helpless old fellow like Durfee.

For, as Sammy pointed out to them, Furness was a fellow who lived as a road agent partly for the money but mostly, he had no doubt, as a means of amusing himself. No, it was plain that he had appointed to his followers some rendezvous near the house of Durfee. He himself had been late and while they waited for him, they had started out to make a little money on the side. And the horrible torture of Durfee had followed.

But originally they must have been summoned to effect a raid of a major importance. No such blow had been struck within the last few days; therefore it was plain that the work for the band had not yet been accomplished. It was still to do, and they could trust to big Furness that the blow would most surely fall! If the countryside were roused against him, so much the greater reason would there seem to him to push his scheme through, no matter what it might be.

With this in mind, what Sammy Gregg proposed was that they learn, as soon as possible, how many of the men who were assembled in Munson on this day could be relied upon to campaign for a matter of a week, at the least. There were now more than a hundred under arms. But perhaps more than two thirds of these could not leave their work for a long man hunt. Better find out the permanent men for the posse at once.

In the meantime, Mr. Cosden would enter the stage and make the journey back to Crumbock as fast as possible. There he would spread the alarm in the same fashion and gather as many permanent men as he could.

"Now," said Sammy to his new henchmen, "there's half a dozen places where Furness' riders are apt to strike. They might tackle Munson. They might try Crumbock. They might land at Chadwick City, or Little Orleans, or Buxton Crossing. Or they might even ride as far as Old Shawnee. Now look at the map."

He sketched in the dust with his forefinger at he talked.

"Here are the mountains in a lump—an armful a hundred and fifty miles across. Crumbock is fairly close to the center of it. Munson is off here to the edge. The other towns are out on the plains beyond.

"Very well. No matter where they rob, Furness and his men always head for the heart of the mountains. That is their hole-in-the-wall country. They hide there as soon as they can after they've made a raid.

"Now, what I plan to do is not to try to herd them away from all the towns, but cut off the line of their retreat. We ought to get thirty or forty men out of Munson, and the same number out of Crumbock. Then split those men into two sections each. That'll give you four posses of between fifteen to twenty men each. Then post each of the four in the mountains, in a square.

"Every side of that square will be about seventy or eighty miles long. We'll put men here and here and here!"

He jabbed out the places on his rudely sketched map.

"Now we'll make no more noise about this thing than we have to, but we'll at once send riders from Munson to go to each of the towns where big Furness is most apt to strike. In the towns they'll not speak a word or give any warning that we think that Furness is going to

raid. Because, so far as we know for sure—he may *not* raid. But we'll have our men there, as messengers. Now, the instant a raid is carried out, the messenger in the town that is raided will ride—not on the trail of the raiders, but straight into the mountains until he comes to that section of the posse which is located nearest to his own town.

"When the word is brought in, in that fashion, the party that is warned will give the messenger a fresh horse and send him on to warn the other nearest sections of our posse. In the meantime, it will have fixed in its own mind the most likely routes along which the seven are apt to hit into the mountains from the nearest town.

"And, in a way, you can say that we'll have Furness and his men running right into our hands. Fifteen or twenty men, who know what to expect, ought to be able to handle at least the seven men in that gang. The advantage of surprise will be all on our side."

Perhaps it *was* a little complicated. Perhaps, also, it was a little more selfish than a real sheriff's posse would have dared to be. But the need was urgent. And the scheme appealed most strongly to the imaginations of the men to whom Gregg talked.

There was one chief danger. They needed three full days in order to set their trap. And if the raid occurred before the trap was set, most of their preparations would be wasted. So the first thing was speed in those preparations.

All was arranged with perfect harmony. In another hour, Cosden was whirling away toward Crumbock to gather what good men he could in the mining camp; and Jack Lorrain and others were weeding out the volunteers of Munson. They got thirty-four men who declared their willingness to remain at least a week on the job. Besides, they were furnished with five messengers who were to scatter to the points of danger exposed to the attack of Furness—namely, to the five towns.

When that was arranged, the Munson volunteers were split into two sections and marched at once out of the town. They only delayed long enough to load up with plenty of bacon and flour and salt at Rendell's store. And then they were off.

Anne Cosden waved farewell to them from the front door of the saloon, as cheerfully as though they were off on a picnic and she herself left behind among old friends. She had her own work, which was to care for old Durfee in his pain, with the meager assistance of Doctor Stanley Morgan.

But the rearmost rider of the second party that started for the upper mountains was beckoned to by her. It was Sammy Gregg, who rode over before her and removed his hat obediently.

"Sammy," said she, "I hope that you're only riding out of town with the boys to see them off. You're not going with them!"

"Why," said Sammy, "after starting a thing like this, I couldn't stay behind!"

"Will you tell me," said Anne Cosden impatiently, "why you should put yourself in the way of bullets when you don't know the first thing about how to shoot back?"

"Oh, no," said Sammy, "I don't expect that I'll be of any real use when the bullets begin to fly. But you see, I thought that I could be handy around the camp."

"Are you a camp cook?" asked Anne Cosden sternly.

"I can wash the pans, at least," said Sammy Gregg, and he rode on with a grin.

"Young man," said Anne Cosden, "don't be silly and try to be a hero."

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE FOOTHILLS.

AT the head of that party from Munson of which young Sammy Gregg was himself a member, there rode that tall and long-mustached viking, Cumnor. It was he who had abandoned all such industries as mining and lumbering and even cow herding for the reason, as he said, that they were the sign of a new country, and what he wanted to be in was a country which was permanent in its occupations and in the returns which it yielded to good law-abiding citizens. Therefore, he had established himself, after a time as a rancher, in the smaller field as farmer. It was said that he and poor old Hobo Durfee were the only real farmers in that part of the world, and now that Durfee was unlikely ever again to till a field, or afford to have one tilled for him, Mr. Connor stood alone in that branch of work.

He was proud of this lonely eminence, and he was fond of saying that the rest of the members of the community were no better than mere temporary interlopers, whereas he was the forerunner of the men who would make the country rich and great. The time would come, as Cumnor was fond of saying, when those mountains would be terraced high up their sides and thriving farms would throng in every valley.

For that reason he had not hesitated to establish himself in a district where there was a good deal more scenery than there was soil. There were great crops of rocks, and the faster they were removed, the faster they grew. But the good nature and the optimism of Cumnor were as long as his yellow mustaches. It was said that he was losing money hand over hand every year, and that often he did not receive back from the soil the seed which he had sowed upon it. But his courage was never daunted, and he was fond of saying, when he was asked how he was doing: "Well, sir, I fenced in a new quarter section last month!"

Indeed his expenses for fencing ran very high, especially as the cow owners grew more numerous and their men developed wicked habits of cutting any wire fence lines that happened to be in the way of their cow drives. However, Mr. Cumnor would not down.

"I'm building for the future," he would vow. "My grandsons will be thankin' me for the work that I've done around here."

"But why, Cumnor," asked Sammy Gregg, upon a day, "do you want to fence in that big round-headed knoll over yonder. It will cost you a lot to drill post holes in that rock!"

"It's worth the money," vowed Cumnor. "Because right yonder is the spot that overlooks all the rest of the land, and my grandson or my great grandson will thank me for havin' included in the estate the right site for the mansion."

Of course there was no arguing with a man like that. And people merely stood by and shook their heads and waited for him to go broke, which was the direction in which he was headed as fast as he could go. But, as some pointed out, though he knew no more about farming than to order all sorts of new and unneeded implements from Rendell's store, he was on the other hand an expert cowman of long standing. His talents were simply diverted into the wrong channel. Most pitiful of all, there was no way of getting rid of his grain, unless he could find a mill to grind it to flour, when it would sell readily enough. But this merely inspired him to build great, capacious granaries, in which he stored each year's product.

"Look at the way the population of the country is growin'!" Cumnor used to say. "I guess that there is your sure sign that prices for wheat and barley

is gunna stay right up there in the clouds for a long time."

And if some of the stored grain began to rot in the winter damps, he was merely inspired to reinforce the foundation solidity of his barns! "You got to pay for experience," Cumnor would say.

Perhaps it would have been hard to tell whether big Cumnor was more amusing or pathetic as the owner and operator of a farm; but at the head of a trailing party, he was a dignified and important person. His school was the bad lands of the great plains, and there he had been trained up in the terrible discipline of the Indian wars. And he remained rather a grim fellow, whenever he was put with his back to a wall, as young Sammy Gregg could testify strongly enough. But that was long ago, and they were now firm friends.

It was a beautiful sight to see Cumnor lay his course through the mountains to the spot which had been designated as his location. He had been given the post of honor at the angle which was nearest to the two towns of Chadwick City and Little Orleans. The warning messengers from either of those towns would find the party of big Cumnor first. And now the farmer guided his band swiftly among the growing peaks.

He did not need a compass to tell him the way. That was a trail which he had never traveled before, but any old plainsman has learned to stock his brain with all manner of landmarks and signs; and when he comes out of the plains, where it is difficult enough to find *any* sort of a mark, it is simple enough when he finds himself among the mountains. For they are not to him what they are to the uninitiated—simply great forms, monotonous as waves in the sea. Rather, they are so many faces, each with individual features.

And the general landmarks were so well fixed in the mind of big Cumnor that now he led the party on with a perfect surety, never pausing to make his reckoning at any point along the journey. They crossed the first range of heights before noon of the starting day. Then they swung down into a rough, narrow valley which extended between that range and the next just off to the north.

A narrow, rising wisp of smoke attracted the sure eye of Cumnor, at this point. On the trail, the trail leader is as absolute as the captain of a ship at sea.

"Ride over, two of you, and see who's at that camp fire. Burton and Si Manning, go along, will you?"

"Camp fire?" echoed Si Manning. "I dunno that I see any smoke."

"Look yonder agin' that rank of big pine trees, will you! There you'll see it, right under that big strike of yaller porphyry."

Any stone which does not fit in with a definitely known class of rocks is put into the category of porphyry by the amateur geologist, like the self-taught prospector. But toward that yellow strike of rock, Si Manning and Burton, his companion, looked, and after a moment they saw what looked like a tiny little blue-white cloud under the rock. It was so dim that it was lost to sight the instant it had nothing but the blue of the sky behind it.

And Si Manning winked aside to his companion, as much as to say: "The old boy is pretty much of a mountaineer at that!"

Then they started on their detour, crossing the valley rapidly, while the main body held on toward the summit beyond. They dipped out of view among the rocks at the bottom of the valley, and then they were lost to the following eyes.

For a full hour they were gone, though Big Cumnor had held back the pace of the main body to a slowly dragging walk. And finally he halted his

men and turned to look back down the trail with an oath.

"Dog-gone them no-account Pi-utes!" sighed Cumnor. "Are they taking a dog-gone siesta, maybe? Or do we have to go back and see what's happened to them?"

But, just as that moment, the whole party heard the crack of a gun in the distance, and then a rapid chattering of bullets. They looked, and behold there came two riders—their own men—Si Manning and Burton, riding for dear life, leaning well over the necks of their horses and firing back from time to time at the trees out of which they had issued a moment before. And the sharp, metallic clangor of a rifle echoed back to them from the trees.

Some of the party would have scattered back toward the point of danger, had not Cumnor stopped them.

"This here little game is their own making," said Cumnor. "Now they got their wits addled and they're pretty well scared. We'll hear a wild yarn when they come in. But when I send out gents to scout for me, I expect them to be able to take care of themselves—*and* us! It's what I got a right to expect. The scouts is the eyes and the ears and the *hands* of the main body. Look at 'em come lickety split!"

Even when they dashed their foaming horses up to the others, Si Manning and Burton did not seem at ease, and in response to a volley of questions, Manning would only shake his head, for a moment and, panting, point to Burton.

As for Burton, he looked as though he had been kicked in the face by a heavily shod horse. It was Manning, however, who told the story, little by little, a rather confused narrative, but the chief points of it were made out clearly enough.

They had crossed the ravine, as the main party saw, and the pair had then proceeded more carefully, attempting, if possible, to steal upon the hidden camp fire unobserved. They had got well within the edge of the trees when they were met by a good-natured hail from the glade just before them, and then accordingly gave over their attempt to stalk and, feeling very foolish, had advanced into a small clearing among the trees.

They had expected to find a number of people there, some one of whom they felt must have given warning to the rest of the approach of strangers, but when they came in they found—at that moment at least—that the camp was occupied by one person only.

This was a slender youth, handsome, dark brown of eye, very genial and lazy of gesture and of voice. He had greeted them kindly and without surprise and invited them, if they chose, to have supper with him, only stipulating that they should pluck their own supper, a task which was too much for his single pair of hands.

He illustrated by pointing to a heap of dead birds. Some few of these were of a fair size, but the rest were mere little puffs of feathers.

They thanked him but told him that they had to push on. And yet, as Si Manning said, it was a most tempting spectacle which they had before them—the stranger taking up one by one the birds which he had plucked and cleaned and spitting them on a long, clean stick. Apparently he had selected the cream of the kill for his first ration. And now, as he turned the birds above the blaze, the fragrance of the roasting meat was almost too much for the always-raging appetites of two true mountaineers.

The other, turning the spit with care, kept glancing in dismay at the heap of slaughtered birds.

"A mighty shame to have them all go to waste," he said. "I didn't realize that I had snagged so many of them. And there they are—poor little beggars—and all for nothing but fun, you might say

I wish you strangers could stay awhile and eat up the batch for me!"

"Why," said Si Manning, "d'you mean to say that you're only gunna be able to eat the few that you got on that stick, there over the fire? Ain't you got no more room than that in your stomach for such game?"

"Matter of fact," said the youth, "I suppose that I could eat two or three helpings like this. There isn't much to 'em, you see. But when it comes to sitting and pulling out the feathers—why, that's quite a job. I'd rather go about half hungry than stay here drilling away at work like that for another half hour!"

They could see that he meant what he said.

At this point a great black stallion, which had apparently been approaching through the brush, but with all of the uncanny silence of a stalking moose, appeared within the clearing and at the voice of the man, walked straight up to him, just as a dog would have done. It was the grandest looking horse that Si Manning had ever seen.

"Ah," said the stranger, "you've found water, have you, Clancy, you old scamp? Well, you can lead me to it, after a while. Now go back and find the best grass around. You may have weak pickings to-morrow."

The stallion, exactly as though he had understood the spoken words, had turned and started across the clearing, when Burton intercepted him. The beauty of the wonderful animal had been too much for him, and he had stepped forward with his hand outstretched.

"Be careful!" warned the stranger. "That horse is dangerous!"

"Dangerous nonsense!" said Burton. "I've known horses all my life and I can tell the bad actors by the look in their eyes. This here hoss ain't no more'n a pet!"

As he spoke, he went close to the big black, which had paused, with pricking ears. But now the ears flattened like magic and the stallion flung himself suddenly at Burton.

The master cried out sharply—and in time. The head of Clancy was thrown up as though he felt a strong hand wrenching on a curb bit. But the impact of his lunging shoulder had struck Burton and knocked him flat.

Altogether, it was a very uncanny affair.

But Burton had leaped to his feet in a wild tantrum. He had been made a fool of a little too thoroughly to suit a man of his humor.

"Darn you and your tricks!" he had shouted at the stranger. "Here's a trick that's worth a dozen of them all!"

And he took a hearty swing with his big fist at the head of the owner of Clancy.

The latter had been seated, but in some manner he had floated up to his feet and away from the blow. And the next instant he had struck Burton a staggering blow that had sent the latter reeling across the clearing. After him went the stranger, with a leap like a panther's. And there was such a devil in his face, Si Manning vowed, that it still curdled his blood to think of it. He caught Burton at once and struck him to the ground with a blow that fairly crushed that unlucky mountaineer. He was by this time too frightened to feel the effects of the blow. He simply rolled to his feet with a yell and leaped into the saddle on his horse. Si Manning had followed the example.

"There was something about that kid," said Si Manning. "I dunno what it might of been, but after I had had one look at his face, I forgot all about having a pair of Colts on the hip. All I wanted to get was distance between him and me! I didn't remember a gun until I was in the saddle and he was shooting after us!"

"Burton must of been right part

ways," declared big Cumnor, who, like the rest had listened in amazement to this weird tale. "But why wasn't he able to drill you boys good and proper?"

"Gimme another look and you'll see what he could of done if he'd wanted to!"

He snatched off his hat and held it before them. At least five bullets had flicked through the high crown of the hat, tearing it to ribbons, but so sharp was their razor-edged flight, that the hat had not been torn from his head.

"And how far was he missing you?" Cumnor asked Burton.

"The devil was shooting for my ear, I guess," drawled Burton. "I heard his bullets come singing past my ear about a quarter of an inch away. He give me a regular breeze along side of my face, you might say, but somehow, that breeze never blew me cool all the way across to you!"

He added: "I say, let's go back and clean up that gent. He's achin' and spoilin' for trouble. He's queer—that's what he is. And he's tricky. He's loaded with tricks. Besides, what right has he got doin' his tricks with a man-killin' stallion like that? Is it nacheral? Is it anything that you or me could do?"

"Tell me, Si," said Cumnor. "Did this fellow really start any of the trouble with you boys?"

"He done nothing but give it a mighty thorough finishing!" admitted Si Manning. "And if the gang rides in to mess him up—well, you'll all ride in without me. I'll stay behind to do the buryin'!"

CHAPTER VI.

A MESSENGER ARRIVES.

WHEN such a man as Si Manning admitted with this frankness that he did not care to engage an enemy even with fifteen proved men at his back, it was enough to underline his expression of opinion, and the entire posse was thoroughly impressed.

"But," said Cumnor, "who the devil is this fellow?"

"If none of you know," broke in Sammy Gregg, "I can tell you quick enough. It's the same man who brought the herd from Mexico for me and kept them together in spite of stampedes and thieves and everything else. It's the same man, too, who cleared the stage line of big Furness so thoroughly that although you notice that he is raising a good deal of devil in other quarters, he has never touched one of my coaches, ever since. Some of you may not have been on the inside news, but I was there and I knew all about it. This young chap simply frightened Furness away. And if you want to clean up the whole Furness gang, there's only one sure way of doing it. And that's to get Jeremy Major—for that's his name—to work with you."

Cumnor gasped at this flood of information and Sammy Gregg filled in the interval with more news:

"Because there's no trail so dim that he cannot find it, and no horse so fast that his horse can't catch it, and no fighter so great that he cannot beat him."

Here Burton looked distinctly uncomfortable.

"We'll camp about three miles farther along," said Cumnor. "And in the morning you can go back, if you want, and try to persuade your friend to make one of us. But I got an idea that you ain't gunna have no luck. Ride along, boys!"

Sammy Gregg did not argue that if he waited until morning there would probably be no chance to find Jeremy Major. He had come to know that there are many subjects about which it is foolish and useless to argue with a Westerner. So he held his peace and rode on in the troop.

The next morning early he was on the road—on the road before the sun was more than a dim brightness to the

east. But even though he started so early, when he reached the spot where young Jeremy Major had camped the night before, he found that it was deserted.

He looked vaguely about him for a trail, but not with any hope. He had a suspicion that the trails which Jeremy Major left behind him were of a kind that would quickly puzzle even the wisest trailer in Cumnor's outfit. Where had Jeremy Major gone and when? No one could tell. The first whim that stirred him would be the one that controlled him. Too lazy to pluck more than enough of the birds he had shot the day before to keep himself from starvation, yet if the fancy entered his head, he might mount his horse at daybreak and be away, or he might have thrown himself upon black Clancy in the dark middle of the night and darted like one pursued through the upper mountains.

So Sammy Gregg made not the slightest effort to pursue the man, more than he would have made to pursue any phantom. He merely turned his horse from the black embers of Jeremy's cold camp fire, and rode slowly back to Cumnor's band. And to Cumnor he made his brief report.

"Why," said Cumnor, "maybe it's as good! I dunno that a gent like him would work in with the rest of us. He's a lot more likely to play his own hand and a lone hand at that. We'll get along and I believe much better without him."

The rest of that day they labored slowly along through the mountains with the yellow flannel shirt and the rigidly squared shoulders of Cumnor in the lead. That evening they camped on the spot which had been chosen for them by Sammy Gregg before the start. They were now at one of the four corners of the square which the scattered posse sketched across the surface of the mountains. And from that time forth they need do nothing except wait from day to day for news of the raiders.

So two lazy days in the camp passed away, comfortable days of rest for the men with Cumnor; days of torture for Sammy. For he was not one of those who are plentifully entertained by the sights and the sounds of the great outdoors. If some one cared to sit down and talk to him about the nature of the stones or about the trees and their peculiarities, their ages and their uses, he was glad enough. And there were many men who could make a most fascinating tale out of the sign on the trails which crossed the mountains. However, if left to his own devices, Sammy could only sit and twiddle his thumbs.

And, left to himself in the dreary silences of the camp, he could only wonder if any success would ever attend this complicated scheme of his, or would it be another of the failures which had always attended every effort to bring back Chester Ormonde Furness to the hands of the law?

It was on the fourth evening that the news came. They had started the camp fire to cook the evening meal. Cumnor himself, left free from camp duties as the leader of the expedition, was walking across a hill to the east of the fire, when they saw him pause and then wave his hand and shout. A moment more and they heard the rapid drumming of hoofs. And after that, a horseman loomed suddenly beside Cumnor—a man who talked with many violent gestures.

It seemed that Cumnor refused to listen. He turned and led the way to the fire, the rider still rattling forth news as he went. But when they came in to the scene of cookery, Cumnor said:

"Thar ain't gunna be anything gained by savin' five minutes here and now for the sake of confusin' everybody. A gent always fights better and rides better on a full stomach, and without no

hunger or curiosity eatin' away in him. Now what I claim is best is for you to set down here and roll yourself a smoke and tell us what news you bring in from Chadwick City. Take it easy. We got lots of time to listen and you got lots of time to talk."

The other dismounted obediently and stretched. "All right," said he. "You're the boss. I can't turn around and catch the whole seven of 'em with my bare hands. But sure as fate, they're comin' right at you now, boys—makin' a bee line straight for where your camp is!"

"All right," said Cumnor. "The straighter they come, the easier it's gunna be for us to get our hands on 'em. Now you talk and tell your yarn. Ain't any of you boys got any coffee ready? Are you gunna make a gent talk with his throat all caked up with dust?"

Coffee was brought in a great tin cup that held more than half a pint. The cigarette was rolled.

"All right, Cumnor," said the messenger. "If it comes to takin' time and sippin' coffee and smokin', I reckon that I can do about as good as any of you. I'll yarn it for you as much as you want.

"You go back to the time that I was sent off to Chadwick City. I didn't think much of this here scheme. Askin' the pardon of Gregg, whom I see now for the first time. However, I didn't think much of the idea of sendin' about a hundred gents off into the hills to set there and wait around and try to hatch an egg with Chet Furness inside of it. Y'understand?

"But I didn't care much if I wasted a few days lazyin' around Chadwick City, where I know some of the boys pretty good. I put up with a friend of mine, Hank Treecomer. Maybe some of you know him, too? Well, I laid around at Hank's place every day, swappin' lies with Hank, when he was around, and lazyin' pretty much in general. But along about when night comes, I sort of set up and opened my ears and my eyes, gettin' ready in case something should happen along that I had ought to know.

"Well, things went along like that until this morning, along about ten, when the day begins to get sort of hot and sleepy. Jest when I was takin' a nap for myself in the hammock in the back yard of Hank's place, I hear a terrible loud bang, like the slammin' of a door with all holts let go.

"'Somebody is leavin' home mighty fast!' says I to myself. 'And maybe they's a couple of flatirons follerin' him.'

"Right then I heard a half dozen more bangs! There wasn't no mistakin' 'em this time. When a door slams, it don't *cough*, if you gents can foller what I mean. And these here noises had a sort of a cough to 'em.

"Right on the hind end of that, I hears a yell—a sort of a long yell that died out weak toward the end, like somebody was terrible sick.

"'There's a dead man or a scared woman, one of the two,' says I to myself.

"So I rolls out of that there hammock and I come around to the front of the house, but before I got there, there was a roarin' and a smashin' of rifles and revolvers about enough to deafen you. And everybody in that there town had turned loose and was yellin' and hollerin' and tellin' everybody else to 'get 'em quick!'

"Well, when I got around to the front of the house, all that I seen was a cloud of dust wingin' up from the street and a lot of men gallopin' away in the dust like shadders inside of a fog.

"Just then one of them hosses went down—slam! And a puff of dust went up, like somebody had dumped loose a whole sack of flour. And there was a gent that was down sprawled flat on the ground. He got up, staggerin', and I

seen that there was only a sort of an empty hole where his head had ought to be. And then I seen that he had a black hood pulled down over his head.

"Sort of ghostly lookin', he was. And about a hundred gents started in yellin' and pot-shottin' at that poor beggar. But just then the tail end of that dust cloud was kicked out and through the hole there came a gent that all of you boys would be pretty glad to see lyin' dead.

"He didn't have no mask on. Like as if he would say that he didn't care about how many bad things he done, nor who knowed about 'em. He comes sashayin' back with a Colt in each hand, turnin' em off pretty loose and liberal. And if I seen one man duck for cover, I seen about a dozen. And the shootin' at our end of the line got sort of scarce. And I seen this big gent on the big gray gallopin' hoss—that was Furness, as I s'pose that you've guessed a while back—I see this here Furness up and rush up to the gent that had lost his hoss.

"He was a pretty good-sized man—as big as me, anyway. But Furness just leaned out plumb easy and picks him up with one arm and throws him like a sack over the pommel of his saddle and goes smashin' off down the street turnin' in the saddle and loosin' off behind him a gun that was shootin' so straight that nobody cared to step out and take no chances with it.

"You might say that was a sort of a thriller. And it sure took all of my breath away from me!"

CHAPTER VII.

NEWS OF THE HOLDUP.

AT this point the narrator paused, not as one who requires much urging before he will tell his story, but rather as one who wishes to close his eyes and taste again, in reminiscence, the strangeness of the thing which has passed.

"It was Furness and his crew," murmured big Cumnor. "What a roarin' scoundrel that gent is—and what a man! You could take him and spread him out and there would be enough of him to carve out half a dozen little ordinary gents, like you and me, boys!"

All, apparently, were willing to coincide with this view of the gentlemanly outlaw.

"But when it comes to roasting the feet of poor old helpless men to make them give up the money that's been worked for?" suggested Sammy Gregg.

"He didn't do any of the roastin'!" put in Cumnor.

"He took his share of the coin, which was just as bad as helpin' at the torture of poor Durfee."

"Ay, and he'll roast in purgatory for it!" muttered Mr. Cumnor. "All right, old son, you go on with your yarn. I suppose Furness just about cleaned up the town, before he got out if it?"

"He didn't bother nothin' but the bank," said the messenger. "What he done was just to ride right up to the door of the bank and get off his hoss and walk in. Seems that about a dozen gents seen him go down the street, just joggin' his hoss along free and easy. And every man says to himself that it sure must be old Chet Furness and his gray galloper. And then everybody says to himself that it *couldn't* be Furness, because not him nor nobody else in the world would have the nerve to come ridin' into the town in the middle of the mornin' like that, all alone, and take the chance of bein' blowed to bits."

"Alone?" broke in Cumnor, surprised.

"Wait a minute," said the messenger. "That part is comin' next. Because when Furness gets off his hoss and walks into the bank, the cashier is busy with some accounts and bendin' down low over the list that he was addin'."

"'I beg your pardon,' says Furness, "but may I cash this order here?"

"You see there was two or three women standin' there in the bank room, that minute, and they didn't catch on that there was anything gone wrong.

"'All right, in a minute,' says the cashier, and goes right on doin' his addin', and not lookin' up, and big Chester Furness goes right on standin' there, hummin' a tune to himself mighty calm, and tappin' free and easy on the edge of the counter with his fingers.

"'All right,' says the cashier after a minute. 'Now let me see your check!'

"And this is what he read:

"'Please pay to bearer and charge to my account all the cash that is in the bank.

"'signed,

"'S. S. Colt.'

"'S. S. Colt!' says the cashier. 'I've never heard of him. Who the devil may he be?'

"'If you have never met him,' says Furness, 'pray let me have the pleasure of presenting to you Mr. Six-shooting Colt.'

"And he lays the barrel of a long gat on the edge of the counter under the cashier's window bars.

"The cashier was pretty much staggered, as you or me might have been. He looks up again into the face of the holdup artist and he says in a whisper: 'Furness!'

"'Thank you,' says Furness. 'I'm glad you know me. Then I can hope that I shall have to do you no harm.'

"Well, that cashier didn't wait; he just walked right over to the safe and he opened it right away quick, the same as you or me would have done, with that Colt starin' us in the eye, all the time.

"But all the time, that gent was thinkin'. And he says to himself that there is about a cool quarter of a million in bank notes in that safe, and that it is a devil of a shame if the bank has got to be ruined because one crook like Furness has took a fancy to that cash.

"Now he reaches inside the safe and he unlocks the inside drawers all fast and steady, and he reaches into the first drawer with both hands, as though he was gunna bring out a whole double handful of packages of banknotes. But instead of that, what he had his grips on was the handles of a mighty snug little gun.

"Because he was a game sucker, this here cashier, y'understand? And he knew how to handle a gun, and he was a sure-enough fightin' fool when he had a chance.

"Then he draws back from the safe and turns quick and tries to get in a pot shot at big Furness, but there wasn't no time for that. He couldn't even get turned halfway around. Because Furness was watchin' all of the time, d'you understand? And he seen something change in the face of the cashier, I guess. But anyway, he planted a big forty-five caliber slug of army lead right in the shoulder of the cashier and knocked him flat. Like that—d'you see?

"Of course, there was the devil to pay right quick. And there come gents runnin' from every which way. But Furness didn't even turn around to see who was headed for him. He just grabbed hold of the steel bars that was over the cashier's window and heaved himself up by them and he sings out as he climbs: 'Guard my back, boys!'

"The boys was right there for the job. It seems that a number of gents had showed up at the doors of the bank while Furness was standin' there, chinnin' with the cashier, and the minute that Furness sung out, these six gents stepped inside of the bank and from under the edges of their sombreros they yanked down black hoods that covered their heads front and back.

"And they outs with their guns—one in each hand—and they had the drop on everybody in that bank so bloomin' bad

that it would of made you sick to see it, I guess. And they kept things covered.

"Then some gents that was supposed to be right in there savin' the bank—them bein' the hired guards—they started firin' pretty free and plenty in through two of the windows and the six boys peppers them right back.

"And in the meantime, there was big Furness just swingin' himself over the tops of the steel spikes and dropping down on the floor inside. Once he was there, it was mighty easy to scoop the stuff out of the safe and throw it in bundles over the top of the bars and his boys on the outside scooped up the stuff and dropped it into a sack.

"After that, they scattered for the street, big Furness heavin' himself over the bars again in fine style and singin' out to the cashier: 'You're a nervy kid. If the bank doesn't take care of you, you can depend upon it that *I* shall take care of you!'

"And dog-gone me if I don't think he meant what he said!

"And then they go swarmin' down the street, raisin' a dust that made shootin' after 'em pretty much like guessin' in the dark. But there's one funny part of this here game that you gents had ought to notice—that there was enough lead spilled around to make up a regular battle. But there was only three wounded—all on the side of the town and countin' the cashier as the first of the three. And on the side of the outlaws there was just a hoss killed, the way I told you, and there was no other harm done!

"Which is something that I wouldn't of believed if I hadn't been there myself and seen.

"Matter of fact, I dumped a couple of revolver loads of shots after them rascals myself, but I'm free to say that the sight of that there big Furness sort of shook up my nerve, and though I did some shootin', it was just the same as though somebody had hold of my elbow and was shakin' it a little all of the time.

"Y'understand? I was plain scared, and so was most of the rest of that town, and so would you boys of been if you'd been with me there. And maybe so you'll be if you ever *do* have the bad luck to fall in with big Furness and his gang. Which I'm hopin' that you don't. For your own sakes, I'm hopin' that you don't!"

"Go on," said Cumnor. "Then you come ridin' right on to us?"

"I only waited about ten minutes in town to get all the news and find out how many thugs there had been along, and when I found out what I wanted to know, I just slithered out of Chadwick City as fast as I could come and hit the bee line for your camp—or where I thought your camp was—which was about a mile north of this here.

"I did some pretty steady pluggin' along, because the pinto hoss, yonder, is sure a good fast stepper and he don't wear out much easier than iron. I rode along for about five hours. It was right along in the afternoon, and then I pulled up to give the hoss a mouthful of water and rinse him off a little and loosen the cinches and let him have a couple of free breaths. And while I was waterin' him at a little creek that I come across, I heard some hosses down the road, and through the branches of the trees I seen seven riders come slatin' down the road.

"Well, you can say for yourselves how mighty sick I was. I seen that there wasn't any chance for me to scatter out, because I was in easy range of a rifle, and there wasn't no doubt about what them rapscallions would do if they seen a gent tryin' to ride away from them. Besides, the hoss ain't been foaled in these mountains that could ever keep up with that gray galloper of big Furness. He would of rode up

and put me in his pocket and then they would of took me apart to see what made me tick.

"So I waited there in the shadow of them trees, mostly hopin' that I wouldn't be bothered; but mostly guessin' that I *would*. Dog-gone my heart, though, if they didn't come right up to the edge of the creek. I thought they was gunna cross over, and then I would of been a goner! But they just rode into the water and begun to let their hosses have a mouthful or two.

"I slid out of the saddle and shoved my hand into the mouth of the pinto hoss, yonder, so's he wouldn't let out no neigh. And while I stood there, the wind parted the leaves, some right in front of my face, so that I could look out and spot every one of them gents, as clear as day. And they sure could of looked right through the leaves and seen me and my hoss because the leaves wasn't much thicker than enough to make a sort of a veil. Y'understand? It was a mighty naked feelin'. And every minute I expected to hear a gun and feel a bullet come smashin' right through me, by way of sayin' that they had spotted me.

"I dunno what kept them from it, neither; unless it was that I was so dog-gone close and that they didn't *expect* to see me. If they'd had any idea that there might of been a gent within ten miles of them, they'd of spotted me that quick I would of been dead before I knowed it, you might say. But somehow, a gents' eyes is made so that they're apt to see nothin' except what they *expect* to see. Know what I mean when I say that? You walk right on top of a deer and don't know it till it throws up its tail and runs for it. But you never do that when you're *huntin'* for it.

"Well, there I stood, as I was sayin'. And them not twenty yards away from me; and them laughin' and me sweatin' blood, you bet!"

"What was they talkin' about?" asked one of the posse.

"You'd think they would talk pretty serious. Well, they didn't. I knowed five out of the six gents that was with Furness. There was Goodall and Sloan, and that good-for-nothin' gent, Thompson, all from Crumbock. And there was Lewis and little Reimer—you know him?—right out of Chadwick City, where they'd just been tryin' to murder the gents so scandalous.

"What did they talk about? Why, they talked foolish.

"'Have you got a chaw of that nacheral leaf?' says Thompson to Lewis.

"'I have,' says Lewis, 'and what's more, I'm gunna keep it.'

"'Aw,' says Thompson, 'don't be so dog-gone unfriendly.'

"'I ain't unfriendly; I'm just usin' sense,' says Lewis. 'I'm kind of tired of bein' the goat for you and your chewin'. I'm glad that you got enough money now to buy your own chewin' for a week or two.'

"'I'll tell you what,' says Thompson. 'I would pay twenty dollars for the half of what you got left of that plug.'

"'D'you mean that?' says Lewis.

"'I cross my heart to die.'

"'All right, and that's a bargain and here you are.'

"He pulls out a plug of tobacco, and dog-gone me if there was much more of it left than the size of half of your thumb; and the boys all let out a whoop and a holler and Lewis cut the plug of tobacco in two and Thompson, he had to pay twenty dollars for his half.

"He put it right smack into his mouth—the whole thing. And it wasn't more'n a good-sized chew, at that.

"'How does it taste, Thompson?' says somebody.

"'It tastes right smart like there was more gold to it than there was tobacco,' says Thompson, and everybody haw-hawed.

"That was the way they talked, like nothin' in particular until one of their hosses begins to nicker and my pinto hoss, here, he starts in quiverin' and shakin', he tried so mighty hard to nicker back.

"'Looks like that hoss of yours has smelled something nigh here,' says one of the boys.

"'Naw,' says another, 'the dog-gone old fool, he don't smell nothin' nor he don't see nothin'. He's jest blame ignorant, that hoss is.'

"Well, sir, there I was, listenin' and sweatin' mighty bad. But there wasn't any lookin' behind the leaves of the trees along that creek, and in another minute the whole seven of them was ridin' down the road ag'in, as sassy as you please. I just waited until they was over the hump of the next hill and then I up and rode here for the camp as fast as the pinto could leg it along. And you take my word for it, that unless they camped mighty early—which they ain't no ways likely to do, they ain't more'n three or four miles away from you right now. For they was headed right along this here trail!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE TRAIL OF SEVEN.

COUNTING the messenger, there were now nineteen men in the party. And though Sammy Gregg was considered hardly of much force as a fighting man, his counsel on the way might be worth as much as any of them.

Cumnor, however, gave all of the directions for the hunt. He decided to start moving at once, and he selected from his party seven men on the best horses who were to ride well ahead of the main group. They were to scatter out, each man a full hundred yards from his nearest neighbor on either hand. In this fashion they would sweep with their eyes an expanse of about half a mile, searching that ground thoroughly.

The moment any one of these advance men found any traces of the quarry, he was to turn about and ride at full speed to carry the tidings to those who were in the rear.

There was only one difficulty with the plan, and that was that if they searched at night and covered on a half-mile swathe across the mountains, they might miss the outlaws altogether if these had turned aside ever so little from the main trail. Whereas, if they waited for the daylight, they would have ten times greater chances of spotting the outlaws.

But against that chance there was to be posted the great probability that Furness would keep his men riding in short stages all through that night so as to reach the inaccessible fastnesses of the upper mountains in the first long and quite tiresome march from Chadwick City.

There was at least one aid to the searchers. There was a clear half moon which had arisen while the sun was still filling the west with crimson. Now, as the day died, there followed a short time when neither sun nor moon seemed strong enough to do more than confuse the eyes. It was at this time that the search began. But with every moment, as the west darkened and the moon rose higher, it was more and more possible to see to advantage wherever the mountainside was at all clear. Where the forest hung in clouds along the slope, to be sure, nothing could be made out that stirred inside of its shadow.

But they pushed west at a brisk pace, with the advance riders as a rule just beyond sight of the main body, or only occasionally seen as moving blurs in the distance. But still the moon brightened and brightened, or their eyes began to grow more accustomed to the light and to their work. Confidence increased.

and the very manner in which they held their guns had altered.

They had not continued a single hour, however, and there was still a faint, faint rim of light to the west, when a rider slid out to them from the front with hurriedly gasped tidings.

"I seen the whole gang of 'em—all ridin' in single file. I could of drilled Furness clean as a whistle! Boys, we're gunna snag the whole lot of 'em—come on with me!"

Sammy Gregg felt his blood turn cold and rush back upon his heart—which was like ice in turn. And it seemed as though Cumnor must have known what was passing through the mind of the tenderfoot, for his first word was for him:

"You've shown sand enough in sticking with us this far. The gun work ain't *your* work, Gregg. You keep back, will you, and tend the hosses? Because we're gunna go ahead, here, on foot."

"Let some one else mind the horses, or else turn them loose. I've come too far to miss the fun, Cumnor," said Gregg. "I have that much coming to me!"

"Then keep along with me, kid. And try to do what I do. Which'll be only common sense, and nothin' rash, I can promise you. Git off your hosses, boys, and throw them reins. And if they's any of you that's got hosses so poor trained that they won't stand when the reins is throwed, let 'em stay behind with their hosses. Because we got to have men with free hands! Now strike away, partner, and we'll trail you. Mind you, boys, not a word spoke on the trail. Not even in a whisper. If they's any talkin' that *must* be done, I'll leave it to myself to do it. Y'understand? I don't have to tell you to remember to shoot *low* when you see 'em. Remember that everybody that gets excited shoots too high. There was never nothin' ever killed by a shot that was too high, but there's been plenty hurt by bullets that come ricocheting off the the ground.

"That's all I got to say. But run silent on this trail!"

Then they started off, striking at once into a long-swinging trot that began to cut into Sammy Gregg's wind in bad fashion. However, he stuck manfully to his work, keeping his place just behind big Cumnor. They traveled not more than a half mile in this fashion when the leader threw his arm up to stop the others and dropped instantly upon his face.

The rest followed that example and they learned the reason for it instantly. Out of the moon haze before them they heard the steady jingling of horsemen —the clicking of hoofs upon the rocks, the rattle of bits and curbs and chains and spurs; and then the occasional grunting of a laboring, weary horse.

The posse began to crawl softly forward toward the crest of the hummock which separated them from the view of the riders in the hollow beyond.

Then: "What's that moving over yonder?" called a clear voice.

To Sammy Gregg, it sounded very like the voice of big Furness, and the chill returned upon his blood, even though it had been so heated by the run up the slope.

"Nothing moving."

"Use your eyes, you fool—and back there to the right—they're on top of us! Cut for the trees, boys!"

A gun rang from the hollow. And there was a hoarse, distant shout. Plainly, one of the unlucky forward scouts of the posse had been sighted by chance and dropped by a long-range shot. But there was vengeance coming behind the men of Furness at last. To the top of the hill lunged the followers of Cumnor, and they had before them a clear, short-range view of seven riders plunging toward the trees which were just beside them.

The dozen rifles steadied for a brief instant on their targets. They crashed. And three of the seven horses that reached the woods were riderless.

Four were gone, however. Ay, and as the line of riflemen surged forward, they were encountered by a spiteful crackling of guns among the rocks on this side of the wood. One of the fallen men was either stunned or had gone to his long account. But two of them were determined to make the power of the law pay more dearly for their capture.

Sammy Gregg felt a cut, as of a hot-bladed knife, across his cheek, and a shower of crimson covered his shoulder at once. Some one else in the posse spun around and took a staggering step or two, and then went down. The rest dropped upon their bellies and began to worm their way forward.

"Who's up there on the left?" called out Cumnor, as calm as you please, while he sheltered himself behind an outthrust of rock.

"It's Jem Partridge."

"Partridge, darn it, what's the matter with you? Can't you angle some bullets down at them from where you are and roll them over for us?"

The side of the hill sloped sharply up, in this place, and with such an angle of fire it was most probable that Jem Partridge could send a few slugs of lead into the foes.

Presently a spark of fire glowed where Jem, without a word of reply, had opened fire.

And then: "Oh—darn it! Boys I got enough—lend a hand here—before I bleed to death—will you?"

"Tell your pal to stop firing, then," called one of the holdup gang.

"I'll see you damned first!" called another.

"Good Lord," whined the injured fellow, "you ain't gunna leave poor Thompson to lie here and bleed to death, be you?"

"You yaller-livered rat, Thompson. You was never no good. You was always a quitter. I dunno how the chief ever happened to bring you along for a job like this! No, you die there and be darned—but I ain't gunna——"

The voice was cut short by the crash of the terrible rifle in the hand of Jem Partridge higher up the slope. And then they heard Jem say:

"I guess that finished that sucker. You boys don't have to be afraid to go in and keep that there Thompson from bleedin' to death!"

"Hurry up, boys!" cried Thompson. "I got news that you'll be mighty glad to have, I tell you. But I'm goin' fast. Oh, for Heaven's sake, ain't none of you gunna come here and gimme a hand?"

But ah, how dark and how open was that hillside! And who could tell if two of the three were really dead, or merely holding their fire in reserve to make it count the more effectively as soon as some one of the posse showed?

And then little Sammy Gregg said to himself: "What good could I ever be with a gun in my hand for the shooting? But I can serve as well as the next fellow to stand out here and pull their fire—they can't know that it's only me!"

So said Sammy Gregg, with his knees turned very weak beneath him; and he had barely strength enough to force himself to his feet and stand up in the brightness of the moonshine. But he made his way forward. He came safely through the perilous land between to the rock behind which Thompson lay twisting.

"God bless you, partner," gasped Thompson, half gasp and half whine. "You're a brave man. You'll have your share of heaven for doin' this. It's right here—look how I'm bleedin'!"

His voice had raised to an hysteria of terror.

But here were other men now coming hastily after Sammy Gregg—ashamed of themselves that they had let the little

tenderfoot take the brunt of this danger. Cumnor and another were quickly at work bandaging the bleeding wound. And three of the men were sent back in haste to bring up the horses. The others bandaged their own badly hurt man, or examined the dead bodies of the two whom they had brought down out of the outlaw party.

The division of the spoils had already been made among the seven. And from each of the three captives, thirty-two thousand dollars was taken in fresh, well-crisped paper money. Thirty-two thousand dollars in cash for a single raid—a single half day's work!

CHAPTER IX.

FACING FURNESS.

THEY had learned from Thompson, in the meantime, what the probable plans of the leader of the bandits would be. He had intended to push straight in among the mountains, but if there were any danger on the road and he were diverted from that purpose he would turn straight about and take his men down toward the south, and past Munson, and so on until they were lost in the burning flats of the desert. This Thompson was sure of, because he had heard the chief speak of the thing several times.

"South is the trail, then!" said Cumnor. "He's had his check here. We'll ride south."

But Sammy Gregg, remembering something of the big, confident nature of Furness, broke in on this decision.

"Go on toward the higher mountains, Cumnor," he begged. "You'll find him there. He'll never turn back from his way after a little defeat like this. He has himself and three good men with him. Besides, he probably knows that one of the three men he left behind may give away the news of the intended southern trail."

No doubt there was excellent good sense in this. Cumnor decided that it must be acted upon. The horses were by this time brought up. And the sound of the firing had brought in the vanguard. They carried with them the man who had been wounded by the first fire from the outlaws. So the wounded and the guard left behind were four members out of the party. Fifteen in all pushed on along the trail in the pursuit of the four fugitives. The odds were greatly altered. And on behalf of the pursuit the freshness of their horses spoke eloquently. Those of big Furness and his men had received a hard pounding during the course of this day and it would be very odd if they would be able to creep out of the range of the posse.

Indeed, they could not. With the silver clarity of the moon covering the mountains and showing them the way, Cumnor's party came momently upon fresher sign until they reached a point at which the trail turned off into four points, each followed by a single rider!

It was the last desperate remedy—to try to elude the pursuers by simply scattering—the usual vain attempt which children make when the constable takes after them in the orchard where they are enjoying stolen fruit. Cumnor instantly split his band into four sections. Three were of four each. With himself he kept only Sammy Gregg and another named Sid Lannister. And then each party hurried on its way.

Sammy Gregg, however, was none too content. So far all had been well enough. The rush of many horses, the creaking of much saddle leather, the oaths and the murmurs had kept up his courage to a fairly comfortable pitch. But this was now a very different matter—three riders on a trail which might be the trail of the lion—big Furness!

And when he considered that one of those riders—namely himself—was to his own knowledge perfectly incapable of handling weapons in a pinch—why,

what would happen to them should it indeed prove that they were on the trail of the terrible Furness, and if he, Furness—his tired horse being pressed too hard—should turn back and strike at them?

That thought had barely formed in his mind when the wind blew faintly down the gorge through which they were riding the rattle of musketry, followed, at once, by the sound of exultant voices.

