

Mr. Scraggs eBook

Mr. Scraggs

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Contents

Mr. Scraggs eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	5
Page 1.....	6
Page 2.....	8
Page 3.....	10
Page 4.....	11
Page 5.....	12
Page 6.....	14
Page 7.....	15
Page 8.....	17
Page 9.....	19
Page 10.....	21
Page 11.....	23
Page 12.....	25
Page 13.....	26
Page 14.....	27
Page 15.....	29
Page 16.....	31
Page 17.....	33
Page 18.....	34
Page 19.....	36
Page 20.....	38
Page 21.....	40
Page 22.....	42

Page 23.....	44
Page 24.....	46
Page 25.....	48
Page 26.....	49
Page 27.....	51
Page 28.....	52
Page 29.....	54
Page 30.....	56
Page 31.....	58
Page 32.....	60
Page 33.....	62
Page 34.....	64
Page 35.....	65
Page 36.....	67
Page 37.....	69
Page 38.....	71
Page 39.....	73
Page 40.....	75
Page 41.....	77
Page 42.....	79
Page 43.....	80
Page 44.....	82
Page 45.....	84
Page 46.....	86
Page 47.....	88
Page 48.....	90

Page 49.....	92
Page 50.....	94
Page 51.....	96
Page 52.....	98
Page 53.....	100
Page 54.....	102
Page 55.....	104
Page 56.....	106
Page 57.....	108
Page 58.....	110

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS		1
MR. SCRAGGS		1
BY PROXY		1
II		9
III		16
IV		24
V		33
VI		41
VII		50

Page 1

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

“Made any other human countenance I ever see look like a nigger-minstrel show”

“He was disappointed in love—he had to be”

“Scraggsy looked like a forlorn hope lost in a fog”

“‘Dearly beloved Brethren,’ says I”

“Put up a high-grade article of cat-fight”

“You will talk to my ol’ man like that, will you?”

“So we rode in, right cheerful”

“I was all over that Injun”

MR. SCRAGGS

INTRODUCED BY RED SAUNDERS

BY PROXY

I had met Mr. Scraggs, shaken him by the hand, and, in the shallow sense of the word, knew him. But a man is more than clothes and a bald head. It is also something of a trick to find out more about him—particularly in the cow country. One needs an interpreter. Red furnished the translation. After that, I nurtured Mr. Scraggs’s friendship, for the benefit of humanity and philosophy. Saunders and I lay under a bit of Bad Lands, soaking in the spring sun, and enjoying the first cigarette since breakfast. In regard to things in general, he said:

“Now, there was the time I worked for the Ellis ranch. A ranch is like a man: it has something that belongs to it, that don’t belong to no other ranch, same as I have just the same number of eyes and noses and so forth that you drew on your ticket, yet you ain’t me no more’n I’m you. This was a kind of sober-minded concern; it was a thoughtful sort of a ranch, where everybody went about his work quiet. I guess it was because the boys was mostly old-timers, given to arguing about why was this and how come that. Argue! Caesar! It was a regular debating society. Wind-river Smith picked up a book in the old man’s room that told about the Injuns bein’ Jews ’way back before the big high-water, and how one gang of ’em took to the prairie and the other gang to the bad clothes business. Well, he and Chawley Tawmson—’member Chawley and his tooth?



And you'd have time to tail-down and burn a steer before Chawley got the next word out—well, they got arguin' about whether this was so, or whether it weren't so. Smithy was for the book, havin' read it, and Chawley scorned it. The argument lasted a month, and as neither one of 'em knew anything about an Injun, except what you can gather from looking at him over a rifle sight, and as the only Jew either one of 'em ever said two words to was the one that sold Windriver a hat that melted in the first rain-storm, and then him and Chawley went to town and made the Hebrew eat what was left of the hat, after refunding the price, you can imagine what a contribution to history I listened to. That's the kind of place the Ellis ranch was, and a nice old farm she was, too.

"I'd been working there about three months, when along come a man that looked like old man Trouble's only son. Of all the sorrowful faces you ever see, his was the longest and thinnest. It made any other human countenance I ever see look like a nigger-minstrel show.

Page 2

[Illustration: Made any other human countenance I ever see look like a nigger-minstrel show.]

“We was short-handed, as the old man had begun to put up hay and work some of the stock in corrals for the winter, so we took our new brother on. His name was Ezekiel George Washington Scraggs—tuneful number for a cow-outfit!—and his name didn’t come anywhere near doin’ him justice at that. Ezekiel knew his biz and turned in a day’s work right straight along, but when you’d say, ‘Nice day, Scraggs?’ he’d heave such a sigh you could feel the draft all the way acrost the bull-pen, and only shake his head.

“Up to this time Wind-river had enjoyed a cinch on the mournful act. He’d had a girl sometime durin’ the Mexican war, and she’d borrowed Smithy’s roll and skipped with another man. So, if we crowded Smithy too hard in debate, he used to slip behind that girl and say, ‘Oh, well! You fellers will know better when you’ve had more experience,’ although we might have been talkin’ about what’s best for frost-bite at the time.

“He noticed this new man Scraggs seemed to hold over him a trifle in sadness, and he thought he’d find out why.

“‘You appear to me like a man that’s seen trouble,’ says he.

“‘Trouble!’ says Scraggs. ‘Trouble!’ Then he spit out of the door and turned his back deliberate, like there wasn’t any use conversin’ on the subject, unless in the presence of an equal.

“Scraggs was a hard man to break into, but Smithy scratched his head and took a brace.

“‘I’ve met with misfortune myself,’ says he.

“‘Ah?’ says Scraggs. ‘What’s happened to you?’ He sounded as if he didn’t believe it amounted to much, and Smithy warmed up. He ladled out his woes like a catalogue. How he’d been blew up in mines; squizzled down a mountain on a snow-slide; chewed by a bear; caught under a felled tree; sunk on a Missouri River steamboat, and her afire, so you couldn’t tell whether to holler for the life-savers or the fire-engine; shot up by Injuns and personal friends; mistook for a horse-thief by the committee, and much else, closing the list with his right bower. ‘And, Mr. Scraggs, I have put my faith in woman, and she done me to the tune of all I had.’

“‘Have you?’ says Scraggs, still perfectly polite and uninterested. “‘Have you?’ says he, removin’ his pipe and spitting carefully outdoors again. And then he slid the joker a’top of Smithy’s play. ‘Well, I have been a Mormon,’ says he.

“‘What?’ says all of us.



“‘Yessir!’ says Mr. Scraggs, getting his feet under him, and with a mournful pride I can’t give you the least idea of. ‘A Mormon; none of your tinkerin’ little Mormonettes. I was ambitious; hence E. G. W. Scraggs as you now behold him. In most countries a man’s standin’ is regulated by the number of wives he ain’t got; in Utah it’s just the reverse—and a fair test, too, when you come to think of it.

Page 3

I wanted to be the head of the hull Mormon kingdom, so I married right and left. Every time I added to the available supply of Mrs. Scraggs, I went up a step in the government. I ain't all the persimmons for personal beauty, so I had to take what was willin' to take me, and they turned out to be mostly black-eyed women with peculiar dispositions. Gentlemen, I was once as lively and happy a little boy as ever did chores on a farm. See me now! This is the result of mixin' women and politics. If I should tell you all the kinds of particular and general devilment (to run 'em alphabetically, as I did to keep track of 'em) that Ann Eliza Scraggs, and Bridget Scraggs, and Belle Scraggs, and Fanny Scraggs, and Honoria and Helen Scraggs, and Isabelle Scraggs, and so on up to zed, raised with me, it would go through any little germs of joy you may have in your constitutions like Sittin' Bull's gang of dog-soldiers through an old ladies' sewing bee. Look at me! For all them years that cussed ambition of mine held me in its deadly toils. I never heard the sound of blessed silence. Trouble! I'm bald as a cake of ice; my nerves is ruined. If the wind makes a noise in the grass like the swish of skirts, I'm a mile up the track before I get my wits back, sweatin' coldly and profusely, like a water-cooler.

"I ain't got anything to tie to but all them women by the name of Scraggs, and them ties I cut by travelin' fast between daylights. Wisht I could introduce you to Mrs. Scraggs as she inhabits the territory of Utah—you'd understand a power of things that may seem a little misty to you at present. However, I can't do that, nor I wouldn't neither, if I was to be made general superintendent of the whole show for my pains. I'll leave the aggregated Mrs. Scraggs in the hands of Providence, as bein' the only power capable of handling her. Yet I don't believe in Providence. I don't believe in no Hereafter, nor Heretofore, nor no Now; I don't believe in no East nor West, nor Up nor Down, nor Sideways, Lengthways, 'Cross-the-center, Top, Bottom, or Middle. I have lost my faith in every ram-butted thing a man can hear, see, or touch, includin' everything I've left out. That's me, Joe Bush.' He stopped a minute. 'Trouble—' says he. 'Trouble—I wisht nobody'd mention that word in my hearin' again.'

"Well, he had us gummed fast, all right. Nobody in our outfit could push up against such a world-without-end experience as that.

"But Scraggs was a gentleman; he didn't crowd us because we broke. In fact, now that he'd had his say, he loosened up considerable, and every now and then he'd even smile.

"Then come to us the queerest thing in that whole curiosity-shop of a ranch. Its name was Alexander Fulton. I reckon Aleck was about twenty-one by the almanac, and anywhere's from three to ninety by the way you figure a man. Aleck stood six foot high as he stood, but if you ran the tape along his curves he was about six-foot-four.

Page 4

“He weighed one hundred and twenty pounds, of which twenty-five went to head and fifty to feet. Feet! You never saw such feet. They were the grandest feet that ever wore a man; long and high and wide, and all that feet should be. Chawley said that Alexander had ground plan enough for a company of nigger soldiers. And hung to Aleck’s running gear, they reminded you of the swinging jigger in a clock. They almost make me forget his hands. When Aleck laid a flipper on a cayuse’s back, you’d think the critter was blanketed. And then there was his Adam’s apple—he had so many special features, it’s hard to keep track of them. About a foot of Aleck’s protrudin’ into air was due to neck. In the center of that neck was an Adam’s apple that any man might be proud of.

“His complexion consisted of freckles; when you spoke to him sudden he blushed, and then he looked for all the world like a stormy sunset. His eyes were white, and so was his hair, and so was poor old Aleck—as white a kid as they make ’em, and, beyond guessing, the skeeriest—not relatin’ to things, but to people. How he come to drift out into our country was a story all by itself. He was disappointed in love—he *had* to be. One look at him and you’d know why. So he sailed out to the wild West, where he was about as useful as a trimmed nighty. We always stood between Aleck and the old man, until the boy got so he’d make straight once out of a possible five.

[Illustration: He was disappointed in love—he *had* to be.]

“First off, he was still; then, findin’ himself in a confidential crowd, and bustin’ to let us know, his trouble, he told us all about it. He’d never spoke to the girl, it seems, more’n to say, ‘How-d’ye-do, ma’am,’ and blush, and sit on his hat, and make curious moves with them hands and feet; but there come another feller along, and Alexander quit.

“‘You got away?’ says Scraggs. ‘Permit me to congratulate you, sir!’ And he took hold of as much of Aleck’s right wing as he could gather, and shook it hard. ‘Alas!’ says he, ‘how different is the tale I have to tell.’

“‘But I didn’t want to come away!’ stutters Alexander.

“‘Didn’t want to?’ cries Scraggs, letting the pipe fall out of his mouth. Then he turns to me and taps his brow with his finger, casting a pitying eye on Aleck.

“As time went on Aleck got worse and worse. He had a case of ingrowing affection; it cut his weight down to ninety pounds. With him leaving himself at that rate, you could take pencil and paper and figure to the minute when Alexander Fulton was booked to cross the big divide. And we liked the kid. In spite of his magnificent feet, and his homeliness, and his thumb-handsidedness, I got to feel sort of as if he was my boy—though if ever I have a boy like Aleck, I put in my vote for marriage being a failure, and everything lost, honor and all. Probably it was more as if he

Page 5

was a puppy-dog, or some other little critter that couldn't take care of itself. Anyhow, we got worked up about the matter, and talked it over considerable when he was out of hearing. It come to this: there was no earthly use in trying to get Aleck to go back and make a play at the girl. He'd ha' fell dead at the thought of it. That left nothing but to bring the girl to Aleck. You see, we thought if we told the young woman that here was a decent honest man—hurrying over the rest of the description—just evaporating for love of her, that she might be persuaded to come out and marry him. We weren't going to let our pardner slip away without an effort anyhow. We couldn't do no less than try. Then come the problem of who was the proper party to act as messenger. The rest of us, without bothering him by taking him into our confidence, decided that Scraggs was the proper man, because, if he didn't know Women and her Ways, the subject belonged to the lost arts.

"But, man! Didn't he r'ar when we told him!

"*"Me go after a woman!"* says he. *"ME!!!—Take another drink!"* But we labored with him. Told about what a horrible time he'd had—he always liked to hear about it—and how there wasn't anybody else fit to handle his discard in the little game of matrimony—and what was the use of sending a man that would break at the first wire fence? If we was going to do the thing, we wanted to do it; and so forth and so forth, till we had him saddled and bridled and standing in the corner of the corral as peaceful as a soldier's monument, for he was the best-hearted old cuss under his crust that ever lived.

"*"All right,"* says he. *"I'll do it, and it's "Get there, Eli!"* when I hook dirt. Poor old Aleck is as good as married, and the Lord have mercy on his soul! But there's one thing I wish to state: I'm running the job, and I run it my own way. I don't want any interfering nor no talk afterward—'s that understood?

"It was. He was to cut loose.

"*"All right,"* says he. *"Poor Aleck!"* So that night E. G. W. Scraggs took his cayuse and made for the railroad station, bound east.

"Aleck had give us full details. We knew all about his little town and about that house in particular; just how the morning-glories grew over the back porch, looking out on the garden patch, and where the cistern was, which, with his usual good luck, Aleck had managed to fall into, whilst they were putting a new cover on it. Yessir; we knew that little East Dakota town as well as if we'd been raised there; but we were some shy on details concerning the girl. I swear I don't believe Aleck had ever looked her full in the face. She was medium height, plump, blue eyes, brown hair, and that ended the description,

“We suffered any quantity from impatience before E. G. W. showed up. You see, there ain’t such a lot that happens to other people occurin’ on a ranch, and we was really more excited over Aleck and his girl than a tenderfoot would be over a gun fight, and for the same reason; it was out of our ordinary.

Page 6

“Scraggsy didn’t keep us on the anxious seat. He was the surest thing I ever saw. Often I’ve watched him rope a critter; he never whirled his rope, even when riding—always snapped. And he never made a quick move—that is, a move that looked in a hurry—all the same, every time he let go of the rope, there was his meat on the other end of it. Women was the only thing that did E. G. W. Scraggs, and that’s because he wholesaled the business. That ambition of his wrecked him. When he trotted around the track for fun, nobody else in the heat could see him for the dust.

“One evening about half-past eight, when the glow was still strong, here come Scraggs, prompt to the schedule. He was riding and a buggy trailed behind him.

“We chased Aleck over to the main house, where the old man, who stood in on the play, was to keep him busy until called for.

“Then up pulls E. G. W. and the buggy. In the buggy was a young woman, and a man.

“‘Here we are,’ says Scraggs, in the tone of one who has done his painful duty. ‘Check the outfit—one girl and one splicer—have you kept holt of Aleck?’

“‘Yes,’ I says. ‘We’ve got him—come in, folks.’ I was crazy to hear how he’d pulled it off. Soon’s they got inside I lugged him to the corner, leaving the other boys to welcome the guests. ‘Tell me about it,’ I says.