"That's Gavvigan and his boys. He started up that way," said Cumnor. "And by the racket they're makin' they've got their man—yes, and he may almost be big Furness himself. Would they holler like that for runnin' down any common man? I dunno. Anyways, there's four of 'em gone and they's only three left. Push on, lads. We got to do our duty like the rest of 'em. There's where the rascal has turned to the right. We got him dodgin', now, and that's a pretty good sign that he's about played out and that he's not far away from us! Faster, boys! Wring the last stuff out of the ponies. The last that they got in them. We don't want to be the last of all to finish up our shares of the job!"

So they spurred recklessly through the dark woods just before them, little Sammy Gregg with a terrible choked feeling of fear that made it hard for him to breathe. But he dared not give a warning, for the simple reason that it would make the others see his fear so vividly. And if they saw it, what report would go down toward the town and reach, at last, to the ears of Anne Cosden?

She would not be surprised. No, for he realized bitterly that this was merely what she would expect of him; cowardice, weakness—no manhood in body or in soul! So he said nothing but watched the mad onward rush of the two riders. They had forced their way ahead of him down the narrow trail—partly by their eagerness and partly by the superiority of their horsemanship.

They were, in fact, a full five or six lengths ahead of Sammy when they swerved for an instant out of his sight around a dense clump of saplings, and in that moment the thunder burst upon them.

Sammy heard a double report, as of two guns exploding in voice and answer.

Then he whirled around the corner, plucking his six-shooter out nervously. He was in time to see big Cumnor grappling with the towering form of handsome Chester Ormonde Furness; while Sid Lannister was, even now, toppling from his saddle; and in a trice, under the grip of Furness, Cumnor seemed to break in two in the back—then he was flung to the ground in turn.

Which left Sammy Gregg about five feet from the conqueror, with a loaded revolver in his hand, which was thrust out straight at the big fellow. Moreover, his horse was rushing him straight at his enemy.

He saw the glint of steel whipped into the hand of Furness. No bullet through the body would do the business, Sammy told himself There was too much of this man. A cannon ball through the midst might not dispose of him, it seemed to Sammy Gregg. So he chose the head as his target. And, with the pistol thrust out, he strode to keep open his eyes as he pulled the trigger.

The roar of the gun and the sting of the gun-powder smoke in his nostrils and in his eyes as he rushed past gave him a stunned feeling, almost as though he had received a bullet through his own body.

Then one pull was sufficient to bring up his weary horse, and turning about quickly, Sammy Gregg blinked in wonder at the sight of three saddleless horses behind him.

Three horses without masters, and one of them the mighty and famous

gray whose long-reaching gallop had kept his master for so long beyond the reach of the law.

But was big Furness down? Could it be that his puny hand—his—Gregg's—had dropped that famous chief? He got down off his horse at once. There was big Furness rising swaying to his knees—Furness in all his hugeness of stature.

What happened in Sammy Gregg then he could not say. Propping himself upon a weak arm, big Cumnor was groaning: "Your gun, kid! Use your gun on him!"

But Sammy heard the voice and not the words or their meaning. A wild, hoarse cry burst forth from his throat. Such a sound he had never made in his life before—never dreamed of. He leaped in at the giant—and behold! the giant crumbled before him with a groan and lay helpless at his feet!

There was an explanation of the miracle. All miracles can be explained, and this explanation was that the bullet from Sammy's lucky gun had clipped along the skull of big Furness and dropped him stunned to the ground. And, still weak from the shock, he had been unable to brace himself against even the light fury of Sammy's attack.

Furness was down, and now Sammy was on top of him, busily knotting the cord which was to secure the wrists of this famous robber and destroyer of men. Two had gone down before him. And then here came this wisp of a man and struck him to the ground.

Oh, great was that monk who wisely invented the black powder that put the prince at the mercy of the commoner!

There beneath the trees he bound big Furness hand and foot—and then tied feet and hands together, so that he could hardly stir. After that he looked to his friends.

There was no use looking to Sid Lannister. He was dying before Sammy got to his side. He merely opened his eyes and stared vacantly into the face of Sammy Gregg, in answer to the anxious question of the latter. Then, with a stupid smile, he died.

With Cumnor it was a different matter. Two broken ribs and a badly bruised jaw were the effect of his grapple with big Furness, and now he was rallying fast.

He even succeeded in struggling to his feet, and, gaining the side of Sammy, he rested a long, heavy arm across the shoulders of that little warrior.

"Think of it, Sammy!" said he. "Once I was wantin' to shoot lead into you. How was I to guess that you'd ever be out here saving my fool life and Sid's——"

"Poor Sid is gone. Just see if that big devil is tied securely."

"Oh, say, you could hold a ship with less. How are you, Furness?"

"Well enough," said Furness. "And now, lads, this is a lucky strike for you. There's more than sixty thousand dollars in my wallet, there. Take it and welcome. Divide it as you please. Only let me get at that gray horse and away—I don't mind the wound—it's only a scratch—quick, friends, before the others guess that——"

He was interrupted by the savagely crooning laughter of Cumnor.

"Do but listen to him, Sammy Gregg. He thinks that we have been out to hunt for buried treasure, the dog! Oh, he's a grand man, Sammy. But a wee bit addled in the head!"

CHAPTER X.

SAMMY, A HERO.

CUMNOR was too badly battered to assist; but he could at least tell Sam Gregg what to do. The little man, by his instructions, heaped up dried brush and then a fire was lighted which he was kept busy feeding as furiously as possible.

"They ought to see that signal, if any of them are still in the mountains above us, there," said Cumnor. "And they ought to file in down here to see the game we got in the bag. We'll have some of them here before morning."

Two of the parties were in before the night was three hours older. They had buried the men they had hunted down. And they carried with them from each the regular division of the spoil which the robbers must have made shortly after leaving Chadwick City. All had now been saved with the exception of one share of the loot. Of two hundred and fifty odd thousand dollars stolen from the Chadwick bank that morning and divided among seven pockets, a little over two hundred thousand had been re-taken. And the eighth share might still be reclaimed if the party of four riders had any fortune whatever as they struggled somewhere through the mountains after their prey.

Of the seven bold men who had ridden into Chadwick City so bravely and so nonchalantly that morning, four were already dead, one was hounded across the mountains on a weary horse by four active pursuers; one was a wounded prisoner; and the leader of the whole crew was in the hands of the messengers of the law. Altogether a most discouraging day for crime and for criminals!

But Sammy Gregg was the hero. They turned to him with a respect that made him want to break into laughter, and when for the tenth time some one murmured that the thing he had done had been very fine, he could stand it no longer.

"Friends," said Sammy Gregg, "I can't let you go on talking like this here, because it won't do! The fact is that I was scared to death while we were chasing down the trail, just the three of us. I would as soon have gone hunting lions as I would have ridden down the trail of big Furness. Then I heard a crash. And the first thing I knew, there I was riding right straight at Cumnor and big Furness grabbing one another. I saw Cumnor broken. And then I couldn't do anything but pull the trigger of my own gun. My horse was carrying me right in at him. If I hadn't fired like that, I simply knew that I'd get a bullet in my back as I rode away. And then—I was simply lucky in having that bullet land. And there's the end of the story. But I hope that I'm not going to hear any more of this talk about how fine the job was. It was poor Lannister that rode in and took a bullet through the body that deserved most of the credit. And next to him, there was big Cumnor, who grappled with Furness—and then lived to tell about it afterward. They get the credit, and I had the luck!"

He finished this speech with a deprecatory smile and a flush, as one by no means glad of his lack of greatness, but very eager that people should know him honestly for what he was, and not a scruple more. And he was answered by a grave silence and by curious, bright eyes fixed calmly upon him.

"Well," said Cumnor finally, "I'll be darned!"

"And me too," said another. "It seems that it was only luck, after all."

And a third said dryly: "Seems like all anybody needed was to be there!"

"But," said still a fourth member of the party in the same sarcastic manner, "that don't explain how you happened to run in at big Furness when he was on his feet."

"He was stunned," said Sammy, frowning as he tried to remember.

"Cumnor didn't know that Furness was stunned. How did *you* know when you yelled and run in at him?"

"I was excited," said Sammy Gregg desperately. "I didn't know what I was doing."

The same solemn silence greeted him.

And Sammy withdrew a little from his place in the circle of the firelight. The same grave, gloomy eyes followed him.

"You see what the little fool is worrying about?" said big Furness, speaking up at the same time. "He's afraid that you're going to make a hero out of him and that then he won't be able to live up to that mark."

But that explanation did not make Sammy any less wretched. He only dreaded the manner in which Anne Cosden would laugh when she heard this thing!

They left a small party in the mountains to bring the wounded Cumnor to the other wounded, friends and enemies. There they made a depot of all the provisions that they did not need and those who had been selected by lot started back on the pleasant journey to Munson.

Sammy did not wish to go. He protested that he knew a good deal about wounds and the dressing of them and that he should be detailed with the hurt men in the mountains, but they would not listen to him.

"I got to send in somebody who knows everything about what has happened," said Cumnor, "and you're the only man, Gregg. You got to go in and telegraph to the authorities. And I suppose that the bank over there in Chadwick City would be pretty glad if you was to wire to them, too. I think that maybe you could find out if they intend to offer any reward for the catching of the gents that walked away with their money. You run along, Sammy, and do the best you can!"

So Sammy was forced to head the part that started on for Munson. No one talked about the work of the expedition to him on the way down, and no one asked him what sort of a report he was going to make. But now and again he knew that their eyes were upon him and that they were smiling.

So, when they arrived at Munson, he went straight to the telegraph office at the railroad station and there he sent off to Chadwick the following wire:

"Party under Cumnor, of Munson, overtook and fought the raiders of Furness. Four raiders killed. Thompson and Furness wounded and captured. Two hundred and twenty-four thousand dollars recaptured. One bandit escaped so far as is known at present."

This was the legal truth, boiled down as small as possible. And Sammy, glad when that bit of duty was off his hands, started for the back room of the saloon to find out what had happened to the ruined, scorched feet of poor old Durfee in the meantime. He went around the back of the saloon to escape the notice of the men whose voices he heard in the front, and just as he got to the open back door—he heard the happy voice of Anne Cosden crying: "And who really captured big Furness?"

"Sam Gregg."

"Nonsense!" And her laughter ran like a thrill of poison through the tormented soul of poor Sammy.

"I don't mean that. I know that little Sammy planned the trip and I suppose that he planned it very well, indeed! But when Furness was captured—surely there was some sort of a fight—and I want to know who were in it!"

"Well, there was Lannister. He was killed by Furness."

"Poor Sid Lannister. He was a brave fellow."

"Then there was Cumnor. But he was smashed up in the hands of that Furness."

"Good heavens! What then?"

"Ma'am, there was only one left in the party that was trailin' Furness. Only three in that party to begin with, you see, and two of 'em had gone down before big Furness before the fight really got good and started."

"Yes? Yes? Why are you stop-

ping? It was hand to hand, then, between Furness and the third man?"

"Yes. And the third man was Sam Gregg."

"Are you ridiculing poor Sammy?"

"Him, I would be scared to ridicule him, ma'am, after what he's been seen to do on this here trip. He was the brains that started things going. And he was the hand that finished off the whole job that he had planned. He shot big Furness off of his hoss. And when Furness got up, he ran in and grabbed him by the throat and knocked him down again and tied him up."

"Good heavens!" cried Anne Cosden. "Why—*I* have more strength than that little——"

"Maybe you have right now, ma'am—but when he gets excited—he's apt to go sort of wild, I suppose."

"Stuff!" cried Anne.

"But here he is himself."

And Sammy stood at the door with a crimson face that showed that he had overheard too much of what had been said.

"Sammy," cried the girl, "don't think that I've been running you down—only, they're trying to tell me that you actually had the courage to fight hand to hand with Chester Furness. And of course I couldn't help laughing at that!"

Sammy looked at her through a haze. His face was so hot that he felt that his hair must be scorching.

"Sammy!" cried Anne Cosden. "Do you mean to tell me that it is true—what they've been telling me?"

"It was all an accident, Anne," said Sammy Gregg huskily. "You see—my horse was carrying me right in—I couldn't do anything to defend myself except shoot—and luckily it chipped him beside the head."

"Oh," said Anne Cosden. "But—no matter what you say, it was you who shot him off his horse? And then they said that you fought with him hand to hand."

"He—he got up off the ground. I was a little excited. However, he was badly stunned, and so there was no danger from him at all. And that's all there is to it, Anne. And for heaven's sake let's talk about something else."

"We talk about *nothin'* else," shouted a strong voice—the voice of o'd Durfee from the bed. "It was Sammy Gregg that bottled up them seven spiders that chewed me all up. God bless you, Sammy, say I!"

Anne Cosden, however, stood as one entranced, staring at little Sammy until he ducked suddenly away through the door and was gone.

"But," murmured Anne in a troubled voice, "then it means that he really, after all, is *not* just—it means that he really is a good deal of a hero!"

"Ma'am," said a gruff voice in answer, "when Cummor comes in you'll get the details. But this there Greeg is ashamed of what he's done. He's afraid that somebody is gunna find out about it and laugh at him. And I wonder if he's got you in mind!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE LITTLE OLD LADY.

THE jail that was created for the nonce in honor of Chester Ormonde Furness was simply a room in the hotel in the second story. To see that he was kept safely until he could be fetched away to another place of safeguard under the care of the Federal marshal who was at that moment traveling in the direction of Munson to take charge of the distinguished prisoner, the legs of Furness was secured with stout ropes and for a guard there was always one man sitting inside the door of his room and another man sitting just outside the same door in the hallway.

In the meantime, one of the citizens of Munson was rushing West as fast as a train could carry him. And he

came, among other things, to have the particular pleasure of giving testimony against Mr. Furness the moment that gentleman was brought to trial. The reason was that Barclay, for that was his name, had been among the victims of the industry of Furness in the days when that worthy had turned most of his attention to stealing horses on a large scale. Only three animals had been taken from Barclay, but one was a saddle mare he had had for ten years —a mare almost past the days of usefulness. But Barclay was one of the rare Western cattlemen who really loved his saddle string. And he had never forgiven the thief for this really minor robbery. Now he was coming to blacken the record of Mr. Furness as much as he possibly could, even if it required a special thousand-mile journey to accomplish his ends.

The conductor introduced him to Mrs. Fountain. Before the train was half a day out from New York the conductor came to tell him that there was an old lady aboard the train who was bound for the same town that he was bound for.

Barclay was filled with wonder.

"The same town I'm bound for?" he echoed. "Ain't there some mistake? Not for the very same town that I'm headed for. Not for old Munson!"

"Munson is her stop, too."

"But, dog-gone it, you said that she was a lady."

"I did."

"But there *ain't* no ladies in Munson. There ain't no young ones to speak of, and there ain't no old ones at all." He stared almost bitterly at the conductor, adding: "Why, an old lady in that town would be a plumb calamity! What would the boys do with her?"

"How should I tell," answered the conductor, grinning. "I told her that there was a fellow townsman aboard and she's all set to see you. You better come back there with me right now."

Barclay groaned. "Look here, old son," he said. "Now what would I be talking to a blooming woman about, will you please tell me?"

"Aw," said the conductor sympathetically, "I know what you mean, but this one is different. She's a regular lady!"

What this mysterious difference meant, Barclay was very shortly to discover. He accompanied the conductor to a rear car and there he found that there was a little old white-haired lady seated at the end of the car with a white fluff of knitting in her lap.

She was the most dainty and delicate creature that Barclay had ever seen. And she made room beside her with such a smile that Barclay was actually glad to sit down there. A moment later she was telling him that she was going West to see her son, and to take him by surprise.

"Of course you know my boy, Chester Fountain?" said she.

Barclay admitted that he did not, and the little lady seemed enormously surprised.

"But," said she, "you haven't been there very long, I suppose. Perhaps you're just going there now for the first time?"

Barclay grinned. "I was in Munson," he said, "when there was no more houses there than nothing at all. I was in Munson when the trail was first called a street. And I was there when the boys dedicated the first saloon. That was Mortimer's Place! Oh, yes, I've seen about all of Munson there is to see!"

"But," said Mrs. Fountain, "then you surely know my boy."

He shook his head.

"Not know my boy, Chester Fountain!" cried she. "Why, he must be almost as well known as the town, he and his farm."

At that last word, the ears of Mr. Barclay pricked a good deal.

"Is his place near the town?" said he.

"Oh, yes, very near," said Mrs. Fountain. "You can see it from the train."

"Oh!" said Barclay.

For suddenly he understood. Of course there had never been more than two places that could be called farms. One was the little patch of cultivated ground around the shack occupied by old Hobo Durfee. And the other was that strange hodge-podge in the mountains which poor Cumnor called a farm and was trying to make into one—if the rocks and a thousand other hindrances would let him!

But a place in sight of the train which could be called a farm? This precious boy of the old lady's had been lying in great style to her, on the chance that she would never, at her age, risk the long and wearisome train ride to the West. But here she was, coming gayly along.

Barclay could not tell in which way to be most moved—with pleasure that this gigantic liar should be exposed, or with sorrow when she learned what a hoax she had been made the victim of. But chiefly he was immensely sorry for the poor old lady. However, she was not the first to be bled by the devices of some rascal son who had gone West for the purpose of living on his annuity—which he found too small to keep him in liquor and pay his gambling debts. And here was some brilliant scoundrel who had created an illusory farm for the building of which he had no doubt drawn huge sums of money from his mother.

For there were signs of wealth about her. She was dressed simply. But it might have cost a small fortune to duplicate that gold pin at her breast—if the green gem in it were an emerald and not simply a bit of colored glass! And then, too, the daintiness of her hands, the taper delicacy of her fingers, all spoke of a life in which there had at least been no labor.

Barclay regarded these details with a critical eye.

"I suppose," said she, "that you begin to recall, now!"

"Matter of fact," said Barclay, "you see how it is. Chet—of course I know him!"

He added: "But the last names—well, they aren't used very much. You know how it is out there—can't bother about remembering two names for every man—but it's just Al, Bill, Harry, Chet—everybody is in too much of a hurry to waste much time on two names."

"But suppose there are two men with the same name in town? The same first name, I mean. What do you do then?"

"Why, in a case like that, it's pretty easy fixed. Suppose there is two by the name of Bill. Then we'd call one Boston Bill, if he come from Boston, and we'd call the other just plain Bill. You see how it works? But mostly the boys don't stay long enough in town to be called by any name."

"How can they be remembered, then?"

"Mostly they ain't remembered. But if you're thinking back to somebody that had been in town you speak about the gent that rode the Roman-nosed sorrel, or the gent on the cock-eyed gray hoss; or him that had killed somebody some place or other. You see, people out there have a pretty good memory for the things that they've seen, but they haven't got any memory at all for the things that they've just heard."

She nodded, her head canted a little to one side as she drank in this information about the wild land in which her son was living.

Barclay went on to systematically draw what information he could from her.

"Farming," said he, "is a great gamble, you know."

"Oh, is it generally considered so out West?" asked Mrs. Fountain.

"It sure is," said he. "What with changes of weather and changes of prices, and such like things——"

"How lucky my dear boy has been, then," said Mrs. Fountain. "But I suppose you know about his prosperity as well as I do!"

"Humph," said Barclay, feeling that this was a tune that he could not follow so readily. "You see how it is with us: The boys are all pretty busy and they haven't got much time to talk about what they're making, and such like things."

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Fountain, "but then there are ways of telling even if a man doesn't talk about his own affairs all the time."

"I suppose that there are——"

"And in Munson and the neighborhood I don't suppose that you have very *many* fifteen-room houses?"

Barclay blinked. A fifteen-room house in Munson was a thing to dream of, but not to tell. He could not even make an answer until finally he managed to gasp out that that was a pretty big house for any part of the country.

"And I suppose," said Mrs. Fountain, "that a good many of the other men—the ranchers and the miners and the rest—will be wanting to follow my boy's example?"

"I suppose that people follow the leader pretty easily out there," said Barclay. But his mind was in a whirl.

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Fountain. "Money is made more easily now than it used to be. My husband and I waited a long time and he worked very hard, you may be sure, before he could get even in *years* what Chester earns often in a single deal!"

"Is that so?" said Barclay huskily.

And he wished with all his heart that he could get this monumental liar in a place where he could pommel him thoroughly and make him yell "enough!"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Fountain. "I don't suppose that Chester has even let the boys know that he *has* a mother. Nor that he has a mother who must look to him for everything. But oh, I wish that the whole world could know what a genteel, thoughtful son he has been to me!"

And she shook her head. "And how he has showered me with far more than any woman in the world could really use!"

Barclay was fairly downed by this last remark. This consummate liar who had told his lies while he was supporting his mother like a queen—and *not* drawing upon her bank account! It impressed him as being against all the rules.

And then little Mrs. Fountain, in her burst of fondness, snapped open a little locket which was suspended from a gold chain around her neck, and inside the locket Barclay found himself staring at a neatly painted miniature of none other than the handsome face of Chester Ormonde Furness!

CHAPTER XII.

A VISITOR IN MUNSON.

CHESTER Ormonde Furness!" gasped Barclay to his innermost soul of souls. "Chester Ormonde Furness!"

And then he cursed his stupidity for not having put the two together long before this. The same initials—the same first name. It was only wonderful that Furness-Fountain had dared to keep two of his first names the same as his true ones.

Moreover, Barclay told himself that he should have identified the wonderful son in another manner, because there was no one in Munson or its vicinity who could have pretended to a mother such as this fine old lady saving Chester Ormonde Furness.

"I think," said Mrs. Fountain, "that you have only placed him accurately in

your mind since you saw this picture of him."

"Oh, no," said Barclay. "There's only one fifteen-room house at Munson."

For he had become desperate, and he had sworn to himself that, no matter how profoundly he had to perjure himself, he would never take upon himself the painful duty of telling this poor little woman the facts.

Her son was in jail. Munson was congratulating itself upon the splendid performance of her citizens which had resulted in the seizure of the celebrated bandit. And he, Barclay himself, was now speeding West for the sole purpose of furnishing additional evidence to hang this very man.

Altogether, it was a nasty mess. He wished himself well out of it, of course, but since he could not be out of it unless he left the train, he decided that he would go in for the wretched business with all his might.

And in the days that followed, he was gradually ripening into an old friend of Mr. Fountain's. He was one of the boys who knew him best, in fact. And doubly delighted, therefore, to have had the pleasure of coming in contact with the mother of that gentleman. He could even recall pleasant little anecdotes which had to do with various exploits of her son.

But oh, what a check was put upon his imagination. How far he had to roam for the truth.

"Of course my dear Chester has always loved the West," said Mrs. Fountain one day.

"Sure," said Barclay. "It's rough, but sort of friendly."

"Rough?" said Mrs. Fountain. "Have you really found it so very rough after all?"

"Why, sort of," declared Barclay.

"That is odd," said Mrs. Fountain, "because do you know that my boy writes to me that the Western roughness is almost entirely the result of too much writing by Easterners who rush through the mining camps and similar places and then have to write back to their papers to tell them about the wild sights and scenes that have come their way—turning old dogs into grizzly bears and sleeping Indians into drunken scalping parties."

"Humph!" murmured Barclay. "Has he found it a pretty quiet place, speaking for himself?"

And through his mind in a long, shadowy procession, rushed the images of all the stories he had heard about big Chester Furness, robber and warrior extraordinary—and it was like thinking back to a whole battlefield, in which every form was simply another silhouetted outline of the same man—Chester Furness! Oh, if the story of his doings were ever written out in full, what a tale it would make—what a history! But mere words could never tell it!

"Oh, yes, he has found it very quiet, of course," said Mrs. Fountain. "And he has written to me saying that he thanked heaven that he had never had to have a single gun fight since he entered the country and that he was sure he never would."

"Oh!" said Barclay faintly. "Is he sure of that?"

"Because," said Mrs. Fountain, "he says that the trouble is nearly always with the people who drink too much and then hunt for excitement and find more than is good for them. Of course, my boy never drinks to excess, and he is so quiet and gentle that I suppose it is hard to imagine any one desiring to do any harm to him even in that wild country!"

"I imagine that it is!" sighed Barclay. But he felt that his eyes were increasing in size with the passage of every moment and presently he escaped and stood on the observation platform of the train, wondering why this thing had to be,

and why he should have been selected as the victim.

However, there was a sort of fascination about his torture, and he found himself wandering back to face it again, and receive long, rippling narratives about Chester in his infancy—how brave, how gentle, and how manly he had always been! And then there were stories about Chester in school. Oh, yes, there had been occasional storms. And Chester had been thrashed, on a time, by a large boy.

"After that, he learned to box," said Mrs. Fountain, "and a few months later he whipped the boy who had pummeled him. But as a matter of fact, the boxing went a little to the head of our Chester, and we began to get reports about Chester picking fights with other boys in the school yard—larger boys, or two boys at a time. It seemed to hardly matter to him. He had such a passion for fighting. I had to have the minister have a long talk with him. And after that, everything was all right; and there was never again the slightest trouble with my Chester. And as he grew larger, he would *never* take advantage of his size!"

Perhaps not, but Barclay could see the inward story of young Chester, with all the tyrant in himself repressed until the day when he found himself in the West, and at liberty to use his strength. And then the devil in him had come out, of course!

In the meantime, the train was approaching the town steadily. He thanked Heaven in the first place that they were arriving after dark. Therefore there would be no necessity to make explanations about the nonappearance of the "fifteen-room house." Once the train got to the town, he decided that for his part he would bolt for the rear country and stay there until the poor old lady had left the place.

But how like a sneak he felt when the train pulled up at Munson and he helped Mrs. Fountain from the lowest step to the ground beneath and gathered up her suit cases.

"If Chester should see me—walking along the street like this!" said Mrs. Fountain, laughing.

But Chester would not see. Several Colts were doing their duty and preventing that, of course! And Mr. Barclay thanked Heaven for it. He escorted Mrs. Fountain to the hotel, where a dozen loungers stood up at attention, like soldiers when an officer enters. Some of them knew Barclay, but none of them spoke. One could never tell what to do, when a friend showed up with a woman in tow, old or young. So they took no chances and did not speak at all—which was of course the surest way of being right in the matter.

Mrs. Fountain, therefore, found herself smiling cheerfully at brown, blank countenances; and there was a great flurry of cigarette rolling. And suddenly the hotel proprietor's face was a bright crimson. For this was the second time in the history of Munson that a woman had come to sleep in the hotel. The only other time was when Anne Cosden arrived. And she did not count, she was so big, and so hearty, and so like a man.

Mrs. Fountain was shown to an upper front room. It was the cleanest room in the hotel and always was reserved, if possible, for distinguished guests, such as mine owners. But still it could not be called in all respects a flawless room. One had to note, for instance, where a random pair of spurs had been raked a few times across the varnish of the door by way of demonstrating how a certain cow-puncher had handled a bucking horse. And then there was need of taking heed of the black spots along the window sill—some of them with little furry rags of brown paper still adhering to them, in token of the last cigarette butts which

had been put down there and allowed to burn away, unheeded.

There were other slight tokens of wear about the chamber, such, for instance, as the patch upon the matting which had been scrubbed through by the drumming of impatient spurred heels. And there was also a little board nailed across a spot in the center of the floor. The end of that little board was loose, and if one turned it around, one could look down into the next chamber below, through a little hole just the size which a forty-five caliber bullet is supposed to drill through planking.

But Mrs. Fountain overlooked these trifling imperfections with the blandest of smiles.

"You might say that this here is more or less of a man's hotel," said the proprietor, redder than ever as he looked at his room and then at the lady who was to occupy it. "And out here in this part of the world, there ain't many accommodations for the women folks, you know!"

Mrs. Fountain simply laughed. "Don't you suppose I know?" said she. "Of course my son has written to me and told me what to expect, and if *he* has been able to live here and like the place, I'm sure that it is amply good enough for me!"

So young Barclay and the proprietor found themselves outside of the door of her room. A sudden change passed over the face of the proprietor.

"You pie-faced yap!" said he savagely. "Ain't you got better sense than to take your mother into a town like this?"

"You wall-eyed snake eater!" said Barclay, no more amiably, "will you tell me what put it inside of your thick skull she was *my* mother?"

"Then why in the devil have you got her in tow?"

"Would you have me leave her to break her shins fallin' over the rough-neck ways of Munson, young feller, without no assistance from nobody? Yes, I guess you would. You're that sort of a gent!"

"Barclay," said the proprietor more gently, "leastwise you might have wired on to me from the train to let me know that a woman was comin', so's I might of swabbed down the room and got it fixed up a mite for her."

"If I didn't have nothing to think about but the sort of a room that she was to sleep in when she came to Munson, write me down for a four-year old unbroke broncho that never got no sense."

"What *was* you thinkin' about, Barclay?"

"Come along with me, son, and prop your ears open, because you are gunna hear some talk like there was never any talked before in this here town."

"What's the main lead, old-timer?"

"Come along with me. You ain't the only one that's got to hear it. The rest of the boys figure in pretty strong on it. Come along, low life, and get ready to listen in!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BARCLAY TELLS THE NEWS.

WHEN they reached the rude lobby of the hotel below, they found that new arrivals had come in, for the tidings that a woman had arrived in Munson had gone far abroad.

"All right, old sons," said Mr. Barclay darkly. "There is a considerable crowd here, but there ain't enough. I am missin' some face that should ought to hear the news that I'm gunna spill in a minute."

"First, you poor old drunk," said a gentle voice, "will you lemme know what right you got to let live, after bringin' in your ma to a place like Munson?"

"If she is my mother, I am a pie-eyed pinto with no saddle on my back. You

boys run out and collect in the rest of the bunch, because I feel that there is a speech comin' over me. I got pains inside of me and words is sure got to come forth. Go ramble and bring in the boys."

Moved by these injunctions, they hastened out from the hotel to spread the story through the town that Barclay had arrived with a story worth the telling. So presently auditors began to troup into the hotel and after a time that lobby was packed from wall to wall and all eyes were fixed upon Barclay.

The latter sat with his head sadly bowed and one hand clasping a half-filled whiskey bottle with which, from time to time, he moistened his lips and raised his spirits.

At length Jack Lorrain said gravely: "It looks like most all of the boys is in. Which you might be uncorkin' this here story that you got up your sleeve.

Barclay looked darkly around him. "This here ain't no joke," said he. "This here is a sad day for me and it's gunna be a sad day for the rest of Munson. But I'm gunna start right in by tellin' you that the real name of the gent that you got in this here hotel under guard ain't Furness at all, but that the skunk is called back in his home town by the name of Chester Ormonde Fountain."

He paused, rolling his gloomy eye and allowing this news to sink into the minds of his hearers. After which he continued:

"Now that you got that idea put away in your head, I would like to have these here things percolate:

"That this here Furness-Fountain gent has come out here and that he has made a pile of money in—farming! That he has made so much money out here in farming that he couldn't think of nothin' to do. So he sat down and built himself a little fifteen-room house. So's he could have a couple of decent rooms to live in, and so's the prairie dogs and the tree squirrels would have some place to go when they was tired of nacher!"

He paused and rubbed a languid hand across his brow.

There was a deadly silence in the room; but a great grin wrinkled every face.

"All right," said Mr. Barclay. "But that ain't all that I got to tell you. This here Chester Fountain-Furness was raised up plumb kind and gentle with a minister holdin' him by one hand and his ma holdin' him by the other. And this here Fountain, when he comes out West, he brung his gentle ways along with him."

He made another pause and the grins intensified. And the eyes shone brighter. But there was not a sound from that audience.

"And when he come out here," continued Mr. Barclay, "he decided that he would show folks in the rest of the world that there wasn't no real need, at all, for all the rough ways that some people had in the West, and that most of the roughness was caused by liquor and such. And so he made up his mind that while he was here in Munson and the neighborhood, he would never pull a knife or a gun!"

The audience leaned forward in the same silence.

"And he never done it!" said Barclay.

The audience leaned back again. And a groan of delight rumbled in their throats.

"It is funny, is it?" said Barclay harshly. "Well, gents, I am about to wipe that there grin off of your faces so hard that it won't never come back again—and don't you forget it! What I got next to say is that this here Fountain-Furness, he has been sendin' a pile of money back home to his folks, and he has been the single and sole support of his old mother."

The smile, indeed, had disappeared

In its place appeared a look of bewilderment.

"No, friends, I got to have you know that I'm talkin' to you from the heart out, and if I tell you a lie, you call me what I am! But I want you gents to recollect that I am not jokin'. And I tell you that the old lady that I brung into this here hotel to-night is the one that give me the news about Fountain-Furness. It was from her that I heard all the news!"

The gloom and the alarm in the face of Barclay was reflected, now, upon the faces of his auditors, and Jack Lorrain was heard to murmur faintly: "Old son, tell me the all of it mighty quick, will you? Tell me if this here old lady ain't some relation of his?"

"Gentlemen," said Barclay, "I can't tell you no lie. She *is* a relation of his. She is a relation of this here gent that you got locked up here in the hotel, guarding him with gents and six-shooters. And she has come out here to live for a while in the fifteen-room house that Fountain-Furness built out there on his ranch, out of the money that he made from farmin'."

He waved a solemn hand. "Her and me sat at a window of the train and we strained our eyes through the dark tryin' to make out the outlines of her son's big house. And there was once that I thought I seen it. But the night was too dark, and I couldn't quite be sure. So I persuaded her a lot that the best way would be for her to spend one night at the hotel and the next day just to drive out with me in my buckboard and make a call on Mr. Fountain-Furness."

Jack Lorrain said harshly: "Barclay, I don't like to say it about no friend of mine, but it looks to me like you had been encouraging that old lady to think that she was gunna live in a fifteen-story house out here. Most like that there house was really built of stone?"

"It was built of stone, mostly," said Barclay gravely. "And it had marble fountains in the gardens, too!"

The audience groaned.

"And now," said Barclay, "I aim to state that I have about finished up with my part of this here job."

"Son," said Lorrain, "you ain't even started with the explanation of why in the devil you didn't take part of the time that you was on the train with that there lady and tell her that she was wrong—and tell her that the reason you was on that train with her was because you was comin' out here to try to help hang her son?"

There was a hoarse rumbling of assent.

"Well," said Barclay, "I am willin' to tell you the reason why I couldn't very well talk too much to her about that. The reason, old-timers, was that I couldn't very well tell her that this gent was the world's greatest liar—him bein' her son."

Here, upon his grand point, he made a long pause and ran a sardonic eye over the little crowd, as one who would say: "This is the poison. What can be done with it?"

And there was a long-drawn groan from the crowd, a groan from the very bottom of its heart.

"I dunno," went on Barclay, "how you gents may figure out these here things. I know that I come all the way from the East pretty much bent on finishing up with Mr. Furness for a dirty trick that he done to me a long time back. But I know that I'm not gunna bother with giving my testimony now. I'd rather that somebody else did the talking while that little old lady is sitting there in the courtroom listening."

Amazement and sorrow sat on every face.

"Howsomever," said Barclay, "I guess that there won't be much trouble as far along as that, for by the time tomorrow morning comes and you gents

have pointed out to her that there never was a fifteen-room house around here that her son built, I guess it will finish her pretty quick. And when you let her know that the money she's been living on has been all stole from the poor suckers that live around in these parts —I guess that won't be any more than kicking her in the face—but you gents is like me—rough and willing to say the worst you can! Only—don't ask me for no help. I aim to guess that they is enough able-bodied men in this here room to rope and tie and cut the throat of one old lady, if need be, without my hand bein' called for! Gents, I say: 'So long!"

He slipped off the counter and wedged his way into the mass of men. But there was no further attention taken of what he had said by many of the crowd, who started eagerly for the doors. Then a loud roaring voice from the rear stopped them.

"You yaller-livered welchers and quitters! You ain't men! You're pigs! Would you turn away and leave a dirty mess on the hands of them that *has* to live in this here town?"

Shame, and the thunder of that voice made them turn around. It was crippled Rendell, the storekeeper, who had checked their flight. And they turned back one by one, sullenly, sulkily.

"Yes," said Rendell sneeringly, "you is brave enough to come in here and shoot up the guards that is takin' care of that reptile—Furness. You is brave enough to handle him and to take him out and hang him up by the neck in a pretty gay lynchin' party. Don't shake your heads and look at the other feller, because I know what was in your heads, and I've heard the talk that was goin' around. And I could name names, too, and darn my heart if I won't repeat 'em, unless there is a lot of orders showed around here. You could hang this here Furness mighty slick and smooth and manly, but you ain't got the common manliness to stand up to one little old woman! But I tell you that you're gunna stay right here with me until we get an idea of how we're gunna handle this here mess! And you're all gunna help!"

He paused and looked around for suggestions.

Jack Lorrain said: "Boys, it looks to me like one of the best brains in the mountains is goin' to waste right here in this hotel. I mean: Sammy Gregg—which by a manner of speakin', Sammy got us all *into* this mess, I guess!"

Here no less a person than big Cumnor spoke—Cumnor recuperated from all of his wounds.

"Boys," said he, "nobody has got more respect than I have for the brains of Sam Gregg, hut right now I sort of have an idea that he's got worries of his own."

He said it with a gesture of his thumb over his shoulder toward the back room of the saloon where Anne Cosden was nursing old Durfee back to health and happiness. And by the sudden grin which spread over the faces of the men in the room, it was plain that they understood what Cumnor meant. "But," went on Cumnor, "there is another that we could ask for a few suggestions, and that is Furness-Fountain himself!"

CHAPTER XIV.

GOOD NEWS AND BAD.

THIS idea, as the saying goes, struck them all "where they lived." Instantly the mutter of assent went round and in another moment Rendell and Cumnor had been selected to go in committee and confer on the matter with Furness.

So they passed the guards and entered the chamber to find the big fellow stretched upon his bed smoking a cigarette. He looked up from his ten-day-old newspaper and smiled at them. "Well, boys," said he, "you look so

solemn that I suppose you have come to lynch me?"

"And what have you got to say," said Cumnor, "agin' that?"

"I have nothing to say against it."

"Furness, you're a cool gent, and a sort of brave one, in your own rascally way. But will you be tellin' me, now, if there is any messages that you would like to send to your folks—maybe in the part of the country that you come from when you left for the West?"

"Why, gentlemen," said Furness, alias Fountain, "you are very kind, really. I think if I had known how extremely decent most of you fellows are, I would never have given you such a good cause for wanting me hung. But as the matter stands I can assure you that I have been fore-thoughted enough to prepare for that matter. In the hands of a certain lawyer there is now lying a letter; and if he does not hear from me within a certain number of days, he simply communicates that letter to the people most concerned, and they know that I have made my exit from this vale of tears, so to speak. Now, if the necktie party is all arranged, I'll be only too happy to walk out with you boys."

"Fine and handsome," said Rendell. "Well, Furness, all I say is that it is a shame that you was not born honest. But I wonder, now, that none of your folks never come out here to visit you, seein' how well you've done out here!"

"Naturally not," said Fountain, "when they don't really know where——"

"Oh," said Cumnor, taking the swing of the idea from the storekeeper, "they might hear about a gent that made as much out of farming as you've done."

"And built a fifteen-room house out of a part of the profits," put in Rendell.

Fountain turned perfectly white with emotion as he started to his feet.

"Friends," said he, "will you tell me what this means?"

"She's here," said Rendell. "She's here in this hotel!"

Fountain sank slowly back upon the bed. "I never thought there would be a way to hurt me like this," he said at last. "But this is it! Are you going to bring her in here to see me like this?"

"What else d'you deserve?" asked Rendell in a terrible voice.

"Nothing!" said Fountain. "I deserve nothing. But for Heaven's sake, men, take me out and put a bullet through me. Don't make me face her like this!"

Cumnor found it necessary to turn away. And the guard at the door assumed a sick look. Because it is not a pleasant thing to hear such a man as big Fountain beg, as he was begging then—with a drawn face and with tremulous voice.

So Rendell cut the torture short. "We're not gunna do it, man," said he. "Heaven knows that we ought to do anything that we can to make you suffer. But we ain't got it in us. All we want out of you is to suggest a way out; so start thinkin'. She's right here in the hotel, and in the morning she wants to be drove out to see your fifteen-room house that can be seen from the station!"

The outlaw thanked them with a single eloquent glance. Then he was lost in thought.

"The house was burned down," he announced suddenly. "It caught fire a week ago——"

"But there would have to be a lot of ruins for a stone house——"

"The stonework was sold to the railroad to build a station farther down the line."

"Even the marble fountains?"

The bandit smiled faintly and nodded.

"But there was your farm," suggested Rendell. "What are we going to show her in the way of a farm? We can show her the place where the stacks

burned down out on the edge of town and say that was where your house stood. But what are we going to do by way of a farm?"

Fountain buried his face in his hands, lost in thought, but it was Cumnor who had the next good idea.

"There is only one farm around these parts that deserves to go by the name. That is my place. This here house of yours was just your town house. And besides that, you had your ranch house up on the farm in the hills. My place has got to do for your place to-morrow when we show the old lady around."

"Cumnor," said Fountain, "you're a gentleman. And I'd like to thank you."

"Leave the thanks be. One time or another, all of us has some sort of an experience with a mother, I guess."

Then the face of big Chester Furness became illumined. "I have it, boys," said he. "Take me out in the woods, here, and put a bullet through my head. That will simply shorthand what the law would have done to me. Put a bullet through my head. And then let on to her that I had an accident and that while I was shooting—you know what I mean. There is *always* an 'accident' handy. People don't seem to realize how really hard it is to turn a gun around in your hand and shoot yourself in the face with it, even if you want to do it! Tell her there was an accident. She'll be happy and have a chance to take me back home and bury me. And the law will be satisfied—is that fair?"

"It sounds fair to me," said Rendell. "What more could be asked out of him?"

"All right," said Cumnor, "but at the trial a lot of things would be proved about the crooked things he did. And if they had a chance to get a confession out of him——"

"Boys," said Chet Fountain, "I'll be glad to write out a full confession."

"A true one?"

"Yes."

"Then start now! There's the table and the ink. And there's the paper. You got from now until sunrise to finish it off!"

With those words, Cumnor herded his companion out of the room and they went gravely down to the room below. Not a man had left it. All were waiting calmly there in expectation of the return of their committee.

"It is all decided," said Cumnor, looking steadily at them. "We got the suggestions from Chet Furness himself. In the morning we'll take the old lady out and show her the place where the stacks burned down a few weeks ago, and we'll tell her that that is the place where the fifteen-room house stood. Y'understand? Then we'll drive her out to my farm in the hills and show her that and tell her that that belongs to her son—who is away on a trip! And when we come back to the town, we'll get the sad news that her boy has been accidentally killed by his own hand while riding through the woods just outside of town. And then she'll have, as Fountain says, the pleasure of taking him back East and burying him."

This recital was received with a slight stir.

Then Jack Lorrain asked gravely: "Did Furness himself up and suggest that we take him out in the woods and shoot him?"

"He did that," answered Cumnor without comment.

"H-m-m!" said Lorrain. "I would say, speakin' personal, that that was sort of abrupt—on his own suggestion!"

But the rest of the crowd maintained the same stricken, depressed look which it had worn before. And in that humor they broke up and started for their bunks.

Some of them, wandering through the streets, met a small man skulking in from a ride through the country—a little man riding slumped together in the saddle.

with a hanging head. They looked sharply askance at him, and when they spoke, they heard a voice of one who had recently become very familiar to the men of Munson.

It was Sammy Gregg, who had taken his troubles off to the dark of the night, to commune with them in silence. He made no rejoinder to the hails which he received beyond a single terse word, and so he passed on down the street, a lonely form. And he entered the hotel and passed wearily by a big hulk of a man—Rendell.

"Son," said Rendell, "did you ever hear of the old proverb: Nothing venture—nothing get?"

Little Sammy Gregg turned around upon his heel. "Now what do you mean by that?" he barked out.

"I mean what I say," said Rendell.

"But why should you say it to me?"

"Think it over, son, and you'll see! You ain't so darned mysterious as maybe you would like to think you are!"

And with this, he hobbled out of the hotel and left Gregg standing blinking behind him, with his thin hands hanging helplessly at his sides.

And then, turning a bright crimson, he hastened out of the hotel and rushed to the back of the saloon and tapped softly at the door which opened upon the room where the injured Durfee was still kept.

In answer to his tap, the door was opened at once, and tall Anne Cosden towered above him. The red in his face became more fiery still.

"Anne," he whispered. "I just came to see—how—how Hobo Durfee might be this evening."

And Anne, who had seemed to stand there quite expectant a moment before, now sagged wearily against the side of the door.

"Oh, he's all right, I suppose," she said. "I wish that somebody would ask how *I* felt once in a while.

"But, Anne—how *do* you feel!"

"Tired!" groaned Anne.

"I expect you are," said Sammy.

"Tired of all the men in the world!" groaned Anne Cosden. "They're all such fools!"

Sammy Gregg groaned. Then he blurted out: "Anne, I love you! Will you marry me?"

"I've been an idiot," said Anne. And then there was nothing more said just then. Sammy looked foolishly happy, and Anne was radiant.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE OUTLAW.

CUMNOR and Rendell were the official guides, on the next morning. And Jack Lorrain—had just happened to be in town from the farm. So he went along with the party. But the nice young man who had known dear Chester so well and who had ridden out with Mrs. Fountain all the way from the East—he was not anywhere to be seen.

But the three chosen worthies were seen bundling the good old lady into a buckboard. And a hundred pairs of awe-stricken eyes watched her settle herself.

They heard her say: "You are all so kind to me! But I knew that it was sure to be this way. Chester has never gone any place without making himself loved by every one!"

Then they drove away.

Afterward, they were seen by covert scouts who sneaked in the rear and made observations where the buckboard paused in front of the charred remains of the old straw stacks which had burned down recently on the edge of the town. They made their observations and they saw Rendell, walking with a limp which in nowise interfered with his eloquence, striding about the plot and making large gestures to indicate the handsome structure which had once stood there.

But most of all he distinguished himself when he came to a small hollow in the ground.

"And here was one of the fountain pools!" said big Rendell. "It was all lined all around with marble that must of cost a mighty lot of money. And there was a bronze lion a-standin' up."

"A bronze lion!" cried Mrs. Fountain. "Why, how extravagant my dear boy has become!"

"Money don't mean nothin' to a gent like him, that picks money right out of the ground, you might say. There was the bronze lion up there, lollin' out its tongue and lollin' water out, too, and the water it run down into the pool and there was a whole lot of goldfish swimmin' around in the pool as sassy as ever you seen."

"All destroyed by that frightful fire!" sighed Mrs. Fountain.

And they went on out to see the farm, and the country house of Mr. Fountain.

They spent most of the day out there, Mr. Cumnor pointing out the possibilities of the farm until the eyes of the good old lady glistened.

"You seem to know all about it almost as well as Chester could!" said she.

"I'm only his foreman," said Cumnor. "But sometimes he says that I know enough to run the place while he's away."

And so, in the late afternoon, they started on the road back and were encountered, miles from town, by a dusty rider who communicated to them the following terrible news:

"There has been a tragic accident." said the messenger. "And Chester Ormonde Fountain has killed himself."

Of course the poor old lady fainted, but when she came to and was told the whole story, she took it all bravely enough. Not that she was told what actually happened, for she will never know that her son deliberately took his own life to save her from a great misery. She believed that it was all an accident that he was killed in the manner that they had so minutely described to her.

But the truth of the matter was that Furness was not shot by the boys who took him out in the woods according to his own suggestion, but that they gave him a gun and he brought about his own end.

Later, they found that Furness had left a bunch of checks that were drawn on different bank accounts that he had. By one of the checks he left twenty thousand dollars to old Durfee to take care of the poor old codger the rest of his life. And old Durfee says that the price is just about the money that he lost and a little over twelve thousand dollars more. He's going to hire a negro to work for him and he's going to go right back to his shack in the hollow and start in makin' strawberry preserves. He says he never would have known how many friends he had if it all hadn't happened, and so he's pretty happy.

And there is about eighty thousand dollars more that this big gent Furness happened to leave behind him in checks. That money is to go to pay back the bank the rest of the money that it lost. All of which goes to show how much Furness appreciated what the Munson boys did for him in the end.

FOREST FIRES IN BLACK CANYON

RECENT reports from Colorado Springs, Colorado, state that a destructive forest fire that started in the stone quarries at the head of Black Cañon raged for four hours before being checked, devastating an area of two square miles. Williams Cañon, the Garden of the Gods, and the Glen Eyrie estate of Alexander Smith Cochran of New York, were threatened by the conflagration.

Salt for the Goose

By

Herbert Farris

Author of "Burglars' Day in Drydust," etc.

CATCHING the eye of Henry Wilkinson, "Big Ed" Lutes winked surreptitiously. Wilkinson nodded with the appreciation of a man who loves a joke. Lutes, suppressing a grin, loosened the top of the salt shaker, and passed the shaker to "Silent Jack" Hammer. Food was never quite salty enough for Hammer. He received the shaker in silence and shook it vigorously over his steaming mulligan stew. The shaker, improvised from a small baking powder can, was wielded too vigorously; its top, loosened by Lutes, fell into Hammer's stew and was followed by a full third of the contents of the shaker.

"That's once he got himself enough salt," said Big Ed Lutes with an uproarious laugh. "Get yourself another plate o' mulligan, Hammer."

Lutes, whose turn it was to do the cooking for the three, had emptied the last of the savory stew into the three tin plates on the rickety table, so his suggestion to Hammer was particularly amusing. At least Wilkinson thought so, for his harsh guffaw rose stridently on a high note until the side walls of the small ten-by-twelve tent seemed to quiver. Any joke at Hammer's expense was pleasing to Wilkinson, who hated his reticent little partner as much as he feared Big Ed Lutes.

"Yes, Hammer, get yourself another plate of this larrapin' good stew," jibed Wilkinson. "Get yourself lots of the grouse; that's the best part of it—you hammerheaded runt!"

Little Hammer made no reply. He was accustomed to such abuse, and realized the futility of attempting to voice his resentment. In spite of the unpalatableness of the stew, he managed to eat much of it, for he had spent a hard day in a prospect hole and was famished. When he had finished his meal he rose, filled his pipe and left the tent.

"Don't drink the crick dry!" Lutes called after him. "We might need that water for sluicin' purposes!"

Hammer had been leaving his partners alone of late. As the claim they were prospecting had utterly failed to show any indications of pay dirt, Lutes and Wilkinson had steadily grown harder to live with. Hammer much preferred solitude and his pipe to the companionship of men who never lost an opportunity to make his life miserable. Alone in the tent, Lutes and Wilkinson were vociferous in their appreciation of the little joke which Lutes had perpetrated upon Hammer.

"I sure salted him good an' plenty," Lutes said between pulls at his black pipe. "I hate that little tongue-tied runt, anyhow!"

"Me, too," Wilkinson agreed. "He's

nothin' but a sponge; if we hadn't let him in with us this spring he wouldn't have a dollar to his name. Either one of us can move twice as much gravel as he can."

Wilkinson's statement was untrue, and both of them knew that it was false. Early that spring Hammer had discovered good pay on a creek which he had called Rusty Gulch. Being alone, he had given Lutes and Wilkinson, who were prospecting near by, a chance to work with him. Hammer had needed their help, for it is impossible for one man, working alone, to whipsaw lumber for sluice boxes. Accordingly, Hammer had invited them to Rusty Gulch, with the result that when the little creek was worked out, each of them was richer by approximately two thousand dollars.

"Yes," Lutes agreed, "we're better men than he is in ev'ry way. We was fools to stop here on the way out. With two thousan' apiece off that Rusty crick we'd ought to quit right there. Snow'll be flyin' soon, an' we've just wasted three weeks time prospectin' a crick that won't give up a color that's big enough to make a rattle in a pan. My hunch is to pull out to-morrow, an' let that little fool hang on if he wants to. Me, I got enough."

Wilkinson pondered this thoughtfully. "We got two thousan' apiece almost, ain't we?" He put the question slowly, watching the hard, small eyes of his companion narrowly as he spoke. "Are we goin' to let that shrimp walk out of this country with as much dust as we've got?"

"I'm willin' to take a chance," said Lutes, with a grave nod of his bullet head. "We can hustle out of Alaska on an early boat. We can both use an extra thousan' apiece when we get to Seattle. I'm all set to go; we can rap it to him to-night if you're ready."

"No rough stuff, Ed," Wilkinson broke in hurriedly. "Nothin' rough, so long as there's anything else we can do."

"There ain't nothin' else; no other way that I can see."

"I thought of a way." Wilkinson puffed leisurely at his pipe, and his speech was aggravatingly slow to the impatient Lutes. "I thought of it when he dumped all that salt into his mulligan a while ago. Do you get the notion?"

"No, but spill it, whatever it is."

"Well, let's make him buy the claim. Take that hole he's sinkin' now; he's down within a foot or two of bed rock when he quit work to-night. Suppose one of us slips out there later on an' sticks about an ounce of dust in that hole? What you think would happen when he finds it in the mornin'?"

"He might want to buy us out, if he ain't wise he's salted," said Lutes dubiously. "It's hard to fool an old-timer with a salted claim. To-night at supper he was sure wise he'd been salted," Lutes concluded with a hoarse chuckle.

"Let's try it, anyhow," Wilkinson urged. "No harm in tryin'; then if he don't fall for it, we can try your way."

Lutes knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose from the table. "I'm willin'." He stepped to the tent flaps and peered out. "He's settin' on a rock a hunderd yards down the crick. While I keep an eye on him, suppose you slip up there to his prospect an' make your plant; make the play good—stick in about three ounces."

On the following morning Hammer went to work early. Lutes and Wilkinson "laid in;" that is, they sprawled upon their bunks, smoked and speculated on the probabilities of the success or failure of their scheme. Would Hammer tell them of his discovery of gold, or would he remain silent?

"Oh, he's honest all right," said Lutes, when Wilkinson had propounded the question; "he'll come a-runnin' just as soon as he finds what he's got. I wish he *wasn't* honest. If he wasn't

honest, he'd stall around a while, an' before long he'd make us an offer without ever sayin' a word about makin' a discovery. Bein' honest the way he is, it's liable to be hard to talk him into either buyin' or sellin'. But if he don't act reasonable——"

Lutes' voice trailed off, leaving the sentence uncompleted, but Wilkinson understood his partner thoroughly.

"We'll *make* him buy or sell," he said earnestly. "I don't like the notion of pullin' off any rough stuff. We'll find a way all right."

For almost an hour they discussed the matter, at the end of which time, the tent flaps parted and Hammer entered. Never talkative, the little man was apparently not excited. Lutes and Wilkinson knew that it was not the first time that he had discovered gold, and so his lack of enthusiasm surprised them not at all. Hammer placed his gold pan on the table, set up his small gold scales and began to fumble with a box of weights.

"I found pretty good pay, boys," he said coolly, as he began weighing the gold which he carefully poured from his pan. "I found this at the bottom of that hole I've been working in for the last week."

Lutes and Wilkinson were on their feet at his first words. "You've struck it!" exclaimed Lutes with well-simulated astonishment. "Blast it all, Wilkinson, he's hit another pay streak!"

The two conspirators looked on until Hammer had finished with the work of weighing the gold.

"A little over six ounces," he said gravely. "Not half bad for less than four square feet of bedrock."

"Not half bad!" Lutes repeated. "I'll say it ain't half——"

His voice broke off abruptly, and behind Hammer's back he shot an understanding glance at Wilkinson. Lutes' meaning was perfectly clear, and Wilkinson understood instantly. Six ounces —it was more than twice the amount of gold that he had used to salt Hammer's prospect! Wilkinson remained silent. It had been agreed that Lutes should do the talking.

"Listen, Hammer." Lutes no longer wanted to sell; he was now prepared to buy. "The three of us haven't been gettin' along any too good for the last few weeks, an' this bunch has got to split up. Do you want to buy or sell; which is it?"

Hammer turned suddenly and faced Lutes. "Neither one," he said positively. "What's the idea of buying or selling? Why can't we go ahead and work this claim together like we did Rusty Gulch?"

"We don't get along, that's why." Lutes' small eyes were cold and calculating as he went on. "Me an' Wilkinson are goin' to sell to you, or you're goin' to sell to us, see? It's give or take. You make us an offer, an' we'll make you one right now. If we offer more'n you do, we buy your int'rest, see?" Lutes addressed Wilkinson. "It's a go with you, ain't it?" he asked.

Wilkinson nodded assent. "Give or take suits me," he said with a broad grin as he caught the full purport of Lutes' proposition. "When pardners don't get along good, that's the easiest an' best way to bust up the pardnership. Sure; give or take suits me."

"It's not fair," Hammer protested. "You know it's not fair. It looks like this claim is a mighty rich one, and you fellows know that all I have to offer is less than two thousand dollars, while the two of you together can make me an offer of nearly four. Of course I haven't got a chance in a deal like that."

"You needn't be afraid we'll offer you any four thousan'," said Lutes with a hoarse laugh. "We'll give you two thousan' an' fifty dollars in cold, hard cash, or in dust, which is the same thing in this country. If you want to offer us more than that, we'll write you out

a deed for our two-thirds int'rest. Just because you've only got around half the money we've got don't cut any ice with us. Me, I always say that what's sauce for a goose is sauce for a gander, see?"

Hammer pondered this. "It's a dirty frame-up," he protested hotly. "You fellows know you couldn't make that kind of a deal stand up in court—not for a minute, you couldn't."

"Listen, you fool." Lutes shook a menacing fist at Hammer. "We ain't goin' into no courts, see? We're two against one, so you'll never be able to prove it. I'm goin' to tell you something. We're slippin' you over two thousan' just so there won't be any court business in this deal, see? We'd rather do that than to take any chances. I always believe in doin' a thing up legal, so there's no comebacks. Two thousan', with what you've got, is a whole lot of money."

"Yes, but more than a hundred dollars from four square feet of bedrock is a lot of money, too." Hammer looked steadily into Lutes' hard eyes. "A third interest in a claim like that is certainly worth many times more than two thousand dollars, and you fellows know it as well as I do!"

"A hundred dollars from four square feet sure is rich dirt," Lutes agreed with a satisfied smirk. He caught Wilkinson's eye and winked knowingly. "Even if it was just *half* that good, it'd sure be a mighty rich claim."

Wilkinson grinned. "Yes," he agreed, "it'd still be mighty rich, an' I'd be willin' to chance half my pile on it. But what about that deed? Hadn't he better sign it right now?"

"No, he hadn't," Lutes snapped. "He's goin' to sign that deed in the presence of two witnesses, so there won't be no comeback. An' we'll pay him the dust in front of the witnesses, too; we'll even let 'em weigh it theirselves, so there won't never be any chance of a court squabble comin' up later on."

No matter what the argument, Hammer had always yielded to his companions in the end. He did so now, though his consent, reluctantly given, followed much more than the usual amount of blustering. Finally, however, they set off for the camp of their nearest neighbors, two miners who were working a claim three miles distant. Hammer, with a small pack on his back, led the way, followed by Lutes and Wilkinson, who watched him warily. Hammer was a much better man on the trail than either of the others, and they feared that he might attempt to escape.

"He's a coward, though," said Lutes in a whisper to Wilkinson, "an' I don't think he'd likely chance it. He'd be afraid that we'd take a shot at him."

"I reckon you're right on that," Wilkinson agreed. "I haven't worried much about him tryin' to make a getaway on the trail, but—what if he should balk when it comes to signin' that deed?"

"You're a fool," Lutes scoffed confidently. "He's a coward, I tell you; he'd be afraid of what one of us would do to him later on."

They reached the camp of Sherman and Johnson at noon. When Lutes had explained the object of their visit, Sherman produced a set of balances, while Lutes and Wilkinson drew their pokes from sagging coat pockets. Without a word, little Hammer looked on; he watched Sherman carefully weigh the gold and write a brief, clumsily-worded deed, which, although it was poorly written and misspelled, was nevertheless a legal conveyance of an undivided one-third interest in the partners' claim. It was when Sherman handed him a pencil that it seemed that Hammer was on the point of refusing to sign. He awkwardly took the pencil; then opened his mouth as if about to voice a protest. Seeing this, Lutes, who stood at his elbow, spoke in a whispered snarl.

"Sign it, you dirty little hammer-

head," he hissed in his partner's ear. "I dare you to go back to camp *without* signin'. You know what I say about sauce for the goose."

Hammer was apparently frightened out of his wits. With a gulp, he nervously signed the deed, pocketed the dust which Sherman gravely handed him; then sat silently while John prepared for his guests a meal of beans, bacon, sour dough bread and tea. Hammer ate but little—and that hurriedly. He finished his meal long before his partners.

"Well, boys," he said as he rose to go, "I won't see you again likely, so I'll say good-by. There's nothing left in this country for me, and I'm hitting the trail for the outside. So long, and good luck."

An hour later, when they had finished their meal, and had had a leisurely smoke with Sherman and Johnson, the two conspirators took the trail for their camp. Wilkinson was jubiliant; Lutes was thoughtful.

"I wonder," said Wilkinson, "why Hammer, the hammerhead, didn't wait an' mush over to camp with us; camp's right on his way to town."

"*I* know why he didn't wait," Lutes replied with a snort of disgust. "He's mushin' out of this country with more'n four thousan' bucks, he is; he's got more'n four thousan', an'—we've got his deed, all signed up legal an' proper. No wonder he's hittin' the grit, an' hittin' it fast."

Wilkinson shot a puzzled glance at his partner. "I reckon I don't quite get you," he said.

"Don't get me! Why, he's scared that we'll take that four thousan' away from him, you poor fool! An' he's got a right to be scared, too. In a way, he has." Lutes shrugged as he admitted that he was beaten. "But I was wise that he had us licked," he went on. "I was just as wise as he was. We didn't have a chance no time of catchin' up with him. He travels like a deer, an' that's why I let him go. We could sure've got away with it, if the guy wasn't such a musher. An' we'd never 'a' been caught, neither; it would've just been his word against ours—two against one."

"Well, so far's I'm concerned, he's welcome to the two thousan' we paid him, an' he's welcome to keep the two thousan' he already had," said Wilkinson contentedly. "Why, man, what do you want! Didn't we just the same as *steal* that third int'rest from him?"

"Sure we did," Lutes growled, "but just the same I hate to see that hammerhead walk out of the country with all that money."

Lutes became more cheerful as they neared their tent. He discussed with Wilkinson the best method of working the claim, the probable amount of gold they would recover from it, and he expatiated at length upon the good times they would have with their money when they hit Seattle. When they finally reached their tent, they were fired with ambition to get to work; their discussion of the wealth that was soon to be theirs had filled them with the desire to start sluicing operations at the earliest possible moment. Entering the tent for the purpose of getting a gold pan and some of their tools, they saw on the table a single sheet of cheap tablet paper. It was Wilkinson who first saw it.

"The hammerhead must've stopped in an' wrote us a note," he said with an amused chuckle. "Wonder what he's got to say."

For a moment Lutes stared at the note in bewilderment. On the upper end of the sheet of paper Hammer had carefully set the salt shaker. There was no particular significance to be attached to this, perhaps; the salt shaker was probably placed there for the simple purpose of holding the sheet of paper on the table. It was something else that puzzled Lutes. In the exact center of

the note Hammer had poured a small mound of salt. With an oath, Lutes at last seized the note, scattering salt and salt shaker on the rough table. Wilkinson leaned forward, craning eagerly over Lutes' shoulder, while they read the note together. It read as follows:

MY DEAR PARTNERS: When I first found gold at the bottom of that shaft I was sinking, I thought you boys were maybe just trying to put up a little job on me. You know, just trying to have some fun with me. I've been jobbed so many times by you fellows that I was naturally expecting another trick. But when I found about three ounces instead of a few colors, I saw that you were really trying to salt me. Well, I wasn't positive that you were, but it looked mighty suspicious. So after I had panned out the three ounces you had put in there—it was pretty clumsy work, I thought—I just added three more ounces to it and brought it up to the tent. I knew that if you were as crooked as I was beginning to think you were that you would want to buy me out; while if you were even a little bit honest, you wouldn't think of anything except working the claim out together, just as we worked out Rusty Gulch.

Well, I don't feel a bit bad about the way you fellows got yourselves in a hole. You *made* me sell to you, so it was all your own doing. You salted me with three ounces, and all I did was to salt you right back with three more ounces. I don't know just how *you* will take this, Wilkinson, but I know that Lutes will agree with me that what's salt for the goose is salt for the gander.

So long, boys, and hereafter be mighty careful about using too much salt.

JOHN HAMMER.

CALIFORNIA WOMEN IN COVERED WAGON CLUB

A PROMINENT and highly honored member of California's Covered Wagon Club is Mrs. C. A. Hickock, a hale and hearty resident of Lockeford, California. Mrs. Hickock has the double distinction of having been born in one of the old-time prairie schooners and also of being the first child born in old Fort Sutter, on the site of which the present city of Sacramento had its beginning.

It was on the Fourth of July, 1849, that a weather-beaten and ancient prairie schooner driven by Lorenzo Twitchell creaked through the gate of the famous fort early in the morning. It had taken a whole year to cross the plains and mountains from Iowa. At four o'clock of the same afternoon, a child was born in the Twitchell wagon. The miners and packers, learning of the event, showered the infant with gold dust and asked that she be christened Poppy. Mrs. Twitchell, however, did not like that name and called the child Celesta Ann.

The youngster thrived and grew up to girlhood. She married when only fifteen. Her husband was William Sotwell, who died many years ago. In 1907 she married again. Her husband, Mr. Hickock, was a Civil War veteran who had crossed the plains in 1852, first locating with his parents at Hangtown.

Another woman eligible for the Diamond Jubilee Covered Wagon Club is Mrs. Elizabeth Farnsworth, of Georgetown, California. She was born in a prairie schooner while crossing the plains. Her parents, the late John W. and Margaret Robson, left St. Louis in the spring of 1853 with a small train of ox teams. When they reached a place, called Big Meadows, in what is now Utah, the little daughter was born, on July 24, 1853. Only a few hours' halt was made as the party were afraid of an Indian attack. Word had reached them that the train immediately ahead of them had been stopped and the immigrants massacred.

The Robsons, however, managed to reach California without mishap and settled on Bottle Hill, near Georgetown. Later they moved to Georgetown and reared a large family, of which Mrs. Farnsworth is the sole survivor.

The Runaways

By

George Owen Baxter

Author of "Fire Brain," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

AUNT CLAUDIA'S nephew, Sammy Moore, is hemmed in between her insistence on large white collars with flowing ties and the minister's mismanagement of his voice. Benny Parson, who is paying a call at Aunt Claudia's with his mother, instigates a fight, but does not take his licking like a sportsman. To escape the punishment, Sammy runs off to the swimming pool.

Here he meets the left-handed, red-headed tramp who, with his white bull terrier, had been given a bite to eat in his aunt's kitchen. "Lefty" had been playing his violin in the village streets, and incidentally giving listeners weird fabrications concerning his past life. He likes Sammy and believes he has a voice. Smiler is not so friendly. The two decide to tramp together, the little boy and the big-muscled redhead.

There is an alarm and a promise of reward sent out for Sammy. He is discovered by a farmer whom he knows, but Lefty saves the situation by pretending that he is returning with the runaway. They are compelled to travel in the farmer's buckboard, but finally maneuver to get in his bad graces by having Smiler thoroughly vanquish the farmer's dog. He refuses to take them farther.

They elude discovery once more, and are finally safely ensconced on the rods of an outward-bound railroad train.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW RÔLE.

YOU could hardly have picked out a worse trip for a first ride on the rods. I've learned, since, how to jump the iron ladder of a freight car while it's on the run, but in those days I hardly knew what a freight car was like. Well, I learned that night while I lay stretched out on the rods.

That was a train of empties. It made a noise like all the tin cans in the world doing a jig, and it went smashing along faster than a passenger express bound overland with time to make up. It was on a rough road, too. There were bumps and jumps in that track that jogged the wits out of me. Up from the roadbed, there was a steady, flying cloud of cinders and grit and dust. There was a head wind doing about thirty miles an hour, and there was the train doing about fifty; which made an eighty mile wind driving that stuff in your face. If you opened an eye even so much as a wink, you could be sure that you would be about blinded.

After I had lain on those rods for ten minutes I knew that I had enough. I hollered out and told Lefty that.

He sang back at the top of his lungs so that I could hear, "This trip is just starting, kid, and if you don't hold yourself on, it'll be the finish of you. You've got to depend on yourself!"

That voice ripped into my mind, and I forgot all about my little aches for an hour or more. When the troubles came back again, they kept on getting worse every minute. I could feel my face getting almost raw. There were bruises all over my body where I had twisted around on the rods finding new places to

lie and always getting sore again, surprising quick.

After that, there came a time when I knew that I couldn't hold on much longer, when I decided that to hold on for even another minute was a lot worse than to simply die. If I dropped off the rods the wheels would take me in half a second. Then I would be ended, and my troubles, too. So I would see myself letting go and flopping off—and then I would see myself lying on the track and the big wheels coming——

I turned my head around and looked back. I could see the wheel that would get me and clip me in two. It looked terrible big and bright, it was wobbling a little as it came along, as though it staggered with its speed. It looked anxious to get somewhere—and that somewhere might be me!

It was the idea of having to lie there and *wait* for that wheel that kept me on the rods. A good many more suicides would come if it weren't that you had to pull the trigger of the gun with your own finger. Once I let myself go a little, when I was sure that I was all tired of life, but the minute one leg dangled down, I began to fight and scramble to get back again, with my heart racking and rushing. I was scared to death and kept on shaking for a long time after I was stretched out in place again. That showed me how much I loved living. It's always surprising to see how much a man loves life—and a boy just ten times more!

The noise began to bother me more than anything else. It began in waves, it would start at the engine and you would hear it reaching back, crashing along. Right over your head it gave an extra bump and an extra roar, as though all the tin cans in the world were dropping over Niagara Falls. Then it galloped on past you, that wave of sound and jumped out of the end of the train. Maybe for a split part of a second there would be something almost like silence and you would hear the whish of the wind and the groaning of a wheel, somewhere, that was tired of going on with the night's work.

I got so tired that I was sick, and just then all the noise stopped except a terrible big humming, like ten billion bees roaring and buzzing along.

I looked down. Bars of darkness were flicking past my eyes, uncommon fast, but beyond the bars there was silver water. The train had slowed down for crossing a big iron bridge. I was so light in the head that I pulled myself together and got all ready for dropping off, because I thought that I would have one chance in two of dropping through to the water below—that looked so peaceful down there!

"Steady, kid!" said Lefty.

That brought me to.

After we got over that river, there was a shaking and thundering of brakes. We eased down to a stop, gave a shudder and shriek and stood still with nothing except the engine wheezing and blowing, up ahead of us.

What do you think Lefty said?

"A nice, fast trip, Sammy, what? You ought to go over this section of the road in winter."

Trying to think of something that was really any worse than that ride made me laugh; although it wouldn't have taken much to make me cry, either. The minute I started laughing, I rolled off the rods and just lay on the ground, shaking.

Lefty picked me up by the nape of the neck and gave me a shake. I reached out and touched the back of Smiler, and he gave me an unfriendly growl. Then I heard Lefty say: "A good, clear night, and a good, flying start. They'll never nab you now, son, if we have any luck at all. Take a breath of that air. Like wine, I say!"

Not a word of sympathy to me, not a look at me, when I was so groggy

that I could barely stagger along. That was Lefty's way.

A lantern came swinging along beside the train.

"Here comes a 'shack,' kid," said Lefty. "Can you run?"

I told him that I could barely walk.

"All right," said Lefty. "You start for the woods, there, and I'll tend to the brakie."

I could only hobble along at about half-walking speed. From the edge of the trees I looked back and saw Lefty saunter up to the brakeman as cool as you please.

They say that a brakeman can smell a tramp a mile off. I heard the shack swear, and saw him swing his lantern to brain the hobo. It was just holding a light to get himself knocked down, for I saw that long left reach out, and then I heard the whack of that brakie's shoulders as he hit the ground.

He didn't get up quick, either. He must have wanted to have a good look at the stars while he was in that position. Lefty came back to me, and I said: "Jiminy, Lefty, but you're a great fighter."

"Rot!" said Lefty. "Forget that chatter!"

He went along whistling to himself, and anybody could see that he was pretty pleased with himself. We held around through the trees, me hobbling pretty bad on my sore feet. Every now and then I stumbled and fell flat. Lefty would yank me up without a word. Finally he kept his strong hand right under the hollow of my arm. So we went along.

"We're going to hit the hay in a real town to-night, son!" said Lefty. "I've had enough of this rough life to last me for a while, and so have you."

We got to a town. It was a fine, brand-new, shined-up sort of a town with the pavement all macadam and very bright under the street lamps. Every block there was the skeleton of a new house standing, or scaffoldings up around new walls. Or else you would smell where the ground had been dug up just lately. Anybody could see with half an eye how that little town was booming. Lefty was very pleased with it. He said that it all smelled to him like money in our pockets.

All at once he stood and gave a quick look around him. And then he stepped into the shadow of a front yard. Behind a big lilac tree he took a goggle-shaped pair of dark glasses out of his pocket and put them on.

"I forgot," said Lefty, "that I was born blind. Being born blind a man can get along amazingly well when he's moving around a room, or along a street—except where he comes to a crossing. Now take my arm and lead me along. Remember that I am your Uncle Will. We're going down the street to that sign that says—Hotel. When we get inside, you walk up to the clerk and tell him that we want a room. Here's fifteen dollars. You can let him see that when you pay for the room, because we have no luggage, and we'll have to pay on the spot beforehand. Now, remember, look as sad as you can. Every time you look at me, think of sad music."

We went down to the hotel like that. I was scared, you can't guess how much, at the idea of waltzing into a big hotel with a faker like that along with me. I knew that they pinched you for doing such things. But Aunt Claudia would be worse than prison.

Well, it was easy. We walked into that hotel and there was everything clean and sassy as you please. A man that looked like a bank president or something was behind the desk, and a couple of old goats were sitting over in great big armchairs upholstered in hair cloth. They looked over their papers at Lefty, who was fumbling along, and they said: "Well, well! Poor fellow!" and such things under their breath.

Lefty seemed to get another idea when he was inside. He stopped me, and he said: "Is this the lobby, Samuel?"

I said that it was.

"Find the clerk and tell him that we require a decent room for the night. Tell him that we are without luggage and that you will pay beforehand."

The clerk came right out toward us. He was sort of middle-aged and he looked mighty kind. He asked what could he do for us, and I repeated the spiel. He said to Lefty: "My dear sir, I am quite content to let the matter stand over uutil your departure."

At that I could see the old goats in the corner wag their heads, agreeing that this was the way to treat a poor blind man. The clerk went on to say that guests often had their luggage delayed. Lefty gave a sad smile and shook his head, and said in a quiet, weary voice—pitched just loud enough to reach to the two other men in the corner. "No, my friend, our luggage is not delayed; it is destroyed. Pay the clerk, Samuel. I must go upstairs right away and lie down."

You could see the clerk just busting with curiosity and sympathy. He took my money, but he seemed to hate to touch it. Then he showed us up to the room. It was a great sight to see "Uncle Will" fumbling for the steps a little with his foot. When he got into the room upstairs he looked around and said, "I trust that dogs are permitted in the rooms?"

Smiler was sneaking along behind Lefty, with his nose stopping just half an inch from Lefty's leg. The clerk said that dogs were allowed. Then Lefty fumbled around with the violin, and finally I took it.

"Gently with it, Samuel," said he. "Gently! It is all our livelihood now. Who knows what would come of you and the dog and me if it were gone?"

The clerk got pale with excitement and pity when he heard that. He tiptoed out of that room as if he were going out from a funeral.

Then Lefty sat down on the bed and shoved the glasses up. He gave me a grin and said:

"It looks as though this is a pretty good dodge. I've been blind a lot, but they've always been suspicious before. The blind man and the nephew dependent upon him—if I were only a little older or you were a little younger, you could be my son. A blind musician and his starving son—that would fetch us! Kid, why aren't you a little paler? You look about as pathetic as a pumpkin pie!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GAME.

HE got up and roamed up and down the room, shaking his head.

"If we could work that father and son gag," he kept saying, "we would soon have a bank account."

Then he sat down and wrote out a list of things for me to buy. He had brushed us off pretty good at the edge of the town, but now he put down a big brush on the list and a lot of other things to get at a drug store.

"Now, son," said he, "when you go down, the clerk will want to collar you and get a lot of information. That poor boob is simply oozing curiosity. He is breaking his heart to be done, but we haven't come down to fish of that size. Not yet. We want the fat boys in the corner—the gold-watch-and-chain boys. Those are the ones. If we don't squeeze them, I am a blockhead and a bad prophet. I want you to tell that clerk that you are not allowed to talk. When he asks why, you tell him that we wish to keep our sorrows to ourselves. Understand? Then the two old boys will grab you. They have pumped the clerk by this time, and they know everything that he knows. But they are aching for more. They feel a good deed com-

ing over them. It's making them fairly dizzy, I tell you. Well, let them gradually egg the story out of you. Tell them—well, no grown man can lie as well as a boy can lie. Make up your own story and make it good. Lie as you never lied before. Now, run along and do yourself proud!"

I went out of the room.

Just as he said, the clerk gave me a fatherly smile and come out from behind the desk. As he walked along with me, he wants to know how my uncle is getting on. I said that Uncle Will was rather poorly."

"Why?" asked the clerk.

"I forgot," I said, "that I'm not to be talking. Uncle Will don't like it, because he says that to tell our troubles is too much like making an appeal to the sympathies of folks. I've got to go along, and I can't talk!"

I got away from him, but I saw him look across at the two old geezers as much as to say: "What did I tell you? This is certainly a worthy case for charity!"

At the druggist's I got a lot of stuff and brought it back, but when I came to the lobby again, there were the two old boys waiting for me. When they saw me, they collared me quick. One of them laid the fat palm of his hand on top of my head and turned up my face a little. I thought of taking a high note and give him the same sort of a sad smile.

He says: "Son, we have seen you and your proud unfortunate uncle William. Do you mind telling me his last name?"

I hesitated. "I am not to talk," says I.

"Is there any harm in a name?" says he. So I pretended to be convinced and I told him that the name was William Gobert.

After that he said: "Now, my boy, do not think that any idle curiosity prompts me. But I have a feeling for good men in distress. And I should like to know the story of your uncle's distress."

Here the other fat man broke in, "Young man, this is President Johnson of the Orchard and Alfalfa Bank."

"Tush!" says the bank president, but I could see that he was glad enough to be introduced.

I says: "If I was to talk about what has happened, Uncle Will would never forgive me for going behind his back like this; and I'd rather die than hurt his feelings, he's so terrible sensitive and proud."

"Ah!" said President Johnson. "I could see it in his face. Could I not, Harry?"

Harry said that he could.

"But you want to help your uncle, my brave lad," said the president. "And who can tell that *I* might not be able to assist him?"

I wouldn't be persuaded for a long time, but finally I let it bust out that we had been ruined by fire.

"Fire!" cried the president. "Poor man! Fire!"

He said this in a whisper to Harry. Then I let it all bust out in a flood. I told how my mother had died when I was born, and my father had died two years ago. I had gone to live with Uncle Will, who got along pretty well except that he had a bad heart. About two weeks before Uncle Will's house, where all his money was tied up, was burned down; the crops was wiped out in the fields. Everything in general was pretty badly spoiled, so's he couldn't get money—he just owed money everywhere.

"And what did he do then?" asked Mr. Johnson. "Come now, my dear boy, and please do tell us what he did then?"

"He called in all the gents that he owed money to," said I. "He told them that he was a ruined man, as they knew. There didn't nothing remain to him but his land, and he was blind and couldn't

handle it. So he was going to sign everything over to them, and they could sell it. After it was sold if anything was left they could give it to him. So the creditors got together and sold the land, but they said that there was just enough out of the sale to pay for all of the debts that was owing.

Uncle Will, he said that though he didn't have much strength, and though his heart was weak and his eyes was blind, he still had an honest heart, a clean hand and a fiddle. He would go out and make his strength last as far as it could. We started off, and after we had gone a little ways, the dog, Smiler, comes running after us. Uncle Will says for me to send the dog back, and I pretended to, but I didn't really have the heart to, because I knew that Uncle Will loved the dog better than he did anything else in the world, hardly, besides, them creditors had enough when they got hold of all of our land. Don't you think so yourself?"

Mr. Johnson let go of my head and hit his fat hands together so that they popped like a paper bag that is blowed up and then squashed.

"What wolves. What wolves without a heart! His dog, too! Even his dog they would of taken from this—heavens, I can't speak about it! Child, from what part of the country——"

"Right near to——" I was about to say Gunther, and then I remembered that I was not to say that, and so I stuck a little. I gaped at them and then I said that I had talked too much—that I had told them nearly everything, and if it came to the ears of Uncle Will, it would break his heart—and would they swear never to let him know?

They said that they would swear it, and they pressed their hands on their hearts as they said it. As I went up the stairs, I could hear Mr. Johnson saying: "Harry, I could weep, it breaks me up so; when I see honest pride—and sorrow—and courage——"

I could have cried myself, I had got to feeling so sorry for us. When I got to the room Lefty wanted to know what had happened. I told him that I had burned a house down and left him broke, and that he had even wanted to give up Smiler to pay the creditors. That tickled Lefty a good deal.

"Son," he said, "you have talent. I can see that! You have talent. When I think how you might have wasted yourself on the desert air back there at Gunther, I feel like—a horticulturalist on stilts. All we have to do now is to be calm and grand and sad. Money is going to rain down in this town, my boy. Money is going to shower all over us. Both my palms are itching."

I told him, then, that he had a bad heart. That tickled him still more. He began to walk up and down the room and exclaim:

"Some men would have made out a whole story for you, but not Lefty! I trust a boy's head. All the lies that I could have invented would never have had as much nerve to them. I could never have thought of the stroke of putting the dog in, like that! I never could. Nor the heart, neither. Oh, Sammy, you and I are going a long, long ways together! You have talent; you have a voice, and I'll do the rest!"

He was feeling so good that his face shone—almost the way the face of the fat man downstairs had shone. One was with rascality and the other was with goodness, but it would have been pretty hard to tell them apart. Lefty couldn't stay still. He walked over to the window and leaned out, and he said: "Come here. Look at this. Just lean out here and don't speak. Don't say a word!"

The minute you stuck your head out of range of the electric lights the night air rose up around you, all cool and sweet, and voices came off up the street,

bubbling and soft. Somewhere an automobile started up and went whirring around a corner with two girls in it laughing like bells. It had been a hot day, and now the watering cart had gone around and washed down the streets, so that the big lamps would send yellow paths of light a whole solid block long. The town looked like it was standing in water. You almost looked to see the reflections of the buildings.

"Look out there," said Lefty, "and soak that up and just think about it for a while!"

It made me feel pretty good to breathe that air. It was so cool because the mountains weren't far away. I could see the frosty heads on a few of them even by the starlight, looking blue and awful cold and calm away off there on the edge of the horizon.

"Look at it," said Lefty," and just think about it for a minute." There was a hush in his voice like the minister's when he announced a new contribution from somebody to the church. "Look at it," said Lefty, "and remember that this is just one town in ten thousand in this country of ours. There are ten thousand more just like it, or bigger, better, richer—with more spare cash floating around than they know what to do with!

"Oh, Sammy, when I think of these things, I feel proud, to be an American citizen. It does me good just to know that fact. I wouldn't sell that fact for millions. I really wouldn't! A town like this is to me what the oasis in the desert is to the traveler. Believe me, Sammy, this country of ours is full of such towns! We can travel around all our lives and still keep going to places where they never saw our faces before and where we can pull off the same old dodges again and again.

"It's touching, just to think about it. Confound it, it almost makes you have a tear in the eye, it really and truly does!"

CHAPTER IX.

LEFTY'S TACTICS.

IT wasn't all put on with Lefty. He believed a big part of it, I think. When he got heated up with talk, like that, he hardly knew what he was doing, in a way. The words just floated him away out of himself. He should have been an orator, or something.

After that, he said that it was time for us to go to bed, because to-morrow had the earmarks of a mighty rich day. When Smiler saw me getting into the same bed with his boss he almost died, it worried him so much. No matter what his boss said, the Smiler kept mourning over this situation. He wouldn't be peaceful until Lefty had let him jump up on the bed. There he lay out flat, and wriggled up between us, where he could stretch out and watch me so's I didn't wake up in the night and cut Lefty's throat.

You would have laughed to see that dog, except that a bull terrier has no sense of humor. He would just as soon have sunk his teeth in me as he would have winked.

In two shakes I was sound asleep; it seemed to me that I was falling deeper and deeper into perfect blackness all night long until something shook me by the hand. I looked up, and there was Smiler, with my hand in his teeth, growling and pulling harder and harder.

"You'd better get up and come to me," said Lefty grinning, "or he'll tear that hand right off at the wrist."

There was seventy pounds of that dog, or pretty near that much, and he was tough and hard. When he pulled, you knew that something was happening.

I slid out of bed, and he walked me over to the boss, wagging his tail when he dropped my hand, just as if he had brought Lefty a stick, and you can lay to it that Smiler didn't look on me as any more than a stick! It was a nervous

job, being led around by Smiler, but it was a good way of waking up in the morning. All the wrinkles were out of my head that quick!

After that, we tumbled through a bath. Then Lefty worked on his face a while. What he done to himself was a shame! He worked for not more than fifteen minutes with the things that I had brought to him from the druggist's. When he finished he called me to look at him.

It was a shock, I can tell you. I hardly knew that man! His eyes were all surrounded with deep shadows. His face was mighty pale, and his hair was filled up with gray hairs, with one white patch over the temple. Also, he had brought out all the wrinkles in the center of his forehead. Down beside his mouth there were deep seams that made him look extra sad.

"Do I look like a broken heart, Sammy?" said he.

I admitted that he did. He shook his head and said that for a poor, broken-hearted violinist who had just been burned out of house and home, he really should have hair twice as long as what he was wearing.

We went down into the dining room, me holding his hand and him leading along behind me very slow, with his feet fumbling and stumbling just a little —whenever he looked down through the edges of those dark glasses and saw something worth stumbling over.

The clerk and the two fat gentlemen hadn't wasted any time about starting their talk. Every eye in that dining room swung around and hit us full blast. There were little ohs and ahs from every direction as we went over and took our chairs at a corner table.

I ordered ham and eggs, mush and milk, chocolate, strawberries and cream, toast and marmalade. Then what do you think that that grafter that was with me got?

A glass of milk and some crackers!

Yes, sir, I give you my word that that was all he took. I could see why he did it, of course. It made a grand contrast—me being the wasteful, idle, pampered nephew and him the sad and self-sacrificing old gent who was refusing me nothing, yet starving his poor old self on my account. You should have seen the black looks that I collected, and you should have seen how they looked at him. Why, there was one woman with a face like an Indian squaw's—or a chief's, maybe. When she saw the picture over at our table she began to snivel. Finally she had to get up and sneak out of the room with a handkerchief up to her face. That started a lot of the others that had been holding in. I can tell you that the crying there in that dining room was a whole lot more open and wholehearted than any crying at any funeral that ever I seen. It would have done you good to sit in and listen to it!

It was wonderful, most of all, to be on the inside and hear and see the boss at work. He was a jim-dandy, and don't you make any mistake about it. He pretty soon forgot even to drink that glass of milk and eat those crackers. The darned old faker held out his hand and stuck it in the sun, where everybody could see how bad it was shaking. Then he said in a tragic sort of a deep I-may-be-dying-but-I-won't-let-on sort of voice:

"I think that I feel the sun—I think that I feel the honest sun, Samuel!"

I said that it was shining right on his hand. Then he stuck out his other hand, too, and turned them over in the light.

"God bless the sun, Samuel," said Lefty. "God bless the sun, dear boy, for you will find that there is more kindness and honesty in it than there is in many human hearts. Ah, yes!"

This voice of his, you understand, was one of them controlled voices that ain't supposed to fetch more than the ear of the person that they're talking

to, but you can hear them plain all over a room.

Well, that speech of his sank them in flocks. They couldn't stand it. Every one of the women was finished and had to get up and walk right out of that dining room, which was a shame, because that made them miss the rest of the show. The men didn't miss anything. Lefty had saved up some extra good licks and he gave them the advantage of them.

All the time he was saying in an aside to me:

"Don't eat so fast, kid. We have to lengthen this out. I'll tell you the difference that this show makes to us. It means that most of these boobs are going to go home and write out checks and send them to me. A lot of five and ten-dollar bills are going to arrive in the next mail. I can feel it coming, Sammy. There is nothing like tears, Sammy, to dissolve the glue and threads that hold the strongest wallet in the world together. So take it easy. But seem to be relishing everything a lot. Smack your lips some. And show a lot of pleasure. Because it will do a lot of good for contrast. I'm going to die of hunger, though; I can see that!"

This was the way he was talking under his breath to me, while he was pouring out bunk for the rest of the crowd. Pretty soon the hotel clerk came in like he was walking right out loud in church. He leaned over the table, and said, "When you are at liberty, sir, Mr. Johnson, the president of our oldest bank, would like very much to have the privilege of meeting you, sir."

You could hear people catching their breaths all over the room. At the same time you could see them shuffling the burden off of their own shoulders and leaving it to the banker to do the charity for the whole outfit. Well, you would know that Lefty wouldn't be fool enough to undo everything that he had managed up to that time. He says in that voice which makes everybody in the room feel like an eavesdropper:

"Can you tell me on what account Mr. Johnson wishes to see me?"

No, the clerk couldn't, but he had an idea that it would be to the advantage of Mr.—what was the name?

"My name is William Gobert," said Lefty, loud enough for those with checking accounts to hear and understand.

"Mr. Gobert, I am sure that it would be to your advantage——"

"Ah," said Lefty, "do I understand you, my kind young friend?"

The clerk was at least ten years older than Lefty. Lefty had the folks so groggy by this time that they would swallow anything. He took off his dark glasses, and let them see his eyes, looking terrible deep sunk, he had shadowed them up so well. And he had pulled down his eyebrows, so that they looked very shaggy and long.

"I think that I *do* understand. I feel the kindness of Mr. Johnson. But—will you express to him the deepest thanks of a poor violinist and tell him that I cannot take charity. I cannot, sir, and I fear that that is what he is about to offer me."

By the time this sad, soft whisper had ended, everybody in the room was almost standing up in his place to see how proud and sad and dignified Lefty was—and most of all to look at those horrible blackened eyes. The clerk was finished; he didn't dare keep on talking and spoiling the effect of a grand picture like that. He turned around and tiptoed out of the room, humping all over in a silly way, like he had stolen something.

Lefty leaned his head wearily on his trembling hand. He closed his eyes and sighed. His murmuring lips you would have said were breathing out a few chunks of a prayer.

What he was saying was: "Sammy, there are a dozen of them scribbling down my name, and the rest of them

are too full of salt and tears to see what to write, but they can learn later. There is going to be at least *one* twenty-dollar check in this haul. Oh, kid, it was a lucky day when we started teaming! Wait till I water this fair plant of charity by turning loose your voice and my violin on them!"

CHAPTER X.

PREPARATIONS.

RIGHT after breakfast he went down to the town hall and tried to hire it for that night to give what he said was to be a violin concert, assisted by a boy's voice. The owner looked over the pair of us, and asked if I was the boy. When Lefty said I was, the owner said he reckoned that he could get along without hiring his hall out to us; besides, he said, it was usual to hire his hall out for advance payment.

Lefty had to admit that he didn't have any money for paying in advance. The owner laughed at him. He said that he took no chances on charities like that. Altogether he talked pretty rough. I wondered how mad Lefty would be when he got away. Lefty just said as we got to the sidewalk:

"I was afraid that we would have to perform in that hall. But that old codger played our game for us."

I asked him what in the world he meant, and he said:

"Do you think that I want to get up there on the stage of that hall and fiddle for these people? Not me! There used to be a time when a man could hire halls and go all over the country very respectably. The good old days have gone, son. They have all gone! There's a whole crew of real artists that are flocking over the country. A lot of Polish and Russian 'ski's' are wandering around with their fiddles, giving concerts and educating the public until you can't find any town that hasn't heard one of those foreigners."

I told Lefty that I thought he fiddled so good that hardly nobody could be any better. He only laughed. "Why, some of those Russians could stand on their heads and play better than I can standing on my feet. They've got their start when they're five years old, and they keep right on for ten hours a day until they're a hundred. Well, son, could I compete with a man that has gone through ninety-five years of it? I couldn't!"

Lefty was that way. Always talking up in the air where you could hardly follow him. He said that his playing needed lots of air and probably that my singing voice would need the same thing, that there was nothing like the open to make a rough thing seem smoother.

"Look at what the night does, kid? You can take the worst burned-up desert that was ever made, and a heap of mountains off on one side all jumbled together like a junk pile. Well, you wait until the sun goes down and the old desert is all covered over with fancy blues and violets and such things. It looks like neither water nor dry land, but better than both; the junk heap of mountains has turned into something that looks like a castle—maybe in ruins, but all the better for that. And the same way with us. Night will smooth us off and make us look pretty polished."

Well, you couldn't beat that fellow. He smoothed everything off so perfect. He had ideas about everything. Mostly they were the ideas of a rascal, I suppose, but they were always interesting.

In a little talk with the hotel proprietor, Lefty let it leak out that the boss of the town hall had refused to hire it out on credit. Well, you never seen anybody so mad as that proprietor was. He said that it was the last time that he would ever buy tickets for a show in that town hall, and he would arrange it so that other folks would do

the same way. Lefty tried to pretend that he didn't want anything like that.

When we got upstairs Lefty was tickled, I can tell you. He laughed and carried on and said that the town was ours, that the news would go all over, how the cruel hall owner had refused to give us a chance.

Then he took an extra long time feeding Smiler, brushing him and washing his feet and legs. Lefty said that washing a dog all over—except just his face and his feet was bad for the dog, that a good brushing was a lot better.

We managed to kill the day until the evening came along. Old Lefty waked me up, but wouldn't let me have a bite, because eating might spoil my voice, and if they saw us eating so many squares, they would lose some of their pity.

Then we tried over some tunes, very soft, Lefty just touching them in on the violin so light that you could hardly make them out, and me talking the words out so that he would see I knew them. He didn't want anything fancy.

"We'll give them the good old tunes that they've known all their lives—the sort of tunes that the tired business man wants his daughter or his wife to play and sing when he lies around easy after supper. This world that you're living in is made for that same tired business man, son, and don't you forget it. It's his own private possession. You mustn't turn out anything that is going to give him a shock or a start, because the poor dear is fagged. When he comes home, he wants nothing except the nice light things, that you can lay back and listen to without using any brains; or if he goes out to a theater, he wants to hear a musical comedy. I mean, he wants to see it. Because the music at one of those shows makes better seeing than it does hearing. Or else he goes to a moving-picture show, and there he doesn't have to even applaud. His wife sits alongside of him and reads the captions out loud, so that he can almost see that picture with his eyes closed.

"Well, son, that's the sort of a person that we want to please this evening. We want to catch him on his way back from the moving picture show and give him another close-up with glycerin tears of poverty and art going begging in the streets."