“‘Short story,’ says he. ‘Moment I got off the choo-choo I spotted the house—couldn’t mistake it. Laid low in the daytime and scouted around as soon as night come. Girl goes down to the barn and comes back with a pail of milk. I grabbed her and put my hand over her mouth so’s she couldn’t holler. “Now listen,” I says to her. “There’s a friend of mine wants to marry you. When I let you go, you’ll skip into the house and pick up what clothes is handy, and you’ll vamoose this ranch at quarter of eleven, sharp, so we can make the next train west. If you ain’t there, or if you say a single word to a human being—you see this?” and I stuck the end of my hoss-pistol under her nose. “Well, I’ll blow the head clean off your shoulders with it.” Then I laid back my ears and rolled my eyes around. Well, sir, she was scart so’s she didn’t know anything but what I said. I hated to treat a lady like that, but if I’ve learned anything concerning handlin’ the sect, it’s this—you got to be firm. There’s where I made my mistake formerly. Then I let go of her and went back to the deppo. What she thought I couldn’t even guess, but I knew I was goin’ to have company, and, sure enough, ‘bout three minutes before train time, here comes our friend. When I got her safe aboard I told her she needn’t be scart. Lots worse things could happen to her than marryin’ Aleck, and she says “yessir,” and she kept on sayin’ “yessir” to all I told her.—Wisht I could have found one like that, instead of eighty of ‘em that stood ready to jump down my throat the minute I opened my mouth.—She

Page 7

told me she'd had a middlin' hard time of it and didn't mind a change. That surprised me a little, because I judged from Aleck's talk she was an upstandin' critter—but, pshaw! Aleck would think a worm was a sassy thing if it squirmed in his direction. Then I telegraphed Con Foster to have me a buggy and a minister ready for the three o'clock train, and to keep his yawp calked up. So as soon as I hit land again, there was the rig complete; we hopped in and started a-coming at once and fast, and here we are; for which I raise thanks, and all the curses of the Mormon gods be on the head of the man that gets me into such a play as this again! Snake old Aleck out and get the misery done with. That minister's chargin' me fifty cents an hour, and I don't know whether he's the real thing or not, at that. Con whispered in my ear that he worked in a grocery when he first struck town, dealt stud-poker for Johnny Early, quit that and took to school-teachin', then threw that up and preached. But what's the difference out here? He's expensive, anyhow, and all Con could find.'

"So I wagged my legs for the house and trotted Aleck down to the bull-pen.

"'Friend of yours there,' I told him.

"'That so?' says he. 'Who is it?'

"'Lady,' I says, kind of gay, thinkin' he'd be pleased.

"He stopped in his tracks. Then I remembered who I was talkin' to.

"'Come along, here, now!' says I, and nailed him by the neck. 'You ain't goin' to miss your happiness if main strength can give it to you.' His toes touched about once to the rod. I run him into the pen.

"'There,' says I, 'is somebody you know.'

"Well, sir, old Aleck looked at the gal, and the gal looked at Aleck, and the rest of us looked at each other. Soon's the kid got his breath from the shock he yells, 'I never laid eyes on that lady before!'

"Oh, Hivins, Maria! That was the awfulest minute I ever lived through. Poor old E. G. W. S.! We all turned away from him, out of pity. He had the expression of a man that's fell down a hundred-foot prospect hole and been struck by lightning before he touched bottom. He grabbed aholt of the minister and swallowed and swallowed, unable to chirp.

"At last he rallied. 'You mean to tell me, Aleck,' he says, in a voice hardly strong enough to get through his mustache, 'that I've made a mistake?'

“Aleck was always willing to believe he was wrong. ‘I’m *pretty* sure, Zeke—I ain’t never seen you, have I, Miss?’

“‘No, sir—not that I know of,’ answers the girl, with her eyes on the ground.

“E. G. W. rubbed his brow.

“‘Will you make good, anyhow, Aleck?’ he coaxed. ‘I got the minister and all right here—it won’t take a minute.’

“I’d let go of Aleck in the excitement. At these words he made one step from where he stood in the house, through the window, to ten foot out of doors, and a few more steps like that, and he was out of the question.

Page 8

“Then the girl put her face in her hands and begun to cry. She was a mighty pretty, innocent, plump little thing, and we’d rather have had most anything than that she should stand there cryin’. But we were all hung by the feet and wandering in our minds. The simple life of the cow-puncher doesn’t fit him to grapple with problems like that.

“Then, sir, up gets Ezekiel George Washington Scraggs, master of himself and the situation.

“‘Young lady,’ says he, ‘I have got you out here under false pretenses. I’m as homely as a hedge fence, and my record is dotted with marriages worse than a ‘Pache outbreak with corpses and burning homes. I ain’t any kind of proposition to tie up to a nice girl like you, and I swear by my honor that nothing was further from my thoughts than matrimony—not meanin’ any slur on you, for if I’d found you before, I might have been a happy man—Well, here I stand: if you’ll marry me, say the word!’ By thunder, we gave him a cheer that shook the roof. You can laugh if you like, but it was a noble deed.

“The girl reached out her left hand—so help me Moses! She liked him! I took a careful squint at old Scraggsy, in this new light, and I want to tell you that there was something kind of fine in that long lean face of his, and when he took the girl’s hand he looked like a gentleman.

“You wouldn’t think that holding a gun to her head, and threatenin’ to blow her brains out was just the touch that would set a maiden’s heart tremblin’ for a man, but if a woman takes a fancy to you, your habits and customs, manners and morals, disposition, personal appearance, financial standing and way of doing things generally is only a little matter of detail.

“‘How will this figger out legally?’ E. G. W. asked the minister.

“The minister, he was a cheerful, practical sort of lad, ready to indorse anything that would smooth the rugged road of life.

“‘Do you renounce the Mormon religion?’ he asks.

“‘Bet your life,’ says Scraggs. ‘And all its works.’

“‘That settles it,’ says the minister. ‘Besides, I don’t think anybody will ever come poking out here to make trouble—whenever you say the word.’

“‘One minute,’ says Scraggs, and he turned to the girl very gentle. ‘Are you doing this of your own free will, and not because I lugged you out here?’

“‘Yessir,’ says she.

“‘You want me, just as I stand?’

“‘Yessir.’

“‘Keno. I won’t forget it.’ Then he put his hand on her head, took off his hat, and raised his face. ‘O God!’ he prays, ‘you know what a miserable time I’ve had in this line before. I admit it was nine-tenths my fault, but now I call for an honest deck and the hands played above the table. And make me act decent for the sake of this nice little girl. Amen.’ Then he pulled a twenty-dollar gold piece out of his pocket and plunked her down before the minister, ‘Shoot,’ says he. ‘You’re faded.’

Page 9

“Well. there old Scraggs—I say ‘old,’ but the man weren’t more than forty—celebrated his eighty-first marriage in that old bull-pen, and they lived as happy ever after as any story book. Which knocks general principles. Probably it was because that no man was ever treated whiter than she treated him, and no woman was ever treated whiter than he treated her; he had the knack of bein’ awful good and loving to her, without being foolish. Experience will tell, and he’d experienced a heap of the other side.

“And now, what do you think of Aleck? The scare we threw into him that night wound up his moanin’ and grievin’ about the other girl. He never cheeped once after that, but got fat and hearty, and when I left the ranch he was makin’ up to a widow with four children, as bold as brass. There was more poetry in E. G. W, than there was in Aleck, after all.”

II

IN THE TOILS

Mr. Ezekiel George Washington Scraggs, late of Missouri, later of Utah, and latest of North Dakota, stood an even six-foot unshod. He had an air of leanness, almost emaciation, not borne out by any fact of anatomy. We make our hasty estimates from the face. Brother Scraggs’s face was gaunt. Misfortune had written there, in a large, angular hand, “It might have been”—those saddest words of tongue or pen. The pensive sorrow of E. G. W.’s countenance had misled many people—not but what the sorrow was genuine enough (Scraggsy explained it in four words, “I’ve been a Mormon”), but the expression of a blighted, helpless youth carried into early middle age was an appearance only: I mean it was nothing to bank on in dealing with Zeke. Still, if you could see those eyes, dimmed with a settled melancholy; those mustachios, which, absorbing all the capillary possibilities of his head, drooped like weeping willows from his upper lip; and above, the monumental nose—that springing prow that once so grandly parted the waves of adverse circumstance, until, blown by the winds of ambition, his bark was cast ruined on the shores of matrimony—you would not so much blame the man who mistook E. G. Washington Scraggs for a something not too difficult. Red Saunders said that Scraggsy looked like a forlorn hope lost in a fog, but when you came to cash in on that basis it was most astonishing. In general a man of few words, on occasions he would tip back his chair, insert the stem of his corncob pipe in an opening provided by nature at the cost of a tooth, and tell us about it.

[Illustration: “Scraggsy looked like a forlorn hope lost in a fog.”]

“Why can’t people be honest?” said Mr. Scraggs—*Silence!*

“Charley!” cried Red, reproachfully, “why don’t you tell the gentleman?”

“No, no, no!” replied Charley. “You be older’n me, Red—you explain.”

“Well,” said Red, “I suppose the loss of their hair kind of discourages 'em.”

Page 10

"I had rather," meditated Mr. Scraggs, "I had much rather wear the top of my head a smooth white record of a well-spent life than go amblin' around the country like the Chicago fire out for a walk, and I repeat: Why can't people be honest?"

"I begin to pity somebody an awful lot," said Red. "Did you send him home barefoot?"

"You go on!" retorted Mr. Scraggs. "I fell into the hands of the Filly-steins oncet, and they put the trail of the serpent all over me. I run into the temple of them twin false gods, Mammon and Gammon, and I stood to draw one suit of sack-cloth and a four-mule wagon-load of ashes."

"Is them the close you got on now?" said Charley. "And what did you get for the ashes?"

"The play come up like this," said Scraggs. "After my eighteenth bestowin' of the honored name of Scraggs upon a person that didn't appreciate it the Mormon Church see fit to assume a few duties on me. I was put in a position of importance in a placer minin' districk inhabited by jack-rabbits, coyotes, Chinamen, and Mrs. Scraggses. And still I wasn't happy. Them jack-rabbits et up my little garding patch; the coyotes gathered at nights and sung me selections from the ghost dance; the Chinamen sprung every con-cussed trick on me that a man who wears his whiskers down his back can think of; and day and night alike, Mrs. Scraggs, from one to eighteen, informed me what I'd ort to do.

"I tried to strike up a little friendly conversation with the Chinks, for variety, but it weren't no use. A Chinaman'll be a Mormon, or a Democrat, or a cannibal, or any other durn thing for five cents, sixty days from date. He ain't got any more natural convictions than a Missouri River catfish. They'd just keep a-watchin' my face so's they could agree with me. Now, I didn't want that. I wanted to get up an argument with somebody I could sass back, because in my own house, where I was lord and master, if I happened to remark it was a nice, bright day everybody swore you couldn't see your hand before your face, and I let the subject drop right there. Mrs. Scraggs quar'led some among herself, but when I come in her motto was, 'United we stand him on his head, and divided we fall upon his neck.' When she done the last, of a still day, you could hear the crack of my cervycal vertybree three mile.

"So, at last, I wearied. I writ a letter to the Elders tellin' 'em I enjoyed the work, but thought it was time for my spirit of self-sacrifice to exercise himself a little. So would they mind givin' me another job? Somethin' like lyin' on a board and havin' a doctor rip-saw chunks out of me for the benefit of Science, and let him lose the pieces, for all I cared.

"The Mormon Church, she come to my relief by sendin' me out on a proselytin' expedition to York State. But I wasn't built proper to lead errin' sheep into the fold. Most

of the sheep they hollered 'Baa!' when they see me, and gathered distance with both feet. If I did get a chance to talk to a man he always asked me awkward questions. Like one old farmer, whilst I was explainin' the advantages of havin' as many helpmates and cheerful companions and domestic joys as possible, busts into me by takin' holt of my coat and askin' so confidential I couldn't lie to him, 'How do you find it yourself?'

Page 11

“The Lord be good to fools!’ says I. ‘You got *one* now, ain’t you?’

“‘M ya-a-as,’ says he, without anything you could figger as wild enthusiasm in his voice; ‘I hev.’

“Well,’ says I, ‘multiply one by eighteen, and let’s have a drink.’

“I had to send word to the Elders that Books of Mormon weren’t looked upon as popular readin’ in the outlyin’ districts, so should I come home, or try New York City? They sends me word back, wishin’ my work to prosper, to try New York City, but not to draw on ‘em for any more funds until I had a saved sinner or two to show for it. Well, sir, this last clause jolted me. I had spent money free among them farmers, to boom trade, and for the purchasin’ of fancy clothes, more to look at than be comfortable in, the idee bein’ to show how good a thing the Church of Mormon was to the first glance of the eye. And now, after side-trackin’ my railroad fare home, I weren’t wadin’ in wealth, by no means. More’n that, I understood that the city of New York was a much more expensive place than St. Looey. So I writ a letter back, tellin’ ‘em I was scatterin’ seed so’s you could hardly see across the street. There weren’t no hope for a crop unless I had more plain sowin’ material—please remit.

“And then they come back at me, sayin’ I’d already cost the community about four hundred and fifty dollars, and not even a Dutchman by way of results. That I’d understand this weren’t said in no mercenary spirit, but just as a matter of business. They would hold a prayer-meetin’, they said, which, no doubt, would bring the end aimed at, and for me to go forth strong in the faith and gather ‘em up from the wayside.

“I let fly oncet more, sayin’ that I was strong in the faith but feeble in the pocket; that sinners were costly luxuries in a big town like New York. How was I goin’ to play the Prophet and stand the man off for my board?

“Elder Stimmins wrote back pussonally, exhortin’ me to be of good heart, sayin’ further that the days of miracles weren’t past; at any moment the unrepentant might get it in the conscience—and signed himself my friend and brother in the church, with a P. S. readin’:

Dear Zeke: My wife Susan Ann will continner to have high-stukes till I produce a grand pianny. Mary’s after a dimint neclas, and my beluvid spous Eliza (that’s the carut-heded one lives down by the rivver) will put sumthin’ in my food if she don’t git a gol watch and chane. Tomlinson’s fust three ar rasin’ Ned fur new housis, hors and kerige, and the like. The new ones is more amable, but yellin’ fur close and truck. Uncle Peter Haskins’ latest is on the warpath fur a seleskin sak, and so on and so forth. You know how it is yourself, dear frend and bro., and we ar broke, so I incurrige you to keep your hart stout, your faith intack, and hunt up a poker-game sumwheres, becus we honest ain’t got the money.

Saul Stimmins.

Page 12

“Well!’ says the cookee, when he heaved the egg into the coffee, ‘that settles it!’ And that settled me. I sure did know how it was myself. If there was any man in or out of the Territory of Utah that knew how it was myself, I and him was the same indivijool.

“I took thought of Mrs. Scraggs out there all alone by herself, with her darlin’ Zeke entirely out of reach, and while I don’t recommend the idee of jollyin’ yourself by gloatin’ over the misfortunes of others, I thinks this here state of affairs could be worse, and I went forth strong in the faith to New York City, feelin’ I might encounter some kind of quick action, like Brother Stimmins prophesied.

“And there, you see, is where sinful feelin’ in me turned me over to the enemy, bound hand and foot, gagged and blindfolded. Who was I to exalt myself agin the smart young men of New York City? How come it the foolish notion buzzed in my cockloft that, like Samson of old, I might fall upon the adversary, hip, hurrah, and thigh, and of the fragments that remained gather seven bushels? Pride goeth before destruction and a naughty spirit before a fall. Up I sasshays to my hotel bedroom to take account of resources. Mighty slim they was. In the false bottom of the trunk was a pocketbook that looked like the wheel of progress had passed over it, and a little sack of nuggets—that was all. Them nuggets was the pride of my life. I didn’t buy ’em from the Chinaman that offered, but I come horrible near it. And yet that Chink had the innocentest face in Utah; he might ha’ stood for a picture of Adam before Eve cast a shadder on his manly brow. I don’t recall anything that’s more deceivin’ than appearances, yet what in the world’s a man to go by? Well, them nuggets ort to said to me, ‘Young man, beware! Be warier than John H. Devilkins himself! All that’s heavy and yaller is not gold. Sometimes a patient Chinaman, flappin’ of the flies with his pigtail, will industrusly manufacture that same per schedule out of common, ordinary lead, and, by exercisin’ the art of gildin’, almost whip-saw people by the name of Scraggs, if so it hadn’t ‘a’ been their gardeen angel moved ’em to try a sample with the edge of a knife.’

“Was I warned? Well, I dunno, anyhow, I trotted myself out to the street to see what this here Metropolis business had to offer different from just plain St. Looey.

“And I found out. Dear friends and brothers, I wonder have you ever seen a man reachin’, reachin’ for a playin’-card layin’ prostrate on the table before him, when his last chip is in the pile, his last cent in the chip, all manners and kinds of bills comin’ due tomorrow, the house to close in fifteen minutes, and hopin’ that card is just one more little two-spot? Are you familiar with the lines of anggwish on his face? Well, of all the hullabaloo, skippin’, flyin’, pushin’, haulin’, rompin’, tearin’, maulin’ and scratchin’ messes I ever got

Page 13

into, that street was the worst. At the end of fifteen minutes I had no life in me above my feet, and they was simply slidin', the one before the other, without any aim or purpose. I stood on a corner clawin' hunks of fog off my intellect. In two minutes more I'd ha' yearned for Mrs. Scraggs and Home. I lost all intention of drawin' sustenance out of the inhabitants, when all of a sudden up steps one of these brisk, smart, zippee-zippee-zizoo-ketch-me-if-you-kin young city fellers, the kind of lu-lu joker to go through a countryman like a lightnin' express through a tunnel, leavin' nothin' but the hole and a little smoke, and says he, in a hurry:

"‘Sorry to have kept you waitin', Mr. Johnson, but knowin' how much it meant to both of us, I——Oh, I beg your pardon!' says he; 'I mistook you for a friend of mine—no offense, I hope?'

"Now, this same person had on a soup-pot hat that looked borrowed, and he wore his clothes like he used 'em for a hidin'-place, but how was a plain jaybird like me to notice that? I was almighty lonesome, too, so I told him there weren't no offense at all. Well, he apologized again, and then he begun to laugh, it was so ridiklus, his mistakin' me for Johnson, that he'd knew all his life, and he says, 'I'll tell you what I'll do; we'll step across the street and tone up our systems at my expense, thereby wipin' out any animosity.' So, of course, rather than be peevish, I done it. Then I tried to wipe out some animosity, but he wouldn't have it. Nobody must buy but him. I explained—givin' myself dead away—that I was a stranger, with nothin' to do but hate myself to death, and he was defraudin' me of a rightful joy. But no, says he. I might be a stranger, or I might not. Personally he thought I'd resided some time in New York City, by my looks; if that was so I knew perfectly well he was only follerin' the customs of the place, and if I was a stranger it was up to him to do right by me, anyhow. So we grew one degree stronger with no cost to Utah. And we stayed there, gettin' powerful as anything, and kind of confidential, too, till finally he felt called upon to explain his business with this man Johnson. He took me into a back room to do it.

"‘Mr. Scraggs,' says he, 'there's things betwixt Heaven and Earth that ain't dreamt of on your velocipede, Horatio.'

"‘Ya-a-as,' says I.

"‘Sh-h-h,' says he, 'not so loud. Here's the opportunity of a lifetime goin' on the loose for want of a man. That durn Johnson has lost his golden show. It's a very strange story,' says he.

"‘Ya-a-as,' says I. He looked at me a minute, but Lord! How was a poor Mormon to hold suspicions? So he goes on.

Page 14

“‘At first,’ he says, ‘you might git the idee there was somethin’ jubeeous in these preceedin’s, but there ain’t. I knew a man that once upon a time was the honestest man ever lived. Honest? Why, I’ve known that man to go to bed weepin’, he felt so bad to learn George Washington stole a march on the enemy. “I never would have believed it of George if it hadn’t been in the book,” he says. That’s the kind of a man he was—just your sort to a dot. Well, sir, he has an honest claim agin these United States for damage and raisin’ the devil with his farm durin’ the Civil War. And do you suppose these here United States, *E Pluribus Unum*, In God We Trust, paid that bill? Not on the tintype of your grandfather. When he goes to Washington with it, the President he says, “Now, I’d pay you this in a minute, Billy,” he says, “but think of them Congressmen!” and the President he shakes his head and Billy comes home again. And from that time on, before his very eyes, he has to see his widder and eighteen helpless children die of starvation through not havin’ enough to eat, right in front of his face—ain’t that fierce?’ says he.

“‘Ya-a-as,’ says I.

“‘Well, at last this man gets a job in the Treasury; it didn’t pay much—just enough to live on. He had charge of the banknotes before the Secretary signs ’em, to make good. Now, here comes in the curious part of it: my friend’s handwritin’ and the Secretary’s handwritin’ was that much alike neither man could tell one from t’other. This gives my friend the idee of how to break even with Uncle Sam. He just naturally laid his hooks on ten thousand dollars’ worth of one-hundred-dollar notes and flew the coop, waitin’ to sign ’em and dispose of ’em at leisure, thus payin’ his own claim. But here comes a hitch; after he done it his conscience bit him; the notes was good; he passed a lot of ’em with no trouble, but he quit on the play. Now, if some good, honest man, yet not quite so honest as all that, wanted to turn a dollar, he could buy two thousand dollars’ worth of them bills for one hundred ordinary cold money. It’s this way, too,’ says he. ‘It ain’t only conscience; the old man’s mortal scart; he’s always dreamin’ of Secret Service men comin’ in on rubbers. Now, ain’t that an opportunity?’

“‘Ya-a-as,’ says I.

“‘Well,’ says he, lookin’ at his watch, ‘it’s now my time to eat, Mr. Scraggs, and I’ve took up so much of your valuable time chinnin’ here, I don’t feel I could do less than share my simple repast with you. I’m a stock-broker myself,’ he says, ‘but none of these durned rich ones, so if you can stand for once to eat a meal not exceedin’ five dollars in price, why, come along!’ says he.

“Then we went into a high-toned vittell dispensary, I bet you. Jeemima! but she was gold and white paint to knock your eye out. I’ll never tell you what I et, but it was good food. And to wind up, come little cups of coffee and big seegars. It was beautiful. Then says my man, ‘Well, this is a day in a hundred. I can’t tell you how good it makes me

feel in this city of sin to come across a square man like yourself—what do you say to a bottle of wine?’

Page 15

“‘Ya-a-as,’ says I. With life ripplin’ along like this I was endorsin’ the whole time-table.

“Wine is a mawker. The first small glass of it hadn’t gone whistlin’ down afore she begun to mawk me. ‘Ezekiel!’ says she, ‘be merry; disport yourself—where’s your game blood? Try a fall with this gentleman.’

“‘Ya-a-as,’ says I to myself. And then I says aloud and hearty, ‘My friend, you’ve used me right. It ain’t that I want to make money, but just to help your friend along; I haven’t any greenbacks much in my possession, but,’ I says, ‘if you’re willin’ to arrange a dicker, whereby I exchange eighteen ounces of nuggets—the present market value of Chink Creek gold bein’ seventeen dollars and forty cents per ounce—for two thousand dollars of your friend’s bills, it bein’ herein stated and provided that you can pass ‘em like you say you can to my satisfaction, why, I’m your little huckleberry, waitin’ to get picked.’

“‘I got you,’ says he, and we shook hands. ‘You go to your hotel and bring the dust,’ says he, ‘and I’ll slide along and make the old man sign the bills. I’ll meet you on the corner where we met before.’

“So I met him on the corner, and we went up-stairs to a room where a little old man was signin’ bills fast and furious.

“‘Slide out one,’ says my friend, ‘till I take Mr. Scraggs out and prove I’m no liar.’

“The old man carefully blotted a hundred-dollar green and away we goes to a bank. It was a sure-enough bank. Outside was the name in big letters and inside was the man called ‘teller’ that won’t tell you nothin’ and looks as if he hated you, like all good banks has.

“‘Fives and tens for this, please,’ says my friend. That teller never quit thinkin’ of his dyspepsy, but chucked the stuff right over the counter.

“‘How’s that?’ says my friend, when we got outside.

“‘All right,’ says I. ‘And here’s my plunder.’ I let him heft the bag.

“‘Heavy truck, ain’t it?’ he said. ‘But we can always stand the weight, can’t we?’ He picked out one of them glitterin’ Chinese works of art and regarded it real lovin’. ‘Yes,’ says he, ‘it’s sure nice stuff. Hurry along and we’ll close the dicker.’

“Up-stairs the old gent had the money ready for me to count.

“‘Correct?’ says he.

“‘Ya-a-as,’ says I.

“Well, I’ll put ’em in a neat bundle for you,’ says he. When that was done I handed my precious gold over.

“Now, come here and have one last drink of satisfaction,’ says my friend. I turned to the table and imbibed my last tonic at his expense.

“Here you are, sir,’ says the little old man, handin’ me my package. ‘And much obliged to you; only remember this: Secret Service men is all about; don’t open her till you get safely in your room—mind that, now! Good-day.’

“Down the steps I goes, ker-thump, ker-thump. But when I reached the street I begun to wonder to myself if I hadn’t better just see what those fellers would do next—no harm in ketchin’ on to as many city ways as possible—so I hid under the stoop till they come out, glancin’ sharp this way and that, but missin’ Ezekiel George Washington.

Page 16

“Up the street they skips; me after ‘em, soon’s I could, safe. Round the corner they goes. Me, too. And then they sasshays into a joolry shop. Here I thought I’d stay outside.

“My friend, after some talk, passes a big nugget over the counter. The joolryman he bores into it with a file and hands it back. You never see a face more contemshus than his’n. Then some kind of argyment broke out, arms a-wavin’; windin’ up by the joolryman raspin’ pretty near every nugget in the heap. Each pass his face got more contemshus yet. Finally he swept the whole business back in the bag, throws it at ‘em and intimates they can leave at any time.

“They left. I never heard such language in my life! It or’n’t be allowed in a large city. Why, that friend of mine, he heaved the bag of nuggets in the gutter and he raised up his hands, and just as sure as I sit here tellin’ you about it, friends and brothers, he made a Fourth-of-July speech five minutes long, and never repeated himself once! I wouldn’t go near him, feelin’ in his excited state of mind it might lead to trouble. The little old man at last dragged him away.

“I picked up them poor mishandled treasures in the gutter, for old acquaintance sake. And surmisin’ it probably wouldn’t hardly be worth my while to wait till I got to the hotel to sample my prize-package, I opened her on the spot.

“Well, there’s no use in talkin’. Them fellers were a pair of scoundrels. Instead of anything that looked or smelt or sounded like money in that parcel, was nothin’ but a lot of newspapers cut into strips, with a note on top of ‘em bearin’ these insultin’ words:

“*“There’s a sucker born every minute.”*

“Then I counted up on my fingers fourteen drinks and one five-dollar dinner, and says I to myself:

““Ya-a-as,” says I, ‘I don’t reckon but what that’s true.’”

III

ST. NICHOLAS SCRAGGS

“I have read some’ers,” said Mr. Scraggs, “that some man whose name was a durned sight more important to him than it is to me, for I’ve plumb forgot it, said that he never begun nothin’ unless he could see the end of it.”

“His wife’s family must have owned real estate,” suggested Red Saunders.



"He didn't specify which end," excused Mr. Scraggs. "Maybe 'twas the front end he meant; then the proverb 'ud read that he never begun anythin' unless he could see the commencement of it; which is a wise and thoughtful statement, because had it been otherwise, and therefore essentially different, why, how could he?"

"Of course not," assented Red.

"I s'pose," said the visitor, "that you mean what you say and understand what you mean, but d——d if I do. Is there any right or left bower in this game?"

Page 17

“No,” said Mr. Scraggs. “But this is the twenty-fourth of December, and I was thinkin’ of another twenty-fourth of December. I began something then that come out rather different from what you’d naturally expect. That ain’t so remarkable, for nothin’ I ever had any hand in ever come out as anybody expected—barrin’ Mrs. Scraggs, who, individuool, cool, calm, and collectively, always says, ‘Just what I expected, exactly,’ and any man that says any one or all of the Mrs. Scraggses bound to me by ties of matrimony by the Mormon Church, party of the first part, Mrs. Scraggs, party of the second part, and E. G. W. Scraggs, party of the third, last, and of no consequence whatsoever part—any man, I repeat, who says Mrs. Scraggs would lie is no friend of her’n and ought to be told so. But to restrain a nateral indignation at the hint of such a charge and to proceed: I want to say that this particular twenty-fourth of December I’m talkin’ about came out so much entirely different from what I expected that I can’t seem to forget it.

“There’s something about Christmas that warms the heart and makes the noblest and best of our sentiments to come to the surface for a breath of fresh air. Yes, sir, there is, and they passed it around in Peg-leg’s place that afternoon so hot, sweet, and plentiful that I hadn’t been there more’n two hours before my feelin’s had rose to such a pitch that I went out and bought each’ and every Mrs. Scraggs a pair of number ten rubber boots, a pound of raisins, and an accordion. The boots was useful; the raisins, of course, stood for Christmas cheer; but what in thunder I bought the accordions for I never knew afterward. I’d give a ten-dollar bill this minute to know. It was a tremenjuss idee at the time, but that’s all I recall of it. I sent the hull shootin’-match around to the house by a small boy with a hand sleigh and a card sayin’ ‘Peace on Earth’ on top of it.

“After this, havin’ done my duty by my fambly, as I saw it at the time, I wandered into Mr. George Hewlitt’s emporium of chance, armed with six iron dollars and a gold collar-button. They took my six dollars away from me as though I wasn’t fit to be trusted with ’em, and then I sprung my collar-button for another stack. As far as I could see, that collar-button was all that stood between me and a long, wide, thick, and cold winter. Hows’mever, there was no unmanly tears in the eyes of the support of the noble house of Scraggs when he plunked the lot on the corner.

“‘Slave,’ says I to the dealer in the language I learned shiftin’ scenes for a week, back in old St. Looey. ‘Slave!’ says I. ‘I’ve stacked my life agin the cast in your eye, and I will stand the razzle of your dyestuff. Shoot! You’re faded!’

“And he was, too. I caught that turn and about every other in the deal; split him in half on the last card, and from that on I ripped him up the back and knocked chunks off’n him until everybody got interested.

Page 18

“The game grew too small for both of us. I had four hundred dollars in checks before me, and my original collar-button. I asked him for his limit. He replied that notwithstandin’ the enormous and remarkable growth of institutions of learning throughout the country and the widespread interest in arithmetic, it hadn’t been figured out yet.

“‘Make good,’ says I, tappin’ the table with the finger of authority.

“‘I got you,’ says he, and slams his roll upon the table. ‘There’s eight hundred dollars.’

“‘Well,’ says I, ‘I shall descend upon it in two flies, not counting odd chips. Shall we cut?’

“He shoved out a deck. I cut a four-spot. It come to me all of a sudden how futeel is human endeavors, how fleetin’ is man’s hopes, for we was playin’ it high man wins. And then he cut a three-specker, and talked unwisely. Then he cut a king, and a soft smile lighted his face. I cut an ace. He looked at it, reached up, and took down a sign:

ACE IS ALWAYS
HIGH IN THIS HOUSE.

—a sign he’d made with his own fair hands, and he says to me, ‘You don’t mind if I keep this as a sooveneer of the joyful occasion, do you? You can have the rest of the place, for I move after two beats like that.’

“So then the crowd was uproarious, and I treated several times for Mrs. Scraggs and several times for myself, divided the money square, wrapped her half in a parcel with ‘God Bless our Home’ marked on it and sent it around to her.

“It then occurred to me I weren’t dressed according to my prosperity. So I cut the boys and ambled around to Eichenstein’s to get some clothes.

“Old Eichy clasped his hands with innocent glee.

“‘I have got id!’ says he, clawing out some black duds. ‘You remember dat ’biscobal mineesder who beat der sheriff to der drain? Dat is der close he order t’ und didn’t bay for—dey fid you like a finger in der mud.’

“I tried to explain to Eichy that I didn’t need no minister clothes, but he was shocked at the idea, so I bought ’em and put ’em on.

“It next occurred to me that with a new soot of clothes and money in my pocket I’d orter travel and see a little of the world once more, so I gathers the boys and four members of the Dogtown band, and we went eight miles to the station in good shape. It made the people look to see us marchin’ in.

“Gimme a ticket,’ says I to the station man.

“Where are you going to?’ says he.

“If there’s one thing I can’t put up with it’s impudence from a railroad man.

“What in the hereafter business is that of yours?’ says I. ‘You gimme a ticket, quick, or there’ll be a wreckin’ train due at this spot.’

“Well, how can I tell what to do?’ says he. ‘Pay me for the ticket, and you get it.’

“Sir!’ says I. ‘Do you mean to insinooate that I can’t or won’t pay for a dirty little railroad ticket? There you are—gimme a ticket!’

Page 19

"I slapped what I had loose on the counter; he counted it careful and give me my paste-board, just as the engine come a-hissin' and a-roarin' in. Gee, she did look bully to me! I hadn't seen a train of cars for two years. We detained 'em no longer than was necessary to treat the engineer and the rest of the crew proper in the matter of drinks, and I was off, leanin' back comfortable in the smoker, puffin' huge and prosperous puffs of real seegar smoke into the air, and with the careless thumb of wealth tucked into the armpit of my vest. I reckoned I must have dozed, for bimeby the conductor shook me by the arm and says, respectful, 'We're nearin' your station, sir.'

"I looked out, and I see down the track the most lonesome inhabited spot on the face of this earth. If houses has ghosts I should say that the ghosts of some forty houses that had committed the crime of not bein' properly built had collected themselves there—why, even the snow around the cussed things looked second-hand.