Lefty enjoyed that little speech of his a good deal. You could depend upon that. Lefty would always appreciate himself. Even if he had been on a desert island, I suppose that Lefty could have put on a show and enjoyed it all by himself. If he told a joke, he always laughed at it harder than anybody else would laugh. If he said anything bright, he would lean back, smile a little and taste the pleasure of his own brightness for a long time.

The evening came along, and Lefty let me have some banana. That was all. I went to sleep again, and when he woke me up, it was almost the middle of the night. I got up with a groan and I said why should we go out in the night and wake up folks that was in bed. But Lefty said that the tired business man was rarely in bed long before midnight, because it took him a long time to get over the tired feeling that the day had give him. Besides, he said what good would it be to go fiddling right after dinner time, when people were too full to lean out the windows and be sorry for you. Along about midnight people had already spent so much money that they didn't mind spending a lot more.

"What is a quarter," said Lefty, "after a ten-dollar party?"

Would you have thought of that?

First he fixed himself up, and put some more shadows around his eyes. He said that he would not wear the dark glasses, because it was no use wearing a label when the whole town already knew that he *was* blind and would have fought anybody who said that he wasn't.

When he was all fixed up, he took Smiler along and we started out. I said that it wouldn't do for Smiler to look like a regular trained begging dog. Lefty asked if I thought that there was only one side to Smiler. I wondered what he meant by this, but I figured it was a wrong time to be asking too many questions. We started out.

CHAPTER XI.

ONLY A FAKER.

I WOULD have gone to the brightest corner in the middle of town, where the people would pass pretty thick, as they began to float along homeward from the theater. Lefty wouldn't do that. He picked out a dark spot near an alley's mouth—so dog-gone dark that there was no street light worth noticing. The moon shone down there. Lefty took off his hat and shook out his hair, which he had fixed extra gray for the occasion. Then he told Smiler to guard his feet. That dog-gone dog lay down right across Lefty's toes just as if he understood.

Lefty put back his head and began to play. The moon shone down on that imitation gray head of his; it splashed all white on Smiler, till that dog looked like he was cut out of shining snow—only mighty dangerous.

Instead of picking sad tunes, Lefty said:

"Kid, you and me are out here, being forced to play in the street like beggars, because we couldn't hire the town hall, as everybody knows. But you and me haven't had any begging experience. We don't even know enough to get onto a bright corner where a crowd is passing. All that we do is to sneak off into an alley mouth and there out of the darkness we start in and play bright and cheery little tunes to make everybody happy. And the tunes we play are so bright and so gay that they make a pretty good background for showing off our poverty more than ever. You understand?"

Could you beat that? Nobody could. He was just a regular scamp, that Lefty was. But he knew an awful lot. Well, he led off with something all by himself, played very lively and dancing, sort of. It was an Irish jig tune.

The first thing that you know there was a couple of men coming down the street with a couple of girls. They stopped, and one of the men said: "Good heavens, here they are——"

The other one said: "Reduced to begging in the street!"

"How frightful—poor things!" said the girls. "Go and tell somebody——"

One of the men ran down the street.

You could see that things were going to come our way from that minute. When Lefty finished up that tune the first time, I hit in with the words. It was just right for me. Not too high, but high enough—easy words that didn't mean nothing, about a girl down in the county of Mayo whose name was Molly, and was waiting for you to come down and look into her blue eyes. My throat was feeling pretty good, and my stomach was empty as a drum, so's I could breath deep and hang onto the notes. Somehow a voice sounds better at night, the same as an auto seems to run better, too. The first note I hit made a shiver run through Lefty. I knew that he was tickled and terribly surprised. I went right on making those notes cut clean all over that town, every one of them ringing like a bell.

It put tears in my eyes, it made me feel so good to sing so loud and so fine.

After that we went right on, old Lefty just stopping for a minute in between to rub rosin on his bow or something that gave him a chance to hear what they were saying out in the crowd.

At first nobody could see the hat, they were so busy looking at Lefty's grand face and listening to the violin and me. After a while they saw the

hat, and some man stepped forward, cleared his throat a little and very carefully dropped two fifty-cent pieces in, so that the people could tell by the jingle that he had given something really pretty good.

The next man rolled up a couple of dollar bills and dropped them in. The first man looked pretty mad and small. After that, the men kept sneaking up one by one and dropping something in. They had to be careful about it, because if they leaned over the hat, old Smiler grinned at them and lifted his lip, showing his four fangs.

"The poor fellow picked the worst place in town," said one.

"Hush, you silly!" said a girl. "Do you think this poor, blind, sad man knows where the best places for begging are?"

They went on like that, and the money in that hat got deeper and deeper. I pretended to stumble, and stepped into the hat, squashing down the paper money pretty flat. That gave the hat quite an empty look.

After we had been there about forty minutes, everybody in town was there, or coming pretty rapid.

Then Lefty put across another emotion for them. He stepped on my toe and started in to play a piece that was all on one string, mostly. Lefty said it was the G string, and that an old German wrote it down a long time ago. It was very grand and solemn. It came at the end of all those jolly tunes very striking, like it was something that Lefty couldn't help playing, like it was something that come right out of his heart and showed you how miserable he had been inside, all the time, while he was making happy music for the rest of the town!

Well, sir, it sort of startled me and gave me a choke in the throat. I had to give myself a shake to remember that this *wasn't* a poor, blind, old chap with a failing heart that had just been burned out of his home. It was only Lefty, a faker.

Nobody else in that crowd, of course, knew what I knew, and the effect of that piece on them was more than you could say. I'm ashamed to think of how those poor people stood around and mopped their eyes and sniffed and swallered. Some of the women was so affected that they just leaned up against one another and moaned. The men stopped thinking. They just reached into their pockets and hauled up all the cash that they hadn't spent on their girls. I saw whole handfuls of dough come up into the light. While Lefty was putting away his violin in the case, taking plenty of time, he said in that whisper of his that would of carried through a five-foot wall: "My heart is giving way, Samuel. We must go home. Take up my hat, and if there is anything in it, put it in the violin cover——"

There was a green cloth cover that went around the violin case. Old Lefty was pretty wise, because if we had emptied that hat into our pockets, it was so crammed that the people would have known pretty close to what we had.

I dumped it into the green cover so quick that it looked like nothing at all. Then Lefty put the hat on. I took his hand and led him away through the crowd. When he came to the gutter, he stepped down to the street with such a bump so that anybody could see that he was stone blind!

That crowd was just buzzing and milling around us. We had to walk slow through just mobs of people. As we went by they jammed money into our pockets until they bulged. All the men were saying it was an outrage that a great artist like this had to play in the streets. Did anybody ever hear such a grand piece as that last one. No, nobody ever had!

They stuck right with us up to the door of the hotel, and we collected

money all the time. With Lefty saying every once in a while in that whisper of his: "Hurry, Samuel! I am failing fast!"

Every time he said that, there would be another rush, and wallets would open up and more money would be jammed onto us.

We got into the hotel at last, and Lefty staggered up the stairs with me. A couple of men came along saying they were doctors and that they could be of assistance. Lefty said that all he needed was to lie still and rest.

So they went away and there we were!

We dumped everything on the floor, because the table would hardly have held it without overflowing, and sorted it out—there weren't many nickels and dimes to count. There were more quarters, and still more fifty-cent pieces, and the bulk of the stuff was dollar bills and upward! Yes, there was a whole flock of fives and tens; there was seven twenty-dollar bills. You would hardly think that there was that much money in the world!

We counted it up. It was twelve hundred and fifty dollars!

Lefty sat there cross-legged on the floor looking sort of grim, saying at last: "It doesn't seem possible! It's more like robbing a bank! Here we have all this money thrown in our faces, you might say——"

"And it's the first haul!" I said. "Maybe this will just warm them up a little. Maybe the next haul will be twice as good!"

Lefty smiled down at me, sort of pitying. He said that we had worked the town pretty well, that it was always best to leave a place while you was still lucky, because you never could tell what would happen. He said that to-morrow we would get out of that town quick and slide away for the mountains to try a dodge up there. Our worries were over; most of this money he would plant in a bank where it could keep on growing just as fast as it wanted to at five per cent.

He was a great thinker—Lefty! But it seemed a shame to me to leave that town before we had dragged it dry.

We were sitting there like that when all at once Lefty began to straighten up with a far-away look on his face.

"What's the matter, Lefty?"

He whispered: "Do you hear anything?"

I didn't, but the first thing that I knew, Lefty had reached in under his coat and slid out a revolver. Right then a little draft of air came over our way and started all the money fluttering and whispering, and I looked over my shoulder.

The door to the closet had just been opened. Then I seen him standing for the first time, looking like a devil, which he was. There, with a gun in his hand, pointed at us, was Jake.

As always, he had the upper hand and there was no chance to fight back at him. But even if there had been a chance, who would have wanted to take it, seeing what he was?

CHAPTER XII.

THE HUNCHBACK.

THERE is no real use in describing Jake. Nothing that you can say gives any idea of him. I can say that he was about five feet high, and no more; his head was stuck right in the middle of his shoulders, with his great, long chin sticking out over his chest. He looked sort of like a monkey, his arms dangling down so long that every minute you almost expected him to drop over a little and run along on all fours. Though when he was facing you, you just noticed these things, and the width of his shoulders, which was something amazing, still, you could swear that there was something wrong with the part of him that you couldn't see. In

another minute when you had a chance to look, you could see what it was—a great big bunch on his back, that hiked the tail of his coat away up.

Calling him a hunchback doesn't give just the right idea, because most hunchbacks seem to have pale faces, caved in chests, and walk with sort of a hitch. But Jake's chest stuck out the same as anybody's, or more. Only, on his back there was that great, big lump. And it seemed like he had a lot of strength there, more than you would ever imagine that a man should have.

I've been saying that Lefty was very strong, particular in the shoulders and in his hands. Nobody needed to ask you to say whether he was as strong as Jake, because he wasn't—not half!

Taking him all in all, it wasn't more than one thing that made him so terrible to look at. It wasn't his hump; it wasn't the fact that his head was stuck on his shoulders without any neck—stuck on so stiff that his face was pitched down toward the earth. It seemed hard for him to look up at you, and whenever he looked up it was with a frown. None of those things were so bad. The worst was his arms and his hands. I suppose that one of those hands of his would have made both of Lefty's with something over. There was thick black hair that grew curling all over the back of those hands and down, too, over the first joints of his fingers. Those fingers was so big and so long that, if he wanted to, he could catch hold with one finger as hard and as strong as another man could with his whole hand.

Take for instance that gun he had in his hand. It was the biggest size, but it looked just like a little thing—not like heavy steel, all loaded with six big bullets—in that grip of his.

He gave me a shudder, like he was a toad and a spider rolled into one. And you couldn't look at those bright, black eyes of his for more than a second without beginning to have the horrors so bad that you had to make yourself stop thinking.

Lefty just looked into my face. He didn't turn around at all, just as though I was a mirror that showed him all that he wanted to see. Then he drew in his breath: "Ah-h-h!" with a sort of a bubbling sound that made wriggles run all through my inwards. "He's got us at last!" said Lefty.

Jake grinned. It was like when you step on a nail and make a quick face before you holler. That was his smile. It came flashing on and made him look twice as bad as ever. Then it flashed right off again, and there was just the ordinary nightmare that was there before.

"Here I am, right enough," said Jake, "and I have to admit that the only reason that I've been quiet so long is that I've been standing here behind the closet door admiring you, Lefty—partly by hearing, and partly by looking through the crack and seeing."

I wondered what Lefty would do. Because it didn't come into my head that he could be beaten. I was sure that he would find some way of defeating the hunchback. Then I saw him simply put his revolver away under his coat again, and for the first time I knew that there was something in the world that made him afraid.

He stood up and turned around to Jake. He was quivering all over, he was so scared and so disgusted. Jake saw, and Jake grinned, saying,

"You don't seem very happy about having me here, Lefty. A man would think, to see you face, that it sort of hurt you to have a man like me around you! Is that right?"

Lefty could hardly answer him for a minute. Then he said: "All right, Jake. How much is it? What'll you have?"

"What'll I have?" said Jake. "Why, I'll have the first thousand out of that

twelve hundred and fifty that you've just been counting aloud, there. And I'll have the goose that laid the golden eggs, too. I'll take the kid along with me!"

I would rather have died. Matter of fact, I almost thought that I *would* die when I heard that. And the first thing that I looked at was that big, hairy hand of his. And his arm, that could of reached halfway across the room to me!

Lefty just sat down on the bed and smiled. He was trying to be easy, but you could see with half an eye that he was shamming. His face was all gray, and his mouth was twitching.

"You don't want a lot," said he. "It wouldn't take a lot to satisfy you, I see! Only a thousand dollars and the kid, too! But I tell you, Jake, that you're not going to get a penny—*nor* the kid!"

Jake rubbed his hand over his mouth and grinned again. That grin went through me like fire.

"You would think that even a skunk like you, Lefty, would have better sense than to talk like that. You would think that you would know that it's dog-gone near more than I could do to keep from you. Suppose that I was to just satisfy myself by sending a slug of this here lead through your head and then scooping up *all* the money!"

He said it with a glare in those queer, greasy-looking eyes. Lefty blinked and got a shade whiter, still.

"That's bluff, Jake," said Lefty. "It doesn't work. This is not that kind of a town. They've got police, here; and they've got the means of scooping you up before you could ever get away from the hotel."

"Have they?" asked Jake. "Lemme tell you, kid, that I come into this room without being seen by nobody, and that I'm gonna be able to get away from the hotel again without being seen by nobody!"

He looked toward the window, as he said that. You could be pretty sure that those long arms of his would easy swing him up and down the side of a building, as easy as a monkey could climb through the limbs of a tree.

"It won't go," said Lefty. "You can have half the coin, Jake, but the rest of it and the kid stays with me."

A wave of rage went over Jake's face and he said: "Are you gunna talk back to my gun? I'll have half the coin *and* the kid!"

Lefty winced away. He shrank back from the bed and leaned against the wall, breathing hard and looking cornered. I was almost as sick to see the fear in his face as I was sick to see the horror in the other man. Jake seemed to see that he was paralyzing Lefty, like a wasp does with a tarantula, and he came a step nearer. Even his walk was different from the walk of other men. His whole body rolled a little, but he didn't look awkward, exactly—just queer and ugly in his motions the way he was in his looks, but all the time fast and smooth and sure.

"It would be pretty soft for you," he said, "to go loafin' around the country soakin' up money that don't belong to you, and workin' the kid for everything that he's worth. But the kid is meant for your betters. He's meant for me, old son, and I'm gonna have him. I'm in need of a rest, and the kid is gunna supply me with the hard cash to keep me easy!"

He was in the middle of the room now. When he made another step forward, it looked like he would be right within reachin' distance of Lefty. And Lefty's hand jumped inside of his coat.

"Don't you pull out that hand, Lefty!" said Jake, "or I'll drill you! It's a terrible big temptation to stand up here and *not* drill you. Now you back out of the room. I don't need any more of your company!"

You could see Lefty waver. There

was nothing that he wanted in the world so much as he wanted to get out of that room and away from that devil of a man. He looked to the door, and then he looked back to me, and just when I was giving up hope, I seen a flash come in his eyes. I knew that he would fight for me.

He said: "Jake, you've got the drop on me, but if you shoot, you'll be dead before long. They'll get you sure. Right now I'm the poor blind man in this town. I'm the honest beggar. And if you murder me, they'll hunt you and kill you like a dog—and you know it. More than that, I'm not going to drop without some chance at you. You'll have to kill me with the first shot, Jake, or else I'll surely kill you! It's been growing in me these years. Some day I'll be the death of you, Jake. I can feel it in my bones. And maybe the time is now!"

He was like a man that was drunk. He was blinking and glaring at Jake. All the same, he was getting into a sort of crazy fighting mood. Jake seen it and seemed to be bothered. He squinted at Lefty as though Lefty was a long ways off, and as though he was seeing something strange and dangerous.

"Where's my half, then?" said Jake.

"Split the pot in two, kid," said Lefty.

I dragged my foot through the money and divided it into two parts. Jake leaned down and with about two scoops of his big hand, he had one half of the coin into his pockets. Then he backed away toward the window.

"Well, Lefty," he said, "now that I've found your trail I expect to be living easy again for a while."

He straddled the window sill, his gun still in his hand.

"Because I'm not through with you. Oh, no. And you, kid. You remember me, too. I ain't pretty, am I? And believe me, I look better than I am. But salt this away in your head—one day you'll be workin' for *me!*"

That horrible grin flashed on his face and went out again, and then he swung himself through the window and up out of sight, exactly like a monkey—his big, long arms carrying him, and his scrawny legs sort of dangling.

CHAPTER XIII.

PURSUIT.

OLD Smiler had watched big Jake all that time with his mouth just watering for a word to go after him. After Jake swung out of the window, the dog stood up with his feet on the sill and looked out into the night as though he had a mind to be after that ugly-looking man.

I wondered, too, why Lefty hadn't sent the dog after Jake as soon as he saw him in the room, but it was easy to see that Lefty was more than half paralyzed all the time. He had just made that one big effort—sort of desperate—to get Jake out of the room—and he had won out on it, though it cost him half the loot.

Not quite half, because while I was dragging my foot through the heap, I had managed to put the little stack of twenties and most of the fives in the smallest half that I divided the pot into. The result was that we had nearly eight hundred dollars, and Jake had about four hundred and fifty.

Lefty had fallen into a chair. He lay there with his head back, breathing hard and looking at the ceiling out of glassy eyes. He was all in. If a baby had come into the room, Lefty wouldn't have been able to raise a hand to help himself. It was awful to see him like that. He hadn't been touched by that monster, but you would think that he had been more than half killed.

Finally he managed to get a flask out of his pocket and he poured a big dram down his throat. In a minute it

began to work. His wits came back to him on the jump.

He said: "Scoop up that money. We're going to leave!"

"Leave—now?" I asked, not able to believe him.

"We're going to leave now," said Lefty. "Right now! While 'Jumbo' is counting the money that he's stolen, and while he thinks that we're still in the hotel. Right now is the time when he'll be napping and taking it easy. And right now is the time that we'll give him the slip!"

By the time he finished, we were ready to leave. We opened the door and Lefty listened at the hall.

"Don't walk too soft," said Lefty. "And—lead me along. There may be somebody in the lobby!"

So we got down to the street. When we stepped out onto it, it seemed to me that Jake, like a big shadow, was standing there flat against the wall, ready to grab one of us in each big hand.

But no Jake was there.

We looked at each other. It scared me worse than ever to see how badly Lefty was frightened.

After that we legged it right across the town until we came to the outskirts—then through the outskirts, where even our lightest steps made a sneaking echo behind us. We got to the shadow of the trees at last. A road was winding away through those trees. Lefty said that we'd hit a good pace and keep among that road as far as we could until the morning. Because he said that Jake could almost smell out a place where a man was hiding.

I said: "Will you tell me one thing?"

"Yes, I'll tell you that I'm glad that we're away out here! What else?"

"That time that you woke up in the night and dreamed that a man was in the next room——"

"Yes, that was Jake!"

It was all clear to me. They were old enemies. Jake was hounding Lefty across the country. As we walked along I asked Lefty why it was.

He said: "It's for a reason too crazy to be talked about. What's important is that that devil is after me and wants nothing in the world so much as to get me. Yet back in my head, Sammy, I've an idea that I'm the one that's going to win. Mind you, I'm afraid of that fellow. I don't want anything to do with him. But in the end, I think that I'm going to have his life under my thumb—and put that thumb right down!"

I didn't say anything, of course. Just the same I couldn't help feeling that Lefty was talking through his hat. It was what he wanted to do that seemed to him like what he was *going* to do.

From the top of the next hill you could look down and see a curve of silver in the hollow of the valley over to the left. That curve went out—and then it began again. It was a river, running along with the view shut off by tall trees between here and there. I thought that I would sort of like to stop there and look, for a while, but Lefty said, "We'll do no stopping at all. I have a queer feeling in my bones that our trouble isn't over for a while yet."

Right pat on top of that an automobile came whirring around the corner of the road below us, back toward town. Lefty jumped as though he had been shot, and then he dragged me down the hill through the trees for a way.

"It's not *possible* that that's Jake," said Lefty. "And yet if it is——"

He looked wildly around him, as though he would want wings, to get away from that trouble. And then—right up there above us on the road the automobile stopped. We could hear the noise of the driver's feet when they hit the pavement.

That was enough for us. You can believe that we didn't ask no more questions, but we headed down that slope

like the wind. I was taking steps about twelve feet long, with the slope to help me. When my legs crumbled up under me I rolled head over heels about fifty feet.

That didn't bother me. I only wished that I could have gone a hundred times faster—because ahead of me there was Lefty running away through the night and leaving me behind—so that that big brute could grab me and squash the life out of me with one swipe of his hand.

I wanted to scream. I could feel that scream jump up and take hold of my throat like a hard hand. I kept it back, because it would be like turning on a light to show Jake the way to me. Besides, it wouldn't make Lefty turn back!

When I was about half way down the slope, I heard something behind me and looked back. There was something that was a man, and yet didn't look like a man, coming down the hill with a sprawling stride. I knew that was Jake, running like the wind.

My legs were a little tired and sore from the pounding of running down that steep hill. You better believe that I forgot all about being tired then. I got rubber cushions in my heels and wings in my knees, and I just flew.

There was nothing before, now, to guide me, just the blackness under the trees, and I kept praying to myself: "God, be good to me, and don't let me trip——"

It was that prayer that kept me on my feet. In the day I couldn't have taken half a dozen steps even walking without stumbling over some of the roots. But nothing mattered to me, and nothing stopped me then. I just winged it along. I could only pray, too, that I would be traveling along behind the path that Lefty might of gone.

It seemed to me that a dozen times I passed a glint of something white at the side, where Lefty and Smiler would be crouched, waiting for me to lead big Jake by them. And then—why, they would simply sneak back up the hill, grab the automobile and drive away in her!

I thought of those things, but I didn't waste any time stopping. I only ran all the harder and took longer steps every second. Behind me I could *feel* how Jake was gaining.

"Stop, you brat, or I'll drop you!" gasped out Jake behind me.

I looked back over my shoulder to see him smashing along with his gun in his hand. A slab of moonshine fell through the trees just there and showed me his horrible face.

Suddenly, I knew that he was after me, just as much as he was after Lefty. He wanted me to do as he said—live with him and work for him, begging in the towns. I was awful sick. I almost *wanted* him to shoot. Maybe he would have, but there was a crash and Jake went down with a smash. He was up again right away, and once more I had the feeling that a hand was reaching out right behind me. Now there was no gun—he had lost that when he fell.

The slope got more gradual, and the strength went out of my legs at the same minute. There was no longer any sharp drop of the ground to help me along, and there was no strength in my legs to swing me along. I was pounding hard on my heels, and my lungs were all lined with fire, but there was no sign of any feeling in the rest of me. Below the hips my legs were just numb. I could only know that they were working by the banging of my feet.

I knew I was losing ground awful fast. When I looked back, I seen that big Jake was feeling the run, too. Maybe he was hurt by his fall. Or maybe those skinny legs of his could carry him along fast only for a short ways before he got tired. He was most

awful tired now, and his face all screwed up into a knot.

There was no doubt about who would win out in the end. There wasn't anything left for me to call on when I was used up—and then I busted out from the edge of the trees and I saw before me—the water!

It looked fine to me, I tell you! If only I was to die in it, instead of in those awful hands of big Jake.

More than that was waiting for me. Down yonder a voice called. The next minute I seen my friend Lefty sitting in a canoe right in the shadow of the bank—sitting in that canoe, and cutting the rope that tied her to the bush on the water's edge. There was Smiler sitting in the bows and sticking out his tongue and laughing in the moonshine.

I dived for it just as the hand of Jake, reaching for me, stubbed against my shoulder, but missed any finger hold. I went sailing ahead through the air.

I dived right under the boat and came up on the far side. Lefty got me by the nape of the neck and jerked me right into the canoe.

The first thing that I saw was Jake standing there on the bank above me, throwing his arms up over his head—yelling, stamping and cursing like he was crazy, until Lefty took a shot at him. Then he ducked back into the bushes with a roar like a beast.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

OUTLAW WINS BEGEMMED NOSE BAG

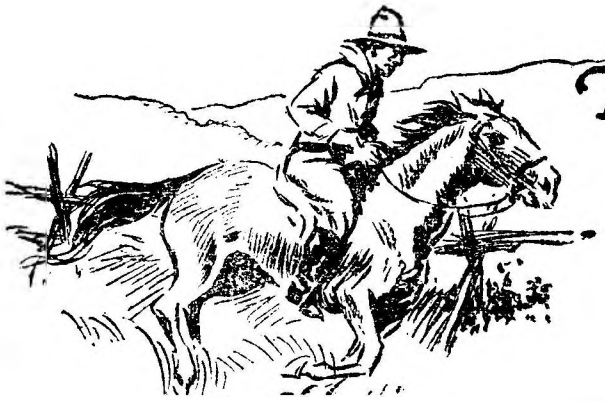
ONE of the most famous outlaw horses taking part in rodeos is Headlight, the champion bucking horse. Headlight is a glaring example of a good horse gone wrong. He is fifteen years old and has been bucking for twelve of those years. Some horses are outlaw buckers from the start, hating man and fighting against being mounted. Not so Headlight, champion bucker. Like Spartacus, the Gladiator, his youth was mild. He was raised on the ranch of his present owner, Ed McCarty, of Chugwater, Wyoming, and appeared destined for breeding purposes. He showed no sign of the murderous disposition he developed until he was three years old, when he accidentally bucked off a rider. That, according to McCarty, spoiled Headlight. He has been bucking off or trying to buck off riders ever since.

This trait makes him very valuable for rodeo purposes. "Good" wicked buckers are much in demand for the various cowboy contests held throughout the country. Strings of such buckers are leased out for rodeos and kept "on the buck" most of the year, earning thousands for their owners.

At Tex Austin's 1924 New York rodeo where Headlight won a jeweled nose-bag trophy, he bucked off Paddy Ryan, who had won the Roosevelt Cup by winning both the Cheyenne and Pendleton bronc-riding contests in the same year, 1924, also Dave Whyte, national bronc-riding champion for 1922, and ten other good men.

Whyte says that, like the elephant, Headlight never forgets. If he bucks a man off one year, he remembers the trick with which he did it and uses the same technique to buck off the same man a year later—or after even a longer interval. Headlight dismissed Whyte from his championship in 1923 at the Yankee Stadium rodeo in New York, so Dave ought to know.

This is not the first bucking-horse championship Headlight has won. He won similar supremacy at Cheyenne. He has bucked the best of them at Pendleton, Calgary, Fort Worth, and at London, where he demonstrated saddle-emptying at the British Empire Exhibition.



The Mutt

By
Ray Humphreys

Author of "Hoofprints Don't Lie," etc.

WHERE he came from nobody knew, but when the mists rose from the Indian Hills that morning he had stood, his shaggy head over the corral gate, gazing wistfully at the handful of thoroughbreds inside—or perhaps, at the plentiful racks of mountain hay.

Within a few minutes a gum-chewing, whimsical cowboy had sought out Phil Fletcher, the millionaire owner of the dude ranch, and duly reported on the arrival of the first guest at the newly-acquired property that Phil, fresh from the East, was endeavoring to develop.

"Boss," said the puncher, with a grin, "thar's a visitor down to the corral gate, blamed anxious to register—shall I let him in?"

"A visitor?" asked Phil. "He's early! Who is he?"

Without answering, the puncher led the boss down to the corral, where the shamefully-unkempt stranger still waited. The rancher let out a snort of contempt as the cowboy gleefully pointed out the "visitor."

"A rat tail!" said the cowboy.

"A mutt!" said Phil disgustedly, "a stray mutt! That's what we call yaller dogs at home, and this is a yaller horse—a plain mutt!"

"Yaller hoss?" echoed the puncher. "Why, ding it, boss, that hoss is a bay, or I'm crazy in the head!"

"I mean he has no breeding," explained Phil.

Fletcher, in addition to sprucing up the old O'Leary ranch for a dude ranch, was also starting a horse-breeding establishment and he had a bunch of high class thoroughbreds already on the place. He seemed to know horses, so the cowboy didn't argue about the stray's breeding.

"Better chase him off," said Phil, but the puncher, who had approached the stray, turned back with an objection.

"He's a rope hoss, boss," said the puncher, "an' we're needin' one bad. Yuh can't use blue-blood colts fer that. Mebbe we oughter keep this feller, until his owner calls fer him, and let him earn his keep?"

That was the way "The Mutt" came to the Fletcher dude ranch. He remained, at the cowboy's suggestion, and in time, due to good handling, he lost his shaggy coat and his hangdog air. He had a running brand on him, but it was too old and indistinct to help much. Fletcher promptly forgot about the stray. Perhaps it was just as well, for had he remembered he might have ordered the animal off again.

As the weeks wore on, The Mutt earned his keep, and in time grew to know the blue-blooded stock in the big barns and corrals. Fletcher had brought out a superb Kentucky stallion, and a remuda of thoroughbred running mares,

from the East, to start his horse establishment. He was more interested in that phase of the game than he was in the dude ranching proposition; hence the season passed with little headway toward the making of the dude ranch. When fall came the ranch had had no visitors and Fletcher was engrossed solely in the beautiful animals in his corrals and pastures—twelve of the finest horses in all of Colorado.

As cold weather came on The Mutt grew shaggy again, for he was not blanketed at night like his high-toned companions. He had no stall. He was fed, and that was all. Perhaps it was the all-too-evident lack of attention that led him to desert the ranch at intervals. gradually growing more frequent. He'd be gone for a day, two days, three days, but he always came back, generally at dawn, and the lone puncher that Fletcher employed would cuss him roundly, then pat his neck and let him in for a good breakfast.

When The Mutt disappeared for five days, the puncher was forced to complain to Fletcher.

"Boss, guess we gotta buy a pony, after all!"

"A pony?" said Fletcher, "what's the matter with that stray mutt you've been using?"

"Guess he's homesick fer th' old hills," said the puncher, "leastwise he's out roamin' most of the time now—an' I can't get along very well without a hoss——"

"When he comes back," said Fletcher, "take one of the colts and run him off the place—if he can't stay around let him go for good—and meanwhile, Joe, you can use that gray mare. She's not much anyway—off color—and I doubt if she'll ever raise another colt. Use her——"

"She's mean for saddle work," said Joe.

"Use her," said Fletcher. That settled it.

The Mutt came back, at dawn of the seventh day, to get a cool reception from Joe. On second thought, the puncher decided to let him in, feed him his breakfast, and curry him, on the theory that it was easier to disobey orders and use the stray again, than it was to fight the gray mare every time he tried to saddle her.

Whether The Mutt recognized the changing conditions or not, Joe didn't know, but the bay remained dutifully home for ten days before he departed for another rest. After he had gone the puncher turned to the gray mare. She had had time to think and arrange matters, and, when Joe did mount, promptly jammed him up against a corral post, crushing his leg for him.

Fletcher, saddling one of the more docile animals, rode the twelve miles to Conifer for the doctor. The rancher, knowing the puncher would be laid up, hired the only man he could get, a Mexican, and the Mexican brought his own horse along. The gray mare was not disturbed thereafter. For several days following the mishap things went smoothly.

The ranch, situated in a secluded mountain valley, was so isolated that the average traveler on the Conifer highway would pass the place by unnoticed. The highway was the only exit from the ranch. The Mexican helper whom Fletcher had hired opened his eyes at the sight of the thoroughbreds. Later he listened eagerly to directions from Joe as to their care. That night the Mexican rode. The next day he was at work and the routine of the ranch went on much as it had before.

The second morning after the arrival of the new hand, however, Fletcher was awakened by an awful din. As he listened, he heard the bark of a revolver close at hand. He got up and out in a twinkling, to find three strangers in the yard. They promptly held him up, and the leader, who appeared to be a

white man, although his companions were Mexicans, spoke crisply to Fletcher, ordering him into the house.

"I've come for your stock," said the intruder, as he backed the rancher into the house, "and being a business man I want a bill of sale for 'em, seein' I have to take 'em through Conifer, an' mebbe somebody might git curious thar. Once through that town I'll disappear—but I gotta have the bill o' sale an' yuh've gotta hurry an' make it out pronto!"

And the stranger pushed his gun against Fletcher.

The rancher, white as a sheet, made out the bill of sale that the bandit dictated. Then the bandit marched the rancher out into the yard again, ordering one of the Mexicans to guard him for the moment. The leader mounted and rode with the other Mexican to the corral, where, to Fletcher's astonishment, his new hired man, Juan, was already opening the gates.

"Fine hosses," said the guard over Fletcher, as the other men rushed the blooded animals out of the corrals.

"Fine hired man I got!" flared Fletcher, but the guard's face went black, and he snarled a warning.

"Yuh bet! He with us!"

A moment and the leader was back again, shaking a finger at the dumfounded Fletcher.

"Jus' want to say," began the bandit, "that yuh better stay right here—quiet-like—an' never raise no fuss. We've been in this game a long while an' won't stand fer no foolishness—anyway, we're taking every hoss yuh got so yuh can't follow us very quick—an' if yuh try to make it on foot I'll drop behind and drill yuh good! Adios!"

Then they swept away, down through the pine-bordered meadow and out on to the Conifer highway, turning towards Conifer and disappearing at a tremendous speed. Fletcher ran for the bunk house, where he found the bedridden Joe trying to bandage up a bleeding arm. Joe was furious.

"That greaser yuh hired shot me—rushed in here after I started to yell fer yuh when I figgered them strangers were bad hombres. Shot me—but missed my haid——"

"What'll I do?" cried the frantic rancher.

"Which way did they go?"

"Towards Conifer!"

"Then mebbe they'll be stopped thar," said the puncher hopefully, "before they can git back into the bad lands—that's whar they must be headin'—to risk goin' through a town. Surely some one will stop 'em—recognize our hosses and try to——"

Fletcher groaned.

"But I gave them a bill of sale, Joe!"

The puncher made a wry face and winced.

"Then good-by Evenin' Star an' Black Beauty an' Prince an' Lady Bird an' Marie Antonette an'——"

Fletcher had heard enough. He turned and stalked out of the bunk house, in blank dispair. He couldn't run to Conifer. He had no horse. There was no way to notify the authorities in time to get a pursuit started before the outlaws reached the bad lands. The thoroughbreds were gone!

The rancher paused on the threshold of the bunk house and sighed and mopped his face with a handkerchief. When he looked up again, he started in surprise, rubbed his eyes, and then whooped. At the corral gate stood The Mutt, patiently waiting for breakfast. He had come back again. The traitorous Mexican hand, never having seen nor heard of the wandering pony, had overlooked a bet after all.

Popping his head in to shout the news at Joe. Fletcher opened the corral. The bay truant walked in, appetite all whetted for the oats he expected. Instead a bit was forced through his teeth; he was saddled, and Fletcher was streak-

ing it down through the meadows, trying to evolve a plan as he rode.

"If I get too close they'll shoot me," he decided, as The Mutt struck the highway, "and that won't help any. I'll take it easy and try to hang on as close as I can without them knowing it. Then, after they get through Conifer I may be there right after them, in time to get a posse started before the trail is lost. That's the best plan!"

The Mutt, though breakfastless, seemed willing to run, and as the bandits had pushed off some ten minutes before, Fletcher figured that he had better make haste for a few minutes, until he had gained on them. He urged the bay on, and the bay responded nobly. It was not until Fletcher decided that he had better slow up that he discovered the bay had the bit in his teeth and had no intention of slowing up.

The Mutt was running away, and bearing Fletcher straight into the arms of an outlaw gang that would surely take vengeance.

Fletcher considered getting off, but decided against it, seeing he didn't quite know how to leave a galloping horse in good order. He tugged at the bay's reins but that was useless. Then the rancher gave vent to his spleen.

"Blamed mutt!" he cried. "A yaller horse if ever there was one—here's his chance to make good and he's taking me to be killed! Ought never to have had anything to do with the brute—mutt—yaller horse!"

The Mutt seemed blissfully unconscious of the man on his back and ran on, with Fletcher holding the saddle and his breath, too. He expected at any moment to burst down upon the outlaws and the thoroughbreds—but the bandits were apparently racing the blooded stock in, and another mile went by and still no sight of the desperadoes.

Just as the desperate rancher had fully determined to get off the bay at all costs, The Mutt slowed up, veered and smashed into the light timber that fringed the road. He almost brushed his rider off before Fletcher had the presence of mind to duck. It was then that the rancher saw the horse was traveling an old trail—dim, but a trail just the same! A cattle trail, apparently, that had been long unused. Well, this was fortunate! At any rate the crazy pony would not dash him into the bandit gang——

Fletcher, busily ducking low limbs and switching in the saddle to prevent his legs from being scraped, hadn't much opportunity to worry about anything else. The Mutt went right on, along the winding trail which he knew by heart, it seemed. And what endurance! The rancher wondered as the pony plunged on—at the speed and the stamina of the sturdy bay—and likewise where they were heading.

Eventually, the trail emerged from the timber and came out on a bald mountain top. Here the horse slowed up, for a blow. He kept on, however, and Fletcher, looking around, saw that the trail led down. Far ahead, the rancher could see the roofs of buildings.

"Huh, another lonely ranch! Reckon that is where this crazy horse belongs! Maybe I can get help there!"

Now, when he could have halted and controlled the bay he didn't bother to do it, but let the horse head for his destination. Down the trail they spun, along a flat meadow, into more timber, then out upon a road. A moment later Fletcher grunted in astonishment. They were in Conifer, right in front of the post office, and several men were getting up from a bench in mild surprise.

"Fletcher!" cried one of them. "What in tarnation? Nobody's ridden that Injun trail in years—lookit your clothes, man, an' your face—you're bleedin'—scratched——"

"Never mind that," said Fletcher. "How about my horses—have they come through here yet?"

"No!" said the astounded townsmen, "but what ails yuh, Fletcher? Are your hosses runnin' away or what? An' whar did yuh pick up that ol' stray? He's been comin' in from th' hills offen on fer months—over that ol' trail. An' we've fed him, seein' he was an ol'-timer——"

"Stray nothing!" retorted Fletcher. "He's mine!" Then he explained rapidly that he had been robbed. It took but a minute to get the sheriff.

They hustled Fletcher and his precious mount, The Mutt, behind a house. The sheriff posted his men and ten minutes later, as the thoroughbreds trotted into town, foam-flecked and dusty, the sheriff beckoned to the men who rode at their tails. The outlaws looked harmless enough, with guns carefully concealed, and they stopped at the sheriff's signal.

"What's this?" asked the sheriff.

"Bought out Fletcher," said the leader simply. "He'll be along directly. I'm Jones from Willow Creek—got th' bill o' sale fer th' stock right here!"

"Better put yuhr hands up quick!" snapped out the sheriff. The bandits gulped in surprise as they saw guns bristle in every direction. They surrendered. There was nothing else to do. Then Fletcher walked out from his place of concealment, leading his sweaty bay horse.

"Yuh—yuh here?" cried the bandit leader, in bewilderment as he saw the rancher. Why—what—how——"

"You overlooked the best horse on the ranch," said Fletcher, with a satisfied smile, "the *only* horse I've got that can really run—comes of a long line of real horses—most valuable animal I've got—The Mutt is!"

TIGER RATTLESNAKE CAUGHT IN DESERTED MINE

A TIGER RATTLESNAKE, a rare species of reptile inhabiting the mountain regions of the Southwest, was captured a little while ago in the mountains south of Phœnix, Arizona, near the Max Delta Mine, by J. C. R. Rogers. Mr. Rogers lives in that vicinity and collects snakes for the Arizona reptile gardens in Phœnix. His experience in capturing the tiger rattlesnake was a thrilling one.

In the course of a search of several deserted mine shafts, he finally found one in which it was necessary to crawl prone on the ground. With the aid of a lantern, which he pushed ahead of him, and a flash light, he searched every crevice in the passageway, slowly working along to the larger opening within. Before reaching that point, he could hear the sounding of several rattlers ahead. His flash light revealed that they were black-tailed rattlers.

Suddenly Rogers heard a rattling behind him, and turning, he saw a fine specimen of the tiger rattler coiled in the passageway. It had either crawled in after him or had been overlooked by him in his search. Moving cautiously, Rogers succeeded in getting his snake noose over the rattler's head and pushed the snake out of the mine shaft opening ahead of him. He then returned and brought out three black-tailed rattlers and another specimen which naturalists were unable to identify and which had to be sent to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington for classification.

Your Dog

By David Post

Author of "The Beagle," etc.

THE BASSET HOUND

THE basset hound, whose native country is France, is believed to have been evolved, by careful selection and breeding, from the large French hounds. The breed is a very old one and has been popular in France, Germany and Russia. It was introduced into England in 1874 by Sir Everitt Millais and later into the United States. Here, however, it has never had a large following, so that there are few American breeders of this serviceable little hound. The reason is, perhaps, simply that some other dogs are better equipped for field work in this country. Where the land is much cut up by gullies, the basset hound is at a disadvantage, for his short, crooked legs do not carry him quickly over the ground. Then, too, he does not coöperate well with other members of a pack, but tends to work alone, following the scent he has found. It is better to use not more than two hounds for this reason. One is really sufficient.

The basset has a very keen nose and abroad has been employed in hunting rabbits, foxes, deer, wolves and wild boar. Although this hound moves very slowly, it will keep to the trail—once found—till it has brought the quarry to bay. It can travel at the rate of seven miles an hour and go for many hours without becoming tired. Usually it will not attack, but with its sweet, bell-like voice will guide the hunter to the cornered animal.

There are smooth-coated and wiry-haired bassets. Only the smooth-coated ones, I believe, have been seen in the United States. Their faces are often very wistful and appealing, and their dispositions are excellent.

Basset hounds should approach the following standard:

General Appearance—That of a hunting hound of classic mien, low set but of powerful physique, with the bloodhound type of head. The basset's legs are dwarfed.

Head—Long, narrow, with occiput well developed, and showing no perceptible "stop;" muzzle deep, square at the end, and with heavy-hanging flews.

Eyes—Small, sunken, and almond shaped, showing the haw and having a soft, gentle expression.

Ears—Very long, set on low, soft and velvety, and folding as the bloodhound's do.

Neck—Muscular and strong, but free from coarseness, with dewlaps well defined.

Body—Long, large, flat on back; ribs

well sprung, and loins broad and powerful, with strong, powerful quarters.

Shoulders—Sloping and laid well back.

Chest—Deep, not broad, and with the breast bone prominent and well developed.

Tail—Moderate in length, carried like a sickle, and slightly "feathered" on the underneath side.

Legs—The forelegs should be short, crooked at the knees, with large, strong, broad feet, turned slightly out. Because of the large body the legs have to support, they must have plenty of bone.

Coat—In the smooth variety the coat should be short and dense, the skin thick, but free from coarseness. In the rough variety the coat should be about an inch and a half in length, and harsh to the touch.

Color—Should be distributed in patches upon a white body, as in the foxhound, and any recognized hound color is permissible.

Perhaps you don't know that the dachshund is a hound. I'll tell you a little about this lowly, elongated dog in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

WARRING ON BRITISH COLUMBIA'S WILD HORSES

VIGOROUS warfare is being waged on the wild horses that roam the range in British Columbia, according to reports from Invermere, British Columbia. Early in the summer, permission was granted to shoot all unbranded horses found between Sinclair Creek on the north and Canal Flat on the south. The excitement of chasing wild mustangs over the rocks and hills of their mountain refuges is one of the most thrilling kinds of sport, and as the horses become a menace to property if allowed to roam unchecked, it is necessary to keep their numbers down.

British Columbia has always had wild horses. They were reported by David Thompson, the first white man to visit the country in 1807. Living the lives of the hunted has given these creatures greater cunning as time goes on, and their wise leaders do not bring their bands down to the lower levels until the deep snow of the mountains forces them to do so for feed.

PINNACLES NOW MORE ACCESSIBLE

A BUS line was established during the summer between the Pinnacles National Monument and the town of Hollister, California, thirty-eight miles away. Hollister is the nearest rail point to the Pinnacles, and the establishment of the motor stages brings this natural wonder within easy reach of rail travelers.

The Pinnacles National Monument was established by President Roosevelt in 1908, to protect from commercial exploitation this area of precipitous spirelike rocks that rise from the cañon floors to a height of from six hundred to one thousand feet. The awe-inspiring combination of spires, domes, caves, and subterranean passages led the early Indians to name the region "The Land of Whispering Voices," as they believed it to be the place from which the spirits of the happy hunting ground came to hold their councils.

The Lucky Bug Lode

by Arthur Preston Hankins

Author of "The Wife of the Grizzly Bear," etc.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TEMPTING FATE.

MORNING came at last—came slowly from the dissolving night. Twain Reading had not slept a wink. Sheriff Olcott had slept. His men had slept by turns, rolled in blankets on the floor. The three had guarded the squatter—the prisoner—by four-hour shifts. And now the eastern sky was lighting reluctantly, and another day was near—a day which was to mark the beginning of new and terrible things for Reading.

All night long his tortured mind had dully struggled for an answer to all of these strange problems which had so suddenly confronted it. The man in the woods—the man with the flaring, reddish hair and the negroid nose and lips—was he not N. Painter? He had led Twain to believe that he was—that he had made the locations and erected the monuments which held the notices.

He had told Sheriff Olcott that N. Painter was his name. Yet the note from old man Hulette told Twain that Nell Noble, the girl he loved, was N. Painter—that she had located quartz claims on land that she must know was claimed by him. Her father had been present and had backed her up.

Jerry Noble, as he had called himself—Jerry Painter—was responsible for that. Twain realized now that he had considered the man peculiar since first he had met him. He was so reserved, so confident of himself, so experienced in matters that a city man is supposed to know nothing about! His gun play—his Western way of riding! This man knew the outdoor West. He was a mining man. Hulette was right. There was gold on his land, and Painter had discovered it years ago. He had come into the Nancy's Dishpan country purposely to claim it—and Twain had fallen in love with his daughter.

Then had come the quarrel over the miserable escape from Folsom prison. Would Painter have told him about the gold if the quarrel had not come up? Would he have offered him a share—which would be the just and friendly thing to do? Twain doubted it now. Here was a cold-blooded, self-centered man, a conscienceless grabber of what he considered his—a potential killer if crossed. And he had persuaded Nell to side in with him, to sign her own name to the filing notices.

This hurt him most of all. He loved her; he had trusted her; he had thought there could be no selfishness, no malevolence in her. And she had failed him. She had allowed her gold-worshiping, egotistical father to counsel her into betraying the man she had claimed to love.

Ah, well! He had been a fool. He scarcely knew the girl, he remembered now with bitterness. Her physical beauty had swept him off his feet, and, passion blinded, he had not looked deeper. He would erase her from his thoughts forever. She was unworthy of his slightest consideration. Yet he knew that he lied to himself when he thought these things.

The sheriff stirred on the hard board floor. The man who was seated before the door rubbed his fists in his eyes and yawned sleepily. Twain bent forward on the bed, sat immovable, his fingers clasped before him, his forearms resting on his thighs. The birth of another day was at hand, but Twain Reading did not care. Black night continued to envelop his soul.

One of the sheriff's men cooked breakfast. Twain could not eat when food was set before him. He remained silent. He had nothing to say. Long ago he had ceased to argue, to protest his innocence. His mind was too clouded for coherent speech. He could not account for the crimson stains on the painted window frame. He had not tried to. Some crushing, inexorable, malignant force had seized his life and was showering it with evil. There was no use to protest, to fight back manfully. He didn't care.