"I made up my mind on the instant that I'd never really intended to go there. But it was too late now. I didn't propose to back down before that conductor.

"The names of all these little towns is so much alike,' says I, 'that I've forgot the name of this one already.'

"Yes?' says he, raisin' his eyebrows. Of course, as a matter of fact, I hadn't thought to look at my ticket; but having started on this line I meant to buck through.

"Yes,' says I. 'Would you mind giving it to me?'

"Oggsouash,' says he.

"There was silence for a second.

"Hog's wash,' says I, musin'. 'Don't seem like I ort to have forgot that, does it?'

"No,' says he; 'it don't.'

"There come a kind of awkward silence again, me thanking the Lord that we was almost there.

"Injun name,' says the conductor.

"Sure,' says I; 'of course; certainly; I remember now distinctly. What saloon do you recommend?'

"Saloon?' says he, steppin' back.

"Saloon,' says I, wonderin' where he found the queerness of my words.



“‘Saloon?’ says he. ‘Why, man, it’s a Prohibition, Presbyterian, Vegetarian Colony. I didn’t know what to make of your actions when you got aboard, but from your face and clothes I supposed you was one of them ministers coming to scare the kids to death for a Christmas present. Ain’t you one of ‘em?’

“‘I’m a sort—sort of connection,’ says I with my expirin’ breath.

“He looked at me as if he couldn’t quite see the connection. ‘Well,’ says he, ‘here we are, and they’re expectin’ you, for there’s a lady waitin’ on the platform.’

“‘A lady?’ says I, risin’ from my tomb. I’d begun to think before there was truth in the sayin’, ‘You can’t win at two games on the same day,’ but when I heard there was a lady waitin’ for me—well, if there’s any man in this here bull-pen can think what I thought, let him whisper it in confidence, and I’ll make it right with him.

Page 20

"I never knew how I got off that train of cars.

"Well, I oughtn't to have been scart—it was the littlest, thinnest, palest, tremblingest woman you ever saw—why, there wasn't a Mrs. Scraggs on the face of the earth that couldn't 'a' dandled her in her arms like a baby.

"Is this the Reverend Silas Hardcrop?' says she.

"Yes, madam,' says I, thinkin' it best to humor her, even if she was small.

"I wanted to meet you first—I wanted to say—to speak—there's something I felt I must tell you,' she says.

"Thinks I: 'No, you don't. So long's I've got a gun in each hind pocket I reckon the men folks and me will get long all right, but private conversations with ladies is off the bill-of-fare.' So I says:

"Y-a-a-s?' in a tone of voice to put out a bonfire.

"Oh, it doesn't matter,' she said quick and shaky; 'it was silly of me. I only thought——' Well, she was tremblin' with cold or somethin', and kind of near cryin', too—one of them women that wears themselves out by botherin' to be good, and if they are good, botherin' about what ought to be done next. In short, as the saying is, I forgot my part.

"Why, you poor little critter,' says I; 'you're near froze to death—take a drop of this,' pullin' out a flask of Peg-leg's best.

"What?' she says, starting back in horror. 'Can that be *whisky*?'

"Madam!' says I, rememberin', 'how dast you? That's a prescription put up by my favorite physician—a small dose will do you a large good. Try a piece, and we'll go in the station, where it's warmer, I hope, and talk it over.'

"She strangled some, but downed a trifle.

"There was a good old lignite fire blazin' away 'n the station.

"Now that you've been so kind to me,' she says, 'I dare tell you what I thought.'

"She had stopped shiverin'—Peg-leg's best knocked shivers quick.

"I don't want you to think I do not believe in our tenets, because I do, I *do*!' says she; 'but it's been such a hard and weary year, with no brightness in it, and the old times come to me so, and they haven't had anything—really, you know, and it's awful to think



of Christmas going by without—without—I know it's a Pagan festival, and that Christians should pass the day in meditation and fasting, but—don't you see?

“‘Certainly,’ says I. ‘If there ever was a guilty party that didn’t do it, why, she’s not him—you and me agree there, entirely.’

“‘I beg your pardon?’ says she, lookin’ at me with them scart-deer eyes of hers. ‘I don’t quite understand—I’m so stupid.’

“‘Yes, that’s what’s apt to come of vegetables,’ says I. ‘But tell me more about the Pagan festival.’

“I fancy Peg-leg’s best couraged her up some.

“‘I don’t think it’s a Pagan festival for children to have fun and toys for Christmas. I don’t,’ she says, ‘I can’t. And to think of them sitting there in that cold church for hours to-morrow—ugh!’ she says.

Page 21

“Well, dear friends and brothers, I did think of ’em sittin’ in that cold church. There was a time when I used to behave fine for a month previous to December twenty-fifth, for the privilege of seein’ Uncle Santy Claus tumble down the chimbley; and I want to say right here that all the good times I have seen sence ain’t got near enough to them good times to catch their dust. Besides which, the merry Christmas in glassified form with which I had encouraged myself at Peg-leg’s, and the wad of that beautiful sensitive plant, the long green, which was reposin’ on my heart, says to me: ‘Scraggsy, spring yourself—jump, boy, jump!’

“And furthermore, in the wildest dreams of my youth I had never figgered on spendin’ a cold and cloudy Christmas in the bosom of a Presbyterian, Prohibition, Vegetarian Colony. It stood to reason if I didn’t do something to that colony the colony would do a thing to Scraggs. I made up my mind that right here was where I jarred Oggsouash to a finish.

“And further still, that poor little deluded, cold-potato-fed woman was on my mind.

“‘You mean,’ says I to her—my eddication in the Mormon Church, and what I learned about play-actin’ in St. Looey, standin’ me in handy for manners—‘that these here children, the offspring of cold water and vegetables, is expected to pass to-morrow in prayer and meditation, and be better for it?’

“‘Yes, sir!’ says she, impressed by my manners.

“‘Well, then, madam,’ says I, ‘if you’ll excuse my onprofessional language, I’ll say that that’s a low-down, Scandahoovian outrage.’

“‘Now,’ says she, eager, ‘that’s just what I think.’

“‘Madam,’ says I, bowin’, ‘I’m enchanted to see such a spirit—I’ll think kindly of turnips from this day on. Let us prescribe for ourselves once more—the directions say take one every three minutes until you feel better. Besides, you got to help me, and you’ll need your strength. My duties demand that I leave here by the night freight, but before that —’ And I give her her directions. She jumped up and hustled out, as young as ever she was.

“Then I went up to the telegrapher. ‘Where can I buy some toys and truck, to come out on Number Three?’ says I.

“He didn’t pay no attention.

“I reached in and took him gently by the hair, drawin’ him part way through his cubby-hole so’s he could hear plain.

“‘My young friend,’ says I, ‘is it any part of your notion that I grew up on cabbages? Does it please your youthful fancy to picture me picketed out to grass, and chewin’ my cud on a sunny slope?’

“‘Ow!’ says he. ‘Leggo m’ hair!’

“‘You are now in the hands of E. G. W. Scraggs,’ says I, ‘an honor which I shall give you cause to appreciate if you don’t lend me your ears to what I say. Do you think you can hear me now?’

“‘Yes, sir. Oh, yessir, yessir,’ says he.

“‘Good,’ says I. ‘Then telegraph to the first place east to send one hundred dollars’ worth of toys out here on Number Three. Here’s your money.’

Page 22

“Well, he picked away, and then we waited. Bimeby we got the foolishhest kind of answer: ‘What sort of toys? How much of each?’ *etc.*

“‘Michael and the Archangels all,’ says I, ‘how am I supposed to know? Ain’t that part of a toy-shop man’s business? Here, young man, you tick-tack ‘em that I want toys—children’s toys—to use up one hundred plunks—I want ‘em on Number Three—and if they don’t arrive I will. I will arrive in their little old toy-shop and play with them till they holler for ma. Tell ‘em I never felt more impatient in my life than I am this minute, and that I’m getting more so per each and every clock tick. Mention the name of Zeke Scraggs, so they won’t think it’s Mr. Anonymous behavin’ frivolous. Tell ‘em I mean every word of it. Go on; do it.’

“So he did.

“Then comes a sensible answer: ‘Goods go forward by Number Three.’

“‘Sure,’ says I. ‘ill you join me?’

“‘I certainly will,’ says he, and bimeby he cried because I looked so like his father, who was just the same kind of short, thick-set, hairy kind of person I was.

“Then my poor little deer-eyed woman come back with a roll of cotton-battin’; at the same minute Number Three pulled in. ‘You get Jimmy, there,’ says I to her, ‘to help you whack up the play-toys, whilst I disguise myself as Santy Claus.’

“She stopped and looked at me, then she says in a scart whisper, ‘Are you *really* the Reverend Silas Hardcrop?’

“‘I’m just as near bein’ the Reverend Silas Hardcrop as I shall ever get,’ says I.

“There come a twinkle of somethin’ almost like fun in her eye. ‘I told them,’ says she, ‘that you would address them at seven, sharp.’

“She and me an Jimmy finished Jimmy’s lunch and sat around, whilst I told ‘em anecdotes concernin’ life as it was lived outside the bonds of Oggsouash, till quarter to seven rolled around. Then we took the back way to the church.

“I don’t think it has ever been my privilege to gaze on one hundred and fifty faces all so astonished at one and the same time as when I stepped forward to the center of the stage at Oggsouash and addressed the meetin’, me bein’ clad as Santy Claus, in flowin’ white whiskers, hair to match. Jimmy’s coat that come down almost to my waist, a baggage-truck of toys behind me, and a gun in each hand.

“‘Dearly beloved brethren,’ says I, ‘I shall try to interest you for a few minutes, and I urge and beg and pray of you that if any male member of your number here assembled feels

in any way nervous or fidgety during the course of my remarks that he will conceal it with all possible haste and discredit, because otherwise I ain't goin' to have the bill for the consequences in my mail.

[Illustration: “‘Dearly beloved brethren,’ says I.”]

Page 23

“How Oggsouash and I come together is neither here nor there, although I could find it in my heart to wish it was,’ I says. ‘But now that the worst has happened, let us meet the consequences like men—you, like men raised and prostrated by such things as cauliflower, sweet potatoes, and hay, washed down by the water which flows in all its glistening uselessness among the hop-toads and mud-turtles of Oggsouash Creek; and me, like men that pick the hindleg of an ox at a sittin’ and make the spirits in Peg-leg’s place go down like the approach of Arctic breezes.

“To resume,’ says I. ‘It may be that there ain’t a man drifted further from what the standards of this here place is than I be, but I’m willin’ to put my hand to an affydvait statin’ it never crossed my mind to draft a set of rules as an improvement on the Almighty’s. There’s where you put it all over me. I have held up a train to hear what the passengers would say, but lackin’ the advantages that has doubtless been yours, I duck when it comes to reformin’ Heaven.

“It struck me with the force of a revelation when I arrived at your glowin’ mertroppollus this afternoon that to make any human bein’, particlerly children, forget for a time that they lived in Oggsouash was a religious duty. I have therefore furnished a few trifles for the purpose. I move you, ladies and gentlemen, that we turn this Christmas Eve into a Pagan festival. All in favor of this motion will keep their seats—contrary minded will please rise,’ and I cocked both guns.

“Carried, unanimous,’ says I. ‘Now, please let each young person come forward as his, her, or its name is called. I shall be severely displeased if you don’t.’

“Then I read from the list the lady had furnished me, and the kids come up. The last party on the list was a little gal that had been poppin’ up an’ down like a prairie-dog, fearin’ she was goin’ to git left, and when at last I sings out ‘Annabella Angelina Hugginswat!’ here she come, her eyes snatched wide open by the two little pigtails that stuck out behind, walkin’ knock-kneed and circular, as some little girls does, and stiff er’n a poker in her j’int from scart-to-death and gladness.

“Angelina,’ says I, pickin’ up the big doll-baby I’d saved for her, ‘you must be the fond parient of this child,’ says I. ‘Raise it kindly; teach it that it’s been damned since the year of our Lord B. C. 7604; feed it vegetables, Angelina, and keep it away from strong drink, even if you have to use force.’

“Angelina, she didn’t mind my pursyflage, but she just stood there quiverin’ all over, lookin’ at her prize.

“‘Ith that my dolly?’ she says.

“‘That’s your sure-enough dolly, little gal,’ I says.

“She took hold of it—her little arms was stiff as railroad ties and her hands was cold.

“She looked at me again and whispered: “‘Ith that my dolly, *really*, *truly*, mithter?’

Page 24

“She looked so darned funny standin’ there that I grabbed her right up and kissed her.

“‘If anybody tries to take that dolly away from you, you let *me* know—skip!’ says I, and down the aisle she runs hollerin’: ‘Oh, papa, papa! Thee my dolly!’ Seems she didn’t have no mother, poor little thing.

“Well, sir, old human nature is human nature, after all—elsewise it would be a darned funny state of affairs—but anyhow, that little gal’s holler did something to my friends, the Oggsoashers. I don’t think I overstep the mark when I say some of ‘em smiled a kindly smile.

“‘But I didn’t have no time to study it. If I missed my freight I stayed in Oggsoash over night, so, reasonin’ thus, the tall form of E. G. W. Scraggs might ‘a’ been seen proceedin’ toward the railroad track at the rate of seventeen statute miles per hour. Just as I hooked on to the caboose comes a feller pastin’ after me.

“‘Say!’ he whoops. ‘Say! We want to thank you!’

“‘Turn it in to the kids,’ says I. ‘Good-night, Oggsoash, good-night,’ I says, ‘Partin’ is such sweet sorrow that I could say good-night as long as my wind held out.’

“Well, sir, it was nigh three in the mornin’ when I hit Castle Scraggs agin, after the coldest walk to be found anywhere outdoors; but when Mrs. Scraggs come to the door—and it was one of the blackest-eyed and snappiest of the race—and she says, ‘Zeke Scraggs! Where you been?’ I just fell into her arms.

“‘Bear with me, Susan, or Mary Ann, or whatever your name is,’ says I, ‘for I’ve had a ter’ble time.’

“‘You behave yourself, you old idiot, or I’ll do you personal harm,’ says she.

“‘Thank you, thank you for them sweet words, spoke by somebody *alive*, anyhow,’ says I. ‘And this much more, Mrs. Scraggs,’ says I, ‘before we part. If ever you hear me complain of anythin’ concernin’ you ladies just you say “Oggsoash” to me and hold your hand, so, to indicate an empty glass.

“‘Good-night, Susanna—Merry Christmas,’ says I. ‘On my word of honor, there has been one moment of my life when I was glad to see you.’

“And I left her standin’ there, with the candle in her hand, paralyzed.

“And I can conclood, as I suggested in the beginning, that I had not foresaw one item of these occurrences when I risked that collar-button.”

IV

THE SIEGE OF THE DRUG STORE

"Once upon a time, when I was scarcely married at all, you might say," began Mr. Scraggs, "I quit workin' for a livin' and started a scientific school."

"*You* did?" cried Red, after one astonished second vanished in the past.

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Scraggs, "I did. *It* was for the investigation and pursuit of this, here doctrine of chances. The idee was to put a little box full of playin'-cards on the table, and draw them forth one at a time, to see just how they'd fall. Some of the students got that interested they bet on the results."

Page 25

"Oh!" said Charley, "I took a course in that one winter myself. Did you always draw *one* card at a time out'n that box, Zeke?"

"So help me, Bob! I did," returned Mr. Scraggs most earnestly. "Hence I didn't get rich. It sometimes happened that a Wild Wolf from Up the Creek would breeze in, full of rum, plumb foolishness, and money. Oh, man! High or low, red or black, odd or even, coppered or open, on the corner or let her rip, last turn and in the middle, from soda-card to hock, them brier-whiskered sons-of-guns would whipsaw my poor little bank till there wasn't much left of her but sawdust. Yes, sir," mourned Mr. Scraggs, "I made enough out of the early birds to eat, but them Roarin' Bears from Bruindale uset sometimes to apply the flat of their hands to my seat of learning till the sparks flew out of my eyes. In short, this sportin' life was too much up and down hill for me. No sooner would I git ready to declare a dividend than one of my outside customers would come in and take that dividend and wipe both feet on it, roll on it, stomp it, fly ten foot in the air and come down on it, bite chunks out of it, and then I'd light a match, gather the crumbs from the floor, and wisht I could git holt of something at once easy and reliable.