"Well, Reading," said the sheriff as he pushed his chair back from the table in the center of the room, "I guess we'll have to be gettin' under way. I'm mighty sorry, boy, but if you won't come clean and explain it all, there's nothin' I c'n do but take you in and lock you up until they's been a proper investigation. You gotta face the district attorney, and——"

"I'm ready," Twain interrupted petulantly. "Let's go."

As the chairs scraped back, the man at the door announced that riders were coming into the clearing from the trail.

"Who?" asked the sheriff quickly.

"Don't know, sheriff," the man replied. "They's two of 'em. Somethin' white across the breast of one of 'em. Looks like as if his arm was hangin' in a sling. Yes, by golly, that's what it is! And you may strike me blind if the other'n ain't a female! It's ridin' straddle, but it's got a female look."

For the first time that morning Twain Reading showed animation. They were riding to his cabin, Nell and her father! And the hour was early. If they had ridden from Nancy's Dishpan they must have started at three o'clock. But the point was that they were coming to him—after what had happened! For an instant his heart grew warm. Would they ride to him if—if everything was not all right? An explanation would be forthcoming. Nell hadn't deceived him; she hadn't meant to ruin him. She would explain his doubts away. That was all that mattered. Some way he would manage to clear himself of the accusation of murder that the sheriff had placed against him. That was a trifling matter compared with his loss of respect for Nell.

At the door the pair dismounted. They talked lengthily with one of the sheriff's men outside.

Then Nell appeared. She paused, undecided, in the doorway, and stood with hands behind her, gazing from Twain to the sheriff and to the other two at the table.

The sheriff bobbed his head. "Howdy, miss?" he greeted her. "Did you want somethin'? Won't you have a bite to eat?"

Nell's lips were trembling. Her eyes were filled with a swimming mist. She

gulped, but could not speak. Then, in a brisk little run, she reached the side of Twain. She thrust a brown hand into his and looked up into his face with tear-dimmed eyes. But she spoke no word to him. She simply kept her hand in his. And the squatter's heart leaped wildly. She had not deserted him. She would explain when the time had come.

Her father entered the cabin, followed by the curious man with whom he had been speaking before the door. He smiled and bowed to the sheriff. He smiled, too, as he bowed to Reading.

"Good morning, Twain," he said cheerfully. "May Nell and I have some breakfast with you? We've been out the greater part of the night. Some hot coffee would help."

The sheriff, nonplused, spoke a low word to one of his men, who filled the coffeepot from a bucket and set it on the stove. Noble, or Painter, had seated himself and crossed his legs. Neither he nor Nell, Twain noticed now, were dressed as he was accustomed to see them when riding in the timber.

Nell's father smiled genially at the wondering sheriff. "So N. Painter is dead?" was his surprising opening.

The sheriff blinked his eyes. "Yes, dead," he said.

"Allow me to introduce myself, sheriff," the stranger continued. "My name is Painter. Jeremy Painter. And this young lady is my daughter, Nelita Painter, more often called Nell. She is the N. Painter who has located quartz claims on Reading's homestead."

The sheriff's slouching position in the chair changed suddenly. He sat up straight and sent a penetrating glance across the table at the smiling man.

"This here young woman is N. Painter, did you say?" he barked out.

Nell's father nodded slowly.

"Then who the devil is that hog-faced Ike that's jammed in between the rocks at the bottom o' that cañon up there?"

"That man," was the assured reply, "is known as Pierre Moxey."

Olcott studied. "Never heard tell of *him*," he said in a childish way at last. "He told me an' the boys he was N. Painter yistiddy afternoon. Somebody lied—that's sure!"

"Somebody lied," the other agreed.

The sheriff wrinkled his brows. "Why?"

"I can't quite answer that. I'll answer it for you, however, in the course of time. Now, I understand from the gentleman I talked with at the door that you have arrested Twain Reading as under suspicion for the killing of this man."

The sheriff nodded.

"On what evidence, please?"

Olcott repeated what he had told Reading the night before in regard to the opinion of himself and his posse that the sound of the shooting had come from the direction of Twain's cabin. He told of his having overheard the quarrel between Reading and the slain man in the camp on the branch creek. He told of finding the body crushed between two stones at the bottom of the deep cañon. He told of the trail left by the killer when he dragged the body to the lip of the cañon to cast it over. He concluded by dramatically pointing to the dried spots of crimson on the buff frame of the window.

"Purely circumstantial," was the comment of the man with the broken arm.

"Not them stains," Olcott contended.

The man who called himself Painter rose to his feet and went over to the window. He examined the stains.

"You don't know, even, that they're blood," he pointed out.

"Analysis will tell," maintained the sheriff doggedly.

"Undoubtedly. You've procured samples?"

"Yes. Last night I took the bullet out of a ca'tridge with my knife blade. Then I poured out the powder. I

scraped off some o' the blood, which had dried, and put it in the ca'tridge case. Then I worked the bullet back in place to plug it up ag'in."

For emphasis Olcott took from a vest pocket the cartridge case he had mentioned and set it on the table. His strange interlocutor looked at it for a little, then thoughtfully took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"May I look at it closer?" he asked, returning the handkerchief to his pocket.

"Certainly," agreed the sheriff, but not without a moment's hesitation.

"Yes, I see, on careful examination, that the slug has been pried out," the stranger presently remarked.

He set the cartridge, butt down, before Olcott, who had watched it closely with his keen eyes all the time that it was in the other's hand.

"Rather clever," commented Painter. "Sheriff, I'm something of a gambler. Gambling is my prevailing sin, I guess. Do you indulge to any extent at all?"

"I don't savvy what you're drivin' at, Mr. Painter—as you call yourself—nor why you're drivin' at it; but I reckon I like a little game o' draw as well as the next man."

"I commend your taste," said Painter, smiling. "I like draw poker myself. But I'd like to bet you any amount, from a hundred dollars to ten thousand, that the content of that cartridge case is not blood."

The sheriff looked foxy. "You know somethin', I reckon. You're a sure-thing gambler, are you?"

"Not at all. I never set eyes on those spots until you pointed them out to me. But I'm willing to take a chance. Are you?"

"Well, my hundreds don't come as easy as yours do, maybe," returned the sheriff thoughtfully, "and it wouldn't be c'rect fer me to bet."

Painter rose. "You're taking Reading with you?" he asked.

"I gotta. There's no way out of it."

"I think you're making a grave mistake, sheriff."

"Can't help that," the sheriff came back with a shrug.

"When you leave the cabin, I suppose you'll look for more evidence of the body having been dragged from it into the woods, won't you, sheriff?"

"I will. It was too dark to folly the trail any farther last evenin'."

"Then I think you'll find more evidence still against the prisoner. But it will be purely circumstantial. It will be hard to convict him on such evidence. Of course that all depends on the kind of a prosecuting attorney you have, the ability of Reading's attorney, and the degree of dumb-headedness of the jury."

"I reckon the jury'll be dumb-headed enough," admitted Olcott. "It usually is. But the prosecutin' attorney's a bear."

"And if my friend Reading is tried in the superior court," said the other, "the defense lawyer will be another bear."

He turned to Twain and held out his hand. "Sorry to see you in this trouble, old man," he told him. "But we'll be working for you—Nell and I—until you're back on Lucky Bug Ranch, which will be quite soon."

Nell's eyes filled with tears. She continued to let her hand rest in Twain's, while her father still held his other hand. There was a strange choking sensation in the squatter's throat. He couldn't understand all this, but he realized that genuine friendship was the basis of it.

"I—I don't know what to say," he faltered. "My mind's in a whirl."

"Everything will be explained in a short time," said the father of the girl he loved. And, wringing the hand he held, he stepped toward the door.

"Ahem!" the sheriff cleared his throat. "Of course you understand,

Mr.—er—Painter, that, if you know anythin' about this case, it's your duty to tell me."

"What I know and what I can prove are different matters. But in time I'll see Reading back on his homestead. I wish you all good morning. Come, Nell."

"And where can I find you if the district attorney wants to hear what you think you know?"

"At Nancy's Dishpan," was the reply. "But I'll keep in touch with the authorities, sheriff."

"Oh, daddy!" moaned Nell, as the two rode away side by side. "They won't—they won't find him guilty, will they?"

"Not on any evidence that the sheriff has at present," he reassured her. "You mustn't forget, daughter, that your father was once a professional gambler. And, though he was a straight gambler, in self-protection it was necessary for him to know all of the tricks of the crooked gambler."

"But I don't understand!"

Lucky Bug took from his pocket a .45 cartridge and held it up for her to see.

"The dried substance that the sheriff scraped from the window frame is in this," he told her. "While I was studying it as it stood on the table, I reached for my handkerchief, and brought out with it one of my own .45 cartridges. I palmed the sheriff's when I picked it up after returning my handkerchief to my pocket. He now has one of mine, and the contents can't possibly be analyzed as blood."

"Oh, daddy!" she cried, aghast. "But isn't that criminal? Isn't it dangerous to tamper with the evidence in a case?"

"I suppose it is," he answered gravely. "But the whim seized me, and I acted on impulse. I hadn't tried the old trick for years, and I was tempted. I guess I'll never really grow up, Nelita.

"And besides"—and now his tones were grave—"I was taking no chances on my daughter's future happiness. That happiness can't exist without Twain Reading's freedom. And I know that what's in this cartridge is really blood. I may as well be slaughtered for a sheep as for a lamb, Nell. I belong in the penitentiary, anyway. And so long as you have what I have set my heart on giving you, I don't care what happens to me. I'm recklessly tempting fate—but don't forget that they call me Lucky Bug!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TWAIN, VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

AS the sheriff and his posse rode with their prisoner from Lucky Bug Ranch, they immediately discovered the incriminating trail that had been lost the night before. Not only did the earth show where a heavy body had been dragged along, but blood appeared here and there. They followed it, with eyes fixed on the ground, to the point where they had abandoned it the previous evening.

They continued in the same direction to the cañon on the floor of which lay the crumpled body of Pierre Moxey. With their lariats they were able to hoist it to the edge above, where they roped it on the back of a snorting horse and proceeded directly toward the highway.

That portion of the posse that had left the sheriff to search for The Finn had not put in an appearance at Reading's cabin. This meant, the sheriff determined, that they had been unable to discover the man. He expected to find them waiting for him at the headquarters of the man hunt, which was a camp half a mile from the paved thoroughfare toward which they moved.

When they reached their destination, the sheriff found his men, as expected. They reported that they had come upon the camp of Gus, the Finn, but had

found it vacated, with all of the equipment of the two removed.

"He'd have a hard time gettin' away along the highway," mused the sheriff, "with men strung out along it like we got. He's still in the timber hereabouts, somewhere. We gotta find 'im. Maybe it was 'im that done the killin' after all. That feller had good reason to kill 'im, I'd say, from the way this Painter—if his name was Painter—batted 'im about in camp for nothin'. I'd a heap rather it'd turn out to be 'im instead o' Reading."

So he dispatched men on a special search for the Finn. Others of the party he directed to continue the systematic man hunt for the escaped convict. And he sent his chief deputy, with two others, in an automobile to the county seat with Reading. The chief deputy carried the cartridge that Olcott had given him, which was supposed to contain the blood, and which was to be handed to the district attorney immediately upon arrival. The body of the slain man was taken, too, to be turned over to the coroner.

So before noon Twain Reading was lodged in the county jail, where he paced back and forth the length of his cell and wondered dully when and where the next stunning blow would strike.

It was two days after he had been confined that he was taken out by a deputy sheriff for the inquest. It was held in the undertaking establishment of the county coroner, and there were about thirty people present, exclusive of the jury.

When the deputy conducted him, handcuffed, into the room, he looked about swiftly for Nell and her father. But they were not present. The sheriff, who came in toward the end of the proceedings, stated on the witness stand that he had been unable to locate them.

Sheriff John Olcott was the main witness. He told his story succinctly. One by one other witnesses were called, including the members of the sheriff's posse who had been with him in Twain's cabin, and the medical man who had examined the body. At last came the expert to whom the district attorney had given the cartridge supposed to contain particles of dried human blood.

The testimony of this man created considerable stir, for he had little to say beyond the bare statement that the cartridge intrusted to him had contained powder and nothing more. Sheriff Olcott forgot himself and shot a question at him without asking the coroner's permission.

"Powder?" he bawled. "How could it have contained powder? I'd poured the powder out!"

The expert shrugged his shoulders as the coroner indicated by a nod that he might answer Olcott.

"I'm positive," he said, "that the cartridge given me by the district attorney had not been tampered with since it left the factory. There were no evidences whatever that the bullet had been pried out."

"But——"

One of the sheriff's deputies leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"But I couldn't 'a' got her mixed with the good ca'tridges in my belt!" the sheriff protested aloud to him. "They was in my belt, wasn't they? And I carried this here ca'tridge that had the blood in it in my vest pocket. There's somethin' wrong! Some funny work here, by golly!"

The deputy whispered to him again, and the sheriff nodded thoughtfully. Then he asked permission to address the jury. The expert left the stand and the sheriff took his place.

He repeated the tale of his encounter with Lucky Bug in Reading's cabin. Again he told of the queer statements of this man who claimed to be Jeremy Painter, father of N. Painter, who, he alleged, was his daughter Nell. He reminded the jurymen that the dead man

had called himself Painter. Then he told of his having allowed the cartridge to pass into the strange man's hands for an instant.

"Gentlemen," he concluded, "that bird gyped me right then. He slipped me a good ca'tridge instead o' the one that had the blood in her. That's what he done. He tampered with evidence in a criminal case, which was in the hands of an authorized representative o' the law. That's a mighty serious offense."

The jury nodded gravely.

"Why, Sheriff Olcott, did you allow this piece of evidence to leave your hands?" the coroner asked.

"She was settin' on the table," Olcott replied. "He jest naturally picked it up to examine it. I thought I was watchin' it all the time it was in his hands. But I guess the hand deceives the eye, as the magicians say on the stage."

"Didn't you protest when he reached for it?"

"Well—no, sir; I reckon I didn't."

"And this man picked it up without asking permission, even?"

The sheriff's bronzed face fired up at this. "Mr. Coroner," he said, "you've known me fer twenty years and over. I hope you ain't contracted the belief in them twenty years that I'm a plain fool. But he *did* ask permission to look at her, and darned if I didn't let 'im go ahead."

"Why, sheriff?"

Olcott seemed to be studying over his answer. "There was something about that fella," he replied finally, "that made you do what he asked without question. He's one o' these here masterful fellas, Mr. Coroner. He don't bluff you, and he don't ask fer favors, and he don't make you suspicion 'im at all. And when he asked me if he could examine that there ca'tridge I let 'im do it, jest as if the judge o' the superior court had asked me. I did hesitate a little when he says: 'Can I have a look at her?'—or somethin' like that. But I looked into his eyes and said 'Yes' and before I knowed I'd said it. His mouth says, 'Can I have a look at her?'—but his eyes said, 'I'm goin' to.' And I jest didn't have it in me to tell 'im no. I ain't usually that a way, either. Dog-gone it, anyway!"

The jury laughed at the sheriff's perplexed face. They eventually reached a verdict which was in no way an indictment against Twain Reading, and Twain was led back to his cell.

Nearly two weeks passed after this, and then one day he was led out for a preliminary hearing before a justice of the peace.

The sheriff was still unable, he stated, to lay hands upon the man who claimed to be Painter and his daughter. The apprehension of the camp mate of the slain man, Gus, the Finn, was likewise beyond the sheriff's power. But the sheriff had something new to disclose, nevertheless.

He had returned, with witnesses, to Reading's cabin immediately after the coroner's inquest. His object had been to scrape off more of the dried crimson beads on the painted window frame. He had intended to be sure, this time, that the samples found their way into the district attorney's and the expert's hands.

He had found the window frame entirely clean of stains, however, and was positive in his own mind that the paint work had been thoroughly scrubbed.

The evidence of the marks left by the body having been dragged over Reading's trail, coupled with that of the quarrel between the dead man and the squatter in the former's camp, were considered sufficient grounds by the justice for binding Reading over to the superior court to be tried on the charge of murder.

Twain left the courtroom more deeply concerned than he had been since his arrest. He had fully expected to be exonerated by the coroner's jury.

Again, he had expected the justice's court to consider the evidence against him too superficial for him to be bound over to the higher tribunal. He realized now, though, that nobody who had listened to his story—which, in reality, was no story at all—had believed in him. He had read accusation in the eyes of everybody. He was stunned as he slowly reëntered his gloomy cell and seated himself on a bench. Why, they were going to try him for murder! Him! Twain Reading! It seemed incredible.

And what was he to do? He had no money to employ efficient counsel. He would ask the court's permission to plead his own case, of course, explaining that he was a graduate of a well-known college of law, and had been admitted to practice at the bar. But he couldn't plead his own case! There was no case to plead. He knew less about these strange proceedings, it seemed, than his accusers.

What had become of Nell? Why couldn't the sheriff locate her and her father? Had they left the country? Could it be possible that Painter himself had killed this man? Who had erased the red stains from the painted window frame? How had they come there?

None of these perplexing questions could he answer. For three days more he paced the length and breadth of his narrow cell, with his fingers twining and untwining themselves behind his back. Then, on the fourth morning, the deputy sheriff who watched over him told him that his trial had been set for an early date, one week from that very day.

He resumed his pacing back and forth. He was worried, distraught. He began to realize that perhaps Nell's father had been right when he maintained that there were many men behind prison bars who were entitled to freedom. Why, he would be one of these, perhaps! It all depended on the mental character of the jury. And he had done nothing—absolutely nothing! He was as innocent as a baby in its cradle of the crime of which he had been accused.

And how had the red scrapings vanished from the cartridge into which Sheriff Olcott had dropped them? Was it possible that the sheriff had been right—that Nell's father had switched cartridges on him? Where had he got the good cartridge, if this was so? He had been dressed in such clothes as a city man wears. Usually, when riding through the woods, he dressed like a vaquero, and carried a .45 and cartridge belt. But no gun was in sight when he had come that day. Was he carrying a concealed weapon? Did that account for extra cartridges which might have been loose in his pocket? But why should he carry a revolver when, to all appearances, he had just come from Sacramento, where he had gone with Nell to make filings on the claims?

It was the day before his trial that the deputy shoved a letter to him through the bars. The envelope had been slit; the letter, presumably, read.

There was no signature attached to the brief note that he found inclosed. In fact, there was nothing but the typewritten body of the note itself. The postmark on the envelope, however, was Sacramento, California, and the date the day preceding.

He read:

Don't worry about an attorney to defend your case. One will be on hand to-morrow, and there will be no need to consult with him before your trial begins. Good luck!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE COURTROOM.

ALL of the first morning and all of the second were taken up with the task of selecting a jury. There was a brisk little attorney who wrung Twain's hand and grinned good-naturedly when the prisoner was conducted beyond the railing of the courtroom.

"My name is Hurley," he said. "Arrangements have been made for me to handle your case and look out for your best interests in the matter of selecting a jury. I shall be assistant to the regular attorney who has been retained by friends of yours to defend you, but who will probably not arrive until late tomorrow night. However, that will be in plenty of time. It'll require some time to get a jury to suit me in a case like this, where the evidence is all of such a circumstantial nature. Don't worry, Mr. Reading. We're going to knock 'em dead before this thing is over."

And with that he bustled away to his seat, as the dull business of calling the roll of empaneled men and women began.

The two sessions dragged out their weary course, and the twelve jurymen were at last accepted. Then there was nothing to be done but to wait for another day and the opening of the trial proper.

When Twain was led into the crowded courtroom on that momentous morning, the deputy sheriff seated him beyond the railing, the center of many curious eyes. He glanced up at the empty bench—for the judge had not yet entered the courtroom—and dully studied the backs or faces of the several men before the bar. He caught the eye of Attorney Hurley, who smiled at him over his shoulder, but did not leave the side of a man who was bending over a table with him.

This man's back was toward the prisoner. It was a broad back, covered with creaseless gray cloth. There seemed to be something familiar about that back, but Twain's searching eyes were elsewhere when the owner of it finally stood erect and turned about. Hurley nodded toward the prisoner, and the man, an enormous fellow, with iron-gray hair and a close-cropped, iron-gray mustache, a perfectly dressed man with piercing gray eyes and a consequential mien, stepped briskly across the carpeted floor.

He laid a big white hand on Twain's shoulder, and Twain started nervously at the unexpected touch and looked around.

"Well, my boy," came the man's resonant but modulated voice, "I've come all the way from Massachusetts to see that they don't hang anything onto you out here."

Twain Reading's lower jaw sagged down and his blue eyes grew round with wonder.

"Uncle Sam!" he gasped. "Uncle Sam Reading!"

"Yes, Uncle Sam," returned the other. "And by the courtesy of the appellate court my application has been speeded up and I have been admitted to practice in the State of California—simply to get you out of this mess. And I may add that there is more country between here and Boston than I was aware that the entire world contained. I'm glad to—er—see you looking so well, Twain. Why don't you offer me your hand, confound it!"

Twain grinned sheepishly and stood upon his feet. He held out his tardy hand, and the gray man gripped it.

"You unbelievable young ass!" growled Uncle Sam. "If you'd stayed in Boston instead of getting lost in this abominable land of spaces you'd not be in this infernal fix. You'd now be an attorney, a man of means, position, and consequence. And what *are* you, because of your bullheadedness? A penniless homesteader—and on trial for your life for the murder of a tramp! It's a wonder I consented to come. I ought to let you hang, by George! And it's doubtful if even my unbounded affection for your mother would have brought me here if that confounded man who calls himself Lucky Bug hadn't forced his inescapable personality on me! He's fascinating—hypnotic. And

I have some little reputation along those lines myself."

"Lucky Bug!" puzzled Twain. "Why, that's the name of my ranch and my creek! I don't——"

"No, you don't!" interrupted the other crossly. "You don't know anything. Lucky Bug is also the name of your gold mine and of your father-in-law to be, if all that I've heard is true. Lucky Bug is the man whom you knew as Noble, and later as Painter. He's the father of the girl you're going to marry, if I have anything to say about it."

"Lucky Bug!" puzzled Twain. "The girl I'm going to marry! Where—where did you meet this—this Lucky Bug, Uncle Sam?"

"In Boston, of course. He went back there to get me to come out here and defend your case. And darn me if he didn't succeed!"

"How—how did he know I had an Uncle Sam Reading in Boston?" marveled Twain.

"Don't you suppose the most prominent criminal lawyer in New England can easily be found? The man's not a fool! He finds out what he wants to know. Looking your family up, by golly, to see if you come of stock fit to graft his daughter onto! The nerve of him! But I can't blame him one bit. The only sensible thing you've done in the past eighteen months, Twain Reading, is to fall in love with that girl."

"But why didn't you come to see me in jail, Uncle Sam?"

"Got in only last night. Arranged everything by wire beforehand, through our representatives here. But so long, now. Here comes the judge. Just sit tight and watch your Uncle Sam at work. I'll tell you more after the trial. Maybe you'll like it; maybe you won't."

The trial began. When the prosecuting attorney had finished his address to the jury, he first called Sheriff Olcott to the witness stand. Olcott was duly sworn, and proceeded in his blunt, concise manner to reveal all he knew about the case. He did not neglect to mention the episode concerning the failure of the cartridge case to contain dried blood instead of powder.

The prosecuting attorney then questioned him briefly. When he concluded, Sam Reading whispered into the ear of his colleague, and the young attorney immediately waived the privilege of the defense of cross-questioning the witness.

One by one the members of the sheriff's posse who had been with him when the body was discovered were placed on the stand. All told substantially the same story as the sheriff's. In each case Hurley, apparently advised to do so by Twain's uncle, declined to cross-question these witnesses.

Then came the turn for the defense. For the first time Sam Reading rose to his feet and spoke. There was a pronounced stir among the spectators, for the secret had leaked out that a distinguished criminal lawyer from Boston, none other than the prisoner's uncle, had come all the way to California to defend his brother's son.

"Your Honor," came the deep, resonant tones of the veteran, "we desire to call but two witnesses to the stand. They have not been duly subpoenaed, but we ask permission of the court that they be sworn, nevertheless, and allowed to tell the truth about this matter."

The court's permission being granted, Sam Reading spoke a name to the clerk, who called:

"Mr. Jeremy Painter."

Then Lucky Bug, with his arm still in a sling, rose from his seat beside Nell and walked down the aisle. The gate was opened for him and he stepped upon the stand and held up his right hand to be sworn. He seated himself amid a breathless silence.

Sam Reading stepped toward him. "Your name is Jeremy Painter?"

"Yes, sir," replied the witness.

"Where is your place of residence, Mr. Painter?"

"At present I am living, off and on, with my daughter at the ranch called Nancy's Dishpan."

"What is your occupation, please, Mr. Painter?"

"At present I am unoccupied, except that I am coöperating with my daughter in making preparations for the development of gold claims which she recently located on Lucky Bug Creek."

"And before that?"

"For the eighteen months or more previous to the locating of the claims I was traveling with my daughter in South America and Europe."

"And what was your occupation before starting on that trip?"

"I owned and operated in Puerta de Luna, Mexico, a resort and hotel known as The Lucky Bug."

"You have a pseudonym, sobriquet, or nickname, haven't you, Mr. Painter?"

"Yes, sir. For many years in Mexico I was known simply as Lucky Bug."

"Do you know the prisoner before the bar?"

"I do."

"Tell me, please, whether or not the mining claims located by your daughter are situated on land claimed by the prisoner as a homestead."

"They are."

"And what, please, is the name by which this homestead is generally known?"

"Lucky Bug Ranch," was the immediate reply.

The spectators here became deeply interested. Gold claims on Lucky Bug Creek; the nickname Lucky Bug; a resort in Mexico known as The Lucky Bug; Lucky Bug Ranch!

But Sam Reading was not yet through with lucky bugs! "Mr. Painter," he asked, "what title was used in posting the notices of location and in recording the filings on your daughter's gold claims?"

"The Lucky Bug Mines Company," came the answer.

"And if the mines develop according to your expectations, under what name will they be known?"

"The Lucky Bug Lode."

Somebody laughed, and the gavel rapped for order.

"Mr. Painter," continued Twain's uncle, "will you oblige me by telling the jury everything that you know about the case which is being tried before this court today? Kindly address your remarks to the jury, will you?"

And with this Sam Reading resumed his seat beside his colleague.

In compliance Lucky Bug turned his chair slightly so that he faced the jurors. His tones were low as he spoke, but so quiet was the courtroom that no one missed a single word of what he had to say. And there was small wonder concerning this silence, for Lucky Bug began:

"For about thirteen years I have been an escaped convict from Folsom Penitentiary."

This was followed, however, by a slight interruption: for from the throat of Nell there came a low, inarticulate cry, and she hid her face in her handkerchief and began to sob. Necks were craned her way, but her father was speaking again; and the mere sobbing of a wretched girl could not distract attention from the fascinating disclosures of the witness.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LUCKY BUG SPEAKS.

THE story that Lucky Bug told the members of the jury was virtually the story of his life. He told it briskly, unfalteringly, and the listeners hung upon every word in rapt attention. Even the judge listened, fascinated, as if he were hearing a play. But to Twain

Reading the story that he heard seemed like a dream.

Lucky Bug dwelt upon the plot to hound him into paying hush money concocted by Pierre Moxey and Kenelm Laplace. And now the tale was swiftly drawing to a close. Lucky Bug had told of his encounter with Laplace in the hotel suite in Sacramento. He told how, after Laplace had left them, Nell and he had made haste to leave the hotel and drive back to the Dishpan country in their car, in an effort to get on Laplace's trail and follow him to Pierre Moxey, whom they believed to be hiding in the woods close to the Lucky Bug Lode.

Not far out of Sacramento they had had reason to believe that a little runabout speeding ahead of them along the highway was being driven by Laplace. So Nell had regulated the speed of their car according to that of the car ahead, and they had managed to keep it in sight for the greater part of the trip.

Then, just before they had reached Nine Mile, they had seen the runabout parked in the trees beside the road. They had run their own car into the timber farther on, and hurried on foot down Reading's trail, in what they hoped were the tracks of the man they wished to spy upon.

Suddenly they had heard voices ahead of them on the trail, and they came to a halt and hid themselves in the trees. Presently Lucky Bug crept forward and saw Laplace and the man with the reddish hair whom he knew as Pierre Moxey. He waited, hidden by the brush and leaves, until Laplace and Moxey sought out a secluded spot away from the trail in which to continue their planning.

Now Lucky Bug, creeping on hands and knees with difficulty because of his broken arm, drew close to the pair and secreted himself behind the trunk of a spruce, close enough to hear every word of the conversation that passed between them. And presently he was startled by a touch on his arm. Nell, still able to hear the voices from where she had been waiting, had become worried and curious, and had come up behind her father and seen him hiding there.

She stood behind him. Both were able to overhear the conversation between Laplace and Moxey when they spoke in ordinary tones; and when the pair began to quarrel their voices rose until their words might have been distinguished from quite a distance.

Lucky Bug told the jury all that had passed between the two, and then of the sudden and unexpected shooting which had wiped Moxey out of the plot forever.

"Laplace was frightened," the witness said. "I am positive that he scarcely knew that he had shot the man twice until he saw him struggling in his death throes on the ground. I was on the point of stepping forward and covering him with my .45, which I have carried everywhere I went since I encountered Laplace at Nancy's Dishpan. He had ruined his own plot against me. I was an escaped jailbird, but he had made himself a killer; and the doors of the penitentiary were hungry for both of us.

"But my daughter held my arm and in a whisper cautioned me to wait. She cannot explain why she did so even now. But some feminine intuition warned her that our interests would be benefited if we watched what Laplace would do next.

"At first he ran away, when he gained full realization of what he had done. But he didn't run far. He didn't even get out of sight. A plan was born almost instantaneously in his mind, and he came back swiftly.

"He bent over Moxey and did his best to stanch the flow of blood. Then with great difficulty, for Moxey was a heavy man, he got the body on his back and staggered with it through the trees.

"When he disappeared we followed,

keeping under cover carefully. He shoved and dragged and pulled until the dead man was lying in the trail to Nine Mile. Then he redoubled his efforts to stop the flowing of the blood. And once more he got under his burden and shuffled with it along the trail toward Reading's homestead.

"Dusk was close at hand. We had started late from Sacramento, and the trip is a long one. The trail from Reading's homestead to Nine Mile post office is a long one, too, and considerable time had been spent on it.

"My daughter and I followed Laplace down the trail toward Lucky Bug Ranch. Both of us realized, now, what the killer had in mind. Sure enough, when he reached the spot where the trail leaves the open portion of the homestead and plunges into the timber, Laplace came to rest and eased the body to the ground. Trees hid him from Reading's cabin.

"My daughter and I secreted ourselves again and waited. Laplace sat on a down tree, gasping for breath and mopping his brow with his handkerchief. He was about all in. But there was before him a greater task still.

"He went at it as soon as his wind and strength returned. He removed from the bullet wounds the pieces of cloth that he had torn from his shirt and had used to retard the flow of blood. For it was now his plan to allow the body to leave stains on the trail as he dragged it back the way he had come.

"This was a Herculean task for him, for he isn't accustomed to hard work, I imagine. But he was desperate, and desperation lent him strength. He managed, but not without many stops, to drag the body up the trail from the opening of it to where it crosses a small, deep cañon. Here he left the trail and dragged the body along the cañon's lip. It was almost dark when he came to a halt at last, rested briefly, and then pushed the body over the edge to the rock-strewn floor below.

"My daughter Nelita and I had seen, after trying to follow Laplace when he left the trail, that it would be poor policy to do so. There were few trees on that slope of the hillside, and the chaparral, even, was straggling. Laplace would return the way he had come after disposing of the body, we believed. And there was no place for us to hide if we followed him.

"So we turned back at once, hurried across the cañon on the bridge that had been thrown over it, and followed the course of Laplace on the other side, where the forest is deeper and the undercover thick. We traveled much faster than he did, of course. We knew about the deep place in that cañon, for we had scoured the country pretty thoroughly in our search for the lost lode. We had already surmised that he would dispose of the body there. And we were at the scene ahead of him, but on the opposite side of the cañon, when he arrived with the body and heaved it over the edge.

"Then, to our complete surprise, he started running as if the fiends of darkness were after him. And he didn't run back the way he had come. He continued on up the cañon, following the northern rim of it, and we lost him completely, since we had no way of getting across except to go back to the down trees that bridge the trail.

"So we returned to the highway and spent the night at Nine Mile. Next morning we hired horses and rode to Lucky Bug Ranch, with the idea of telling Twain Reading all about the gold claims, offering him a partnership in the venture, and disclosing what Kenelm Laplace had done to throw suspicion on him. But when we arrived there, at an early hour, we found that the sheriff and his men had arrested Reading, and had stayed at his cabin all night.

"Then, making use of an old trick in

prestidigitation which I have known for years, I took one of my own .45 cartridges from my pocket, and, after examining the cartridge into which the sheriff had dropped samples of the blood found on the window frame, I switched on him. That, then, accounts for the absence of the samples in the cartridge that the expert examined."

"Just a moment, please," interposed Sam Reading. "Why did you do that, Mr. Painter? Didn't you realize that you were taking the risk of laying yourself liable for criminal prosecution for tampering with evidence already in the custody of an authorized representative of the law?"

The judge and the prosecuting attorney stared at Twain's Uncle Sam. Was the man trying to discredit his own witness in the jury's eyes?

"Oh, yes, I realized all that," Lucky Bug returned. "But I was taking no chances. I believed that the dried red beads on the painted frame were actually blood. How they came to be there, I couldn't imagine. Reading might have cut himself—something like that. I wanted time to think and investigate. And I didn't want samples of human blood to appear as evidence at this trial. I know what circumstantial evidence did for me.

"That same day, after Reading had been taken away, my daughter and I rode back. We managed to get into the cabin through a window. We investigated the red drops. Then we scraped them from the window frame. That was before I had had time to take the sample in the sheriff's cartridge to an expert. I did this later. It is the blood of a newly slaughtered beef."

A murmur ran through the courtroom.

"And how do you account for the beef blood being on the window frame?" asked Twain's uncle.

The prosecuting attorney here hopped to his feet and raised speedy objection. The witness was not an authorized investigator, and how he accounted for this and that had no bearing whatever on the case. Sam Reading merely smiled at him. He knew that judges were human. He believed that the judge before whom this case was being tried would be consumed with curiosity if he did not find out how beef blood came to be spattered on that window frame. He smiled again as the objection was overruled and the witness commanded to proceed.

"In Reading's screened cupboard, outside the cabin," Lucky Bug explained, "I found a sizable piece of fresh beef. It was very fresh indeed. I learned afterward that it had been sent to Reading as a present that same day by the wife of Edwin Hulette, of Nancy's Dishpan.

"Still, my daughter and I were at a loss to account for the stains being on the window frame. The kitchen table, on which Reading was accustomed to prepare his food for cooking, stood, as usual, at least ten feet from that window.

"But in a saucer in the same cupboard outside we finally centered our attention on the remains of a hamburger sandwich, with one large bite taken out of it. Reading, apparently, had been stuffing himself on hamburger sandwiches, made from this green meat, but had stalled on the last one. So, still trying to ferret out the secret of those stains on the window frame, we went back into the cabin and found the little food chopper in which Reading had ground his meat to make those sandwiches. We screwed it fast to the table top, and cut off chunks of the fresh meat. Then my daughter Nell began to grind it. And she had not taken a dozen turns when the blood squirted from the grinder as her fingers forced the meat into it, and splattered the window frame ten feet away from the table.

"That answered our question, so we prepared a solution of soap and water

and wiped the window frame clean of every stain."

Lucky Bug paused and looked at Sam Reading.

"Once again," said the attorney, "you were destroying evidence, weren't you, Mr. Painter?"

"I was, perhaps," Lucky Bug replied. "But the evidence I now knew to be beef blood, and that would have helped to clear Twain Reading."

"But you switched cartridges on the sheriff in order to keep this same evidence from being exhibited at the trial!" cried the lawyer.

"At that time," Lucky Bug returned, "I thought that it might be human blood. And that if it was found to be that, it might aid materially in sending Twain Reading to the gallows or the pen."

"And then, when you discovered that it was only the blood of a beef, you wiped it out so that the sheriff, when he returned for another sample, would not be able to find the beef blood which might have helped in clearing your friend of the charge of murder. Such antagonistic actions require an explanation, Mr. Painter."

"The explanation is simple," Lucky Bug told him. "I didn't want Twain Reading to be found guilty of murder. But I did want him to languish in jail for a time, and see the gates of the penitentiary yawning before him, so that he would be brought to realize fully that there may be many a man behind the bars who is innocent. I wanted him to see the fallacy of circumstantial evidence. I wanted him to know for a surety how an innocent man can be sent to the pen. I meant to clear him at the last moment, of course, by my testimony on the witness stand. If mine would not be accepted because I am an escaped convict, I knew that my daughter's would be. But I didn't want the evidence of the beef blood to clear Reading at the coroner's inquest or at his preliminary hearing. I wanted him to suffer something of what I have suffered. Because he wanted to marry my daughter, and my daughter wants to marry him. I wanted to scare a little humanity and tolerance into him."

Sam Reading stepped closer to the witness and the jury. Over and over in his white fingers he turned a gold pencil. The judge, the jurors, everybody in the room watched him, wondering what strange disclosures his next question would bring out.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SECOND WITNESS.

"MR. PAINTER," asked Reading's Uncle Sam, "where have you been since the date of the killing?"

"In the country hereabouts, on my way to Boston to persuade you to come West and defend your nephew, in Boston for a time, and en route back here."

"Didn't you realize that it was unnecessary to bring me out here to clear my nephew? Wouldn't the testimony of yourself and daughter accomplish that almost without the need of counsel?"

"I wanted to scare you into thinking that your nephew was in desperate need of your expert help," Lucky Bug replied. "I didn't tell you all of the particulars until you reached California, last night. I did this purely to bring Twain Reading in touch with his family again and patch up the breach that came when he left your law offices in Boston and came West to be a cowboy. I was afraid that you wouldn't consent to come if I told you everything back there."

"M'm-m!" Sam Reading muttered through his mustache.

The district attorney tried once more to stop what he considered irrelevant testimony, but the judge, apparently, was being entertained. It was not often that he had before the bench an attor-

ney of the caliber of Sam Reading. He was interested in finding out how at least one big criminal lawyer had gained his enviable reputation.

"Mr. Painter," Reading continued, "do you realize the gravity of the confessions you have made under oath today?"

"I do," said Lucky Bug.

"Do you realize that, the moment you leave this courtroom, the sheriff of this county will place you under arrest as an escaped convict from the penitentiary?"

"I do."

"Then why have you taken this momentous step?"

"To save my friend, Twain Reading, from suffering as I have suffered. To let him know that an escaped prisoner may have a heart and be a man well worth his knowing—a man worthy to be the father of the girl he loves. And, again, I did it because of my daughter. She could not be happy without Reading's love, and it is my one aim in life to make her happy. I would not have had her marry Reading and keep her father's past a secret from him. So I recklessly, deliberately, have done what I have done for her sake and his. I consider myself nothing but a victim of fate. I am ready for whatever the future may hold in store for me. I have done my best, and if I have failed I have failed. That book is closed."

"That will be all, Mr. Painter," said Sam Reading in a low voice. Then he faced the court. "Your honor," he said, "we invite cross-questioning by the prosecution."

But the district attorney shook his head.

Then the name of the second witness for the defense was called, and Nelita Painter, her eyes now dry and her lips set firmly, took the chair vacated by her father.

The defense attorney's questioning of her was decidedly brief. He asked brisk questions, born of the story told by Lucky Bug, which brought out answers substantiating the latter portion of her father's testimony. He concluded in rapid-fire manner:

"Did you go to Boston with your father, Miss Painter?"

"I did," she answered.

"And before that, were you with your father when he was hunting for Kenelm Laplace, in order to bring him to trial for the killing of Pierre Moxey?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did your father tell you, in explanation of his actions in not informing the sheriff that you two knew who had killed Moxey, that he considered himself better able to capture Laplace than the sheriff or his men?"

"Yes, sir, he told me that."

"And also that Laplace, not knowing that the slaying had been witnessed by anybody, would consider himself safe and would make a lone attempt to threaten your father into paying him hush money?"

"My father told me that."

"And did Laplace finally make such an attempt?"

"He did."

"And what was the outcome of that meeting, Miss Painter?"

"My father and I planned to drive along the road in our car, close to Nancy's Dishpan," the girl replied. "We had done so several times. You see, we had overheard Moxey's plan in the woods, and thought that, now that he was obliged to act alone, Laplace might follow it. So we were laying a trap for him. Yesterday afternoon he stepped out and confronted us, and in his hand was an automatic pistol. He ordered me to stop the car and throw up my hands. And he ordered my father to throw up his good hand, too."

"Did you do so?"

"Yes."

"And your father, also?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then can you remember what happened?"

"Why, I heard a sudden explosion right beside me, and saw Mr. Laplace spinning around in the road. Then daddy got out of the car, took Mr. Laplace's gun away from him, and told me to help him in. We got him in and brought him here last night. He wasn't badly hurt. Daddy had only shot off one of his ears."

"Do you know where Laplace is now, Miss Painter?"

"Yes, sir. The undersheriff to whom daddy handed him over this morning, after he'd kept him tied up in our rooms at the hotel last night, brought him in a few minutes ago."

The spectators craned their necks and their eyes popped as the undersheriff mentioned came down the aisle with his prisoner, about whose head was bound a bandage.

Sam Reading nodded to Nell, who started to leave the witness stand. And at the same time Reading spoke:

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "I demand that, when you retire, you immediately return and bring in a verdict of not guilty. Your honor, we rest our case."

The judge cleared his throat. "Mr. Reading," he said, "it seems to me that you have introduced into this trial a series of proceedings which are highly irregular."

"I have done just that, your honor," returned Twain's uncle. "But it strikes me as a highly irregular case, from beginning to end. And there is no doubt in my mind but that everybody, including your honor, has been entertained thereby. And, with your honor's permission, I should like now to make this entertainment more dramatic still. I wish to announce to the court and all present—particularly the sheriff—that the man known as Lucky Bug was pardoned over thirteen years ago by the governor of this State. He was pardoned four days before he escaped from the prison camp."

Amid a vast silence the judge said: "But doubtless that pardon has long since been revoked, Mr. Reading."

"The strange part of it is, your honor, that the pardon has not been revoked. When Lucky Bug's daughter was taken East by the relatives of her stepfather, these good people secretly began an attempt to influence the governor of California in her father's behalf. They did not tell the child for fear of raising hopes which might never be realized. They were people of some influence at home, and they brought this influence to bear out here through the medium of friends. But for several years, or until the daughter had grown almost to young womanhood, their efforts in her father's behalf were fruitless.

"Then the man whom Lucky Bug held up at Sontag, in a foolish, boyish attempt to get back the money that had been stolen from him, confessed on his deathbed that he had previously held up the youngster that same night and taken his all. This confession was brought to the governor's attention by no less a person than Jimmy Keister, of Sontag, the stepfather of Nell. This was after the death of his relatives in the East. And the governor decided to pardon No. 7809.

"The pardon was forwarded to the clerk of the prison board. But there was a miscarriage by reason of the clerk's having been called away to the sick bed of his father, and for four days the pardon was kept from the prisoner, out in the road camp. He had escaped before the clerk of the prison board returned to his duties at the penitentiary.

"So the governor did not revoke the pardon, but let it stand. That precious piece of paper, together with a new suit of clothes and five dollars in cash, are waiting for No. 7809 to-day.

"I know all this because I visited the governor in the State capital last night. I went to him to see what might be done for Lucky Bug, a man who has impressed me greatly, and learned this surprising thing. The governor sent a special messenger in an automobile to the penitentiary for the ancient data on the case. It was brought to him, together with the pardon, now yellow with the years. And the governor promised me then that this pardon would stand."

There was a mumble of voices, then a scream. And Nell Painter's arms were about her father, while the tears streamed unheeded down her cheeks.

And now Twain Reading was running toward them, leaping the gate of the sacred space before the bench. The crowd stood back. With a cry he threw his arms about them both. Then everybody cheered, and the frenzied hammering of the gavel was in vain.

While out in the freight yards a flabby-faced, pigeon-breasted man, who mumbled brokenly to himself, and mouthed his words, stole along like a dog that has lost its master, and hid himself in a box car of a moving train. Gus, the Finn, was alone in the world again, and he shrank from the unknown future that lay before him.

And slowly toward the divide of the high Sierra a lean, hungry, hunted figure made his cautious way toward the eastern boundary of California—the convict to whom Lucky Bug had given the doubtful joys of freedom.

THE END.

EMULATING "BLACK BART"

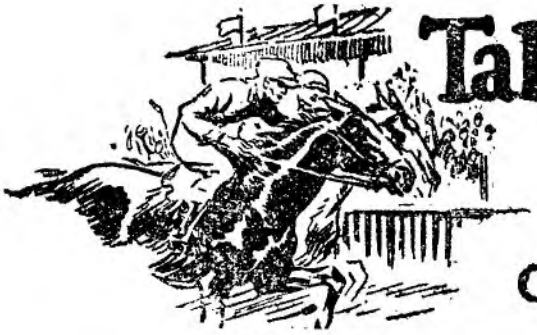
A NUMBER of robberies of motorists recently were laid at the door of a pair of bold highwaymen operating on the Lake Tahoe Road, some fourteen miles east of Placerville, California. These twentieth-century bandits lay in wait for their victims within five hundred yards of a spot known as "Bullion Bend," where bullion from the famous Virginia City mines was stolen by Black Bart in the historic stage holdup of 1863. They felled a tree in the roadway and then lay in ambush for their prey.

As soon as the news of the bandits' activities got abroad, Sheriff Charles Woods, of Placerville, California, started out on their trail with an armed posse, partly in autos and partly on horseback, but they managed to make their get-away, probably aided by the dense underbrush and forest through which the narrow road winds.

THREE FOUND GUILTY IN RANCH MYSTERY

THE mystery surrounding the death of Lee Camp, the wealthy young rancher on the ranch of Mrs. Jennie Laura Brown, near Hanford, California, was apparently cleared up by the recent conviction of the three persons accused of participation in the crime. These were Mrs. Brown herself, John H. Tipton, and Fred Mills, foreman of the Brown ranch. The three were given prison sentences of from ten years to life, after having been found guilty on a second-degree murder charge. Robert McCamish, a young nephew of Mrs. Brown, was the only one of the defendants acquitted of complicity in the crime.

Camp was found dead at the foot of a windmill on the Brown ranch on December 14, 1924. The authorities at first believed that he had fallen from the structure, but an investigation resulted in the indictment of Mrs. Brown and her accomplices, Tipton and Mills, on the murder charge.



Talkin' Turkey!

by John Briggs

Author of "The Stolen Stallion," etc.

THE man in the buckboard was leaning out of the seat with his arm resting on the side, talking to "Big Steve." His wide sombrero was hooked over one doubled knee, and he was mopping his reddened face with a spotted bandanna. He was Jed Ballister, one of the wealthiest independent stockmen of the Pacheco country. The two men were talking over the question of watering cattle at Big Steve's spring. Steve Thomas, better known as Big Steve, owned the only water available, that year, in the north neck of the Pacheco Range. Big Steve was one of the country's oldest inhabitants, owning land which his father had taken up in the early days. He now possessed a scanty half section of land which was not very fertile, yielding a poor income under his haphazard methods of ranching.

At twenty-five cents per head for the season, he would receive from Ballister five hundred dollars for the watering privileges. Thus the dry season was netting him a sum which he could use very handily. As long as he could remember, his existence had been a precarious struggle with the desert in which he had held off famine at close range. He was one of those ranchers who seemed to do everything at the wrong time. When rains were plentiful, it would seem that Big Steve had been discouraged by the drought of the year before, and had planted only a few acres. Then encouraged by the prosperity of his neighbors, he would plant again, only to lose his crop by a succeeding drought, or by a late rain, or a flood, or dry smut, or rust, or by planting too late, or too early, or by some unprecedented misfortune. Years of such living had given him a wilted look and a hard-luck story to pour into every willing ear. He was a drooping man, and by no means large in design. His name, Big Steve, was a sobriquet assigned him only in recent years to distinguish him from "Little Steve," a lad now in his fourteenth year. Anywhere on the Pacheco Range, one might inquire about Big Steve and receive a noncommittal shrug in answer, or perhaps a few disparaging words. Having thus acquitted the father, your informant would be pretty liable to break out with:

"But, say! d'yuh know Little Steve?"

Jed Ballister had closed his bargain with Big Steve. The afternoon was hot, and he was searching his mind for an excuse to end his visit and the tiresome task of hearing Big Steve's latest tale of misfortune. His eyes were wandering with a view to aiding his mind, when he caught sight of Little Steve.

The boy was herding a bunch of scrawny cattle down a dry hillside to water. Waving his sombrero and yelling, he was keeping the small herd bunched in perfect order. The sorrel pony beneath him doubled and wheeled

with lightning rapidity, apparently without guidance, for it had neither saddle nor bridle. As Ballister's attention fixed itself on the boy, an obstinate steer separated from the others and skirted back along the base of the hill at a bellowing run.

Guiding his mount by the pressure of his knees, Little Steve shot slanting down the hill at an angle which required breakneck speed to cut off the steer's retreat. Although accustomed to dare-devil riding, Jed Ballister now caught his breath. He expected to see the horse and the boy rolling down the hillside with an avalanche of rocks and dust. With a careless slap of his ragged hat, and a kick of his booted heels, Little Steve landed in front of the running steer, yelling delight.

"Yi-ee-yip! ye long-horned beggar! Hi-yip!" he shrieked, in a high falsetto, rushing the animal back into the herd. His sorrel mare reached out a slender nose and nipped the steer on the hip bone.

Little Steve drove the herd on down to the stream, then he wheeled his mount and came tearing up to the buckboard. Slapping the mare's flanks with his hat, he guided her straight for the side of the wagon, at a wild run. Jed Ballister cringed back into the seat with an involuntary movement. Without a bridle or rope, it seemed impossible that a boy could stop the mare's mad run.

Within twenty feet of reaching the buckboard, Little Steve threw up his doubled elbows and seemed to lift himself as though by levitation.

"Who—Babe!"

The sorrel mare stiffened her forehoofs into the dust and slid, settling her rump almost to the ground. She halted within four feet of the vehicle, bathing Ballister and Big Steve in a splash of heavy dust.

"Hey! what's a-gettin' into ye?" Thomas querilously complained. "Ain't no sense in cuttin' capers that a way. I got uh durn good notion t' wallop yer hide!" he added in an unconvincing tone, as he wiped fine particles of earth from his eyes with the back of his hand.

The visiting cattleman betrayed broad amusement.

Little Steve seemed not to notice his father's weak remonstrance. "Ole Lophorn busted 'er neck!" he announced. "She tuk over th' slide comin' outa the back field."

Having delivered the message of calamity, he wheeled the mare about with the same remarkable horsemanship and raced wildly away to the ramshackle ranch barns.

Ballister watched him slide from the sorrel's back, then turned again to Thomas.

"A fine filly, there," he remarked. "She ought to make a runner. What'll you take for her?"

"Well—I don't reckon she's fer sale," Big Steve replied, with squinting calculation. "She sort of belongs t' the boy. Dunno as he'd like to let her go."

Ballister grinned knowingly. He could judge horseflesh when he saw it, and Little Steve's mare had aroused in him a covetous desire. He knew, also, to what small extent Little Steve's nominal ownership of the mare would influence the rancher, when it came to a matter of sale. Reaching to his wallet, he withdrew a handful of greenbacks and counted out ten of them on his knee, noting meanwhile the greedy look which entered Thomas' face.

"Two hundred," he said, extending the bills until they nearly touched the rancher's nose. "I won't give a cent more!"

Thomas met Ballister's gaze waveringly. He knew that the cattleman meant what he said. He had named his limit. And knowing Ballister, he realized, also, that the offer would not be held open very long.

"Take this, an' I'll take the mare

along with me," Jed Ballister continued. "I've got to mosey—what d'y'u say?"

"She's yours, then," Big Steve accepted, holding out a gnarled hand for the greenbacks. "Only, don't blame me, if ye stir up uh fracas with the boy. I dunno how he come by his tarnal disposition, that youngster. He sure gets me a guessin'."

At the time Babe's mother had died from the bite of a rattler, Little Steve had nursed the colt with a bottle. From a wabbly legged, soft-eyed, trusting little beast, he had watched her develop into a creature of fleet limbs and beauty. Little Steve had owned other ranch animals, with the nominal title of minority, which had nothing to do with purchase, or with the money received from their sale. But—Babe! He loved Babe with all the ardor of a sensitive youth naturally endowed with the faculty for loving a horse. Babe had been his very own. No one else had ever ridden her. Boy and horse together were as of one mind. Babe had understood his every whim, had delighted in the pranks which they played together.

Never had Little Steve dreamed that he would lose Babe, any more than he had dreamed of losing his tired, drudge-worn mother, or his small sister. The young mare had become his one great joy and his greatest pride of horsemanship.

Already he had ridden her in the cattle round-ups. Babe's and his services had come to be regarded as valuable by the surrounding ranchers. Seldom was there a cattle drive in which he did not participate. With wages thus earned, he had purchased a good stock saddle, a pair of chaps and a bridle. The bridle was an ornament, rather than a necessity, for it delighted him to show what Babe could do at his command and by the guidance of his knees.

To replace Babe, his father gave him Baldy, and to appease his feelings, promised that Baldy should be entirely his own—to do with as he chose. Through bitter experience, Little Steve suspected that Baldy would go the way of the others, if chance for a sale should happen along. He didn't care. No horse could be his very own, more than Babe had been.

Little Steve slipped from Baldy's back under the shade of a great oak and clasped the pinto's neck in his arms. The scalding tears ran down his freckled face to mix with the salty sweat of the beast. He had ridden a long ways to permit himself this outburst in solitude. Baldy seemed to understand, for he stood very still and didn't toss up his head. But Baldy could be relied upon to stand still when given the chance, although he could show a good burst of speed when urged into it.

A long time, Little Steve stood there, ashamed even to himself to uncover his face until his unmanly behavior had ceased. At last he slipped to the ground to run his fingers hopelessly through the leaf mould under the tree. He could see a dusty herd of cattle coming up across the plains to water at the Little Pacheco—where a fenced shute was being built across the lower corner of the Thomas Ranch by Ballister's men.

Ballister had laughed, the evening before, when Little Steve had turned away with tears starting in his eyes, after asking the cattleman if he could buy Babe back again.

Jed Ballister had taken the hesitant query humorously.

"Sure, you can, sonny," he had agreed. "But I never make a horse trade without I double my money. Give me four hundred cash, an' she's yours."

A great gulp of empty misery had risen to Little Steve's throat. He had tried to look at Babe standing there with the lead rope around her neck, innocent of the tragedy. He had turned away with an effort to swallow his hurt, and then had flared around with hot anger in his eyes.

"I got my 'pinion uh robbers like you!" he cried, looking Ballister full in the eyes. "I bet yer scared t' gimme a chance!"

Ballister had replied jestingly, "Well, don't accuse me like that, Stevey. Just t' prove that I ain't what you called me, I'll hold the offer open till th' stock show, next month. But if she wins the races, nobody's money'll buy 'er."

Little Steve recalled the offer as he lay under the tree. "Four hundred dollars!" And if she won the races, she could not be bought at all—his Babe—she'd win! That was one thing, sure. Momentarily he forgot his loss in a surge of pride. He knew of nothing on four legs in the Pacheco country that could outrun her. He glanced up at old Baldy. No, Baldy couldn't do it—though he had shown a bit of speed in his time. If Baldy could—if Baldy could—— But Little Steve knew better. Baldy might be good for a quarter, if he were taken in hand, trained and fed plenty of oats—but to outlast Babe! And four hundred dollars—what a chance of raising that, in less than a month's time? To Jed Ballister, that sum was as nothing. But four hundred dollars to the son of Steve Thomas—— Seldom in his life had Little Steve seen more than twenty dollars at one time. He had saved up forty dollars to buy his saddle. It had taken him three years.

He looked down over the tumbledown buildings of the Thomas ranch. That had been home for him. A carefree place about which hovered his boyhood dreams, with a toiling mother who sometimes sympathized with them, but who was equally a slave to hard reality. Never before had Little Steve compared it as a home with other ranch dwellings. But now its desolation, with a few straggling flowers by the front doorstep, spoke to him in terms of poverty. In his mind he pictured the immense barns and the sumptuous dwelling house of Jed Ballister. The Ballister children had never known what it was to wake up tired in the morning and go to work.

After a long silence, he got up, mounted Baldy, and rode down toward the advancing herd of cattle. The drivers greeted him familiarly, and he dropped in behind the herd with them.

"Where's yahr sorrel mare?" inquired Zed Morgan, a grizzled old puncher who had known Little Steve since he had appeared on his first pony at the age of three.

"Paw sold her t' Ballister," the boy replied laconically.

"Huh—yuh don't say!" exclaimed "Old Zed." "Shaw, ain't that too bad, now? What'd Jed give fer her?"

"Two hundred," muttered Little Steve.

"Two hundred!" The old puncher exploded with indignation. "Now, don't that dumb-blast yuh! An' I s'pose Jed'll put 'er in the sweepstakes next month, an' most likely take the five hundred purse. Why didn' yuh hang onto 'er an' ride 'er yuhrself, Stevey?"

"Couldn't," Little Steve answered gloomily. "Paw don't b'lieve in hoss racin', nohow."

"Yeh? An' him allus raisin' fast hosses, too," commented Zed, as he flirted out the long lash of his bullwhip with a resounding pop.

"How long uh run is the sweepstakes a-goin' t' be?" suddenly inquired the boy.

"Two mile, free-fer-all, stock saddle, an' no handicap," announced Zed. "Goin' t' be uh humdinger, this year. Wheel an' start—one time around, stop an' turn, an' back t' the finish."

"Well, I'm a-goin' t' enter!" declared Little Steve.

Old Zed opened his eyes round with amused interest.

"Well, yuh don' say! What hoss yuh aimin' t' ride?" he demanded.

"This'n," the boy affirmed.

"Well, by ginger! Ken he run?"

"He useta could," said Little Steve. "Reckon he's as good as anything hereabouts, 'ceptin' Babe."

"Now yuhr a-talkin' hoss, Sonny!" agreed the old man. "But it's tarnation shameful yuh ain't got Babe t' ride, though. Yuh could make 'em set up an' look wise, I'm a-sayin'!"

He cast an incredulous eye at old Baldy, then viewed the animal's lines with more critical attention.

"Well, he don' look so bad, though, at that!" he commented finally. "Did he ever run?"

"Not in uh race," Little Steve admitted. "But he's a-goin' t' start in learnin' right soon."

During the following weeks, Little Steve spent his meager savings on rolled oats and alcohol rubs guaranteed to loosen stiff joints. Old Baldy had never known such treatment. His hair was clipped close to the skin and he experienced the strange feeling of a blanket at night. Eggs deposited in the hay loft by wayward hens mysteriously disappeared. Little Steve's mother smiled knowingly, but with a sad fatalism born of witnessing successive failures, and smothering hopes. She could forego her pin money which the extra eggs usually supplied.

Old Baldy blossomed out into a second colthood, unaware of the test awaiting him. Twice a week, in the early mornings, Little Steve rode the seven miles into Wishbone and put Baldy through his paces on the track.

Between Zed Morgan and him a secret bond of friendship had developed. Zed borrowed the best runners he could locate among his friends, and several times he met Little Steve at the track to give Baldy a try-out. The old puncher developed the conviction that Little Steve might have a fair chance for the purse, after all—except for the sorrel mare, for whose training Jed Ballister had hired a regular jockey from Tanforan.

"Don't yuh worry none about that there slicker," Old Zed consoled. "He don' know no more about hosses 'n' you do. An' besides, he's gotta ride straight up in uh stock saddle an' do uh cow-hoss start. You've got it all over him a-ridin' this kind of uh race."

Little Steve met Ballister as he was riding out of town. The ranchman slowed down his car and stopped beside the road.

"Well, Stevey," he greeted, as the boy reluctantly drew up beside the machine, "have you raised that four hundred yet?"

"No, sir!" answered Little Steve with a snarl. "But I'm aimin' t' win that'er sweepstake purse, if yuh wanta know it. Then I'll talk turkey to yuh!"

"H-m-m—so I've heard," the rancher rejoined. "If you take that purse, sonny—I'll trade you fifty-fifty for the horse that beats Babe! How's that for talkin' turkey?"

"Will yuh put that inta pencil writin'?" challenged Little Steve.

"What's that! Did you ever hear that Jed Ballister's word ain't good?" demanded the cattleman.

"I don't take no chances," retorted the boy. "I talk turkey!"

Ballister chuckled and drew a pencil and pad from his pocket.

"All right—how's this?" he queried, after a moment's scribbling. Clearing his throat, he read:

"'I hereby agree to trade the sorrel mare, Babe, in a free bargain with Little Steve Thomas, on the condition that the horse which I am to trade for wins the sweepstake race of May Thirtieth, Nineteen Twenty-four—said horse to be ridden by said Little Steve Thomas. Signed, J. O. Ballister——'"

"Is that your kind of turkey talk?" questioned the rancher.

"Yep!" affirmed Little Steve, taking the slip of paper in a trembling hand and cramming it into an overalls pocket.

"An' I kinda like t' buy old Baldy back again, too—if he wins," little Steve

suggested hesitantly. "Would yuh sell 'im t' me—after we trade?"

Ballister scrutinized old Baldy with a true horseman's appraisal. "Kind of counting your chickens before they're hatched, ain't you, Stevey?" he remarked.

"Not chickens—turkeys!" attested Little Steve shortly. "Will yuh sell—after I win the purse, an' after we trade?"

Ballister chuckled outright. He didn't want to incur Little Steve's enmity beyond the necessities of hard business dealings. Horses were horses to him, and business was business, but outside of that he had the generous heart of a true sportsman. In his estimation, he had just made a bargain to placate Little Steve, without the least idea of coming out the loser. Also, he appreciated, with a true horse lover's sense, the forthcoming disappointment which the boy must experience at losing the race and his hope of regaining Babe. Drawing a long frown to conceal his inner enjoyment, he replied.

"Well, if your horse proves to be a better runner than the filly, I oughtn't to let him go. But seein's it's you ridin' him, I guess if you put him through the ropes, he'll prob'ly never do it again. I'll make you a sporting proposition. If you win the purse with your horse, we'll trade, and you can have Baldy back for the same price I offered Babe at—four hundred. Does that sound all right?"

"Yep—sounds good!" returned Little Steve, clamping the string of a tobacco sack between his teeth.

Rumor of the deal between Ballister and Little Steve Thomas spread over the entire Pacheco Range. Old Zed Morgan was dumb to all questionings. Witnesses straggled in to the try-outs, for the three days preceeding the annual stock show. The town of Wishbone was humming with good-natured rivalry. Twelve entrants were made for the sweepstakes. Few of the prospective winners knew much about the horse that Little Steve was to ride, but most of them had heard the story and knew what the boy was hoping to gain. And Ballister's Babe had been seen in the try-outs. Hopeful horse owners shook their heads gloomily. It looked like a "walk-away" for the sorrel filly. Some questioned Little Steve privately as to his former mare's merits.

"She c'n beat anything runnin' on four legs!" he invariably declared to these seekers of information. Still they wondered why the boy should be attempting to race against her, since he was so certain of her speed. But no further information was available, either from himself or from Zed Morgan.

The usual racing, broncho riding, steer roping and varied entertainments of the stockmen's show, occupied the first two days. Jed Ballister made several entries in the preliminary races, but he wisely withheld the sorrel filly for the final event—the free-for-all sweepstake, which the cattle country regarded as its own particular kind of race. The start was made from a motionless stand, the horses facing opposite to the way they were to run. At sound of the pistol shot, the ponies were turned about and raced over one lap of the mile track, then brought to a full stop, wheeled about and turned back the reverse way for the second lap. It was really a cow-horse race, combining the rider's skill with the speed and tractability of his mount.

Big Steve Thomas took in the show, in a desultory sort of a way, for the first two days, but he refused to witness the final event in which his son was to figure. If Little Steve's mother had similar scruples about horse racing, she also had a secret sympathy for his ambition. She rode to town with him in an old cart, behind which Baldy was led with his usual propensity for pull-

ing back. Bedecked in scraps of finery, she seated herself early on the pine-board bleachers, near the ropes, and waited tensely the beginning of the final event, which was to begin at nine sharp, before the full heat of the day.

After a final consultation with Little Steve, Zed Morgan seated himself beside her.

"I been a-hearin' lots about you, Zed," the woman greeted him. "Didn't you put Stevey up to this?"

"Why, me, mam?" the old puncher replied with feigned astonishment. "No, mam," he denied. "That brat uh yours has got too much head o' his own, fer an ole foggle-brain like me t' be hornin' in. But I got uh hundred round plunks on him, jest th' same—I have!"

"Why, Zed—you don't think Baldy can win?"

"Baldy?" The old cow-puncher scratched his head thoughtfully. "Nope," he said, "I don't reckon Baldy ken do more'n keep up with the filly's dust. Nope, Baldy ain't got th' chance of uh snowball in—— I mean—'scuse me, mam—I mean I'm a-bettin' my money on Little Steve——

"Yi-ee-yip-e-e! They're a-comin'!"

Little Steve in his shirt sleeves and overalls, his tousled hair uncovered to the breeze, maneuvered for a place beside Babe and her rider. He noticed that the mare seemed nervous. She had recently been drilled by a stranger in ways to which she was not accustomed. The jockey, in his striped silk riding outfit, shone resplendently in the white rays of the morning sun. He glanced at Little Steve with a confident grin.

"Babe!" commanded Little Steve. The mare tossed her head and her trembling ceased. She received a swift jerk on the bit as she nickered in recognition of the voice. Never had she failed to respond to that command.

From the judge's stand, the starter raised his six-shooter for the tense pause of readiness. The pistol cracked.

With a snorting whirl, the line of horses spun about. Little Steve, on Baldy, was among the first four to start. Oddly enough, Babe fell in behind. Her quickest work had always been done by guidance of the knees, and she was not yet accustomed to bit jerking.

Whoops of delight rose from the grandstand, as old Baldy shot into the lead. But it was only the good horsemanship of the boy which placed him there. Even so, the old horse proved his mettle. From a long inheritance of runners, Baldy knew at last that he was in a race, and he called upon that mysterious source of speed, and yet more speed, which only the thoroughbred knows. Neck and neck, ran the four. Five of the twelve were out of it before a half of the first lap was run. Now there were two slowly, strainingly, stretching the lead—Baldy and a chunky little roan. Then like a dash of wind, Babe shot a length ahead of them, where her rider held her in until he passed between the posts.

A full stop, right-about and return. Babe could have stopped and spun about just as easily as she had always done under Little Steve's direction, but now there was lacking the familiar command and guidance. Instead, old Baldy, with the other two, slid to a halt and whirled in unison, meeting the stragglers that had not yet reached the posts.

Baldy, again, was in the lead, while the crowd shrieked and yelled amid a shower of tossing hats. A pale-faced little woman sat clenching and unclenching her hands, with tears unnoticed rolling down her sallow cheeks. Old Zed Morgan forgot himself completely and never confessed afterward that he was stamping on Mrs. Thomas' hat, having thrown away his own. But later he bought her a new one, and a good one.

Perhaps it was the eggs surreptitiously fed him, which renewed old Baldy's wind. But more likely it was the uncanny understanding of horseflesh pos-

sessed by Little Steve, by which he could gauge the horse's endurance and eke out his strength, for old Baldy kept the lead of his nearest adversary by half a length. Half a length—until Babe again shot into the home stretch with her marvelous speed. Past the others as though they were not running at all, Babe drew neck and neck with Baldy, while the resplendent jockey shot a mocking grin at Little Steve.

Then the boy pleaded with his courageous old horse, calling upon the last straining breath of his heaving lungs. Ahead of them, like a glittering strand of gossamer, stretched the tape—a straightaway!

But Baldy couldn't last. A groan rose from the crowded grandstand. One and all, the spectators were with the gamest little rider that the Pacheco country had ever known. Now, easily, surely—Babe was drawing ahead—a neck—half a length. Old Baldy was faltering at last, blowing—winded.

Still twenty yards ahead, stretched the white tape. And then—something happened.

The astounded spectators didn't know. Perhaps among them there was only one who knew—that was Old Zed Morgan—and he wouldn't tell. The sorrel filly suddenly lowered her head between her stiffened forelegs and slid to a full stand, while her frantic rider tried every trick of his trade to force her on to the tape.

Later, the city jockey indignantly claimed that the boy had leaned over and said, "Whoa—Babe!" in a purring voice, but he was laughed at. The next day he left Wishbone, declaring that he would never again ride a cattlemen's sweepstake, or any other kind of a Hoosier race!

ISLAND HOMESTEAD FOUND IN MICHIGAN

AN island recently discovered to be the property of the United States government, in Beaufort Lake, Michigan, has been declared open to homestead entry. The island contains approximately three acres and is situated in Baraga County in the northern peninsula of Michigan. Establishment of this island as public land belonging to the government resulted from a recent resurvey.

In throwing the island open to homestead entry, ex-service men of the World War are given a ninety-one-day preference, dating from September 22, 1925, after which the unentered tracts will be open to the general public. Applications for homestead entry on the island are received at the General Land Office in Washington, D. C., there being no local land office in Michigan.

FAMOUS YELLOWSTONE GEYSER SLOWING UP

THE famous Yellowstone Park geyser known as "Old Faithful" is slowing up in his eruptions according to observations made during the summer. This year Old Faithful is making an eruption of about five minutes at intervals of every sixty-seven minutes. The record previously was an eruption every sixty minutes, and there is much speculation among scientists as to the changes beneath the earth's surface which cause the slowing down of the famous geyser's action. Old Faithful continues to send a great volume of steam and water up into the air to a height of from one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet, and has been as popular a spectacle as ever with the tourists who throng the park.

Dogs Are That Way

by

Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Tubby Willow's Guide," etc.

THE big malemute was muzzled, yet with all this protection people kept well away. The few tourists on the dock had heard strange tales about malemutes. They were part wolves and frequently brought down their masters; they were never safe, never loved mankind, but were only kept in subjection by a free use of the whip and many a hearty kick. So it was the tourists watched Tip from a safe distance.

A cry of horror came suddenly, when a little girl rushed forward and with words of delight approached the dog. "Nice dog!" she cried. "Good old dog!"

Golden curls clustered about her pink cheeks, her blue eyes sparkled with the joy of living. The hand and the arm of the child were proportionately small.

A deck hand picked up a club, when with a quick movement the dog pawed the muzzle from his nose and stood there waiting. One snap of those powerful jaws and the foreleg of a wolf would have been severed.

"Nice boy!" the child said as her tiny hand touched the cold nose, and the malemute's tail waved ponderously in approval. He wrinkled up his nose, showed his teeth, and, though it looked like a snarl, it was intended for a smile.

The child's mother decided not to faint; the father approached doubtfully. While the dog approved of the child, he might not be so friendly with elders. "Old fellow!" the man said, "how about it? I'm part of her family!" Just a brief glance that pierced the man's body and searched the soul, and the dog signified his approval. Dogs are that way.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" the man exclaimed, experiencing considerable pleasure at the contact. "You fellows are not so bad as you are painted."

Tip might have told him his kind were like most people: treat them fairly, and they will respond in like manner; get rough and see what happens. Most malemutes and huskies are that way—friendly despite their size and gleaming fangs. Wolves they may be in part, yet there is that urge within to seek the companionship of man and to serve him.

Joe Hardy stepped down the steamer's gangway at that moment. He had been Outside on a visit and had taken his lead dog along, as a matter of course.

"Making friends, eh, Tip? Well, that's the stuff. We can't have too many these days," he said and turned to the group. "Up where Tip and I hole in most of the time, there isn't much chance to make friends, but those we have—stick!"

"Why do you keep him muzzled?"

"Mostly so people won't bother him too much. Down in the States they went crazy over Tip. I visited my old home in the Middle-West, and malemutes are not very common there. If they see he's muzzled, they keep away. He wasn't muzzled very good this morning; it wasn't necessary, so he got loose easy enough. I leave him that way purposely, so the other dogs can't jump him and get away with it! At other times—well, I muzzle him good and plenty. I have to, or he'll—kill."

The group became silent. "Human beings?" a man ventured at length.

"He hasn't yet, but he would if he got the chance. It's another story, but some time you may read about it in the newspapers. If you do, don't think of him as a killer, but just a good natured old malemute who let a little girl maul him."

As a group of men passed along the dock, Joe Hardy became unexpectedly silent. Those near by heard him speak a low word of restraint. "Easy, Tip! Easy, boy!"

The group passed on, but apparently paid no attention to the dog; yet once out of sight, two men turned excitedly to each other. "For three years now, Joe Hardy has made fools of us. He's kept that dog muzzled in town, unmuzzled on the trail, just so Kozig could not square accounts. It's a bluff. He's as harmless as a kitten. Did you see the big mutt stand there and wag his tail while that kid rubbed his nose? I went cold all over; I expected to see him slash her. I had my gat in my hand but was afraid of hitting the girl."

He turned to a swarthy man at his side. "Well, Kozig, how about it?" he asked.

"You know if Hardy gets capital interested in his coal vein, we are done. We'll have to stand by and wait until the market is greater than he can handle, then ship in our stuff. You are the logical man to square accounts. With him out of the way, you can let the coal in that district sleep, for future generations to mine. We can dictate our own terms, just keeping it below the price Outside operators can ship it in for, and you can clean up a snug fortune in placer mining."

"I'd have to put him out of the way," the swarthy man muttered, "but I'm afraid of that dog. I'm a dead shot, yet when I aim at him I'm nervous. Twice I've fired from a distance and missed."

The other nodded. "We, who play golf Outside, call it a mental hazard. It is difficult to overcome."

Kozig continued. "I can see him coming at me, nothing can stop him, not even bullets. I might drill him through and through, but he'd get me before he died. Now—after what I saw, I know he's just a dog. When the time comes, and I again shoot at Tip, I'll be close and sure!"

Kozig stood something over six feet, and about his eyes there was an Oriental cast. Most men noticed it, particularly when he was angry. His skin contained more than a tint of the Oriental. He was a type one sometimes finds in the North, where many races have come for gold. He seldom laughed; in repose his face was sullen.

As he commenced packing for the trail, his mind ran back through three years of history in which Joe Hardy, Tip, and himself figured. Joe had warned him, and many others, against the dog; he had kept him muzzled to back up the warning. Now he knew the truth. A mere child had torn the mask from the malemute. Behind the supposed fierceness was only lazy contentment.

It was Hardy's contention that gold mining filled a valley to overflowing in a week and left is desolate in a year. He was a dreamer, perhaps. He wanted his coal mines developed; that meant

development of a land rich in farming possibilities; it meant a permanent population, and that to him was what Alaska needed.

Three times he had interested outside capital, and three times Todd, Manning, and others of Kozig's crowd had sowed seeds of doubt, and the deal had fallen through. The fourth time he proposed to see it through and had even ventured outside. Now he was returning to prepare the way. He was a lone scout, blazing the way to new lands, as others of his caliber had done from the landing of the Pilgrims to now.

When Hardy boarded the train that night, Tip was lifted into the baggage car, muzzled. Todd sneered, and Kozig laughed lightly. The poor fool was still striving to keep up the deception after that affair on the dock.

The train pulled out with Tip and Joe Hardy aboard. "Well, he's gone, Kozig; when are you going into his country to—er—prospect?" asked Todd.

"It is well that people here know he is gone, and I am staying. It will help if ever an alibi is necessary. Many things can happen to a man venturing into that country alone. There are glaciers to cross and rivers to ford on frail rafts. I would not be surprised if Joe Hardy fell and broke his legs, before many weeks have passed. And his dog will—wander off!"

Todd understood. "Then about next year, Kozig, you'll begin placer mining. If you need any money, you know where to come."

Kozig knew where to come, but it was not only placer gold that urged him on and on; it was revenge. A cousin of his had been publicly beaten, five years previous, by this same Hardy—driven, in fact, from the country. He knew nothing of the details, cared even less. The insult was sufficient for him.

When he left the train, Joe Hardy bought several dogs and fitted packs to their backs; then he loaded them with provisions. Each dog was good for forty pounds, while Old Tip could carry fifty. The pack Hardy himself carried weighed seventy-five pounds. The straps creaked in protest with each step. Then he struck straight into the wilderness, following an easy grade which he knew would some day feel the rumbling weight of coal-ladened cars. He swung along at a rapid pace, for his time was limited. These Chechacho capitalists would be soft; he must have well-stocked cabins for each night's stop. It would take time; he must not let anything delay him. Instinctively he selected good trout streams for his various cabin sites. While he cooked breakfast each morning, the others could snake out a few trout from the icy creeks that had sung them to sleep the night before. All this would help to put them in a favorable frame of mind. Yes, he must force his pace. He felt sure they would follow within a month at least.

He built the first along substantial lines, threw up an emergency cabin at the second site, and had reached the third site without incident. Whereas he had left town with the big dog muzzled, now he ran loose, as was always the case when Hardy was alone. An enemy with the Oriental trend of thought strikes differently from the white man. He looked for signs, from time to time, but found none. Perhaps Kozig, Todd, and the others had given up the search. No, that did not seem likely.

He was asleep when the first warning came. It was just an instinctive feeling that eyes were upon him, watching from the distance perhaps. It lasted throughout the day, then disappeared. He finished the third cabin and headed for the fourth and last site, bending low under the weight of his pack. Old Tip's feet were sore, so Hardy carried the

dog's load as well as his own. It made a staggering burden.

Toward noon he came to a real grade. In his mind he decided the railroad would go through a cut here. He bent well forward, his empty hands hanging straight down as he trudged up the slope, following a zigzag path of his own making. The warning whispered so suddenly that he looked up with a start. The brush stirred. Just once in his life he had felt the terrible impact of a bullet. Now he felt it again. It seemed to drive the very life from his body, as it came unseen from that stirring brush. "Tip! Tip! Take him, boy!"

Joe Hardy lay writhing on the ground, held down by the weight of his pack, his hands struggling to reach the gun in his holster. Almost frantically Kozig was hurrying forward for a better shot, a final shot before Hardy got his own gun. "Tip! Tip!" Hardy's cry was frantic

Kozig sneered. The vision of the dock scene came to him. The tiny girl, the outwardly fierce dog that wagged his tail, the muzzle, or mask if you will. His dark eyes flashed as he fired the second shot from his automatic pistol, then swerved at the crashing of brush close at hand. The brush parted, and Tip burst into view. The dog did not hesitate but came at Kozig with great bounds. The automatic steadied, then leaped. The impact of the .45 bullet knocked Tip to the ground. He rolled over, struggled to his feet and came on, although grievously wounded. Again and again, the pistol leaped until at last Kozig hurled it aside. He drew his knife and slashed swiftly, the keen blade cutting gleaming arcs in the air but finding nothing solid. Then he went under. Fangs tore aside his arm, ripped the clothing to shreds, and found flesh. Over and over man and dog rolled, down the slope to the edge of the bluff. The dog fought in blind fury; the man, with the madness of terror. Men, who shoot their enemies from cover, usually are afraid to die. Kozig screamed for mercy, and Joe Hardy, faint from his wound, ordered Tip back.

Perhaps the dog would have obeyed, had he heard; perhaps not. He thought only of the business at hand, obeyed only the instinct that urged him to subdue this enemy of his master, this breed of mankind that he hated.

Nearer and nearer the man and dog rolled to the edge, while behind them Joe Hardy crawled on his hands and knees and sought to intervene. On the edge of the bluff they seemed to pause a moment, then Kozig and Tip vanished. When Hardy reached the edge and looked down, he saw only the swirling water sixty feet below. The stream cut into the bank, found granite, and eddied in a great pool. He peered steadily and saw something beneath the surface. "Old Tip!" he muttered, "Poor old Tip!"

The object seemed to divide, and part of it came to the surface—the head and shoulders of a dog, leaving a crimson stain in the water. The other object was caught by the current and carried on downstream below the surface, where mankind could not see. Tip drifted on the crest of the flood and came ashore on a bar. His legs gave way beneath him, and he lay half submerged in the water. Joe Hardy squirmed from his pack and wadded a handkerchief into his wound; then he got unsteadily to his feet. He was long in reaching the dog's side; and, when he did, he was unable to do more than pant heavily from his exertions.

His fingers explored Tip's wound, then bandaged the place with the tenderest care. Next he bound up his own wound and fainted. The sun was dipping behind the mountains, when he regained consciousness. "Well, Tip, here we are. Maybe we'll live, maybe we'll die; but it'll be together, eh, boy?"

Tip tried to wag his tail, but he was too weak. Throughout the night, man and dog huddled beneath the same blanket for warmth; and in the morning the man struggled to his feet and turned back to the newly built cabin. Sometimes he fell, sometimes he walked, again he crawled, and always the dog dragged himself after him. The other dogs trailed behind and wondered why the packs were not lifted from their backs.

In the almost bare room, Joe Hardy waited and watched his dream fade, like the ending of a screen story; the picture became dim and dissolved. The rumble of wheels died in the distance, only the rushing of the stream remained in his ears. Of course, he might leave Old Tip and return to town and meet his capitalists from the Outside. Yet, as between wealth and Tip—— "I'll stick, boy, money is nothing," he decided. "Maybe some day the dream will come true, and we can sit on the bank together and watch the trains steam by."

Time passed swiftly. The day he promised to meet his people came and followed the trail of many other days. A week passed, then ten days. By this time they were taking the train home, disgusted with Alaska, disgusted with the promises of its sour doughs—lots of talk, lots of vision, little performance. Todd and the others had got in their work with them, no doubt.

The sun was dipping below the peaks, when Old Tip stirred and looked downstream. He sniffed, then cocked his head sideways. Satisfied, he walked some distance from the cabin and waited. Not a killer but a friendly old dog, expecting somebody. Voices came, and two men plainly from the Outside paused. "By gosh, it's Tip, the dog Hardy brought Outside with him last winter. Hello, boy! Where's your muzzle? I have my doubts of you, now that it's off."

"What's eating you?" his companion muttered. "Can't you see he's wagging his tail? Looks like he's been hurt. Hello, Hardy, what happened?"

Hardy walked down the trail to meet them. His dream was becoming a reality. "You came?"

"Sure our gang waited ten days, then decided to come in and see what happened. Say, there's great fishing in this country. Gravity haul, plenty of suitable land for farms and town sites, all kinds of water for power; this is great. The rest of our gang is coming!"

Joe Hardy was dazed. Slowly he reached for Tip's muzzle.

"Aw, don't muzzle him, Hardy, he's safe enough?" the other protested.

"Are there any Oriental servants in your party? I remember you had them in the States?"

"No, we left 'em behind. We're roughing it. Why?"

"Tip doesn't like Orientals. Like any other race, there are a few bad apples in each barrel. One of them owned Tip as a pup. Used to beat him, until one day I took the whip away from him; cousin of a fellow named Kozig who was—who Tip—who fell into the river and was drowned several weeks ago."

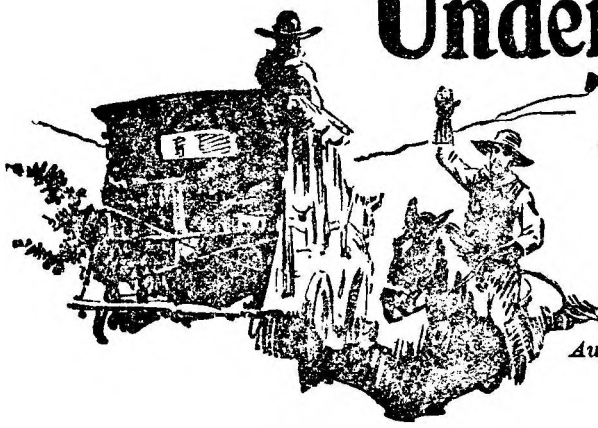
"Well, go ahead with the story!"

"I'm a little dazed at your coming. I took the whip away from this fellow and gave him as many lashes as he had given the dog; then I bought the dog. Tip doesn't like Orientals; that's why I keep him muzzled—he might kill one."

The other looked at Tip, dreaming in the light of the midnight sun. "Nonsense!" he cried, "I don't believe it!"

Joe Hardy did not reply. He saw the cold eyes of Kozig peering down the barrel of the automatic; saw the weapon leap; felt the impact of the bullet and winced in pain. Then he saw Tip, a different Tip, leap straight into the spitting weapon; saw him go down. That hurt. He did not want to see more. He turned and led the way into his cabin

Under His Trusty Hat



By

Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "A Dip in the Desert," etc

THE sun had not been up long when "Cal" Pierce drove his ancient buckboard along the single street of Channing and stopped in front of the post office. Three days in the week, rain or shine, he made this early start from the little railroad town on his thirty-mile drive with the mail for Split Rock. On the three alternating days, he started just as early from the inland terminus of his route in order to cover the long, dusty miles back to Channing before night. "Just as fur one way as t'other, an' a heap dustier," he had once told a complaining and inquisitive passenger.

Cal was a little runt of a man, grizzled and tanned. His legs were bowed from years spent in the saddle, for in his younger days he had been one of the best riders on the cattle range. It was when his old joints became stiff from hard work and exposure, and a knee had been crushed by a falling horse, that he had been compelled to quit the saddle and take to less exacting duties. For a number of years he had been driving the "mail hack," as his unpretentious two-seated buckboard was called, between Channing and Split Rock.

From long habit he still wore the high-heeled boots and the broad-brimmed, four-pound hat of the cowpuncher. Under the leather band of the big hat he carried numerous small articles for safe keeping—matches, cigarette papers, and the like. In the holster at his hip hung his old six-shooter with a barrel almost a foot long. With his trousers stuffed in the close-fitting boot tops, this costume gave him the appearance of being top-heavy when he walked.

Old Jonas Peters, the Channing postmaster, came out presently with a mail pouch in one hand and a few letters and papers in the other. He threw the mail pouch in back of the seat and handed the letters and papers to Cal for distribution to the few ranches that had mail boxes on his route.

"It's in there this trip," the old postmaster imparted in a low tone as he leaned over within a yard of the driver of the buckboard.

"Uh-huh," Cal responded without looking up from the task of sorting the handful of letters and papers into half a dozen thin packages. He thrust the packages of mail into labeled pockets of an ingeniously contrived canvas bag hanging on the dashboard. As he reached for the lines he turned to ask: "Ain't no passengers to go, I reckon, Jonas?"

"Reckon not, ain't nobody left word with me fer you to stop fer 'em. Might

be you'd like to have comp'ny all the way to Split Rock to-day, too," the postmaster added significently.

"Dunno—if they was the right kind I might," Cal returned.

Cal knew that "it" referred to by the old postmaster was a registered package of currency in the mail pouch, being sent by the bank at Channing to the paymaster of the Split Rock Copper Mine. It wasn't often that the pay roll was sent by mail, but on two recent occasions the special messenger carrying the money had been held up and robbed. Evidently the sending of it by mail was intended to throw the bandits off the track by the change in method of transmission. Some contended that inside information, leaking out from the bank or the mining company, was responsible for the staging of these holdups with such remarkable precision and success.

Although advised of the unusual value of the mail he carried this trip, the driver of the buckboard left the pouch where the postmaster had thrown it, lying on top of a miscellaneous collection of boxes and bundles. The natural impulse of a man intrusted with so much money would have been to draw it up within reach of his hand, but Cal Pierce had notions that were peculiarly his own in such matters. Without so much as a backward glance to see if the mail pouch were riding safely, he slapped his wiry ponies with the lines and swung into the dusty road that wound away toward the mining settlement of Split Rock. So far as he could see, no one except the old postmaster was witnessing his departure, but you never could tell.

In the first five miles, Cal stopped twice to leave mail in a box erected by the roadside. He covered another five miles before he again made a similar stop. After this he would pass through an uninhabited region where a few cattle and an occasional band of sheep foraged on the scant vegetation. In the fifteen-mile stretch of barren hills and scrubby timber he might sight a sheep herder tending his flock, but more likely he would not glimpse another human being unless he met a freighter or a lone traveler.

When Cal had thrust the single letter and a frayed newspaper into this last mail box, he removed his hat, and from its three-gallon crown took a small package wrapped in a red bandanna. Removal of this gaudy outer covering revealed a plug of tobacco. When he had bitten off a liberal chew, he rewrapped it and returned it to the place from which he had taken it, then put his hat back on his head.

"Keeps it from dryin' out or gittin' sweaty," Cal had once explained when asked why he carried his tobacco in his hat.

The crown of his big hat had been the receptacle for more than tobacco on occasion. Cal admitted having fed his horses out of it when he forgot to take his nosebags along on a trip, and it was said that he once carried a setting of eggs from the Holston Ranch to Channing in the capacious crown in order to keep from breaking any of them. The matter of a pound or two extra weight in addition to the heavy hat did not inconvenience him greatly.

Cal did not drive on from the mail box at once. He sat for a moment scanning the horizon, then turned for the first time to look at the dust-covered mail pouch behind the seat. Twice in the last four years he had been held up, both times in the stretch of rough country ahead of him. The bandits had got little from the mail pouch then, but if they should strike him now it would be a different story. Once he had successfully secreted a roll of bills that had been intrusted to him privately; but the mail pouch could not be hidden. Locked, it had been delivered to him for safe keeping and transmission to its destination without regard to its contents. He

was really supposed to be in total ignorance concerning its contents, but he must not let it out of his keeping for a moment until he placed it in the hands of the postmaster at Split Rock.

Cal finally slapped his team with the lines and drove on. He could see no reason why the bandit should suspect him of carrying valuable mail to-day, unless it was, as had been reported, that the robber got inside information through a hidden source. At any rate, he would be on the alert. He gave the pouch no further attention, letting it lie in the bottom of the buckboard just as if it contained the usual collection of letters and papers.

Cal Pierce had been raised in a treeless country, and he had early formed the habit of looking at the ground, since there were no treetops for him to gaze into. It had been a part of his work, too, to study signs on the trails. When he was two miles from the last mail box, he drew up his team with an exclamation of surprise as he studied the dusty trail ahead of him.

"Cow-puncher a-walkin'—that's funny," he mused.

He got out and examined the tracks he had glimpsed. Sure enough, there was the impression of the high-heeled boots and the scar made by the three-inch rowels of heavy Mexican spurs at every step. There was no sign of a horse track, and evidently the man had passed along not more than an hour or so before.

"Reckon I'll come up with him pretty pronto. Cow-punchers ain't cravin' to do a heap o' walkin'," Cal muttered as he climbed over the wheel to his seat and urged his team on along the dusty road.

Presently the tracks in the road disappeared, indicating that the pedestrian had either left the road altogether or had taken to the hard ground by the side of the trail. In the next mile Cal failed to glimpse another footprint in the dust. He was a little disappointed, for he had hoped the pedestrian might prove to be an old acquaintance, and company of the right sort would be welcome until he passed the dangerous part of his route.

It was where the road followed the windings of a dry wash that he saw a man step into the road ahead of him and raise his hand quickly in a friendly gesture. In spite of the evident good intentions of the stranger, Cal's hand dropped involuntarily toward the butt of his gun before he could arrest the movement. The man on the ground noted the movement and spoke reassuringly.

"Wonder could you give me a lift far as the Cross S Ranch trail?" the man queried as Cal drew up.

Cal moved over to make room on the seat. At one glance he had satisfied himself that this was the man, though a stranger to him, that had made the tracks in the road. He wore high-heeled boots and heavy spurs—the spurs were a little too heavy for practical use. Apparently he had been resting by the side of the road when he heard the buckboard coming.

"How come you was afoot?" Cal asked innocently.

"Horse stepped in a badger hole back up this draw about a mile, an' broke his leg—had to shoot him," the stranger explained glibly, pointing up a wash that intersected the road at right angles from the left.

"Might throw your saddle in, too, if you got it along," Cal offered, glancing about for this inseparable equipment of the cowboy.

"I—I left it hid back there in a mesquite where I shot the horse," was the reply, not so readily this time. "Knowed you'd be along any minute, an' didn't want to load myself down. Just got here in time to ketch you as 'twas."

Cal gave a quick, sidelong glance at his passenger. It wasn't like a cow-

puncher to abandon his saddle when he would have to carry it no more than a mile to the road with a possible chance of having it taken back to the home ranch. All the punchers Cal had ever known were fools about their saddles, though the loss of a horse might be of small account. But the ranches were certainly hiring all sorts of hands these days.

Another thing was somewhat disturbing. This glib young stranger had said that he had just reached the trail in time to intercept the mail hack, and yet there were the tracks a mile back the road. A casual comparison was evidence enough that the boots the man wore had made those prints in the sand, and the rowels of his spurs had cut the shallow mark at every step. The country wasn't full of men who walked with riding boots and spurs. Undoubtedly the man had lied, but why?

Cal wisely refrained from asking the question that was on his lips when it occurred to him that the man must have reasons for lying, and would not hesitate at another misrepresentation if questioned. Besides, you always had a man at a disadvantage by pretending to believe the lies he told. The reason the man may have had for saying he had just arrived at the road when he had struck it more than a mile back, was of no particular importance, but the attempt at deception had sown the seed of suspicion and distrust in the mind of the old mail carrier.

It was seven miles to the place where the Cross S trail crossed the road. In that stretch of scrubby timber had occurred most of the numerous holdups within recent years. A man could easily lose himself there. It would not be a difficult matter for a man seated by the side of a driver to turn the trick at an opportune moment while his victim was engaged in the task of handling his team at a difficult stretch of road. All this occurred to Cal within two minutes after the appearance of the stranger.

In spite of his distrust of the man, Cal had no definite reason for believing him other than what he pretended. There was no mark by which a bandit might be distinguished from a cowpuncher. Gamblers frequently posed as ministers without immediate exposure. If more than a casual glance had been bestowed upon the mail pouch back of the seat, the fact had not been noticeable.

While the stranger talked, evidently with the purpose of being disarmingly friendly, Cal listened quietly, carefully observing all that went on around him. He missed some of what the other man was saying, for the reason that he was working out a difficult problem, the solution of which he must reach before he had proceeded more than a mile or two farther on the road. It was little to his liking to carry a stranger on this day, yet he could not very well have refused the man without reason, and to give the reason had no part in his plans. If the stranger were really masquerading, he could not show his hand until the appointed time. To force a show-down in advance was Cal's problem.

Once Cal removed his hat, deliberately unwrapped his plug of tobacco, and offered his passenger a chew. The man refused with a grin, and the plug was returned to its place in the crown of the hat.