"Well, there was a friend of mine lived at the Transcontinental Hotel. The partition between his room and mine didn't come clear to the ceiling, so when I arrived home late I uset to heave a boot over on top of him and have a chin. He was a nice feller, Hadds. A pale, thin sort of man, very red-headed—that is to say, not red-headed like some parties I have known, but a sort of bashful red, that would ha' been different if it could; and he wore eight large freckles on his face. There would have been more if there had been more room. Hadds was then workin' for the railroad company, but not happy. He was in the dispatcher's office, and I'd hear him holler in his nightmares, 'There they go! Bang! Everybody killed! I always expected it!'

"You see, he lived in fear of running two excursion trains together. Nervous cuss—oh, awful! Not without reason, neither. Seems when he was at college he studied chemistry. Always experimentin'. Mixed two things that was born to live apart. Hadds left simooltaneously with that corner of the buildin'. He didn't stop till he reached the Transcontinental Hotel.

"Hadds worked at me to start a drug store with him. He'd saved some out of his wages, and he knew I had a fluctuatin' roll. He says, 'You're goin' bust some day, young man—why don't you quit it? You come with me and we'll make a decent thing. It's mighty lucky for the gang that they swill patent medicines instead of lettin' that Jones up the street give 'em a quick finish over the prescription counter. That pill-wrangler couldn't tell the difference between an auger-hole raffle-board and a porous plaster if there wasn't a label on the box. Jeeminneticus!' says Hadds, 'when he mixes coffin varnish for a man you'd think he was scramblin' eggs. Come on, Washy,' he says, 'while you got the price. You'd like the business.'

Page 26

"One night it happened Bitter Water Simpson was borne on the wings of evening to my place of business, and he calculated that the last two cards in the box would come out, queen first, trey next. He was so sure he inquired about the theory of limits.

"'The limit,' says I, 'is the clothes and contents, body and immortal soul of E. G. W. Scraggs. You slam your wad down and I'll cash it.'

"It had occurred to me there was no use foolin' longer. If I busted this gun-fighter I went into the drug business; if he busted me I'd take a walk.

"He laid down one thousand dollars' worth of Government promises, and I took a long breath, drew forth, first trey, next queen, removed his money from the table with a light, sure touch, threw the layout in the stove, blew out the lamp, remarked that the bank was closed, and stood prepared to deal in chemicals instead of playin'-cards.

"Simpson was surprised. 'Ain't I goin' to get satisfaction?' says he.

"'If it's to be had on the prescription counter you do,' says I. 'Otherwise, I prefer to stay satisfied myself.'

"It would have been better if he'd refrained from abusing me. I was younger then, and while not in the least quarrelsome, yet such talk as Simpson talked to me was entirely uncalled for. Besides that, he got festive with guns. I relieved him of his guns and sat him on the stove till he promised to behave. Nobody ever heard me kick when them fellers nailed me to the burnin' oak for anywhere's up to five hundred a night. Howsomever, it wound up amiable; I staked Simmy to a new pair of pants, and kept him in spendin' money till ridin' again appeared among the possibilities. I never could get used to people pullin' guns on me.

"So, then, there was a drug store goin' in no time. Both me and Hadds was happy as could be, and workin' like a pair of mules. When we had things fixed, and a sign 'Hadds & Scraggs' in gold letters four foot high, I felt I really was a prominent citizen. But dear friends and brothers, always there's somebody handy with a fly to stick in your ointment. Once I went down street to see how that sign looked a little ways off, and up rides a puncher.

"'Hadds & Scraggs!' says he: 'I wonder what kind of merchandise them is? Well, I must take a Hadds and a Scraggs home to show the boys.'

"He knocked every bit of poetry out of that sign. Howsomever, poetry ain't the chief business of a drug store, and when you come to the practical side we done mighty well. We got in a line of patent medicines with pretty red and blue labels that took the popular taste. As there was a minin' boom over the hill, our line of gold pans and gunpowder went well. A new seeder brought in some money, and with rubber boots, snowshoes,

baseballs, carpenters' tools, spectacles, lumber, and an agency for a self-binder as side issues, I see myself getting on in the world.

“‘Tweren’t long before nobody’d think of buyin’ a faro layout or a deck of cards elsewhere than at our store, and as for perfumed soap and perfumery, why, I think our feller-citizens must have et the one and drunk the other, for we unloaded by the box and pailful. When we’d count the kitty nights, ‘Didn’t I tell you?’ Hadds would holler. ‘Put your feet in my tracks and you’ll wear diamonds!’

Page 27

“And I guess I would if it hadn’t been for a lady. There’s a woman in it, nine times out of ten, when a man’s ruined; and the other time there’s a man in it. If neither one nor t’other’s in it it’s a durned uninterestin’ occurrence, anyhow. Yes, sir; we come under the double-cross kindness of a female major.

“One night—Sufferin’ Ichabod! but that was a night.’—we were jerried to a standstill in one half-hour, or thirty minutes, by the clock.

“Things was slack this evening nobody in the store but Hadds, Keno Jim and me, throwin’ poker dice for cigars, when the door opens and here come Major Pumpey and his wife from the army post. We were not glad to see the Major. He was a little, pussy, red-faced, pop-eyed man, pompous as a banty rooster, with black whiskers and a mustache like a cat. He had a voice on him like barrels rolling in a brewery vault. It would surprise you quite a little to hear that number ten voice come a-roarin’ out of that number two man. The Major used to corral everything he wanted and say, ‘Charge it!’ two octaves below a bull’s beller, Bein’ a military person, he was fond of charges; me and Hadds, bein’ plain civilians, weren’t. We charged it and we charged it, but that there Major’s defenses were impregnerville. I had told Hadds that the next time Pumpey said ‘Charge it’ I was goin’ to take him at his word, then and there, and rush him along on his ear till I felt better. But, of course, now his wife was along I couldn’t.

“She was just as different from the Major as anything could be: a tall, pale, rangey woman, kind-hearted and good-natured as they make ’em, but with a pair of nose-grabber specks, and a way of letting her hands flop at the wrist, whilst she talked in a high gobble-gobble style, like singin’ a tuneless tune. They made a pair to draw to. The Lord only knows what you’d got if you filled. My! And the general effect of that lady! She wore her hair in an omelet, and looked as if she’d been put in her clothes by a boiler explosion.

“There was another powerful difference between them two. The Major he gazed on the wine when it was any color at all. He didn’t care so much for decoration as he did for quantity. He passed his time in bein’ tee’d, tee-heed, or teeterin’. On the other hand, his lady couldn’t stand plain raw water. Honest, friends and brothers! I ain’t stringin’! I have it on the word of their striker that Mrs. Pumpey couldn’t be induced to take a drink of water unless it was boiled, and as for spirited liquors—Oh, murder! Don’t mention it!

“As the Major entered I observed upon his person a kind of uprightness that no sober man ever had, varied with quick little steps sideways, for no good visible reason, and when he comes up to the counter he grabs it with both hands and says, ‘How do—gla’ meecher—hot, ain’t it?’

“I admitted it was hot, told him I was glad to meet him, too, and as this last wasn’t no more than a plain lie I asked the lady quick what we could do for her.

Page 28

"Perfumery was wanted, so I passed the bottles out. Mrs. Major would take a lady-like sniff and say, 'Dee-lee-shus! Ha-oow do eeyou lieek that, Ma-JAW?'

"And when de major laid his hands on the right one of the numerous bottles floatin' in the atmosphere about him he'd hold it a yard off, give a snort like a buzz-saw striking a knot, and after a minute's silence roar, 'Ain't that nice, b-y-y-y GOSH!' and slam the bottle down.

"It was tryin' on the nerves. First place, the way he come out with that 'b-y-y-y Gosh!' hit you in the pit of the stomach like standin' alongside a bass-drum, and it was only a question of time when he slammed one of them bottles through the show case. So I flagged Hadds for help, and the two of us plied the lady with perfumery so fast that the Major couldn't get his oar in, at which he cut loose for himself, wanderin' around behind the counter, smellin' of every bottle on the shelves.

"It ain't everything in a drug store has as pleasant a greetin' for your nose as perfumery, and once or twice, when I looked around, to kind of keep cases on him, I see the Major had struck a shock. But at last he come across a sample that pleased him. I saw him swig a good lungful of it, and his mouth opened wide with delight.

"Well, I guess you'll be amused for a while,' thinks I. So I paid no more attention.

"The next thing Hadds looks up. 'Here!' he yells; 'drop that! That's chloroform, you bull-head!'

"The call come too late—leastways, to work as intended. The Major dropped the bottle, but he also dropped himself, two shelves, and about six dozen glass jars of everything you ever heard of. Powers of darkness! Flat on his back laid the hero of many charges, whilst over his manly form and face trickled cough mixture, Canady balsam, liniment, sugar syrup, castor oil, and more sticky, oily, messy kinds of stuff than I'll ever tell you. The worst of it was that a bottle of carmine had landed last in the wreck and, bustin', flew over everything. As there wasn't a dry spot for a rod it looked like the Major had done a turn of bleedin' at every vein same as the young man we used to read about at school. In fact it was much worse than that. It appeared to be the most awful tragedy any one man ever was concerned in.

"Before we got our wits about us poor Mrs. Pumpey see her Major afloat on a gory sea, and without askin' for explanations she give a loud holler and fainted on our stock of fancy dishes.

"Here's where we make a lot of money, I don't think,' screeches Hadds—he was an excitable person, that Hadds. 'Come!' he hollers, 'help me get 'em out of here! There's enough chloroform loose to sleep the bunch of us!'

“We lugged the Major and his wife to the back of the store. I made a piller for her out’n some rolls of wall-paper, but the Major had to get along as best he could. There he lay, his little round stummick stickin’ in the air, breathin’ like a wind-broken horse.

Page 29

“Keno Jim and me looked after the lady whilest Hadds pranced around the Major and cussed scientific cuss-words. Of course, Keno and me didn’t know no more what to do than a photograff of the Wild Man of Borneo when there was a fain tin’ woman in the question. As I said, I hadn’t been married enough to learn, and the present line of Mrs. Scraggses was healthy, whatever other faults they might have. Hadds ’ud come over and tell us half of something, and then rush back to the Major, tearin’ his hair.

“‘Blast it, Hadds!’ says Keno, ‘quit callin’ the man names and let us know what to do for this woman.’

“‘Give her a drink of whisky!’ yells Hadds. ‘Come here, Zeke, and see what ails this beggar now!’

“‘If he hadn’t called me off like that lots of things wouldn’t happened. ‘Look at him!’ says Hadds, and grinds his teeth. ‘Forty dollars’ worth of stuff smashed—charge it, of course. Prob’ly he’s goin’ to die on our hands—’twould be just like his unmerciful nerve. Pass me that bottle of ammonia, Zeke.’

“Then Keno hollered for me. He’d pried the Majoress’ mouth open, stuck a cork in to it keep it so, and then fed her the revivifier. She wasn’t a handsome woman at the best, but with that cork in her mouth——!

“‘I gave her to there of whisky,’ says Keno, indicatin’ about four Swede fingers on a water tumbler. ‘Do you think that’ll bring her to?’

“‘Like a bear trap,’ says I. ‘Do you mean to say you sluiced that much raw jump-and-holler into a woman that can’t stand uncooked water? Well, you are an allotropic modification of the genus jackass, like Hadds says of the Major.’

“Keno got purple in the face. He slammed the glass down and walked out. ‘Now you can look after your own women,’ says he, bitter. Them scientific cuss-words cut him to the heart.

“I looked at the lady. The color was coming back to her face. Evidently she’d be around in a minute or two. Then Hadds fairly whoops at me:

“‘Come here! Come ‘here! You’re a nice pardner, you are, standin’ there with your hands in your pockets!’

“‘Well, what’ll I do, Hadds?’ says I.

“‘Do? I don’t care what you do, so long’s you don’t look so aggravatin’ useless. D’yer think this specimen of an officer and gentleman appears to be—what in blazes is he doin’ now?’

“‘Don’t abuse the poor cuss,’ says I. ‘He really couldn’t help it.’ Then I had an inspiration. Several times in my life I’ve been afflicted that way. ‘See here,’ says I, ‘he took his dose through the nose. Why don’t you give him the remedy the same way? Try a pinch of that Scotch snuff.’

“‘Why, sure!’ says Hadds. He’d tried anythin’ at that stage of the game.

“Well, dear friends and brothers, it ain’t down in the farmer-coop-here, nor no other agriculcheral reports, and I dunno as you could bank on it in every case, but from what I see on this occasion, if you ever happen to have a friend or relative that’s over-indulged in choreform and can’t seem to recall himself, wait till he takes a deep breath, and mix about an ounce of Scotch snuff in his air supply. It may work wonders.

Page 30

“‘Hoor-rash-o!’ says the Major, comin’ to a sittin’ position. ‘Hoor-rash-o!’ says he again, and then he went off like a pack of firecrackers. A sneeze wouldn’t more’n get fairly started before another’d explode in the middle of it. And the Major was as powerful a sneezer as he was talker. Gee! them bass sneezes of his sounded like a freight-engine exhaust. Mind you, he didn’t open his eyes; just sat there, covered with carmine and soothin’ syrup, rockin’ backward and forrard and sneezin’ like George Washington. There was somethin’ kind of horrible about it. Me ‘n’ Hadds looked on petrified.

“Then, ‘Oh, my poor husband! What are they doin’ to you?’ says a v’ice behind us, and the Majoress skipped across the floor and fell on the Major. That’s the word for it; she let go all holts an’ dropped, gatherin’ him up in her arms.

“‘What did you say, Willie?’ she asks.

“‘Hoor-rash-o!’ says the Major. ‘A-kissh-uuu! ha-ha-hrrrum-pah! A-ketcher! Aketcher-hisssh-hoor-rash-o!’

“Now, Hadds, when he see the lady weepin’ that way, was all broke up. He didn’t know about Keno’s goblet full of whiskey, so he thought it was genuine emotion.

“‘Don’t cry, ma’am,’ says he. ‘Twill be all right in a minute. That red’s nothin’ but carmine and simple syrup—it’ll all come out in the wash, and sneezin’s good for the man.’

“The Mayoress she rose and looked at Hadds. There was a glare in her eye more’n human. I read in a book once about the tremenjous dignity of the lady the trouble was all about. It didn’t seem reasonable any female person could act that way till I see the Majoress. She had dignity enough for two maiden ladies at a niece’s weddin’ and a nigger head-waiter. The way she laid holt of Hadds’ collar was impressive a great deal more than I’m able to tell you. Poor Hadds was faded. He looked like a pup caught with a chicken in his mouth. They made a grand march to the general goods counter, the Majoress still resemblin’ a foreign queen. Arrived there, she took up a hairbrush, and with a motion the grandest I ever see in a human bein’ she brought it down atop of Hadds’ head. Whacko!—Christmas, what a crack.

“‘Now, will you let my Willie alone?’ says she.

“Hadds jumped up and down and rubbed his head.

“‘What ails you?’ says he, near cryin’.

“‘Hadds!’ I remonstrated to him, ‘remember you’re speakin’ to a lady.’

“‘Lady!’ yells Hadds. ‘Lady! Look at the lump on my head!’



"It was at this unfortunate minute a young feller see fit to come into the store to buy some matches. He stopped a minute, as he took a general view. There was the Major, apparently bleedin' profusely, yet not carin' a great deal, seemin' more concerned in rockin' bac'ard and forrard and sneezin'. His manner seemed to say, 'So long as you don't interfere with the innocent pleasures of a sneeze I don't care what breaks.' There was Hadds rubbin' his head: there was me with my mouth open; and there was the Majoress, leanin' over the counter and smilin' a dark, mysterious smile.

Page 31

"The customer didn't know what to do.

"'Well?' says the Majorress, sharp and businesslike.

"The young feller jumped.

"'I beg your pardon,' says he. 'I'd like a box of matches.'

"The Majorress shook her head.

"'People don't always get what they like in this world,' says she.

"'No,' says the young feller. 'No, ma'am.' And then come an awkward silence.

"The Majorress still shook her head.

"'This is a sad world,' she says.

"'Yes, ma'am,' says the young feller, edgin' for the door.

"'But you can have the matches,' says she.

"With that she hit him square between the eyes with a ten-cent box. The young feller drew himself up proud.

"'I don't come in here to get insulted,' says he.

"The Majorress resumed her mysterious smile.

"'Why not?' says she.

"The young feller opened his mouth twice, but nothin' to suit the occasion seemed to occur to him. He wheeled and tried to walk off dignified, but the matches snappin' under his feet spoiled the effect.

"'By-by!' says the Majorress; 'come again!'