They were rattling across a rocky flat just before reaching the point where the road disappeared in the scrub timber, when the driver of the buckboard drew up slowly.

"Here, hold the lines a minute, stranger," he said as he prepared to climb out over the wheel. "I been hearin' somethin' a-rattlin' fer quite some time, an' I allow it's a bolt in the reach that's worked loose. Reckon I might patch it up with balin' wire till I git into Split Rock."

He secured a short piece of rusty wire from a box under the seat, and, hobbling to the rear of the buckboard, he disappeared beneath the vehicle. As he fumbled there with the supposedly loose bolt, he was well out of sight of the man on the seat, but he kept his eye on his shadow on the ground. If the stranger really had designs upon the mail pouch he was biding his time, realizing that he would be taken at a disadvantage should he make a move at this time while he might be observed without being able to locate his opponent.

Still grunting and panting as if engaged with the refractory bolt, Cal removed his hat and quickly transferred the plug of tobacco to his pocket. From a hip pocket he took a short, heavy object, compact and smooth, and placed it in the hat. He put the hat back on his head, pinching the crown together in order to keep in place the object with which he had replaced the plug of tobacco.

"Reckon that wire'll hold her together till I git to Split Rock," Cal observed as he crawled from under the buckboard and climbed to his seat.

The passenger had fallen ominously silent as the buckboard entered the scrub timber, and Cal fancied he detected a restlessness in his eyes. The thick growth encroached upon the wheel tracks from either side. A man planning a holdup might attempt it anywhere in the next four or five miles.

Not long after entering the timber, Cal again drew up suddenly and jerked his ancient six-shooter from the holster. Without taking time to sight along the barrel, he blazed away into the thick undergrowth by the roadside. Six shots were fired in rapid succession, when a metallic click told him that his gun must be reloaded before he fired another shot.

"Missed ever' shot, danged if I didn't," Cal declared ruefully without taking his eye from the spot in the brush that had been the object of his bad marksmanship. "Time was when I could shoot the head off'n a rattler ever' time, but I let that'n git clean away."

He heard a gasp of surprise, followed by a triumphant chuckle from the man on the seat by his side, almost behind him as he turned sidewise to shoot into the brush. Before Cal turned around he had sensed a change in the attitude of his passenger.

"Stick up your hands an' hold 'em there, old man," the stranger ordered as he thrust the cold muzzle of a short gun against the ribs of the old mail carrier.

Cal dropped the empty six-shooter and complied without hesitation. When the stranger had assured himself that there was not another weapon concealed in a pocket, he reached over back of the seat for the mail pouch, keeping his victim covered with the gun he held in his other hand.

"Didn't allow to pull this off so soon, but couldn't let a good chance like that slip. You played right into my hands," he said, as he picked up the sack and swung backward to the ground. "Reckon if you'd knowed they was five thousand dollars in that sack you wouldn't ha' been fool enough to shoot your last ca'tridge at a rattler, leavin' the sack lay around like it was junk."

Cal blinked foolishly, as if the information about the money in the pouch was news to him, unbelievable as it was.

"You can take your hands down now," the robber suggested as he paused a moment for a parting gibe, his gun held loosely in his right hand at his side. "Third time I've took the pay roll single-handed, but robbin' you, old man, is like takin' pennies from a blind woman. That hat you got on is some hat, but the trouble is they ain't nothin' under it."

Cal was running his fingers idly through the sparse locks back of his right ear when the robber delivered him-

self of this voluntary estimate of the mental ability of the man he had disarmed and robbed.

"No, mebbe not, but——"

Cal had inclined his head and tilted the hat with his hand until there dropped into his waiting palm the rounded end of the short metallic object he had hidden in the capacious crown. He whipped it around in front of him at a single motion, and there spurted from it a stream of fire accompanied by the unmistakable bark of the short army pistol.

This first shot, apparently fired at random, and without any effort at taking aim, sent the loosely held weapon of the bandit spinning as he involuntarily jerked a bleeding finger toward his mouth with a howl of pain. He made as if to recover the fallen weapon with his other hand.

"Put 'em both up an' let 'em freeze there," was Cal's terse command, the tone of which could not be mistaken. "They's a lot more loads in this little spittin' Sally, ever' one a go-gitter, an' if you so much as wiggle a finger like you wanted to git that gun you dropped, I'll show you how easy 'tis to shoot the head off'n a rattlesnake. Reason I didn't hit that'n a while ago was because it wasn't there."

In his turn now, Cal made sure that the other man carried no other weapon. He would take no unnecessary chances, and ordering the conquered bandit to put his hands behind him, he bound them securely with a short length of rope. When he had bound his legs together in the same manner, he rolled the trussed-up robber in the back of the buckboard and prepared to resume his interrupted journey.

"No, mebbe they wasn't nothin' to speak of under my hat," he imparted to his sulky prisoner, "nothin' but that fire-spittin' little gun I bought off'n a dood that was out here last summer. He called it a army Colt, but I reckon it's a growed-up hoss of a gun if it is little. I been ashamed to tote it out where folks could see it, but I allow my old .45 ain't got nothin' on it.

"Talk about what's under a hat, young feller," Cal resumed after biting a chew from his plug and returning it to its rightful place. "Most folks ain't tellin', an' it's a plumb mistake to make a guess like it was a cinch."

DOG DERBY ABSORBS IDAHO YOUNGSTERS

NORTHERN Idaho has apparently solved the problem of troublesome and incorrigible youngsters, if reports coming from Ashton, Idaho, are reliable. All the energies of the boys and girls over six years of age are bent on developing their favorite dogs into winners of Ashton's famous dog derby, or one of the junior events run off in connection with it. The Ashton dog derby is held on Washington's Birthday of each year. It is a twenty-five-mile race and attracts spectators from all over the Northwest. This year's derby was won by "Tud" Kent. Last year it was won by Olcott Zorn, sixteen years old. "Smoky" Gaston won the event for several years and always figures so prominently in the race that he is an idol to the youthful dog trainers of the locality.

Teams of from five to seven dogs compete in the Ashton dog derby, and there are also junior races for single dogs and dogs driven in pairs. It is expected that next year's event, on February 22, 1926, will bring out the fastest and largest field of contestants that has ever run over the Ashton course. The prize for the principal event will be $1,500 as against this year's prize of $600; larger prizes will also be offered for the junior events.

Pioneer Towns of the West

SEATTLE

By *Erle Wilson*
Author of "Fort Dodge," etc.

THE site of Seattle, Washington, was once familiar ground to the Indians of the Northwest. Among the redskins of the section there was a Siwash chief who was well disposed toward the palefaces. So, when in 1852 a band of pioneers made a settlement on the neck of land between Elliott Bay and Lake Washington, they named it "Seattle" in honor of their dusky friend. When the frontier outpost was a year old a town site was decided upon, King County was founded, and Seattle became the county seat.

In 1855 Seattle had a population of a scant three hundred, which growth was resented by the neighboring Indian tribes. A year later the redskins savagely determined to exterminate the white settlers, attacked the struggling village. Their attempt was unsuccessful, however, for the town was defended by the U. S. sloop of war, the *Decatur*. A little later Seattle was connected with the rest of the world by a railroad, and began to grow.

A destructive fire in 1889 and the financial depression of 1893 checked the town's progress. In 1897 gold was discovered in Alaska; the Yukon region and Seattle boomed in earnest.

This Washington town speedily became the outfitting post for the prospectors bound for the gold fields, as well as the port to which the precious yellow metal was shipped. Its progress from this time on has been steady and rapid, a large part of its population coming from the eastern and central parts of the United States.

The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition which was held in Seattle in 1909 was an illuminating demonstration of the growth and resources of this region.

At the present time Seattle is the largest city in the Pacific Northwest, its population being more than three hundred and fifty thousand, and its area, including water surface, about ninety-five square miles. Situated on the east shore of Puget Sound, eight hundred and sixty-four miles by water north of San Francisco, and one hundred and eighty-five miles by rail north of Portland, it is a seaport of great importance. The Canadian boundary is one hundred and twenty-five miles to the north. It has a hilly site of marked and spectacular beauty, with the snow-capped Olympics and Puget Sound on the west and the lofty Cascades and Lake Washington on the east. To the south is the nation's highest perpetually snow-capped

mountain, Mount Ranier, rising from the sea 14,408 feet.

Lake Washington, twenty-two miles long and four miles wide, is connected with Puget Sound by an eight-mile ship canal. This canal passes through Lake Union in the north-central part of the city and connects with the Sound by means of a large lock, made necessary by the difference in levels between the bodies of salt and fresh water. The completion of this canal extended Seattle's water front from forty to one hundred and forty miles, adding a non-tidal fresh-water harbor. With such facilities it is not surprising that this northwestern seaport has a vast maritime commerce with Pacific coast ports, British Columbia, Alaska, South America, Australia, and all the Orient, as well as with Atlantic ports, through the Panama Canal.

Seattle is literally built upon hills, some parts of the city having an altitude of five hundred feet. Many streets are traveled by means of cable cars. The wholesale and manufacturing district borders on Puget Sound, where the water front has ample dock facilities for the ocean-going vessels that frequent the port. Adjoining this district and on slightly higher ground is the business center with its many big buildings of steel and concrete. Upon a steeper tier is the residential section, where many slopes are adorned with beautiful homes surrounded by lawns and gardens.

Seattle is considered one of the cleanest and best-lighted cities in America. It has excellent clubs, theaters and hotels. There are many stately public buildings, fine churches and tall business structures. Among the latter is the forty-two-story L. C. Smith Building, the tallest office building outside of New York City. There are forty-four parks, the principal ones bordering Puget Sound and Lake Union, where there is excellent boating and canoeing. All of the parks are connected by boulevards, scenic highways and winding drives.

Cheap and abundant hydroelectric power has made Seattle the most important manufacturing city in the Pacific Northwest. Situated in the heart of America's greatest timber area, the leading industry is shipbuilding. Port Blakeley's lumber mills are the largest in the world. The fisheries of Alaska and Puget Sound are also centralized here.

This seaport is the terminus of eight transcontinental railroad lines, four of which enter the city over their own tracks. Elliott Bay, the central harbor of Seattle, is one of the best land-locked harbors in the world. Owing to its northern location this city is the nearest American port to China, Japan and the Philippines, the gateway to Siberia, and the only port in the United States which has direct passenger service to Alaska.

This advantage has made Seattle one of the leading seaports of the country. Through its gates pass large quantities of silk and tea from the Orient, as well as the trade with Alaska, America's farthest north frontier. An assay office handles all the gold that comes from Alaska and the region of the Yukon.

Seattle is the chief educational center of the Pacific coast. The public school system, under the management of a board of education which is independent of the municipal government, is rated as second in America as to efficiency. Here on a spacious campus skirting the city's two beautiful lakes are the Tudor-Gothic buildings which house the University of Washington, the second largest State university west of the Mississippi River. In addition Seattle has a number of preparatory schools and colleges of good standing, as well as a public library with nine branches. This city has the distinction of ranking second in literacy among the cities of the United States.

This Pacific seaport is also considered one of America's healthiest cities. Due to the Japan current its climate is mild, and there is a bracing tang in the salt air filtered through pine forests. Snow is a novelty, and the summer is pleasantly cool. Almost fifty per cent of the citizens of this seaport own their homes, which, whether they are large or small, are all beautifully set in the midst of floral loveliness and look out upon the mountains and the sea.

Outdoor activities play an important part in the life of this Western city. Golf may be indulged in every day. Trout and bass fishing is a leading recreation interest in summer. In season upland birds, ducks, geese, snipe, brant and big game afford excellent sport.

The city owns and operates the water system, which has its source in Cedar River, twenty-eight miles distant and at a considerable altitude. The municipality owns an electric light and power plant, and the major portion of its street railway system. Municipal markets and beaches have been established. The city has a fire department of six hundred and fifty men, while the police force numbers five hundred and thirty. The government of Seattle is administered by the mayor and a council of nine members elected for a term of two years. The present mayor is Edwin J. Brown.

Seattle's citizens are friendly, virile Westerners, and the city is an outstanding example of American initiative, having grown in a single generation from an isolated frontier town to the place of the twentieth city of the United States.

In next week's issue Omaha, Nebraska, will be described.

PROSPECTORS FIND HUNDREDS OF RATTLERS IN CAVE

WHILE prospecting along the slope of Miller Mountain, ten miles from Candelaria, Nevada, two California prospectors, Charles Crowe and James Lansington, made their way into a cave containing hundreds of rattlesnakes. The snakes ranged from sixteen to thirty inches in length, the largest having fourteen rattles. In proof of their story, the prospectors displayed about two quarts of rattles, when they reached the near-by town of Tonopah.

SHASTA BUTTERFLIES BLOCK MOTORS

THE species of butterfly commonly known as the sulphur was so thick along the roads in the Shasta Valley, between Yreka and Weed, California, during the summer, that they seriously interfered with passing motorists. It was when Shasta Valley's second crop of alfalfa was in full bloom, and the sulphur butterflies were gathering honey from the blossoms. In flying across the Pacific Highway, they were unable to dodge the autos and they became flattened out against the radiators in large numbers. This interfered with the cooling system of the cars and resulted in the death of thousands of the dainty insects.

Greased Lightnin'!

By James Edward Hungerford.

MY little hoss has lightnin' feet,
An' jest can fairly fly,
All other hosses he can beat
Upon the ol' "X Y!"
His scrawny legs are thin o' shank,
But they don't ever tire,
An' he is muscled, head to flank,
With sinews tough as wire!

To look at him you wouldn't 'low
As if he had the "pep"
To hardly beat a muley cow,
An' win hisself a rep,
But when that broncho starts to *run*,
An' gits into his pace,
He's shore the *best* hoss, barrin' none,
Upon the ol' ranch place!

The other broncs don't stand a show,
When in a race we ride;
He beats 'em all right from the go—
They cannot hit the stride!
Before they hardly git a start,
He's movin' swift as sin,
An' he would rather break his heart
Than let them critters win!

I picked 'im up, a little "scrub,"
One day at auction sale,
An' paid three dollars fer the "dub,"
Hide, tallow, hoofs an' tail;
The other fellers laughed at me,
When that bronc's praise I sung,
An' they nicknamed the critter "Bee,"
An' 'lowed that I was *stung!*

But now the laugh is all on *them*,
They do not now deride
My hoss, an' heartlessly condemn
His looks, to wound my pride;
They called 'im "Bee"—they've changed the name
O' this swift steed o' mine,
Since he has run their hosses *lame*,
They've branded him "Bee Line!"

A Bucket of Smoke

By Cherry Wilson

THE all-brass band belonging to Triangle Z was not only to furnish the music at the big fiesta following the christening of Francisco Diego, month-old heir of the Las Palmas acres, on the second Sunday hence, but—in accord with the strict etiquette of the Grande Ronde—it was taking the new citizen a present. It was to be a saddle, one made to the boys' own specifications. Having ordered in hasty enthusiasm, they had leisurely despaired of ever claiming it, until last week when "Cahlina" luckily got a job reporting local news to the *Gunsight Gazette.* The boys with their usual vim had helped him round up enough items to make payment certain. To-night he was submitting them to Editor Clem Cleek.

Sublimely confident of the outcome, Triangle Z's bandsmen, grouped outside the bunk house, were employing the time until his return in serious practice for the "big day."

"Jiminy Cripes!" "Wishful" Dixon applauded one particularly awful blare. "If *thet* don't plumb electrocute folks, our flashin' thet saddle shore will."

"An' show up Lazy K fer pikers," "Dad" McKeen said. "Them punchers has spent a hull week—an' nuthin' else—a-braidin' the leetle feller a bridle."

"Neither 'ud we a-spent nuthin' else," reminded Wishful honestly, "hadn't it bin fer Cahlina landin' thet job reportin' fer the *Gazette.* But now everything's jake. Clem said flat out he'd pay ten cents an inch fer news, an' we sent in more'n enough inches to git thet saddle. Cahlina'll be comin' back any minit, bringin' the——" he ceased, heart and pulse stampeding.

Was this Cahlina coming back—this dejected wretch, exuding misery from every pore, whose spurs, even, gave off a dismal jingle? It was! Before ever he opened his mouth, they knew——

"Pardnahs," drawled the crushed puncher miserably, displaying three thin dimes, "theah's ouah week's wages in the fields of juhnalism. Clem throwed all ouah stuff away but three inches."

The disaster was too colossal.

"Thet bars us offen the track," Wishful said, gulping mournfully. "We can't go carousin' down to Las Palmas, eatin' their grub an' all, 'thout we take leetle Francisco his saddle. We're busted, an' the boss is gone so we can't draw, which don't leave us a chancet to make——"

"Not onless I kin git Clem a scoop," put in Cahlina thoughtfully.

"Scoop?" chorused Triangle Z, a shade less blue.

"Yeah, a scoop fo' his papah."

"Why in Tophet does Clem Cleek want a scoop fer his paper?" demanded old Dad. "Tuh bury th' *Gaz*——"

"Not thet soht of scoop," Cahlina ex-

plained, with touching allowance for Dad's years and understanding. "When a newspapah hombre gits a piece of prime news undah the wiah a neck ahead of a rival papah, he calls it a 'scoop.' Clem's riled at the *Badget Blatt* fo' hirin' Sadie Slocum offa him, an' rustlin' subscribahs on his range. He'll come across big fo' a scoop to put it ovah the *Blatt*. He says what we sent ain't new."

"Waal, what *is* news—a scoop of news?" queried Dad curiously.

"Clem says if a dawg bites a man, thet ain't news. But it is news—a scoop—if a man bites a dawg. Savvy?"

The old cow hand cackled shrilly.

"Clem wuz a-pokin' fun at yuh!" he declared with severe sarcasm. "I'm eighty-odd, an' dummed if I ever heerd tell on a man a-bitin' a dog. Howsumever, thar's bin no drought o' news. Reckon a thousand newspapers is printed every day, an' they're filled up with somethin' besides th' doin's of dog-biters."

But Wishful had caught the idea and his dark face flamed.

"Clem don't mean you gotta git right down an' *bite* a dog," he pointed out eagerly. "But jist somethin' freaky, like—like——"

"Like a man a-hookin' a cow," suggested Cahlina.

"Yeah, like thet. An' all we gotta do to git thet saddle is *make* a scoop! We'll all jist put our heads together an——"

"Bite or hook!" exclaimed obtuse old Dad, horrified. "Not on yore tintype. Durned if I'll be in on thet!"

"I'll bite a poisoned pup, afore I'll miss the leetle shaver's party!" retorted Wishful, fervently, and set out in search of his partner "All-in" Lappin. He just remembered not having seen him since the old puncher laid down his tuba in the middle of one inspired tune.

That All-in should absent himself in this crisis struck Wishful as mighty strange. He quickened his steps and found his partner pathetically slumped on an empty salt box in the rear of the barn—the very effigy of despair.

"What's eatin' on you?" Wishful asked coldly. "It shore don't make me weepy—our goin' down to Las Palmas an' cuttin' the biggest shine of any cow outfit in the——"

With a hopeless, hollow groan, All-in lifted agonized eyes to his youthful partner.

"I knowed it!" he exclaimed. "I knowed it 'ud come on me, an' it did. It's come this time every year fer nigh twenty years, an' it won't leave fer——"

"What's come on you an' won't leave?" Wishful was merciless.

"My—my hay fever," All-in said.

As suspicion became awful certainty something exploded inside Wishful Dixon.

"You jist aim to spoil our band!" he cried furiously. "All because you don't want to see leetle Francisco baptiz——"

"Gosh a'mighty, but I do!" cried All-in, misty-eyed with longing. "Seems like I can't stand it not to see the leetle tyke's eyes shine when he gits his saddle. But I dassn't risk hevin' to breathe faster playin', allowin' I could play—which I can't. Moreover, they's no use holdin' out any hopes it'll git better afore Sunday week, fer it allus runs its course, an' 'twill jist be goin' strong by——"

Wishful's disappointment was bitter. More bitter were the words he uttered, words that were destined—because of their appalling and unforeseen effect on All-in—to put 'Flint" Gooch on his partner's trail, and make his own life a torment in the horrid days to come.

"Fer cripe's sake!" His fatal speech was addressed to the world in general. "I wisht somebody'd tell me what's wrong with this outfit! Does Lazy K git asked to go anywheres an' take a present, they take a present an' go. But we gotta rustle money, an' then take a census of the able-bodied. You got dis-

ease on the brain, All-in, an' no brain worth mentionin'! Great Jumpin' Juniper! If I wuzzn't able to go ten miles an' jist breathe in a horn, I'd take a swift jab at myself with a cactus spine!"

Inexpressibly shocked at this outburst from one upon whose ready sympathy he had banked, All-in's wind-bitten old face registered amazed, unutterable reproach. At the last gibe his eyes took on a queer, determined glint. Without a word, he got slowly to his feet and shambled off, leaving Wishful to the sharp pangs of remorse.

Maybe this time All-in was really sick! He'd been crazy to go to the christening. Always taking on about how tickled he'd been to get his first saddle, and how "the leetle tyke's eyes would shine when they handed him hissen." Why, All-in had dug up half them news items, Clem turned down. And now he wasn't going!

That the rest would go, Wishful did not doubt. Before that time there would be another issue of the *Gazette*. They had only to manufacture a piece of news —something like a man biting a dog— corral it for Clem and get the saddle money.

Suppose they got the saddle—without All-in, the band would sound sick, as sick as All-in might be for all he knew. Suppose he, Wishful, got hay fever and couldn't play the saxaphone? All-in would never tell *him* to go jab himself with a cactus spine!

In a perfect frenzy to make amends, the conscience-stricken boy hurried in search of All-in, only to glimpse him riding away into the night. Where on earth was he going? Vividly, Wishful recalled the dumb misery in All-in's eyes and his own cruel taunt. Surely he wouldn't——

In record-breaking time he had saddled his buckskin and was galloping away. Night had closed, but the moon was high and it was not hard to keep in view the dark blot that was All-in and his roan bobbing over the prairie. Though yearning to speak to All-in and mend the breach, some strange instinct held Wishful back.

There was something spooky about this ride. All-in's movement were decidedly queer. He had hit straight for the broken hills east of Triangle Z, but, once in them, detoured to every rise, where he halted as if for a careful survey of the moon-flooded gulches below. What was he doing here? In a desolate waste land haunted by the ghost of that old desert rat, Lafe Hutchins, and the living presence of the old-time gunman, "Flint" Gooch? All-in was searching for something! What? A—*a cactus spine!*

At that awful thought Wishful forgot caution, everything, in his frenzy to overtake All-in and prevent him from committing any rash act. Cutting across a star-shaped cañon, he lost him. A quarter's hour's frantic search ensued. Then Wishful rode out upon a ledge, to behold that which made his eyes start from their sockets and his flesh creep.

Down in the little coulee at his feet, All-in was bending over a dark lump— a motionless lump. Something he'd roped and hog-tied—not a horse, it wasn't that big. Nor a cow. Bigger than a calf, though—a burro! There was just one burro in that waste—*Flint Gooch's Jennie!*

In one horrible flash Wishful comprehended. Bitterly, the wretched youth blamed himself. What he had said to All-in had proved the last straw. All-in was stark, staring mad! None but a madman would dare touch Flint Gooch's burro. Why, Gooch thought the sun rose and set in Jennie. Folks all laughed at the way he coddled her. Putting clothes on her in winter, and sopping-wet rags on her head when it was hot. If Gooch caught All-in monkeying with that burro, there would be a massacre and an end to All-in Lappin!

Flint Gooch was a bad man. The

Gooches had all been bad men. Of late years—since old Lafe Hutchins died—Gooch had reformed, putting in his time just snooping around this country with a pack, boring every one he met with the story of how he found Hutchins dying out there, and how Lafe had left him a mine along with Jennie. But he never could find the mine, because he couldn't find the map Hutchins said he left, having died before he could say where. If Gooch could see what he, Wishful, was seeing, he'd see red, he'd almost——

Wishful's scalp prickled as his hair rose stiffly. A cold chill zigzagged up his spine, reached his brain, numbed it.

Below, in the shadows, scurrying about on some unholy task, All-in darted to his horse, extracted an object from his saddle bags, shuffled briskly back and dropped on bis knees beside his helpless victim. Batty! Batty as a loon!

Then the shivering youth caught the moon-reflected gleam of *something* in All-in's hand, something sinisterly bright——

The spell of horror snapped. Whirling his horse, Wishful lit out for home, imagining himself hotly pursued by a nameless terror that took a familiar, chunky shape and wielded a bright, white gleam!

Safe at the bunk house, with the boys sleeping audibly about him, Wishful recovered sufficient poise to face his problem. Should he tell? It might be dangerous not to! He ought to put the boys on their guard. His natural impulse to shield a partner's weakness and guilt prevailed. With shaking fingers he undressed and crawled shudderingly into the bunk he shared with All-in, shared with a maniac.

A stealthy crunch on the gravel without. Wishful's blood congealed. Suppose All-in again ran amuck. There was no burro here!

Popping one fearful eye over the blanket he made out All-in slinking toward the bed. Then he popped under the covers again. There came to his strained ears a nerve-breaking rustle, as something was shoved under the pillow beside his own.

What—what awful souvenir was All-in bringing home? Then All-in slumped down on the bed, removing his boots and humming under his breath a cheerful little ditty Wishful heard only when his partner was especially pleased.

They wuz blood on the cantle,
An' blood all around,
An' a whoopin' big puddle
Uh blood on the ground!

Wishful's limbs grew perfectly rigid.

He must have slept. The next he knew, it was broad day, and he was opening his mouth to tell All-in of the fearful nightmare he'd had of him and a jackass, when he caught the old man stuffing a fat paper bag in the front of his shirt. The bag gave off a familiar creak, and Wishful's jaw closed like a trap. It was no nightmare, it was true!

He had only to look at All-in to know it was true. In the horrible recollection of last night's experience, the self-satisfaction written on the old puncher's wrinkled visage was positively ghoulish, strengthening the boy's belief in the shattered state of his intellect. Poor old All-in! Then it wasn't just a temporary fit of——

Seeking earnestly to divert the mind of his unfortunate friend into saner channels, Wishful craftily expressed the hope that All-in's hay fever might relent this year, so he could accompany the rest to the christening of little Francisco, to be utterly dumfounded by the grinning assertion:

"Stranger things hev come to pass!"

For All-in Lappin to admit that any ailment from which he happened to be suffering was not hopelessly incurable was positive proof of something strange.

The other boys, blessedly ignorant of the black cloud over Triangle Z, simultaneously punched cows and racked brains for a way of achieving the scoop, which was to permit their going with honor to Las Palmas, proudly bearing the gift of gifts, and, incidentally, be a weapon for Clem Cleek in his war against the *Badger Blatt,* as well as a subtle rebuke to his former star reporter, Sadie Slocum, for deserting to the last-named publication.

Wishful heard their light-hearted colloquies wistfully, deciding to let them be happy while they might. When Gooch showed up, he'd have to tell them. Meanwhile, he'd watch All-in like a hawk. But at dinner the old man succeeded in one of his foxy attempts to give Wishful the slip.

Missing him a moment later, the boy abandoned his pie to dash out of the cook house, where he glanced quickly around to behold wreaths of smoke drifting from the open window of the bunk house.

"Fire! Fire!" he yelled at the top of his lungs as he raced for the scene, the boys pounding after him. Cahlina, with rare presence of mind, snatched up a bucket of water from the wash bench as he passed.

Five jumps ahead, Wishful flung open the bunk house door to be hit in the face by smoke of a smell so strong that he was all but laid out for the final count. Rallying from this assault to his nostrils, he was amazed by a fleeting impression of All-in on his knees beside an iron kettle, from which wafted the strangling stench.

Wishful coughed. All-in spun around like a wounded buck, then promptly plopped down on the kettle. Whatever pungent secret was his, he was taking heroic means to conceal it.

Bent on discovering the nature of that secret, Wishful sprang forward only to be violently dashed aside by Cahlina, who on seeing All-in seated with wisps of smoke curling up around him, excitedly shrieked "Fiah! All-in's a-fiah!" He let fly the contents of the five-gallon pail.

Though more than half strangled, All-in retained his position.

"Gosh a'mighty!" he sputtered in awful wrath. "Quit tryin' to put *me* out! An' th' hull kit an' boodle of yuh *git* out! Can't a hombre hev a leetle privacy onct in awhile?"

"All-in," demanded Dad sternly, "why're yuh a-settin' thar like a hen on a hot griddle? Be yuh crematin' a skunk, an' concealin' the evidence?"

"*Git out!*"

So fierce was All-in's glare, so ferocious the angle at which his jaw was outthrust that they obeyed. Wishful lingered unnoticed. Clouds of pent-up smoke arose as All-in rose, which was the very instant the boys' backs were turned.

"All-in——" began Wishful appealingly.

Like a shot All-in dropped the lid back on the kettle.

"All-in, let's mull this over all calm an' docile. Let's not hev no secrets, All-in. I'm yore friend, an'——"

"If yuh be," muttered All-in, "git out! That's all I ask—just git!"

"Now stand hitched, All-in," pleaded the boy, distressed by the fact that All-in's eyes were wild and—kind of red. "Let's not git all het up. Even if you did swipe the fried cake kittle—— S-s-sh, pard! Be cool. Be cool as a cucumber. We'll jist talk of somethin' soothin' like—like goin' to Las Palmas an'——"

"Son!" All-in was desperately calm. "If you don't go pronto, I won't be able to go nowheres, not ever!"

Utterly despondent, Wishful left. Although Triangle Z, in general, dismissed the incident as only another of All-in's monkeyshines—like his messing around with herb teas and electrical harnesses in search of a cure—Wishful knew bet-

ter. Instinct told him that what All-in had just been doing had some connection with his outbreak last night. For the life of him he could not imagine why a hombre—even a loco hombre—would hog-tie a healthy burro. The only time you done that was when you aimed to brand him, shoe him, or—skin him! Was that it? But All-in could never get a burro hide in that sack.

In his loyal desire to conceal the morbid change in his partner, Wishful forgot all about the coming event which had absorbed his thoughts for weeks. The boys, desperate in their inability to frame up a scoop, appealed to him for an idea. But he, who had ever been their leader and inspiration, failed them now.

In watching the irresponsible All-in, and looking out for Gooch, Wishful's heart and hands were full. When Flint Gooch did appear, fate, and not Wishful, was All-in's buckler and shield.

It was late afternoon of a sizzling day. The boys were branding some spring calves at a corral about a mile from the ranch. All-in was stealthily sneaking back to the ranch, confident that his desertion had not been remarked, and Wishful was following his guilty progress over the sun-burned field with brooding eyes, wholly indifferent to the grumbling that went on about him.

"D'ja reckon," asked Cahline darkly, as his rope settled neatly over the head of a bawling calf, "d'ja reckon if I wuz to nip a chunk outta this here maverick, it 'ud be a scoop?"

"Thar'll be need fer a scoop of anuther kind, if I ketch yuh!" threatened Dad, applying the iron. "Besides, it ain't no dog."

"We ain't got no luck," Cahlina complained. "What with Wishful, here, layin' down on us, an' All-in fiddlin' 'round with a bucket of smoke—an' Clem throwin' away ouah news when we went a mighty long ways to git it fo' him——"

"Too fur!" stated Dad bluntly. "As fur back as twenty years fer some. An' durned if 'twarn't a crime the way we strung it out. Take thet piece I writ 'bout Lazy K a-drivin' some steers over to Kioyte Springs Clem ain't no cow man, but he knows five miles ain't no drive. But did we let it go at thet? No siree! Along comes Dimples tackin' on a eyetem 'bout Lazy K's steers arrivin' thar safe. An' Cahlina sticks in anuther sayin' Lazy K's steers, over tuh Kiyote Springs, wuz a-doin' as well as could be expected considerin' the grass thar." Dad's jaw ceased waggling and dropped. A smothered moan came from Wishful's stiff lips.

A tall, stooped desert derelict, in tatters and floppy hat, was bearing down on them, leading a fat, crimson lump on hoofs.

"Flint Gooch!" Dad breathed tensely. "An' he's a-totin' two guns! Can't recollect his packin' a gun in years. Land o' goshen, 'spose he's gone bad?"

"Why in blazes has he blanketed thet burro on a day like this?" Cahlina wondered nervously.

"Doty!" explained Dad in an undertone. "Plumb doty 'bouten thet—Howdy, Gooch!"

Gooch gave them no greeting. Each in turn felt the frigid search of his cold, expressionless eyes.

"Yuh—yuh bin out a-huntin' yore mine?" Dad was too disturbed by that inscrutable gaze for any bright repartee.

"I'm a-huntin' a galoot!" declared Gooch stonily. "A two-legged galoot!"

"W-what galoot, Gooch?" Wishful faltered, casting a frightened eye toward the home ranch.

"I'm a-huntin' the' galoot what shaved Jennie."

An astounded gasp from Triangle Z.

"Shaved yore burro!" exclaimed Cahlina weakly. "Holy Cow!"

"D'ja say *shave?"* queried Dad, rocking forward on his toes, thus bringing

his bulging eyes closer by inches to that crimson lump. "Meanin' tuh barber?"

"Meanin' tuh denude the ha'r off a given patch of hide with a sharp instrument," defined Gooch in the same lifeless tone. "An' tuh further elucidate my meanin'——" here he stripped back the blanket, revealing a lop-sided old burro of the feminine gender, and calling their attention to the whitish cleared-off tract on Jennie's left flank.

"I keep it kivvered," explained Gooch coldly, "tuh keep th' sun out."

"Waal, durned if thet don't take the cake!" Dad allowed feelingly. "A-shavin' a burro! Now who in Tunkett 'ud do thet?"

"Thet's what I'm wantin' to know," admitted Gooch, eyeing each in turn. "An' when I find out, thar's a heap a-comin' to thet hombre. Somethin' tells me he ain't no million miles from here!"

Gooch suspected All-in! Wishful went limp. As in a dream he heard Cahlina chanting:

"If a man bites a dog! Whoopee! If a man bites a dog!"

Cahlina, wildly yipping, fell into an ecstatic embrace, while Dad gave a hitch indicative of a clog. Thanks to poor, addled All-in, thought Wishful, they had their scoop!

"Hutchins whispers 'gold—map—Jennie'," Gooch was saying, as if to justify himself for some violent act in mind, "then up an' dies on me. I knowed he had a mine, by the rich samples in his pocket. For years I've hunted the map, but now I'm huntin' the hombre what shaved——"

He was without an auditor. The boys, wild to get the scoop red-hot to the office of the *Gunsight Gazette*, had lit out for the bunk house, and Wishful, infinitely more wild to squelch that scoop, was not far behind.

There was strong evidence that All-in had played truant that he might perform his mysterious rites with the doughnut kettle, for the building, as Dad declared, "smelled to high heaven an' half ways back."

Already Cahlina had half filled one side of a large sheet of wrapping paper with an account of the burro-shaver at large in the hills, taken principally from the inspired lips of Dad.

"An' so," Dad was dictating, with heart-rending, pathos, as Wishful entered, "as the pore leetle thing wuz a-roamin' th' hills in all th' trustful innercence of her unsuspectin' natur, a beast in human shape——"

"Fiend," corrected Cahlina, brow creased in earnest concentration.

"Fiend in human shape——"

"In the shape of man."

"Fer cat's sake, lemme be, or I'll lose th' swing of it!" protested Dad angrily. "A fiend in th' shape of man pounced outta ambush an——"

"He didn't pounce," struck in Wishful wearily, "he plunked."

They whirled on him, aghast.

"Wishful," queried old Dad, outraged, "did yuh mutilate thet pore leetle thing?"

"I didn't," Wishful denied spiritlessly, "but All-in did."

The cat was out of the bag! Swiftly Wishful unbosomed himself, his spirits rising as theirs sank. At least he needn't worry about *them* no more. Forewarned is forearmed, they could look out for themselves now.

"So we gotta stand by All-in," he concluded dismally. "We gotta keep this outta the paper an' keep him away from Gooch. He's looney all right, but he's our pal. An' fust an' foremost, we gotta be mighty careful not to let him know we know—it's plumb dangerous to rile 'em."

Solemnly Triangle Z agreed. Such was the boys' loyalty to All-in, that rather than let the *Gazette* get the story, thus focusing attention on his misdeed, they sacrificed their scoop and all it meant without a whimper.

"We'll put him tuh cleanin' th' barn,"

Dad decided after a moment's reflection. "Ary other time thet 'ud put him on th' prod. But now he'll jump at th' chancet tuh work separate, so's he kin sneak back to his kittle. Which doin's don't mystery me none no more—I've heers they allus like tuh play with fire."

"It's smoke," said Wishful gloomily.

"Whar thar's smoke," Dad said firmly, "thar's bound tuh be fire."

True to Dad's prediction, All-in jumped at the chance to do the barn work—a menial task at which the normal puncher rebels. Hidden from sight in the bunk house or barn, they thought he would surely be safe from the vengeance of Gooch, who, camped not far from the ranch, had developed the alarming habit of popping up on the range at the most unexpected places and times. His only explanation the chilly, oft-iterated statement that he "wuz a-huntin' the hombre that shaved Jennie." This coupled with Gooch's tone and sanguinary reputation sealed All-in's fate.

To the boys' certain knowledge, the flinty-eyed citizen was responsible for the sudden demise of five husky men, retaining his own life and freedom, because of the famed speed with which he drew, and the fact that he never went gunning for a man without warrantable provocation—as now!

Once he inquired outright of Cahlina, if there wasn't another hand at Triangle Z—a bald-headed, bow-legged geezer, by the name of Lappin. In his extremity Cahlina lied not wisely, but too well.

For the next day Wishful discovered the burro parked before the bunk house and Gooch's foot on the step, and an odor in the air that proclaimed the presence of All-in within. It required the proffer of a big feed of oats for Jennie to lure Gooch to the granary, while the boys smuggled the bewildered All-in into the tool shed until the crisis was over.

Nerve-racking, suspenseful days dragged by, bringing the big fiesta near. Among themselves the boys never mentioned the christening of little Francisco. It was something too painful for speech. In this reticence Triangle Z was notable. Elsewhere in the Grande Ronde nothing else was discussed. It would be by far the most brilliant social event of the season. The new son and heir of Las Palmas bade fair to be swamped by gifts. Triangle Z had looked upon the bridle made by the cowboys of Lazy K with lack-luster eyes. They, who had hoped to stun the assemblage with their music and munificence, would not even be among those present.

Pride would not permit their attending empty-handed, and the saddle being made to their meticulous orders had been sacrificed with their scoop. It is doubtful if they would have gone otherwise, for with All-in unhinged—after what he did to Jennie, there could be no doubt—and menaced by Gooch, they simply weren't feeling festive. They had even lost all interest in the *Gunsight Gazette*. Had Clem depended on them, it would have been an empty sheet. They hoped it would be empty—empty of any allusion to the burro and Triangle Z.

All-in, totally unaware of any change in their plans since their last band practise, babbled incessantly of the big barbecue of which they would partake, and the grateful light that would dawn in the little Diego's eyes at their superlative gift. It struck none of them that this was a large order for a month-old babe. They went to great pains to insure All-in's mental calm. He really seemed more "chirked up" than in months back, albeit, at times, immensely puzzled.

The night before the christening, the boys rode in from the range to hear that the saddle had been shipped C. O. D. to the express office at Gunsight. All-in naturally proposed they go right in and claim their own.

To his utter mystification they gazed

blankly at each other, then Dad stuck out his lips in silent formation of the word "Gooch," and Cahlina remarked casually that he'd seen Flint Gooch hitting back for Rattlesnake Flats that afternoon; that some things were better off a jasper's mind than on. By which innuendo all but All-in understood it might be safe to allow the old puncher to accompany them to town, where they would make arrangements to return the saddle to its maker, thus relieving their minds of one great worry.

Morose and glum—with the single exception of All-in, who was in a rollicking mood—they loped into Gunsight at sundown, left their horses at Ike's livery stable and headed for the express office.

"Son," quavered All-in eagerly, "yuh don't reckon they left out them leetle nickle do-funnies I ordered put on it?"

"I don't reckon they left out nuthin' —even the bill," Wishful answered sincerely envying All-in. Nothing seemed to worry a hombre when he was—like that. Of course All-in didn't know Gooch was on his trail. He didn't know they were sending the saddle back.

"Hey, you shorthorns!" this hail from the office of the *Gunsight Gazette* brought them up with a jerk. The next instant Clem Cleek burst out upon them, eyes ablaze, hair rumbled, features and garb curiously askew. In one hand he carried a paper, and this he literally shook under Cahlina's nose.

"Read it!" he exlaimed, making obedience impossible by violently agitating the paper. It was a fresh copy of the *Badger Blatt*, with an eye-smiting headline of terrible import:

"Barbarous Brute Barbers Burro."

"Ma gosh!" feebly ejaculated All-in, his round eyes glued on the fateful line over Cahlina's shoulder.

"Oh, gosh a'mighty!" He sagged back against Wishful, making unanimous Triangle Z's utter petrification.

"Read it, if you ain't too dumb!" raged the editor, smarting under the humiliation of being scooped to a finish by little Sadie Slocum of the *Blatt*. "Re—— No! I'll read it to you!" Snatching the *Blatt*, he smoothed it with a jerk and read all that long, highly sensational account of the shaving of Flint Gooch's burro on the range near Gunsight by one *All-in Lappin of Triangle Z!* Concluding with a caustic dig at the poor news service offered to the citizens of the Grande Ronde by the Gunsight *Gazette*, and advising the publisher of that "weakly" to hire a "live" reporter.

"I'll do it, by Iliad!" he swore fiercely. "You let a girl come out on your range and yank the biggest story of the year right from under your nose. You're fired! Hear?"

Cahlina didn't hear. Like the rest of that stricken group, he was deaf, dumb and blind to all save the direful fact that this paper definitely accused All-in Gooch would read it, with consequences prompt and fatal. How had the news leaked? It was known only to Triangle Z. Surely none of them would traitorously——

"Barberin'—brute!" By fits and starts, All-in was coming to life. "An' Sadie sich a soft-spoken leetle thing, too."

"*Sadie!*" Triangle Z smelled a rat.

"Yeah, Sadie Slocum," All-in was almost coy. "Gooch told her what happened to Jennie, an' she come out to th' ranch, askin' questions, an' takin' down all I said as cute as you please in a leetle red book. But it stumps me—her callin' me a brute, considerin' she said she'd be simply thrilled to meet the hombre what had 'riginality to do a perfectly thrillin' thing like that. When I told her she wuz 'most nigh enough to thet hombre to touch him, she shore wuz pleased."

"Yeah, I reckon she wuz," conceded Wishful, with a bitterness Clem shared. "But next time she slings names at you, it won't be 'brute,' but 'dear departed!'

Flint Gooch in on yore trail, a-wearin' his guns low. We've put in a hull mortal week herdin' him off——"

"Gooch on All-in's trail!" Cleek bayed like a hound on the scent. "Then I'll stick right with you. Maybe it'll happen in time for to-morrow's paper, for Flint's in town now—though for a scoop a killing won't be half so effective as——"

Gooch in town! Then they had bounced All-in out of the frying pan into the fire. Wishful's fevered gaze flashed up the street, met a stooped and tattered individual, not fifty yards away, and cutting down that distance with firm, measured strides.

"Oh, Lordy, he is! *He's here!*"

This time there was no kind Fate to absent All-in. No luring Gooch from his righteous purpose. No motion of any kind it seemed on the part of Triangle Z. Gooch came steadily on, armed to the teeth, leading the red-shrouded Jennie with one hand, and in the other tightly gripping another copy of the *Badger Blatt*. Bringing Jennie to face All-in, was Wishful's last thought, ere burro and badman halted before them.

"Lappin," coldly resolute of tone and aspect, Gooch tapped the *Blatt* with an inflexible digit, "this here says yo're th' two-legged galoot what shaved my Jennie. Is it, or is it not the Gospel truth?"

All-in Lappin was a brave man.

"Reckon 'tis, Gooch," he said firmly.

"Don't lissen to him, Gooch!" shrieked Wishful interposing. "He's crazy! His word won't hold water in any——"

But his intervention was vain. Gooch did not pull his gun. The paper dropped, his big hand uplifted, and the blow fell, paralyzing Triangle Z. It was not a death stroke, nor one physically incapacitating—but a hearty smack between the shoulder blades of All-in Lappin.

Gooch, taking advantage of the first absolutely dumb audience he had ever enjoyed, was telling the old, old story of his finding Lafe Hutchins dying on Rattlesnake Flats, and of Hutchins' last words—'gold—map—Jennie.'

"I knowed he'd struck a mine," Gooch declared, "fer the samples in his pocket wuz all-fired rich. His alludin' to Jennie, I reckoned only his natcheral wish thet I'd give her a home. But the map—I hunted thet map high an' low, all over the State of Arizona. An' all th' time, if it'd a-bin a b'ar it'd a-bit me, fer I wuz a-takin' it everywheres I went. I found it on——"

"Found Lafe Hutchins' map?" they said in an amazed, concerted whisper.

"Found it on Jennie!" For the second time Flint disclosed the burro's naked flank. Scarcely breathing, the boys scanned it closely. Sure enough there was a map—a series of fine lines burned in Jennie's hide, branded there by Lafe, to be hidden from human eyes by hair, until All-in's unexplained exploit with a razor.

Awesomely they looked at All-in.

"What gits me," said Gooch, "is how yuh knowed the map wuz thar?"

It was foreign to All-in's nature to miss an opportunity to toot his own horn, but that was a lot to ask of any imagination on short notice.

"Waal," he explained, hitching up his belt, and poking one thumb through it, "it's a case of killin' two birds with one stone—me unkivverin' a map, while I wuz a-gittin' me some hay fever cure."

Cahlina shot Wishful an I-told-you-so glance, but the boy still looked doubtful.

"I seed in th' paper," All-in said, "how burro hair wuz a shore cure fer hay fever, if yuh burned it an' sniffed the fumes.

"Yuh see, I had my heart sot on goin' down to Las Palmas with yuh, an' seein' the leetle tyke git his saddle. I had tuh git cured fust, an' I did! Now——"

"Now," groaned Wishful, as the irony of it all dawned, "now leetle Francisco ain't no saddle to git, an' we ain't

goin'. Clem turned down our news. We're all broke an'——"

There was an almost human laugh from Gooch.

"Broke? Not him! Not, with me a-huntin' high an' low fer the galoot what shaved Jennie, so's I could give him a hundred bucks in gold! All-in, I'd never a-found thet map but fer yuh, an' I'd never a-found yuh, if these here nannies could a-helped it. Fer they kept steerin' me off——"

"Because yuh wus a-totin' guns," apologized Dad.

"A man what's carryin' 'round with him a good-sized fortune in high-grade ore, don't take chances," retorted Gooch. "I found thet mine——"

A yowl of triumph, and Clem had Gooch by the arm.

"You made a strike!" he gurgled. "You found a mine! Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum! Here's where I put it over the *Blatt!*"

Instantly he was yanking Gooch into his lair, leaving Triangle Z in dazed contemplation of the bag of rich ore Jennie's master had laid at All-in's feet in simple gratitude.

At last Wishful Dixon drew a long, rapturous breath.

"Wow!" he exclaimed, his dark eyes rapt. "To-morrer we kin go to th' christenin', head an' tail up, but seems like I'm gladder jist to know thet All-in ain't loco!"

"Loco? Who? Me?" exclaimed All-in amazed. "Nope, *I* ain't! But they's bin times this past week, when I shore thought you wuz!"