"She grabbed a tray of mouth-organs and heaved it after him; they scattered like a shrapnel shell. The young feller didn't wait to close the door. We heard him gallopin' up the board walk like he was needin' fresh air. We stood stock still for a matter of five seconds, I reckon; Hadds and me scart to move, and the Majorress with her brow wrinkled in thought. All of a suddent, with no more warnin' than a streak of lightnin', she burst out cryin'. 'Oh, oh, oh!' says she, 'how I have been deceived in men!' Then to relieve her feelin's she got to work with both hands.



“There was a genuine Sand-hill cloudburst of hair-brushes and combs, porous plasters, tooth-powder, tooth-brushes, pomade, soap, Jew’s-harps, playin’-cards and the old Boy knows what all. It struck me then what a waste of time it was for a citizen to get loaded and tear the linin’ out of a saloon; the place where you can really get the worth of your time and money is a drug store. Hadds and me made one desp’rate plunge for her through the terrific fire she kept up. I don’t suppose that lady could hit a barn with a rock, unless she was inside of it, under ordinary conditions; but I’ll bet she didn’t miss one out of a possible ten that night. She caught me under the eye with a mouth-organ, on top of the head with a jar of tooth-powder, whilest smaller articles flew off’n me in all directions.

“Hadds took holt of her hands and talked implorin’.

“‘Please, ma’am!’ says he, ‘please? Don’t throw things around like that! Remember they cost money! We can’t sell tooth-brushes after you’ve strewed the floor with ’em! I ask you please! Please!’

“‘Villain!’ says she haughtily. ‘How dast you put your evil hands on me?’

Page 32

“‘Hadds,’ says I, ‘leggo the lady. We pass. Let us retire behind the prescription counter and bear up like men. There’s only one thing on earth that E. G. W. Scraggs is willin’ to admit has him trimmed to a peak, and you see that same before you now. ‘Twas ever thus since childhood’s hour, when my maiden Aunt Susan took the raisin’ of me. Take any form thou wilt but this, and my firm nerve ain’t goin’ to tremble; but stacked again this form, my nerve is floppin’ like a hotel wash in a hurricane.’

“So I slung Hadds over my shoulder and we went behind the prescription counter.

“I tried to distract his mind by tellin’ him a funny story. However, the rip-split-smash outside kind of jumbled three yarns into one. Besides, Hadds was foamin’ so it was all I could do to keep him from goin’ over and kickin’ the Major, who still was oblivious to surroundings, and enwrapped in the gentle art of sneezin’. Then there come a fearful bump from outside. I knew by that a showcase was no more.

“‘Zeke!’ yells Hadds, ‘think of somethin’ before that woman has us all in.’

“‘Haddsy, old horse,’ I says, ‘we’ve only got one show. If we can create a diversion we win. My head’s that rumped, the only thing strikes me is for us to go out there and play cat-fight. Holler, and meaowl, and spit, and screech, and jump around till she can’t help but look at us. That’s the way I uset to amuse the twins when they needed killin’; of course we’ll look like a pair of fools——’

“‘Yes!’ hollers Hadds. ‘What do we look like now? You get three guesses!’

“‘Come along!’ says I.

“Well, dear friends and brothers, our hearts was in that diversion, let alone the stake we’d invested in the store. If you don’t think one bald-headed E. G. W. Scraggs and one red-headed Tommy Hadds put up a high-grade article of cat-fight I don’t know how I’m goin’ to prove to the contrary; but it was so.

[Illustration: “Put up a high-grade article of cat-fight.”]

“Why, we buck-jumped four foot in the air, sideways, edgeways and straight pitch-and-teeter; we mi-auwed, and scratched, and tore and rolled over, and kicked with our hind legs, and such yells was never heard in a human habitation before nor since.

“It worked. The Mayoress stopped and leaned over the counter.

“‘Warm it up, Hadds!’ I whispers. ‘We got her lookin’!’

“So then we rollicked for a ramps. I see the Majoress smile; she p’inted her finger toward us.

“S-sick ‘em!’ says she. ‘Sick ‘em, Towser!’

“It would have been all right; we was playin’ on velvet, and could have led that woman out of the store as easy as anything if that concussed Major hadn’t ‘a’ come to in the wrong place.

“I caught one glimpse of him holdin’ tight with both hands to a shelf, with his eyes jumpin’ out of his head and his face as white as flour.

“Of course no man would really believe that the spectacle of two grown men playin’ cat-fight in the ruins of a drug store, whilst his own wife looked on and said ‘Sick ‘em!’ was anything but an optickle delusion, caused by reasons he was familiar with.

Page 33

“‘It’s never come like this before!’ hollers the Major, and then he goes down backward for the final touch, carryin’ away a kerosene lamp, and the same landin’ in a barrel of varnish.

“Well, sir, what with the stuff that was loose around there and the varnish, my coat tails was afire when I lugged the Major out to where Hadds was industriously savin’ the Mayoress’ life.

“The two hose companies got out in good shape, but a most unforchinit dispute over who was to claim first water on the fire led ’em to use axes and spanner wrenches and sections of hose on each other whilst our drug store burned green and purple and pink, neglected. Inside of ten minutes eight firemen was ready for the hospital; a good citizen took the Major and Mayoress in for the night, and all that was left of our promisin’ business enterprise was a small heap of wood ashes and a very bad smell.

“‘Well,’ says I, ‘shake, Hadds; it’s all over.’

“He grabbed my hand, weepin’.

“‘No, it ain’t, Scraggsy, Old Man Rocks,’ says he. ‘You stood by me noble, and I’ll do the same by you.’ He fumbled in his pocket. ‘I’ve saved a complete equipment from the wreck,’ says he, and with that he hauls out a couple of decks of cards and a box of poker chips. ‘All is lost save honor, Zeke,’ says he, ‘but I reckon we can raise a dollar or two on that.’

“I was so moved in my feelin’s I could only shake his manly hand.

“When I could speak, says I, ‘We’ll rise like a couple of them Fenian birds from the ashes, pard.’

“And hope springin’ eternal once more in our chests, we took a little drink at Jimmy’s place and went to bed happy.”

V

THE MOURNFUL NUMBER

“It’s a great misfortune to be superstishyous,” said Mr. Scraggs. “Such a thing would never have troubled me if I hadn’t a-learnt from experience that facts carried out the idee. Now, you take that number thirteen. There’s reason for believin’ it’s unlucky. One reason is, when things is all walkin’ backwards folks says they’re at sixes and sevens. Well, six and seven makes thirteen, so there you are.”

“I ain’t much more than arrived,” replied Red, rubbing his head dubiously.

"I'm comin' fast," said Charley; "but don't wait for me, Zeke."

"Well, that's only speculation, anyhow," continued Mr. Scraggs indulgently; "and speculation has made heaps of trouble for piles of people if I'm to believe what I read, which I don't. But here's cold facts. I was born on the thirteenth of April, at a time when me and the country was both younger than we are now. Hadn't been for that I'd dodged considerable mishaps. It was on the thirteenth of October last, in the early mornin', that I mistook that rattlesnake for a chunk of wood and heaved him in the stove."

"Well, where's the bad luck in that?" asked Charley.

Page 34

"Inquire of the snake," said Mr. Scraggs; "besides, he smelt awful. I don't seem to be able to bring back any mornin' I cared less for breakfast than that one. Suppose you was a happy rattlesnake, Charley, with a large and promisin' fambly; suppose, now, on a frosty thirteenth of October you crawled under the cook-stove to get warm the minute the camp cook opened the door, and, before you limbered up enough to bite him, cooky lays cold and unfeelin' hands upon you and Jams you into the stove—ain't the number thirteen goin' to carry unpleasant recollections for you from that on? Bet your life. Howsomever, these are only small details. My main proof that the number thirteen ain't any better than it orter be lies in the fact that one day I married the thirteenth in Mrs. Scraggs. If I'd never'd hearn of such a thing I'd know'd thirteen was no good from that time on. This ain't to cast reflections on the other Mrs. Scraggses, neither. I will say for them wimmen that anything simple-heartedness could do to prepare a man to meet his end cheerful they done. But Mehitabel the Thirteenth, of the reignin' family of Scraggs, was a genius. Uncle Peter Paisley uset to say that a genius was a person that could take a cork and a dryness of the throat, and with them simple ingrejents construct a case of jim-jams. More than one-quarter of the time Uncle Pete knew what he was talkin' about, too, and the rest of it he was too happy to care. Mehitabel was a sure-enough genius: she could make a domestic difficulty out of a shoestring, she could draw a fambly jar through a hole in a sock, and she could bring on civil war over the question of whether there was anything to quar'l about,

"Come Christmastime, I thought I'd leave home for a spell. There was an old friend of mine holdin' down a mine out in the hills. I knew he wouldn't have no company around, and I pined for solitude. There is a time in the affairs of men, as Shakespeare says, when a pair of cold feet beats any hands in the deck. Keno Jim said Shakespeare said so, and Shakespeare's too dead to argue.

"So I puts on a pair of them long, slidin' snowshoes they call 'skees' and slips for William Pemberton and the lonesome mountains. People don't call a thing 'skee' unless they hev good reason for it. Before I caught the hang of them durn disconnected bob-sleds I saw where the 'skee' come in. The feller that loaned 'em to me kindly explained that you slid down the hills on 'em, and it was great sport. When I clumb the first hill and stood perspirin' on top I felt entitled to a little sport. 'Hooray!' says I, and pushed loose. It was a long, wide, high hill with trees and things on it. Some time after I started, say about three seconds, I thought I'd like to slack a bit and view the scenery. The way I was travelin' the scenery looked like the spokes of a flywheel. I left my stummick and my immortal soul about ten rods behind me. You could play checkers on my coat-tail, as the sayin'

Page 35

is. Man! And I pushed up a hurricane. It cut my eyes so I cried icicles a foot long. *Roar-row-roor-s-s-wish!* we went in the open, and *me-a-arr!* we ripped through the timber. I crossed a downed log unexpected and flew thirty foot in the air. Whilst aloft I see a creek dead ahead of me. There wasn't nothin' to do but jump when I come to it, so I jumped. I don't care a cuss whether you believe me or not, dear friends and brothers, but I want to tell you right now that I cleared the creek with something like one hundred and eighty feet to spare! At which I took to throwin' summersaults. I threw one solid quarter-mile of summersaults before that sudden cravin' was satisfied.

"'Y-a-as,' says I when I picked myself up. 'Well, I reckon I've done enough of this here skeedaddlin' for one mornin'. So after that I went along quiet and dignified to William Pemberton's.

"I hit his cabin on Christmas Eve, findin' him very low-spirited. It seems that he was expectin' an attack from some people anxious to jump the claims, thereby gettin' the mill standin' on the property. The feller that hired Billy as watchman promised him everything and forgot it. Billy was almighty faithful but hot-tempered'

"'Think of it!' says he to me. 'I gets word two days ago that the gang is comin' to hop me, and old man Davis ain't even sent me a rifle, like he agreed. What does he expect? Does he have illusions that when they come squirtin' lead at me I'm goin' to peg at 'em with snowballs?'

"Then he laid back, fightin' for breath, and kickin' out with his legs till I loosened his collar. It was a terrible strain, bein' watchman of a mill under them conditions, with a disposition like this. I pitched in to make him feel better. After I'd narrated some incidents that went to make up livin' with Mrs. Scraggs he chirped up considerable. 'Well, sir! This *is* a gay world, ain't it?' says he. 'I wisht I could offer you something to drown your sorrers in, Zeke, but unless you happen to have brought along the makings of a flowing bowl we can't put an end to 'em at this ranch.'

"Well, now, that was sorrerful tidin's. I reckon William took notice of my face—Christmas Eve, alone on top of a God-forsaken mountain and not a smell of anything to make the sun rise in our souls—oh, murder!

"'I feel awful bad about this, Zeke,' says he.

"'Don't mention it,' says I as soon's I could tune my pipes to a cheerful lie. 'Your presence is sufficient.'

"'But I have an idee,' says he, pushing his finger agin my ribs. 'Don't git excited, Zeke, only to be cast down the harder, but there's a chance. All last summer we had

stockholders' investigation meetings, and the way old man Davis led 'em to make investigations through a glass darkly was a sin and a scandal. The altytood was too altytoodinous for strangers, says old man Davis, and therefore they must take a

Page 36

drink; and it was too cold and too hot, too wet and too dry, and if everything else failed it was too cussed mejium for them to live through it without takin' a drink. The consequence was that all I remember about a stockholder is that he's a kind of man with wibbly-wabbly knees and feet that wants to swap sides, who spends his time hiccupin' up and down the mine trails, findin' specimens when and where old man Davis wills.'

"William Pemberton smote his forehead with the flat of his hand—everything took hold of William so vi'lent. 'I give you my word, Zeke,' says he, 'that them horse-car busters picked hunks of red serpentine, loaded with gold from the Texas Star, out of our white quartz ledges that never see gold since Adam played tag, and believed it was all right—just the same as the gent pulls a rabbit out of your hat at the show, and you're convinced that rabbit was there all the time unbeknownst to you. And to think—' he says.

"'Sit down, William, sit down,' says I. 'I don't know what to do for appleplexy.'

"'Well, I'll sit down to oblige you, Zeke; but to think of them flappy-footed yawps puttin' away good liquor by the pailful—pailful?' yells William scornful. 'Barrelful—steam-engine b'ilerful—

"'Well,' says I hastily, 'you was sayin' you had an idee?'

"'Oh, yes!' says he. 'It don't stand in reason they rounded up every last bottle, so it occurred to me that if we hunted we might make discoveries.'

"'Why, so we could!' I hollers loud and hearty, with more notion of creatin' a diversion, however, than any rank faith in my havin' a good time off what old man Davis overlooked. 'It'll be like hide-and-go-seek of a Christmas Eve when we was kids, William.'

"So we scrimmaged round here and there till there was only one closet in the cabin left.

"'I saved it till the last—it's the most likely,' says William. 'Shine a light on our departing hopes, Ezekiel.'

"He put his hand very careful toward the back. 'E. G. W., says he,' 'my fingers have teched something cold and smooth, just like a bottle—pull hard, Ezekiel.'

"I took a long breath and pulled hard.

"'It is round,' says William Pemberton. 'It is a bottle.'

“Nothin’ could be heard but the beatin’ of our hearts.

“‘Is it—is it—*heavy*, William?’ I falters. Then you couldn’t hear nothin’, for our hearts had cease to beat. He let loose of a roar same as a lion that’s skipped atop of his prey.

‘Ezekiel G. W. Scraggs!’ he shrieks, ‘she’s full!’

“‘I wish no better luck myself,’ says I. ‘Trot her out!’

“When the light of the lantern fell upon that bottle we got a shock. Instead of the cheerin’ color that usually fills useful bottles, the contents of this here one was green—green as grass off a June hillside.

“‘Well!’ says William, ‘what in—where in—why, it’s perfumery!’ he hollers, and raises it for a smash.

Page 37

“Hold, William! Hold!” says I. ‘It’s got red sealin’-wax on the top. If you break it before we take a sample you and me is the best of friends parted in the middle, not to mention the disturbance we’ll make in this room.’

“So I took it away from him and looked at it in the candle-light. Sure enough, there was the inspirin’ words on it, ‘Liqueur—Creme de Menthe.’ A furreign way of spellin’ liquor, to be sure, but what’s a letter or two out of the way, so long as the results is in sight?

“William,’ says I, ‘L-i-q, lick, u-e-u-r, er—licker. Get glasses, William, and let us be joyful.’

“William mumbled somethin’ about green not bein’ a joyful color, but he went and did as I told him.

“That stuff smelt of perpemint, fearful. It was a young ladies’ bevridge if ever I hit one. We sot opposite each other, filled a tumbler apiece, says, ‘Here’s how,’ and waited. We waited quite some time.

“Ezekiel, do you notice anythin’?” says William. Well, to tell the truth, I hadn’t; yet it might only been fancy, so I says, ‘Seems to me I *do*, William—nothin’ vi’lent, nor musical, nor humorous—but a kind of a tranquil, preliminary, what-you-might-call-indication of somethin’ to follow.’

“Huh,’ says William, ‘let’s try another.

“We was careful to load to the brim this time. After five minutes I says, ‘Are you sure you don’t notice nothin,’ William?’ I observed a risin’ color in his face.

“U-m-m—y-a-as,’ says he most sarcastical; ‘I notice somethin’, Ezekiel—a strong smell of peppermint—not escaped you, perhaps? Well, there’s just one more swig of green paint goin’ to force itself into the midst of William Pemberton, and if there ain’t more to show for it than the present odor and a sensation ‘sif I’d been turned inside out and exposed to the wintry blasts you’ll hear from me, Ezekiel. I’ve stood,’ says William, ‘about all I’m prepared to stand. The next act will be for me to proceed to get a move on.’