MONKEY FOUND ON THE DESERT

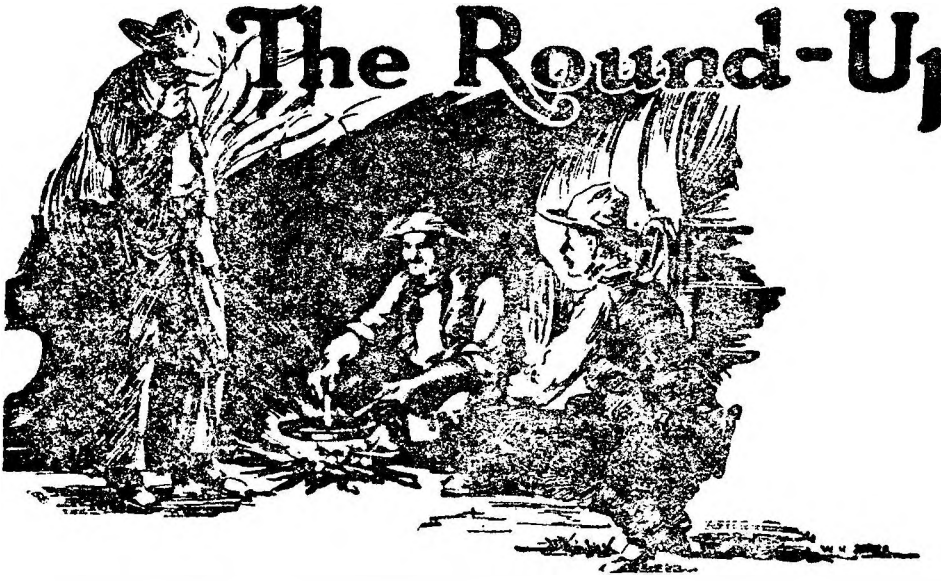
WHILE R. A. Smith was driving his car on the Ajo Road on the desert about ten miles from Tucson, Arizona, a few weeks ago, he noticed a monkey perched in a tree. The animal came to him without hesitation and drank from his canteen, displaying evident signs of thirst. It is supposed that the little animal was lost by some touring party, as monkeys are not native to the desert country thereabouts. On reaching Tucson, the monkey refused to leave Mr. Smith's automobile and had to be lassoed and dragged away by a representative of the humane society.

TUNNEL THROUGH CASCADES PLANNED

PROMINENT citizens of the State of Washington have recently formed the Cascade Tunnel Association for the purpose of accomplishing the boring of a tunnel thirty miles long, linking the eastern and western halves of their State. This would be the longest tunnel in the world. In Colorado, the Moffat Tunnel, under the Continental Divide, six miles long, is more than half built. In the Alps, the Simplon Tunnel, twelve and one quarter miles long, has one portal in Switzerland and the other in Italy.

The tunnel under the Cascade Mountains was first planned by General H. M. Chittenden, who served as army district engineer in Seattle and died in that city in 1917. Figuring on the cost of the Connaught Tunnel of the Canadian Pacific Railway, through the Selkirk Range in the Canadian Rockies, General Chittenden before his death estimated the cost of his proposed Cascade Tunnel as fifty-two million dollars.

The Round-Up



EVENIN', folks! It sure's gettin' a mite chilly these nights. Say, some o' you fellers as has been warmin' your shins round the fire, get out and rustle up some wood, for to het up that fire a whole lot more.

There, that's better.

Say, somehow, there seems to be a lot of powder smoke floatin' round here this evenin', not to mention bullets whizzin' by.

Yes, and there's one of the reasons for it, Billie Strove, of West Los Angeles, California. Well, come on, Billie, let 'er go:

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: Can I squeeze in there and throw a few more sticks of dogwood on that fire? I've got something on my chest that's got to come off. Looks to me, the gang never gets tired hearing about shooting, or which is the best gun. Well, everybody is entitled to brag about the one particular shooting iron that he is used to, and he's right, too. Any one who can handle a gun and picks out one that's in good condition can make that gun 'the best ever' if he will only practice enough.

"I want to tell the boys what an ordinary gun can do, with a fellow behind it that knows how to handle it. In the early days our army was equipped with the old Springfield .45 caliber. The wind-up of the annual target practice was skirmish firing. There was a group of three targets for each man, and they represented men, one standing, one kneeling, and one lying down. Hits on these counted three, four, and five, respectively. The men started at about six hundred yards from the targets, and at double time, that is, running. At the bugle call, 'halt,' they stopped, threw themselves down, adjusted the sights, and began firing at any one of the three figures they chose. The time between commence firing and cease firing was fifteen seconds. In that time the man was supposed to fire two shots, but that was not compulsory. He might fire only one shot and wait until he got closer, and then fire more than two shots, and at either the kneeling or lying-down figure. One or two expert shots in a company would never fire more than one shot at the six hundred and five hundred and four hundred yards' stop, and would put all the saved shots in at three

and two hundred yards, and at the smaller figures.

"Apparently the old Springfield was a clumsy rifle, but I have known two men, at least, who could put in five shots at the closest range, within the allotted fifteen seconds, and make hits. Of course, that took oceans of practice, but it shows what can be done.

"Now, don't you call me names. I am not spinning a yarn, and there must be a few among the gang that will bear me out. And I like to say further that for reliable and accurate shooting, the old Springfield could not be beat, that is, if one selected his rifle with care. Rifles don't shoot alike, and one has got to know his gun."

We sure did smell powder and hear bullets. Here is another reason why, same bein' Daniel Talbot, the Dan Talbot as hails from Kewanee, Illinois. Go to it, Daniel:

"BOSS AND FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: If them quick-drawing gents will hold on a second, I will say my bit and hit the trail. Have been a reader of WESTERN STORY for quite a while, and like it fine, as I have seen a lot of the country.

"In a recent issue Mr. McCoy has a few words to say. He asks if any of the boys have seen any of the United States Cavalry men handle the .45 automatic. I was on the border in D Troop of the Eighth Cavalry, and as Mr. McCoy says, with the flap snapped you had to draw, find your target, and fire in three seconds, and get a hit—and that is not all. We had ten seconds for seven shots, and I have seen seven hits at twenty-five yards from your horse, and the horse did not always stand like you liked him to for the quick draw we practiced every day. To make the draw, you took the flap with thumb and first finger, pulling up, and as your hand came by you made the draw with your last three fingers. That leaves your thumb and first finger to do the rest. The gun is cocked or the safety on the side pushed down by the thumb while you are drawing. When the draw is made, of course, your first finger is on the trigger. While in France, we had a lot of practice. One little stunt we had was to take the empty .45 cartridge box and stand it on end, walk twenty steps, draw, turn, and fire, and nine out of ten would be hits.

"Here comes 'Shorty' with my bronc, so I will ride. So long, pards. Three cheers for the W. S. M."

Gosh blame! if here isn't another one. It's Jim Powell, jest in from Thayer, Missouri, that State whose inhabitants has to be showed. Maybe, Jim will show us something. Let's see:

"BOSS AND BUDDIES: I have been a reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for some years, and especially of The Round-up. In a recent issue I saw the request of Leonard Thebault of New York regarding rangers' guns. I cannot possibly give him all he wants to know, but I will say I have my father's gun he used for several years while a Texas Ranger. It is a single-action .44 Russian model, jointed frame, Smith & Wesson, with eight-and-one-half-inch barrel, with heavy flanged rib back full length of barrel. This gun measures fourteen and one half inches in length from end of muzzle to end of butt. It is the model patented July 10, 1860, at which time I believe that there was about an even number of Smith & Wessons and Colts used At that time there were no double-action guns, and few Rangers ever used the sights of their guns. A great number of them had the front sight off to prevent the gun from hanging on a quick draw, as all of those men lived by the quickness of their hand and the sureness of their shot."

K. Andrekson, Bradford, Rhode Island, speakin':

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Thank Mr. P. H. Morland for his story, 'The Squaw Boy.' It's good, but couldn't he have had a little more of it? It's cut too suddenly.

"Now, for Miss Mexico! Why do you go to an academy to get the wild horse? Such are only domestic animals to be handled by domestic people. You should rope something really wild from the jungle, and try your hand with it, then let some one who has more time for horse training use 'apples and whip,' if necessary, for diet, and watch the result. In the first place, you have no means of knowing that that academy horse wasn't one of the most intelligent animals walking. A once broken-in animal is difficult to rebuild. On the other hand, you say that it wouldn't do any harm to the horse, if the sharp spurs, powerful spade-shaped bit, such as you are using, and heavy whip, were liberally used. How do you know? Have you been ridden that way? No matter how hungry the horse is, he'll never eat the bit."

Here's an interestin' letter from Hazel Logan, who's still travelin' with Cristy Brothers' Circus. Hazel writes from Carlysle, Pennsylvania. She's still doin' horse stunts. This is what she says. Stir up that fire a little, Pete, and I'll read it out. Here goes:

"DEAR FOLKS AND BOSS: I am sorry you didn't make the show, but I suppose the rain was to blame. Too bad; I know you would have enjoyed yourself. I had the pleasure of entertaining Mr. J. C. DeWolf of the *Black Fox Magazine,* but he couldn't stay long.

"I notice the controversy over horses being able to lope a distance of sixty miles. When I was a kid, back in eastern Oregon—the climate is dry and altitude high—I did some fast traveling with the native horses.

"I rode one cow pony that weighed eight hundred and twenty-five pounds from Baker to Durkee, a distance of twenty-eight miles, in two hours and twenty-five minutes, and walked him on up grades. It didn't hurt him at all that I ever could see. The weather was cool. On the third of July my father took a notion that he wanted a horse for the parade on the Fourth, so I took the ten ten train at Baker, and arrived at Durkee at eleven ten, borrowed a homesteader's horse, who was an acquaintance of mine, and rode four miles to our home, ate dinner, caught the horse out of the pasture, and led him as far as Durkee, when I returned my borrowed horse. Then I mounted Joe Springe and rode to Baker in three hours and a half, and arrived there in plenty of time to change my clothes and go uptown for a six-o'clock band concert.

"I see Miss Mexico is still maintaining that cruelty goes with mean horses. Maybe it does, but I could never do it. I have ridden several alleged runaways and track-jumping race horses, and I haven't got killed yet, and never have had a bit of trouble with the aforementioned horses, but I didn't use any severe methods.

"I persuaded a chronic track jumper to win a half-mile race once without whip or spur, but I didn't know he was mean the first time I rode him. However, I afterward used him in my relay string and never had a bit of trouble getting speed out of him, but I urged him with my voice only. He was from 'Lucky' Baldwin's stock and belonged to a man in Pasadena.

"I think I have chatted quite enough. I looked over the new magazine, *True Western Stories,* and liked it very much. Will probably send in some 'Pet' pictures."

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.

I'VE noticed that the Owl always blinks his eyes in pleasurable anticipation when we pluck a letter from the Tree from some Gangster who has a lot to say about his part of the country. I guess he's a bit partial to informative letters. You see, being a wise old bird himself, he naturally concludes that most of us are a-thirsting to add in every way we can to our store of knowledge. So, with his eye upon me, I'm going to start the ball a-rolling by reading out a couple of letters from folks who want to talk about their respective States.

DEAR FELLOW GANGSTERS: I live in Ohio in the beautiful Muskingdom Valley, known as the Switzerland of Ohio. The name surely is appropriate; very few airplanes land here. Of course close along the banks of the river are a few strips of level, fertile land, but only get away from this valley a few miles and all that can be seen is hills. Brooks, or as we call them here "runs," or creeks are very numerous.

There are lots of rabbits here, some coons, squirrels, and other small game. Tomatoes and cabbage are grown along the banks of the river, but corn and wheat are the main crops. Sheep are numerous and every farmer has about four dozen head of cattle.

The farms here are on an average very small. A two-hundred-acre farm is considered large; sixty to ninety acres is the average. Here we use no tractors or more advanced aids to agriculture. When we plow corn we take old Dobbin and a small plow and go between rows; then two or three boys follow the plow, hoe the corn, and cut out weeds the plow missed. In hay making we have only our forks with which we pitch the hay to the wagon.

In winter when snow falls, we have great fun here. When there comes a deep snow which freezes to ice we use boards for sleds. It is very comical to see some persons get almost to the top of a hill, slip and come rolling down.

Will other boys my age, sixteen, write? I will talk about books, fishing, hiking, baseball, politics, fighting, etc. I would like to get some information from one who has taken a trip down the Mississippi in a motor boat.

BOB D.

Care of The Tree.

DEAR GANG: I live out here in what they call the Sunshine State, South Dakota, in the northeastern part, not far from the North Dakota line on the north and the Minnesota line on the east. We have several lakes about thirty miles east of us. It is a hilly country to the east, and to the west it is level; on real clear days you can look westward and see for miles.

We have several forts here. Old Fort Ses-

siton is about eighteen miles from us; there the soldiers were stationed for many years to fight the Indians. There was only one way you could get to the fort; all the other three sides were surrounded by water.

This is a great farming country. Nearly everybody farms from one hundred and sixty to three hundred and forty acres of land, and some lots more. ISABELLE WILLIAMS.

R. 1, Box 1, Langford, S. D.

An old friend, Claude Meacham, of the Burnt Ranch, has just galloped up with a flourish to talk about ranch life and Arizona.

DEAR GANGSTERS: Talk about Western cowboys and such, we have them, for Prescott is the cowboy capital of the world. Every Fourth of July the boys begin to flock here for the great annual tournament. Hundreds of them from over the entire West gather at the fairgrounds of Prescott to compete for supremacy in the death-defying events of mountain and plain.

The American and Burnt Ranches were among the first to be settled in this country and won their fame through perilous Indian fights, during which period the latter was ransacked and burned by the Indians, from which fact its name was derived. It was rebuilt and is still owned by a pioneer cowboy, who hires men to work the ranch for him.

Many cattle branded B, belonging to the Burnt Ranch, roam for miles back into the high, rocky, timbered regions and are therefore very difficult for man and horse to work. In this case trained dogs are used to drive them from their hiding places.

The cowboy must be quick and accurate and alert with eye, brain, and lasso; he must also be a good rider. It is no unusual thing to see the boys' faces cut and bruised from mad chases through tangled undergrowth. One must be an excellent rider to stay with his horse going full tilt down a steep, rocky mountain, leaping gigantic boulders and bushes as tall as an ordinary man, rushing under impending branches, and handle the lasso at the same time.

I feel quite safe to say that nothing but the wiry mustang of the Rockies could bring a man out alive; he can be depended upon to be sure-footed, and he understands what is required of him. Is it a wonder that a fellow learns to love, respect, and depend on the wild and woolly little mustang?

Northwest of the Burnt Ranch, old Granite Mountain lifts its lofty rugged towers high above the surrounding country. Its colorful ramparts make a picturesque scene. Broken prongs and sinuous gorges lead down on all sides to the brush-covered bad lands. Then, stretching away for miles lies the wide desert strip of Lonesome Valley, the home of the wild mustang, antelope, and wild cattle, to say nothing of numerous other species of animal life.

Northern Arizona is an ideal hunting ground as well as a scenic land. Black-tailed deer, wild turkey, and other game are found here. Bear, lion, wolves, wild cats are often seen stalking their prey, which is usually a young colt or calf. If they are not caught by the cowboys, our famous lion hunter, Ramsey Patterson, succeeds in putting them out of the way.

Hundreds of tourists flock here every year to enjoy the fresh mountain air and beauty of Prescott, the Jewel of the Mountains. At Granite Dells, near by, there is excellent boating and swimming.

Those who are looking for a spot in the West where we "turn 'em out wild" just come to Prescott and enjoy picturesque Yavapai County—out where the West remains. Your cowboy Gangster,

CLAUDE R. MEACHAM.

Burnt Ranch, Prescott, Ariz.

"I am a stunt flyer, parachute jumper, and plane changer; at present am laid up for repairs as the result of a change from an auto to an airplane, and would like some cheerful letters. I will send photographs of wrecks I have been in, balloon drops, and chute drops." Address Jack Stevenson, 615 Cherry Street, Des Moines, Iowa, folks.

Mrs. A. J. H., in care of The Hollow Tree, says: "I am a middle-aged woman, living in Wisconsin, and although I have plenty to do, I would like to correspond with sisters who are lonely. Will give information about this section of the country, and try to write interesting letters."

"I am in search of a buddy to accompany me on a coast-to-coast trip in a car. I plan to go a southern route and camp along the way, stopping to work as funds get lower. I'd like a young man about twenty or so, who isn't afraid of hard knocks. I am twenty-three, and fond of reading. Will welcome some

one of similar tastes." If interested, brothers, address Jim, in care of the Tree.

Speed wishes to exchange letters with globe-trotters, or any brothers who have worked their way through South and Central America, Australia, Cuba, England, Ireland, Sweden, or Denmark. I'll forward his mail to him.

"I want friends who love the outdoors as I do, and who have the chance to live in it; I have always lived in or near large cities. The desert and range country interest me; I love horses and dogs," writes Mrs. A. E. Acor, 565 La Fayette Place, Culver City, California.

Alfred Lange, 611 Doty Avenue, Neenah, Wisconsin, complains that the mailman has been going past his box without even giving it a look. He loves the outdoors and asks that outdoor people get in touch with him. Letters from cowboys, forest rangers, lumberjacks, or from any one in the United States border patrol will be especially welcomed.

Would you like a correspondent in far-off India? Then write to Trooper H. Collins, C Squadron, 417 Princess Royal Dragoon Guards, Hislap Barracks, Trumulgherry Deccun, South India.

Mrs. G. Wilson, 2840—5½ Avenue, Rock Island, Illinois, asks elderly sisters, who, like her, are on their own resources with no special training, to write her.

Mrs. Bessie Demorest, 205 South Fourth Street, Rocky Ford, Colorado, would like to exchange letters with some of The Hollow Tree sisters.

George Martin, 2118 Thirteenth Street, S. E., Washington, D. C., is fond of music. He has several pupils and would welcome letters from other teachers. This brother, who is twenty years old, works for the government.

The Rambling Kid, 380 South Fourth Street, Brooklyn, New York, asks Western brothers between eighteen and twenty years of age to write him.

Jules J. Simoneaux, Box 491, Patterson, Louisiana, will give information about his State. Jules is nineteen, and works at a filling station.

James E. Wofford, 1347 Lucerne Street, Fresno, California, has been a ranger and a trapper. He makes yearly hunting trips to the tall timber; this Gangster also knows something about cattle.

Will some sisters between eighteen and twenty-five years of age write Dorothy Greene, 913 West Fifty-second Street, Los Angeles, California?

Wenonah is interested in out door sports, such as hiking, skating, and fishing. She'd like to hear from some girls about nineteen, especially Indian girls, in care of The Tree.

Here's a lonely married sister just seventeen years old, who'd be glad of some letters: Mrs. Mary Kendrick, 3 North Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia.

Information about California is volunteered by H. B. Glasgow, Box 31, Ivanhoe, California.

Joe Kaluta, 2725 McLean Street, Detroit, Michigan, will be glad to tell those interested about his city.

If you'd like to exchange letters, cards, or snapshots with one who has sailed the seas for eight years, and tramped for three, write William Miller, P. O. Box 15, Indianapolis, Indiana. This brother is thirty-six years old.

Clarence J. Pickering, Naval Air Station, Fire Department, Lakehurst, New Jersey, will be mighty glad of some letters. He's a Canadian, and has been in the States for two years.

Northern born, Southern bred, nineteen years old, is about all I can tell you of Joseph A. Miller, 306 South Pearl Street, Shamokin, Pennsylvania, except that he wants a full mail box.

I am in the mountains on a little fruit farm,

and my nearest friend is seventy-eight miles away. Would like to hear from brothers all over the East, especially from some who are French, as I am. I was raised in the West, and will gladly answer questions about it: I am twenty-two years old.

This message comes from Louis H. Leplat, Pleasant View Fruit Farm, Sandoval, New Mexico.

"Any one who wants to write a logger in Alaska who can swing an ax better than he can a pen—write to me," invites Terry Lewis, Killisnoo, Alaska.

Ernest G. Mosher, 38 High Street, Elmira, New York, is twenty-one, enjoys outdoor sports, can read and write French and understands some Spanish. He's also prompt at answering letters, he says.

"I'm a lonely young fellow interested in most anything. Will explain all I know about antiaircraft artillery to any one who'd like to hear about it. The mail orderly seems to forget all about me," writes Sgt. Fred W. Aydlett, Battery C, 62 C. A., Fort Tilden, Long Island, New York.

Blue Bonnet Lass asks the Gang for suggestions as to places in the West where the climate is good for lung trouble. She hopes some sister can tell her of a shack not too far from other people which she could obtain.

"I have toured the country for four years, been in twenty-nine States, Mexico and Canada, have crossed the United States over the Santa Fe Trail and also over the Bankhead highway through Texas, and can give information to any one of traveling conditions by automobile and camping along the way. Will exchange snapshots of California scenes and gladly answer all letters," says A. M. Dawes, Box 907, Gardena, California.

Ruth Rector, R 3, Box 16, Jacksboro, Tennessee, lives on a farm with her father and brother. She is seventeen and is a high school student. Letters from all parts of the world, especially the wild and woolly parts, is what this sister asks for.

F. W. Alley, Pomona, California, will answer questions about the Golden State.

Rena L. Ayles, P. O. Box 304, N. E. Harbor, Maine, will welcome letters from sisters of all ages; she is twenty-five.

And last but not least is a message in verse:

Bless the wise old Owl,
  And the good old Hollow Tree,
That holds so many jolly
  Letters for you and me.

Let us all get together
  And do our level best
To show our dear, big sister
  How truly we've been blest.

And send our cheery messages
  Over land and sea,
To comfort lonely Gangsters
  Wherever they may be.

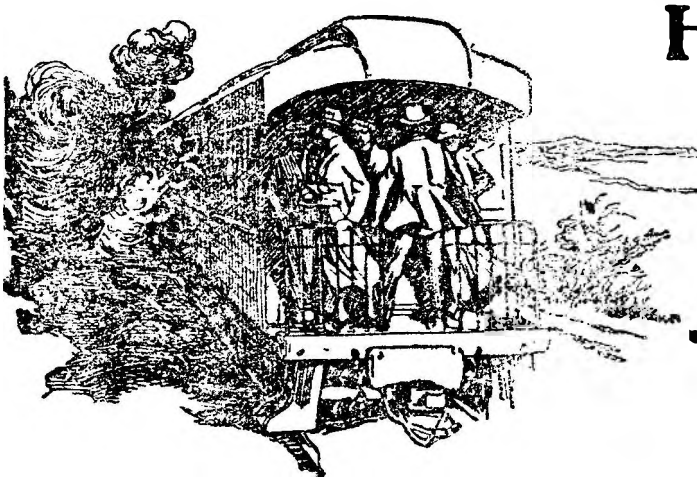
FLORENCE BISSELL.

2909 First Street, San Diego, Calif.

AMERICANS ARE NO LONGER GRINGOS TO MEXICANS

REPORTS from western Mexico indicate that mining work in that region is becoming more and more prosperous, and the era of revolutions and consequent inactivity is a thing of the past. According to Cyrus F. Weeks, a Sonora mining engineer, Mexico is definitely done with revolutions, and the word "gringo," as a contemptuous term for the Americans and other foreign residents, has disappeared from the lexicon.

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 APACHE NATIONAL FOREST

THIS is one of the most interesting of all our national forests, combining some of the most beautiful mountain scenery to be found anywhere with some of the least-known country in the Southwest. In fact, it is only just beginning to be known as a recreation region, for it is far from beaten paths, the greater part being high mountain country with mountain meadows, rugged peaks, and deep cañons. The forest is in the White Mountains of Arizona, and lies in the country over which the Apache Indians at one time roamed, covering an area of over a million acres.

The timber resources of the Apache Forest are enormous and have been estimated at two billion, four hundred million board feet of saw timber, most of which is Western yellow pine, the remainder being made up chiefly of Douglas fir, white fir, and spruce. Most of this saw timber is as yet inaccessible because of its distance from the railroad. As the railroads expand, bringing the forests nearer to civilization, it is certain that the valuable timber stand of the Apache will be of immense importance, as it has hardly been touched by the ax so far, and is a reserve with a big future before it. There is also a big supply of piñon and juniper which is used for the needs of small communities and ranches on or near the forest.

There are a few flat, treeless lands suitable for the growing of crops within the forest, but these have been all taken up by homesteaders, and there are no more available. Those lands which have been retained by the government are not considered to be of sufficient agricultural value to make it worth while allotting them as homesteads.

A large live-stock industry has been developed in the mountain meadows as well as in the timbered areas. The forest supports thousands of sheep and cattle which are grazed under govern-

ment permit. Much of this stock spends only its summer on the high, cool mountain ranges of the forest; it is driven north and south to the lower-lying country for the winter. The settlers on the forest homesteads are allowed to graze nearly three thousand head of work and milk stock free of charge.

There are hundreds of beautiful camping places in the White Mountains on the Apache National Forest, hidden in deep forests, high up on lofty peaks, and on the banks of cold, swift-running streams, where there is no danger of being disturbed by neighbors. There are big spaces for all comers. The cold nights, when thick blankets are a comfort, the bracing early morning air, the clear, warm, sunny days, and the shade of luxuriant trees, make this mountain region an ideal place for rest from the turmoil of the city, filling one with new life and energy, and adding much to the joy of living.

There are no burdensome restrictions placed upon the campers, no red tape, and nothing but courtesy from the forest officials. Camps may be established anywhere and dead wood for camp use may be taken free of charge and without permit. Care with fire is strictly required, the camp must be kept in a sanitary condition, and all refuse must be burned or buried. This is very little to ask in return for the privileges granted, and in justice to the campers it must be said that most of them observe these rules cheerfully and leave their grounds in good condition for the next comers.

The Lee Valley Camp Ground, adjacent to Greer, near the head of the Little Colorado River, is about eighteen miles from Springerville, the headquarters of the forest, a small town on the transcontinental National Old Trails Highway, about one hundred miles southeast of the Santa Fe Railroad at Holbrook, Arizona. This camp is reached over a good road. There is a post office at Greer, where mail is received three times a week.

Grey's Peak Camp Ground is about twenty-four miles northwest of Clifton, on the new Clifton-Springerville road, and offers an attractive and restful retreat from the summer heat of the lower cañon towns, whose residents have built a number of pretty cottages here, and have formed quite a friendly colony. Sites have been laid out at these two places for summer homes, and cabins or cottages may be placed on them under long-term permits, thus insuring permanent camps which may be visited each summer.

There are about three hundred miles of trout waters on the Apache National Forest and the adjoining Apache Indian Reservation, the most accessible of these being the Little Colorado River and the Black River, both of which can be reached by motor roads. Many of the tributaries of the Black River cannot be reached by auto, so that few anglers go there, although the fishing is excellent. The more ardent ones get into the wild country in which these streams are situated on horseback, or on foot, and those who have done this say that the trips are well worth the trouble of getting there

MISSING

This department is conducted in both WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, 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 those 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.

STEWART or **TESSLER, MILFORD G.**—Paul is dead, G. is remarried, and I am alone. Please come home. Mother.

JONES, CHARLES, of Birmingham, Alabama.—He is of average height, has light hair and a fair complexion. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please advise his friend, Louise Busby, Jasper, Ala., as I have important news for him.

W. E. C.—No matter where you are please write to me at once. Babe.

BANKS, ALBERT, was last heard from in Washington, D. C. He has a sister, Mrs. Jenny Kent, also living in the District of Columbia. His niece, Anna Banks, 1518 1st St., N. W., Washington, D. C., would be grateful for any information about him.

M. A. P.—Have not heard from you for six years. Have news for you. Write to W. B. Jones, care of this magazine.

CLARK, LOUIS B., who served in the Spanish-American War, was last seen in Independence, Iowa, in 1912. He is forty-one years old, five feet six inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and fifty-five pounds. He followed prospecting and mining in the Western States. His son is very anxious to get in touch with him, and will appreciate any information. F. A. Clark, Rapid City, S. D.

SABIN, VERNON W.—He was in Los Angeles, Calif., about four years ago, but has not been heard from since. Any one knowing his present address please write to his son, C. L. Sabin, Box 2950, Saratoga, Wyo.

ADAIR, ROBERT ABRAHAM HILLIARD, was born in Hampton, N. B., fifty-two years ago, and was last seen in Lowell, Mass., about twenty-nine years ago. He is five feet seven inches tall, and has brown hair and gray eyes. If he is known to any one seeing this notice please advise Mrs. C. L. Gordon, 20 Clay St., Laconia, N. H.

JIM.—Please come to see me or write at once. Important. Vi.

MOTHER.—We are all well. Dad is still single. Please let us hear from you. Cecil Worth and Royce Burgin, Box 138, Johnson City, Tenn.

KNOWLES, VANCE, was born in 1895, and was last heard of in September, 1918, when he left this country for France. His mother has been married a few times, her last husband being a Mr. Oliver, from Davenport, Iowa. A relative, Mrs. Medreth Hanks, Gen. Del., Littlefield, Tex., would be pleased to receive any information about either one.

VESSEY, SOLOMON or **SAMUEL.**—A descendant of a family by the same name after whom Vesey St., New York City, is named, is wanted to communicate with Attorney E. J. Avison, Quesnel, B. C., Can.

BUNCH, ALPHONSO, was last heard from in 1917 from Kansas City, Mo. His sister is trying to find him, and will be grateful for any information sent to Mrs. Wanda Angels, 317 W. 1st St., Casper, Wyo.

WHITE, ANDY, of Colo Co., Ill., is being sought by Abner Shidle, McCrory, Ark.

FOLKNER, MILLIE DAISY, and **WM.** or **WALTER MARTIN,** left Texico, N. M., June 4, 1923. Mrs. Folkner needs her daughter and wants word of them. Millie is five feet two inches tall, eighteen years old, and has gray eyes and a fair complexion. The man is about the same height, weighs about one hundred and ten pounds, and is between the ages of thirty-two and thirty-five. He has dark hair, blue eyes, and a medium-dark complexion. The mother will be thankful for any information. Mrs. E. D. Folkner, Lockney, Tex.

CLEMENTS, H. RALPH, whose home town is Brevard, N. C., was detailed at Pensacola naval station during 1920 and 1921, and was last heard from at the Naval Hospital at Portsmouth, Va. A friend, at Box 652, Pensacola, Fla., would like to hear from him.

Mrs. FLOY S.—Please write to your old pal at the same old address. S. O. S.

YEO, HAROLD.—He is twenty-two years old, six feet tall, well built, has curly hair, brown eyes, and prominent upper teeth. His dad and mother are both ailing, and will appreciate any word from or about him. R. F. Yeo, Box 357, Prescott, Wash.

YEO, HATTIE, nee **HARRIS.**—Her home was in Norfolk, Va., and she was last heard from in Portsmouth, Va., in March, 1919. Any one knowing her present whereabouts please notify R. F. Yeo, Box 357, Prescott, Wash.

T. E. A.—Both my letters returned and your trunks also unclaimed. Please write to Maffie.

Mrs. M., of D. Calif.—Property was sold by court to satisfy creditors. A. and D. living together in S. Can give you much news if you will send your address to Ruth, Box 143, Denair, Calif.

WOOD, JAMES P., worked for the Ohio Oil Company in Wyoming in 1917, and is now about thirty-eight years old. An old friend is eager to find him again. Please write E., care of this magazine.

MEIVES, Mrs. RUTH.—My health is poor and I am worried about you. Please write or come home. Mother.

BADGER, CYRIL NEWTON, an artist and musician, now about sixty-eight years of age, was last heard of in Colorado Springs, Colo., about nineteen years ago. His sister, who is now very feeble, is very anxious to hear from or about him. Mrs. Fred Annas, 423 4th St., Columbus Jct., Iowa.

FLETCHER, HAROLD.—Received your letter. Please write again. Bill, 1927 Gerrard St. East, Toronto, Can.

McANESPY, JAMES, left Scotland in 1885. Any news of him or his descendants would be appreciated by Mary Reed, 759 Golden Ave., Secaucus, N. J.

CHAMBERS, A. T., served with the U. S. army of occupation in Germany, and is thought to have later gone to Antwerp, Belgium. He is twenty-four years old, six feet tall, and has brown hair and eyes. Any news about him would be gratefully received by his sister, Mrs. H. E. Williams, Box 501, Claypool, Ariz.

MOLLER, PETER E., born in Sweden.—His mother, living in Sweden, has heard nothing from him since 1922, when he worked at Needles, Calif. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please communicate with "Dalsland," care of this magazine.

CLEO.—Nobody here to help care for the baby. Please let me know where you are. I. G. H.

CAIN, ALEXANDER, worked as brakeman for the R. W. & O. R. R. from Charlotte to Oswego, N. Y., and when last heard of was at Niagara Falls, N. Y. He is five feet eight inches tall, weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds, and is thirty-nine years old. Any one knowing anything about him please write to Thomas, care of this magazine.

ROYCE, WALTER B., formerly of Salt Lake City, Utah.—Please write to your wife at once to Gen. Del., Warren, Ill.

BLANKENSHIP, EARL, ROY, and **FRANK.**—Earl, twenty-eight, was last heard of in San Francisco, Calif. Roy, twenty-four, was located near Clearmouth Falls, Ore., and Frank was in Phoenix, Ariz., about four years ago. Their mother misses them and is anxious for some news. Any one who knows them at this time please write to Mrs. C. C. Shoemaker, 220 State St., Reno, Nev.

MARK.—Am considering the offer on your card. Will keep your address secret, if you will send it to me. C. L., 1208 Clay St., Topeka, Kan.

JONES, JOSEPH F., harness, auto-top maker, and upholsterer. He is thirty-eight years old, weighs one hundred and forty pounds, has dark hair, is smooth shaven, and has reticent, peculiar ways. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write to his wife at 703 Scott St., Little Rock, Ark.

KOPERDAK, JOHN, has been missing from home for three years. His people are anxious about him, and will appreciate any information sent to George J. Kichte, Ward 17, Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, D. C.

ATTENTION.—Will any one of the boys who served on the U. S. S. "Newport" during the World War, and knew John David Sullivan, please communicate with his brother, Lt. Thomas L. Sullivan, 190 Highland St., Roxbury, Mass.?

ALLEN, WILLIAM JONES, was last heard of at Ft. McDowell, Calif., while serving with Battery A, 2d Field Artillery, in 1916. Any one knowing him, or having known him there, please communicate with his sister, Mrs. Philip S. Olin, 52 Beach St., Bristol, Conn.

DAY, HERBERT.—Am ready to forgive anything. Please write to Dolly.

STOVER, CLAUDE, ABE, and JIM.—In 1922 Jim was living in Wisconsin. Claude was in the logging camps at LaClede, Idaho, in 1923, and in the same year Abe was discharged from the army at Ft. George Wright, Washington, and left his forwarding address as Spokane, Wash. Nothing has been heard of any of them since, and their uncle, John R. Hopkins, Shelby and 19th St., Bristol, Tenn., will be grateful for any information.

E. A. L.—Unless you come home at once will have to send Jackie to orphans' home, as I must go to work. We both love you. Please write or wire at once to your wife, same address.

SEABOY, IDA and HENRY, who were put in an orphans' home in Asheville, N. C., in 1900, are being looked for by a sister, who has not seen them in many years. Any one who knows them, or knows of them, please write to Mrs. Victoria S. Neal, R. F. D. 4, Box 8, Fort Mill, S. C.

McEVEN, FRANK C., is thirty years old, five feet ten inches tall, weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds, has light hair, and his front teeth are gold. He was last heard of in Los Angeles, Calif. His brother, Homer E. McEven, 317 W. Walnut St., Springfield, Mo., will be grateful for any news about him.

WILSON, CLARENCE E., and Mrs. ROY CLARK, brother and sister.—Will any one knowing their present address please write to Amy Buckland, 1501 25th St., Sioux City, Iowa.

WORTH, CHARLES W., is a Spanish War veteran. He is five feet nine inches tall, weighs one hundred and forty-two pounds, is forty-four years old, and has a small scar over the left eye. He has several tattooed designs on his arms, one being his initials. He has traveled extensively and speaks different languages. It will be considered a favor by any of his acquaintances will notify his wife of his present whereabouts, writing to Mrs. C. W., care of this magazine.

PAL o' MINE.—Am all alone and wish you would write to W. A. M., care of this magazine.

GOWLAND, WILLIAM, and EMMA DAWSON.—Emma is a middle sister of mine, and Mr. Gowland is the husband of another sister. When last heard of they were all living together in Detroit, Mich., and my niece and her husband both worked at the Ford factory. Any information will be appreciated by Harry Dawson, Laurel Cottage, Eyam, N. Sheffield, England.

EVERETT or GILBERT, JAMES, or their descendants.—They are of Irish birth. Any one having information will favor a near relative, who is particularly anxious to meet some of the family, by writing to Mrs. Evangeline Aiken Narogon, Ohio, Tex.

CEALLY, Miss, formerly a Red Cross nurse. She was discharged from service in June, 1919, at Ft. Oglethorpe, Ga. Any one knowing her present address please write A. B., care of this magazine.

GRIGGS, HERBERT W., and I were traveling together, but separated at Ft. Worth, Tex., on January 5, 1925. Any one knowing where he is now please write to his friend, T. O. D., care of this magazine.

LEAP, GLADYS, when last heard of was a stenographer in the employ of the government at Washington, D. C. Please forward any information about her to Dwight Ellis, Box 47, Jefferson City, Mo.

FISHER, CHARLES and WILLIAM.—We were all separated in early life in an orphans' home, and have completely lost trace of each other, though it is thought that each of my brothers has a family living in the West. Any information about either one, or about their families will be appreciated by Roscoe Conklin Fisher, 2613½ Whiteside St., Chattanooga, Tenn.

STEWART, MARTHA.—A friend who knew her while she lived in Ashland, Ore., in 1922, would like to see or hear from her, and would appreciate any information about her. Zepha Woodley, 6006 Hayes Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

MASON, THOMAS RUBIN, left home, in Paducah, Ky., when he was sixteen years old, and is now forty-seven, but no word has ever been received from him since. It has been told that a party in Huntsville, Ala., was either named the same, or was using his name. His mother and father have died since he has been gone, but his sisters are still anxious for information about him. Please write to Mrs. W. H. Womble, care of Bijou Theater, Chattanooga, Tenn.

DANIELS, C., left his home in Crewe, Va., on Jan. 27, 1925, and has not been heard from since. His wife is living at a hotel, and has lost all of her property and money. She is also in need of medical attention. Any one knowing the present whereabouts of this man please write to Mrs. C. Daniels, Box 563, Crewe, Va.

FLORENCE, LUELLA T.—Can send you some news of interest, if you will write to Charles.

WICKER, PRESTON A., owns an interest in an estate in Eagle Lake, Tex., and will receive some interesting information regarding it, if he will communicate with J. M. Callison, Box 272, Eagle Lake, Tex.

KRAMER, ALBERT, served in the Polish army, was gassed and contracted tuberculosis. He left his home in Pittsburgh, Pa., in 1915, and hasn't been heard from since, though it was reported he was in a New York hospital some time ago. Any one knowing him please write to Mrs. Leo Furman, 408 E. Lacock St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

MILLER, R., formerly of South Bend, Ind., where her father was in the fruit business. She is five feet six inches tall, and has brown hair. Any information regarding her present whereabouts will be appreciated by her friend, "Buck," care of this magazine.

NEIBERGER, Mrs., left Fresno, Calif., about fourteen years ago. Her husband died soon after she left, and their three children were left at the San Francisco Nursery. One of the family, Mrs. T. J. Murphy, 1007 Fill St., San Francisco, Calif., would like some word from or about her mother.

McMILLAN, PAUL.—Am in deep sorrow and need you more now than ever. Please write or come back to Sue, 312-A Lee St., Atlanta, Ga.

SMITH, GEORGE.—When last heard of he was in Tampa, Fla. He is five feet four inches tall, weighs one hundred and thirty pounds, has sandy hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. Any one knowing his present address please write to his brother, W. H. Smith, Rt. 2, Section, Ala.

DAUGHERTY, GEORGE.—He is thought to be in California at present. If any one knows his address please write to Miss Margaret Gallaghan, 191 Willemero Beach, Milford, Conn.

HERR, WILLIAM or BILL, was last heard of in Dayton, Ohio, at the time of the flood. He is about sixty-three years old now. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be gratefully received by his nephew, Wilbur D. Herr, 915 S. Poinsetta St., West Palm Beach, Fla.

MARTIN, Mr., who disappeared from his home in Jan., 1924, is being sought by his wife, Mrs. Blanche Bates, 4057 Washington Park Court, Chicago, Ill.

HARTMAN, PAUL W.—He is thirty-nine years old, five feet seven inches tall, has light hair, gray eyes, and a ruddy complexion. He left his home in Watertown, S. D., on Dec. 5, 1921, and was seen in Kansas City, Mo., the first of Jan., 1925, but has not been heard of since. His wife will be very grateful for any information. Mrs. Paul Hartman, Nunda, S. Dak.

PAPPAS, BESSIE, left her home in Cleveland on June 20, 1925, taking her two-year-old baby with her. Her husband is very lonesome, and will be thankful for any news about his family. John Pappas, 1650 Payne Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

O'BRIEN, EMMETT PLUNKETT, supposedly a doctor doing research work, was in Vancouver, B. C., in March, 1923. He is tall and nicely built, has gray-green eyes, and a dark complexion. His wife has some important news for him, and will appreciate any information sent to Emeline L. Kasz, 1751 N. Western Ave., Chicago, Ill.

BOUCHER, OCTAVE, formerly of Sorel, Que., Can., also Bay City, Mich. (deceased).—Will any of the relatives of this man please communicate with Tychus Boucher, 1458 Davenport Road, Toronto, Can.

WILBY, EMMA, was placed in an orphans' home at Cambridge, Ohio, when a boy. He has light hair, blue eyes, and is twenty-five years old now. His cousin, Mrs. Allie Cagg, Miamisburg, Ohio, will be grateful for any information regarding him.

WOLFE, BEN.—Please write to your old pal Sheposky, care of this magazine.

NEESON, WILLIAM, formerly of Philadelphia.—Would be grateful for any news pertaining to the whereabouts of this man or any of his relatives. Harold J. Neeson, Great North Road, New Lynn, Auckland, N. Z.

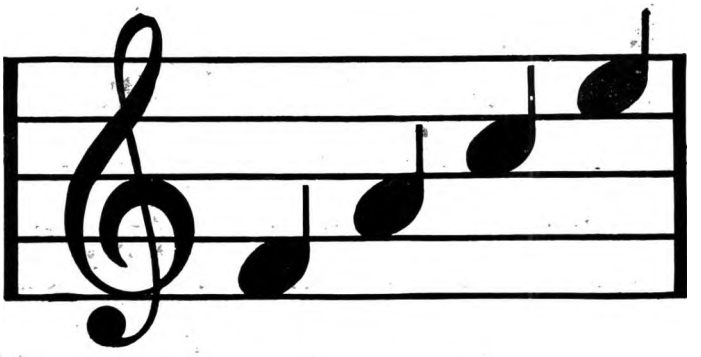
OLIVER, RALPH PAYNE.—In Aug., 1924, he was in Lindsay, Okla. He is six feet tall, weighs one hundred and sixty pounds, has brown hair, brown eyes, and is seventeen years old. His widowed mother will be grateful for any news of him. Mrs. Katie Oliver, 1017 East McKinley, Sapulpa, Okla.

BROCKETT, G. A.—Please come home, or write to your mother, at 707 Crosby St., Akron, Ohio.

HOLLIS, GEORGE B., is a plumber by trade. He is sixty years old, five feet two inches tall, has gray hair and a gray mustache. He will receive some important news by communicating with Bud, care of this magazine.

FLANCHER, CHARLES.—Your property can be sold for three hundred thousand dollars now, but it is advised that you wait at least another year before giving up title to it. L. P. C.

SLACK, HARRY, by trade a cement finisher, contractor, and locomotive fireman. He was born in Hillsboro, Ill., and later lived in Junction City, Kan. He is forty-five years old, six feet two inches tall, has brown hair, blue eyes, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. His daughter, Florence E. Slack, 1442 E. 3d St., Tulsa, Okla., will greatly appreciate any information regarding him.



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The first note shown above is F. Whether you are singing from notes, playing the piano or banjo or any other musical instrument, that note in the first space is always F. The four notes indicated are F, A, C, E, easy to remember because they spell the word "face." Certain strings on the mandolin, certain keys on the piano, represent these same notes—and once you learn them, playing melodies on the instrument is largely a matter of following the notes.

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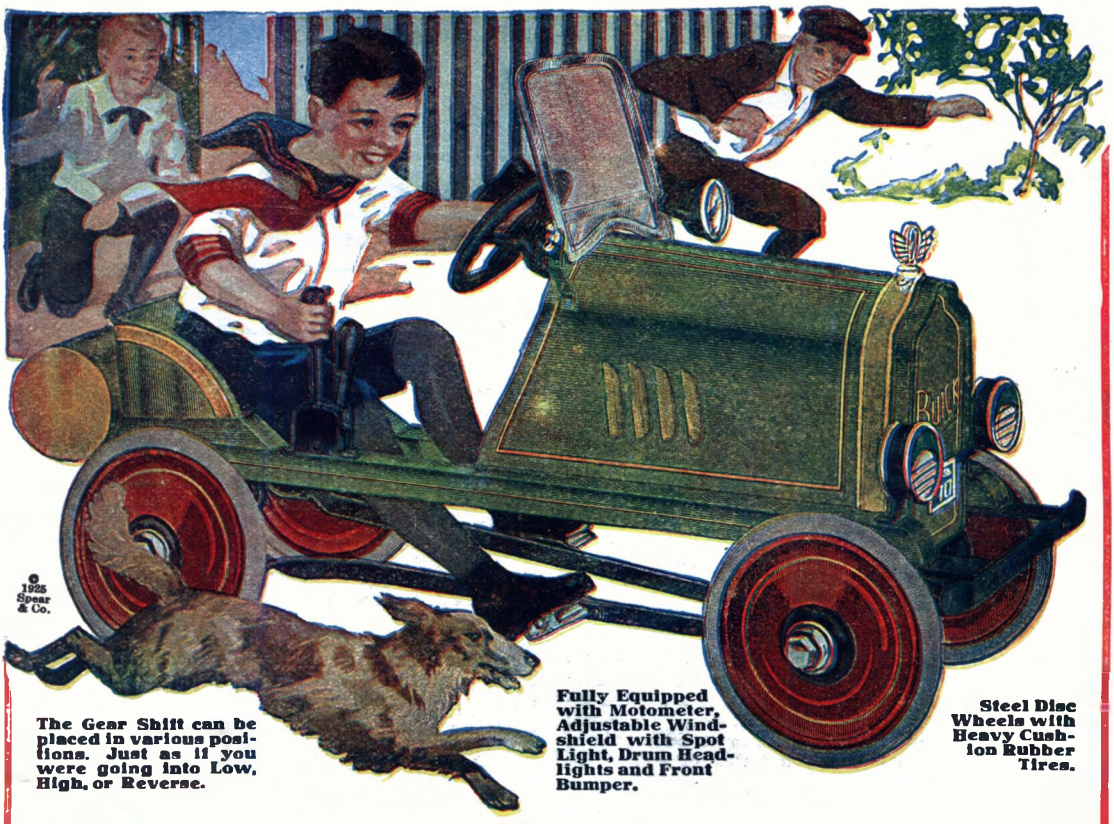

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