“Knowin’ what a powerful disposition he had I most sincerely hoped our next glass would bring about satisfactory conclusions. I downed her, but it had got to be all I could do, I felt a freezin’ cold in my vitals, like William had complained of, instead of the warmth and comfort for which I looked. Y-a-as, I swallowed that glass by main strength, like a snake would a hop-toad—kinder lengthened myself until I was outside of it.

“Tick-tick-tick,’ remarks William’s clock on the wall. When it had arranged its hands before its mild countenance in such a way as to inform me that twenty minutes, mountain time, had done all the elapsin’ possible, I slid my anxious gaze on William. He

held to his chair with both hands, and white spots showed in his cheeks, the way he chawed his teeth together.

“‘Ahem,’ says I, clearin’ my throat, ‘Hum—ah, do you—er—do you no—’

“I got no farther. William leant over and bent his finger double agin my chest. ‘Full well,’ says he in a tone of v’ice not loud but so loaded with meanin’ it bumped on his teeth— ‘full well, Ezekiel George Washington Scraggs, do I assimerlate what the results of such a course will be, but if you should presume to ast me any more if I notice anything I shall at once arise and bat you in the eye—I am beyond carin’ for conserquences.’

Page 38

“Now, now, now! What is the use of gettin’ so excited? Take a drink of water—you’ll bust your b’iler, foamin’ like that,” I says.

“Water!” says William. ‘Ha, ha, ha.’ It wasn’t no giggle, that laugh of his. It was one of them blood-curdlers you read about.

“All right,” says he, brisk, ‘to oblige you—remember that.’ He turned the dipper upside down, then heaved it through the window. ‘Sufferin’ Ike” says he, “I can’t even taste it—nothin’ but cold, cold. Went down my gullet like a buckshot down a ten-foot shaft.’ He struggled for air and continued; ‘Here am I,’ says he, ‘William Pemberton, celebratin’ Christmas by dyeing my linin’ green and smellin’ like a recess in a country school.’ His ventilation give out again, whilst he worked his face into knots and flew his hands around. ‘You come along with me,’ says he, ‘and I’ll show you a Christmas celebration.’

“I grabbed him. ‘William,’ I says, ‘your eye is desperate. You explain to me before you scuff a foot.’

“Leggo me,’ he says; ‘I tell you, leggo me, Zeke Scraggs. I’m goin’ to have my revenge. I’m goin’ to take ten cases of giant powder and blow the mill of Honorable John Lawson Davis, Member of Congress, Champion Double-Jointed, Ground-and-Lofty, Collar-and-Elbow, Skin and Liar, so high in the air that folks’ll think there’s a new comet, predictin’ war and trouble.’

“William,’ I says ‘you ain’t goin’ to do no such thing—that’s wicked, that is.’ I tried to speak stern, but this here Christmas hadn’t amounted to much so far, and I never had seen a stamp mill blew up, so I couldn’t help wonderin’ how it would look.

“See here!’ says he, ‘I’ll admit many a time you’ve licked me in a friendly way, Ezekiel, and I’m obliged to you; but, now, be you, or ben’t you, my guest?’

“I be,’ says I.

“Then don’t let’s hear no more out of you,’ he says, ‘but come along.’

“The powder’ll be friz,’ I hints, still tryin’ to switch him off.

“Not much,’ he says. ‘She’s down a cellar twenty foot deep—come on.’

“Just as you say, William,’ I remarks—the only thing to do.

“So we toted ten cases of giant to the bottom of the mill, fixed the cap and fuse careful, touched her off, and walked away from there.

“Whilst I wouldn’t have you think for a minute, dear friends and brothers, that I uphold any conduct like that, for my part I’m willin’ to admit there’s things less exhilaratin’ than

standin' on a small rise, of a clear, fine, moonlight winter night, waitin' to see a fifty-stamp mill go off,

"And she went. Let me repeat it: she went. We first ketched a smack on the soles of our feet, and then that mill flew to a fiery finish. Jeehoopidderammity! It was simply gorgeous.

"We didn't have time to take it all in, howsomever, for after the first blast a big, black thing sailed over our heads with the fearfulest screech that ever scart a man to death.

Page 39

“‘Zeke,’ says William, hangin’ on to my neck, ‘did I hear somethin’, or is it that cussed green ink workin’?’

“‘I thought I observed a sound,’ says I; ‘and whatever it was lit yonder. Let’s go see.

“William hadn’t intended to go and see at all. In fact, I dragged him by the hair and belt the hull distance—not that I was exactly afraid, but nothin’ is so lonesome when you have company.

“There was a hole in a snowbank where whatever it was went in. I started to paw down, but William was for bunchin’ it.

“‘I tell you, let it be and hump yourself out’n here,’ says he. ‘It’s after me because I blew up the mill; it’s the devil, that’s what it is.’

“‘Is it?’ says I. ‘Well, let’s have a look at him. My veins is full of cream de menthy, and I’ll knock his horns off’n him if he gives me any lip.’

“Just then the snowbank heaved up. It wasn’t no devil—that is, not exactly. It was a lady. I’d a bet on it if I’d had time to think. I might have known there was no place on top of this footstool where E. G. W. Scraggs could rest his weary feet without some female happenin’ in the same spot at the same time. I should have took William’s advice, but it was now too late.

“We stood around kinder awk’ard, with her brushin’ snow from herself, till I says, ‘Well, good-evenin’, ma’am.’

“First off she says good-evenin’, too, out of surprise. Then she begun to talk altogether different. She described William and me by sections, goin’ into particulars, and nobuddy’d loaned us money on her recommend. I was used to this at home, so I spoke up nice and silent in our defense. There ain’t quite so much noise when only one is talkin.’

“Finally, when her breath give out, William says very humble, ‘Would you mind informin’ us, ma’am, how you come to be in these parts just now?’

“She explained fully that, in answer to an advertisement in the paper, she was slidin’ over to Squaw Creek. The advertisement called for a wife for a farmer, to be forty years old, or thereabouts, able to cook, plow, do washing and light blacksmith’s work, and to have a capital of five hundred dollars to invest in the concern.

“‘An’ now,’ says she, beginning to weep, ‘I’d camped in that mill, an’ I was only for steppin’ out to git a bit of a stick to cook me soopper, an’ I was on me way back, when a-r-rur-BOOMP! it ses, an’ where’s the five hoondred dollars that I left there, I dunno? Agghh woosha-woosha the day, ye divils, ye! An’ me hooped t’rough the air like a ol’



hat—bad cess to yer ugly faces! The cuss o' Crom'll lie heavy on ye for mistreatin' a poor, lone widdy woman!

“Well, ma'am,’ says I, ‘I wouldn’t take the loss of the money to heart. When the gentleman sees your face he won’t care.’ Usually, you can kinder edge around the rough places with that game of talk. But it didn’t go here.

Page 40

“Aggh, g’wan, ye bald-headed ol’ pepper-mint lozenger!’ she hollers. ‘D’ye s’pose I niwer see a lookin’-glass? Where’s the man’ll marry me widout me money? “Me face is me forchune, sor,” sez she. “Tek it to the gravel bank an’ have it cashed, then,” sez he. Where’s the man that’ll have me, face an’ all, lackin’ the coin? Woorra, woorra, answer me that!’

“Well, as usual, it was up to me. There wasn’t no escapin’ it. A man might just as well meet his fate smilin’ as trailin’ his lip on the ground, for my experiences teaches, dear friends and brothers, that Fate just naturally don’t care a wooden-legged tinker’s dam.

“‘Madam,’ says I, removin’ my hat and bowin’, ‘the honorable name of Scraggs is at your disposal.’

“‘Eh?’ says she. ‘What’s that you’re sayin’?’

“‘I repeat, plainly and sadly, ma’am, that one-fourteenth of my heart and hands is at your disposal.’

“‘Heh?’ says she again. ‘An’ what’s the one-foorteeneth mane?’

“‘I have now,’ I replies, ‘thirteen wives—’Before I could get another word out she was ra’rin.’

“‘Oh!’ she yells, ‘ye villyan! Ye long-legged blaggard! Ye hairless ol’ scoundrel of the world! How dast ye?’ She begun lookin’ around for a club, so I talked fast.

“‘It’s my religion, ma’am,’ says I. ‘I’m a Mormon by profession, mixed with accident. Think a minute before you do somethin’ that’ll cause general regret.’

“‘Well,’ she says, calmin’ down, ‘is there e’er an Oirish leddy in the lot?’

“‘Not one, up till this joyful present,’ I answers. ‘I don’t rightly know what country they hail from, but I can truthfully add that I’m not thinkin’ of takin’ up homestead rights there.’

“‘Aggh, g’long wid yer jokin’,’ says she, as kittenish as anything. ‘Yer only foolin’, ye are.’ “‘Ma’am,’ says I, ‘if you say the word I shall at once proceed to get my fiery, untamed skees and go gallopin’ over the mountains to make you the fourteenth Mrs. Scraggs with all speed and celery possible. You have only to speak to turn this dreadful uncertainty into a horrible fact. I pay for what I break; that’s me, Jo Bush.’

“‘Well, ain’t this suddent!’ she says. ‘But I’ll not stop ye from yer intentions—men is that set in their ways! Run along, now, loike a good choild!’

“‘Well, good-by, William!’ I says when we started, ‘You see how it is yourself!’

“He cried on my coat collar. I honest believe that grass-juice had a jump or two in it, so darned insijous a man wouldn’t notice.

“‘To think it was me brought this on,’ he hollers. ‘Me an’ my revengeful nature! You try to forgive me, Ezekiel. And we everlastingly did wind up that mill, anyhow!’

“‘William,’ says I, ‘take no heed. No man is above what happens to him, unless like he’d been atop of the mill when she dispersed. I forgive you—good-by.’”

Mr. Scraggs puffed his pipe thoughtfully. “Thirteen,” he ruminated, and shook his head. “Tell me not them mournful numbers.”

Page 41

"But," interrupted Charley, "I don't see as you was any worse off than before?"

"Me?" replied Mr. Scraggs in surprise. "Me? No, *I* wasn't any worse off. But, as I said before, inquire of the snake.

"Mrs. Mehitabel Thirteenth Scraggs opened up on me a few mornings after that, and my latest acquisition instantly laid hold of her by the hair of her head and beat her with a fryin'-pan till Number Thirteen had to take to her feet and stay that way for a week.

"*'You will talk to my ol' man like that, will you?'* says Bridget. 'Well, mind you this, now! If he nades batin' *I'll* bate him, but fur anny skimpy, yaller critter like yerself to so much as give him a sassy look I'll construe as a mortal offense. Run along, now, run along, and git him his breakfas', or I'll strangle ye with me foot!'

[Illustration: "*You will talk to my ol' man like that, will you?*"]

"No," said Mr. Scraggs, sadly. "I wasn't no worse off. If so it hadn't 'a' been Bridget took a drop too much at the drug-store one night, and another drop too much over the edge of the canon on the way home, I reckon I'd had some good out of life. But it wasn't to be, it wasn't to be. Drowned in the bud by the infloence of that cussed unlucky number, thirteen."

VI

MR. SCRAGGS INTERVENES

"There was a man," said Mr. Scraggs, "who said, 'Deliver me from my friends.' Now, I ain't goin' so far as to say I indorse that statement, nor I ain't standin' still so strong as to say I don't. But I know this: An enemy will do something for you every time, whilst most friends won't, and, moreover, I ain't ever had any enemy who furnished me with as much light entertainment as my friend Pete.

"I am speakin' from this here point of view. The real joyousness of life consists of being busy. We won't take no vote on the subjeck; we'll just admit it. Hence an enemy, that is an enemy, when you be in good health and able for to look after the enemy part from your side, is a great source of innercent amusement. A man gets so durn practical, he don't take no interest in all the pleasant rocks and bushes strewed over the country by the beneficent hand of Providence. He shacks along on his little old cayuse, with his mind occupied on how many things he can't do next, and he gits plumb disgusted. But suppose there's a chance of an able-bodied enemy, aided and abetted with a gun, a-hidin' behind each and every one of them rocks and bushes? Don't life take on an interest? I bet you money! The imaginations of that man's mind gets started up. Life becomes full of chances. The man, he's interested in his life because the other feller

wants to take it away from him. A good enemy in a lonesome country means more to that man than her best friend's widower means to a maiden aunt. You bet.

Page 42

"Red and me differs there, I know, but his idees gets sifted through that crop of red alfalfa he wears, whilst I present a clean proposition to any idee that comes boundin' o'er the lee, or to wind'ard, or any direction she chooses to bound. Yessir; when I begin to feel that life ain't worth livin' give me an enemy or a friend like Pete Douglass.

"It ain't for me to poke no fun at Pete's looks. There's a place where a humarious turn of mind orter stop. Pete's looks was too serious for any man to get comic about. It appeared as if his features had been blowed on to his face by a gale of wind; his whiskers had a horrified expression, like they'd made their escape if they hadn't been fastened on, and he was double-jointed in every point of the compass. When he stood up straight he give you more the impression of sittin' down then a man sick a-bed could. I dunno how it come, but everything old Pete looked like, seemed precisely the reverse.

"The way I got acquainted with Pete was when he put his hard coin agin a French tin-horn's race-track game. There was little horses running around a board, and you put your money where you thought it would win, but you never thought right, because the Dago had a stick under the table that pulled them races to suit his fancy.

"It stood to reason that taking money off'n a man who'd play such a game was inhumanity in the first degree, so when Pete's last dollar departed I entered that horse-race with a gun, just as I had no business to, and I says to the tin-horn, 'Look-a-here, you put that money across the board, or I'll play a tune on you,' and so he shouldn't think I was interferin' out of an idle curiosity, I pointed the weapon at him.

"'O-rrr righ'!' says he; 'Tooty-sweet.' I lost a good deal of patience on the spot. You see, it seemed like he was tryin' to be entertaining. I say, by way of an amooosin' remark, that I'm goin' to play a tune on that tin-horn, and he gayly tells me to toot sweet! Well, I don't want to harrow your feelin's. Anyway, Pete got his money and Frenchy returned to the land where his style of remarks was more appreciated, a little later.

"So Pete, he grasps my hand with tears in his eyes and considerable blood on his nose, where I'd accidently hit him with the Dago, and he says I'm his friend forever, and he'll show me what friendship really means. That's why I'm inclined to say that for rest and recreation I'll take an enemy. Whether our friend and brother, Mr. Douglass, was the luckiest or unluckiest man on earth, I've never been able to figger out. He personally explored the bottom of every old prospeck hole in the country. He was romantic by disposition, Pete was, and loved to go for walks at night. If he didn't turn up for breakfast I took down the coil of rope and proceeded until I found the right hole, because you could bet as safe that he was at the bottom of one of 'em as you could that the bottom itself was there.

Page 43

“When I asked him, ‘How come you to do it, Pete?’ he allus answered, ‘I dunno; I got to thinkin’ about somethin’.’ If anything valooable had occurred to Pete, whilst he was in one of them thinking spells, he’d have been one of these here geniuses.

“When a saw mill sent a slab sailin’, or bust a belt, Pete was at the center of the disturbed districk. He fell off every foot log in ten miles; why, he was drowned fourteen times in three weeks!

“The bar we was workin’ had a tunnel about a hundred foot long. Follerin’ the pay streak made us turn at right angles, so it was dark back there. One day Mr. Pete was pushin’ the car whilst I got dinner and his candle burned out. He takes a stick of giant powder, puts cap and fuse on it, lights it careful, jabs it in a frame for a candle, and trots for outdoors with the car—never knowin’ anything onusual had took place. Just as I slapped the last flapjack and straightened up to yell, ‘Come and get it!’ here come Pete and the car like magic right acrosst the creek, followed by the most dust I ever see in my life.

“I watched him end-over-ending as he come, and I couldn’t get near enough to the happenings to even wonder why.

“He landed on top of a quakin’ asp and the car rolled over the dinner.

“I ain’t declarin’ that I was perfectly reasonable; I was surprised. When I was young and soople I’ve done twenty-odd foot in a running jump, but to see a man jump two hundred foot and carry a hand-car along with him was a branch of sport new to me, and perticler when done by a man like Pete.

“‘Why,’ says I, as I climb the tree and helped him down, ‘however did you come to do it?’

“‘I dunno, Zeke,’ says he, ‘honest to Gosh’—Pete never used a cuss-word—‘honest to Gosh,’ says he; ‘I dunno. The last I remember was thinkin’ why this here law of gravitation couldn’t be made to work as a man wanted it, when “bump” says somethin’ behind me, and I went right along, as you see. I tried to figger it out, comin’, but turning handsprings made me dizzy.’

“These are points to show life as lived by my friend Pete Douglass. His autogeography would be plumb full of happenin’s. At first sight, lookin’ careless, you’d say, ‘Why, here’s the most unforchinit cuss I ever heard about,’ but on a sober thought, to a man accustomed to havin’ sober thoughts, it seemed as if there was luck in the bank, to pull through such performances and live to tell the tale.

“I mentioned this idee to Pete.

“‘Why’ says he, ‘I should holler horray every time I’m most killed,’ he says. ‘Is that what you mean?’

“‘Look-a-here,’ says I, ‘I’m able to mean all I’m capable of meanin’ without any outside help. I mean you’re the great human paradox—less human and more paradox then I’ve seen advertised at a circus—and whilst you’re perpetual dodging one horn or t’other of a dilemma, any friend of yours is getting bunked square between the two. If anything ‘ud keep a man from being selfish, you would,’ says I. ‘D——d if I ain’t spent two-thirds of my time and drewed some on the last, fishin’ you out of messes. Now,’ I says to him, ‘why don’t you get married and settle up?’

Page 44

"Dear friends and brothers, that was just a piece of pursyflage. I know women better than any man I ever met that I felt knew less. I've seen wimmen so foolish I wouldn't believe anything more foolish could exist, if it hadn't a-been I'd seen still more foolish wimmen with these same eyes. But a woman who'd marry Pete was beyond my expectations. It took a lady with a turble brain-power and a deliberate intention to arrive at that state of mind; so when Pete says to me, 'That's just what I be goin' to do, Zeke,' he had me swallowing my breath.

"I gathered my fadin' strength and gained perticlars.

"Seems there was a lady 'bout thirty or forty years older than she oncet had been, who did plain washin' for the Royal Soverign Prince boys. The R. S. P. mine was run rather irregular. The boys took the clean-ups for wages, and the owner took the proceeds from stock he sold as dividends. I may mention there was less in clean-ups than there was in stock, so the future Mrs. P. Douglass was buckin' fate in the shape of a brace game. They was an awful nice set of boys, the Royal Soverign Princes, but when you divide thirty dollars and fifty cents amongst fifteen men for a month's wages, the washer-lady can't expect city prices.

"Pete had gained a holt on this lady's affections by falling into the flume and allowin' himself to be piped over the waste-gate. She took care of him for three weeks, at the end of which time Pete arose, renewed, refreshed, and more full of determined uselessness than ever. Any woman will love any man that bothers her enough. A man's idee of romance is to do what he wants to, or to be comfortable; a woman's idee of romance is to feel that she's obliged to do what she really wants to do, under such circumstances as will allow her to call it a great sackerfice, or to be made uncomfortable, which is her real notion of comfort. You have only to look at a woman's housekeepin' to reelize the restfulness she finds in keepin' things disturbed all the time. I have looked upon the housekeepin' of enough Mrs. Scraggses to be able to speak with the v'ice of experience, if not the v'ice of wisdom.

"So Mrs. Maggy Watson, the lady of which I heretofore speak, become unamored of Pete during the time he was such a pesky nuisance around the place, an' when he writ her, later, that he thought they'd orter form a close corporation an' issue the holy bonds of matrimony, why, she writ him straight back again that the scheme had been in her mind for some time, and she'd 'a' mentioned it to him only it seemed like meddlin' in his personal affairs.

"First off, it seems a-kind of unjustitude that a man like me should have a load of Mrs. Scraggses forced on him, whilst a man like Pete gets the kindest and obliginest sort of woman; but after all, I was able to take care of myself, and that bunch of wild cats, too, for a while, and Pete certainly needed a lady with a good disposition. You'll allus find, on investigatin' things, that they ain't a mite worse than you thought they was. Mighty

often it is the horny-handed foot of misfortune that kicks a man into the green pastures of prosperity—the only question is: kin he eat grass?

Page 45

“So it come about with Pete, all along the line. He’d gone and got married so ordinary it wouldn’t attracted nobuddy’s attention, only he was so overjoyed to find that I took sides with him that he sasshayed gayly forth for firewood and cut himself in the small of the back with the ax. Don’t ask me how he done it, It’s the only case on record. Pete was thinkin’ of somethin’ at the time, and could only remember a sudden pain in the back. So Pete was laid on the bed of sufferin’ oncet more, him bein’ so uset to it he took it without a holler, only this time he thought it was prutty serious.

“‘Zeke,’ says he, ‘I’ve come to the cash-up so frequent I dunno just what’s about to happen, but if it should be I was goin’ to die for fair this time, I want Maggy to git my money, and I want you to take it to her.’

“‘All right, Pete, I will,’ says I.

“‘Shack along, then,’ says he.

“‘Pete mixed me some. ‘I ain’t goin’ to leave you like this,’ I says.

“‘Yes, you be, too,’ he says, sassy as thunder. ‘The only time I kin git what I want is when I’m sick a-bed. I ain’t goin’ to rest happy nor do nothin’—not eat nor drink—till I know that woman has the chink. I can’t say I’ve made a great job of livin’, but I’m goin’ to die like a house a-fire, if so the play comes that way,’ he says. ‘You put a little grub and water nigh me, and I’ll just figger on being a full-sized man for oncet; you don’t understand what a power of good it does me to think about it,’ says he.

“‘Well, he had me to a standstill. It was cussed to leave a hurt man all alone, but I could easy appreciate the way he felt. If a man can’t take no pride in himself the hull blamed business comes down to shovelin’ dirt for nothin’.

“‘Pete, I’ll do it,’ I says, and I shook hands with him.

“‘Now, see that!’ says he. ‘That’s the first time you’ve ever treated me like an ekal, Zeke; and I can tell you I don’t like to be pitied no more’n any other man. God knows there wouldn’t ‘a’ been a perter monkey in the bunch, if so it hadn’t come I was scart, or thinkin’ of somethin’ else, when a hot-box arrived. The good Lord took the trouble to make me, and it seems kind of onjustifiable for me to prove He plumb wasted His time. You tell Maggy I done it for her. I ain’t hidin’ my light under a bushel, because I need it to see by. Ouch!’ says he. ‘This racket hurts!’

“‘I reckon it did. I sewed him up with a piece of deer-sinew and a darning-needle. Never was a great hand at tailorin’, nohow, and Pete’s hide was that tough I mostly had to pound the needle through with a chunk of wood.

“‘Well, I fixed him comfortable as I could, and prepared to start.



“‘Zeke,’ says he, ‘don’t—he kinder swallowed hard—‘don’t be no longer’n you kin help,’ says he. There come a tear in his eye. ‘An’ take my respects to Maggy,’ says he.

“‘Shaw, Pete!’ says I. ‘Now, don’t you go borrowin’ no trouble—that’s so easy to git without collateral, it ain’t worth the time. I’ll be back imejate.’ I patted him on the shoulder and he squeezed my hand hard.

Page 46

“No man could be a better pardner than you be, Zeke,” says he. “I ain’t a mite afraid of nothin’ when that bald head of your’n is in sight, an’ you understand a feller—it’s a tough play for a rooster that don’t come by sand natural.”

“You got plenty of sand, Pete,” says I, “all the trouble is, you let it git choked in your hoppers. By-by.” And away I went, slopin’ fast, with Pete’s forty-eight dollars down in my jeans.

“I was so took up with his affairs I didn’t watch out careful, and that ain’t wise in a hard-luck country. All of a sudden I hears a v’ice say, ‘Puttee hands light uppee!’ Sounds like I’d struck a day nursery, but that ain’t so, for just before I hears them words there popped out from behind a rock a Chinaman—not, by no means, one of these here little Charlie-boys that does your wash and gives you a ticket with picters of strange insecks painted on it, but a whoopin’, smashin’ old Tartar pirate, seven foot by three, with mustaches like two tails of a small hoss, and cheekbones you could hang your hat on. More’n that, he was armed and equipped with two hoss-pistols as required by circumstances.

“That tired feelin’ come over me, and I stretched; yessir, the hands of E. G. W. Scraggs went up toward the sky.

“My yaller friend next requested me to produce. Well, now, that was Pete’s money. I’d ‘a’ took a chance at v’ilent physicule exercises, but I see the time had come to talk.

“My Christian friend and brother,” says I, “before we converse upon the root of all evil, let me put you on to the fact that my name is E. G. W. Scraggs.”

“Ah!” says he, backin’ up, “Sclaggsee!”

“Sclaggsee!” I hollers, and we near met on the spot. “Don’t you say that agin!”

“Ah!” says he.

“I noticed his guns was wobblin’.

“Ah!” says I. “You’re darned right. Now, I’ll make you this proposition. I got forty-eight dollars in my pocket that don’t belong to me. If we let things slide by as if they had not happened I’ll give you two dollars for the use of that money until Tuesday next—pay you fifty dollars next Tuesday, at Jimmy Holt’s place—get me?”

“Gettee money now,” says he, cunnin’.

“P’raps,” says I, “but you won’t be in condition to spend it for some time.” He rolled his eye off’n me, and at that instant Mary Ann, the faithfulest gun that ever stood between me and a gentleman whose intentions weren’t good, appeared upon the scene.

“Don’tee shootee, Sclaggsee!’ he screeches.

“You call me “Sclaggsee” oncet more, and I won’t leave nothin’ of you but a rim,’ says I. ‘As for the other proposition, it goes—Tuesday next. Jimmy Holt’s place, I put you in hand fifty dollars, you cock-eyed, yaller, mispronouncin’ blasphemy on a heathen idol! Although I ain’t been near enough to a cherry tree to cut one down, the word of Ezekiel George Washington Scraggs is as good as the Father of his Country,’ says I. ‘He beat me at that last game, but I can stick to my sayin’ like a porous plaster. You get the money; I will lie for the fun of the thing, but not for no dirty fifty dollars,’ says I. ‘You goin’ toward town?’

Page 47

“‘Yes,’ says he.

“‘Well, git your plug, and we’ll amble along together.’

“So we rode in, right cheerful, instead of quar’lin’. I made him come along to Maggy’s cabin, to show it weren’t a bluff about the money.

[Illustration: “So we rode in, right cheerful.”]

“Poor Maggy, she wipes her eye on her apron, and says she’ll start for our camp at oncet.

“I called the Chinaman aside, confidential. “‘You take care of lady!’ I shrieks at him. ‘Lady—you take care!’ I dunno why it is you think if you holler loud enough you can make a man understand anything, but it’s a fact.

“My chink bobs his head. ‘Take clare laly,’ he says.

“‘Yaas!’ says I. ‘I rustley monnellee!’

“He bobs his head again.

“‘Lusselleemonellee!’ he answers, kind of vacant.

“I sot down. ‘Twas clear he didn’t have no idee of my conversation. So we went over it for two hours, me drawin’ maps and wigglin’ my fingers, and makin’ faces to illustrate a man with an ax-cut in the small of his back, and a lone widder-woman takin’ care of him, till at last, by bringin’ hands, face, and feet all into the game, with a small hunk of kerfoozled English language here and there, a light broke on his heathen soul. He near bobbed his head off.

“‘Me makee all lightee for Sclaggsee, you bettee, hellee dammee!’ says he.

“He was that earnest I overlooked the name. ‘Good,’ says I. ‘Now, Charlie, you cut wood, haul water, and keep things goin’ out there and your fifty is waitin’ for you on Tuesday.’

“Maggy did a crow-hop when she found she had to travel with the chink, but I told her it was O.K., so she got aboard an Injin pony and off they goes to Pete.

“Well, dear friends and brothers, I sincerely hope you’ve never had to raise fifty dollars in a busted camp. The boys done the best they could, but a can of corn had to stand for fifty cents, and a pair of pants that would take Tartar Charlie somewheres about the knees drew a credit of two-fifty. Four iron knives and a busted coffee-pot stood for a case, and a pair of scissors with one blade broke half off, and a mouth-organ that only

sounded in spots, was equal to two iron dollars. I got eighteen fifty in cash and the balance was junk.

“‘Well,’ says I, ‘he’s no better’n a road-agent, and I can’t help it, nohow.’

“For all that, I sot in Jim Holt’s place of a Tuesday afternoon feelin’ low-spirited when I looked at the heap, when who comes sailin’ in at the door but Tartar Charlie, wearin’ a grin that took two turns and a half around his face.

“‘Laly comee!’ says he. ‘Petee comee!’

“‘On what?’ says I, ashamed to show surprise to a yaller Chinaman.

“‘Joss man fetchee!’ says he.

“‘Certainly!’ says I. ‘That’s what he ought to do; don’t get excited.’ I did my wonderin’ about the joss man in private. ‘Sit down, Charlie.’

Page 48

"So Charlie, he sot down and watched me rifflin' the cards.

"'Playee poker?' says he.

"'As a relaxiation, Charles,' says I. 'Poker is a business for gentlemen of means—gottee nomonee!'

"'Me stakee you,' says he. 'Likee poker.'

"So Jim and some of the other boys come over, and Charlie and me begun to draw cards. After we dubbed through a few deals, gettin' on to each other's play, I see Charlie stow away a pair of aces. Now, ordinarily, I'd complained, but, under the circumstances, it didn't appear to me to be the decent thing to do, so I motioned to Jim, and he slid me a pack with the same sort of backs.

"After that you never in all your borned days see such hands on a poker table. Why, a king-full wasn't worth raisin' back on. A set of fours was the least a man could have confidence in, and only if it was on his own deal, at that.

"Howsomever, havin' a hull pack at my disposal, whilest Charlie could only use his hold-outs, I worked him down to tin cans of vegetables, the busted coffee-pot, and the pants.

"He, bein' as game as any white man, jack-potted the lot. It was just draw cards and show down for the money. Darned if he didn't get the best of me.' How I come to pick out the queen of diamonds to match a straight club flush is one of them things that won't be revealed till Judgment Day. There wasn't nobuddy more surprised than me. This brought us down to even Stevens, and I felt irritated, so I come back at him with one play for the bunch. He agreed, and I dealt him four aces, pat. I was going to draw to fill my straight color. I snaked out the three I had on my knee, and was just goin' to insert 'em where they'd do the most good, when Pete's v'ice says: 'Well, Zeke!'

"It was a joyful v'ice, but I knowed he'd seen my play. I dropped them cards.

"'One minute, Pete,' says I. I called across the table to Charlie, 'Show openers and win!' And when he laid down them bullets I'd give him with my own hands, my heart broke inside me. But I couldn't stand for a crooked play seen by Old Pete.

"I hopped up from the table and shook his hand, I shook Maggy's hand, where she stood, smilin' bashful, and then I shook the hand of a strange gent in black clothes, whose name was Mr. Somethin'-or-other.

"Pete explained to me that the gent was a minister travelin' through the country, who'd offered him and Maggy a ride to town. 'We thought we might as well get hitched at the same time,' says Pete, 'and I sure wanted to see you, Zeke.'

“‘Yes,’ says Maggy. ‘It wouldn’t seem right to get married without you bein’ there, Mr. Scraggs. To think of what you’ve done for Pete! And that Charley High-ball there is just the blesseddest angel that ever was! Why, he got some stuff in the woods and put it on Pete’s back, and made him well in a minute, you might say. And there warn’t nothin’ he wouldn’t do for us. And I’m just the happiest woman ever was,’ says Maggy, wipin’ her eyes on her apron some more.

Page 49

“Well!’ says I, brisk, tryin’ to forgit that lost fifty. ‘Why don’t you and Pete sign the pledge right here and now?—how’s that, friend?’ I asks the minister.

“Why, ah! says he. ‘Ah! It doesn’t seem quite the proper place—’

“What’s the matter with this place?’ says Jim. He took a great pride in his saloon. He had glass mirrors up that cost him a hundred plunks apiece. ‘If you think,’ says he, ‘that there’s a prettier little joint in town than this, why, don’t let me keep you.’

“That minister was cut out fer the business. He hedged his bet so quick, I admired him.

“That’s just it,’ he says loud and hearty. ‘I look upon matrimony as a solemn affair, and I was afraid our friends would be distracted from the seriousness of the ceremony by the surroundings.’

“Don’t say a word!’ says Jim, wavin’ his hand. ‘You have put the next round on me; but I guess Pete and Maggy has had seriousnesses enough, just as she slides—heh?’

“You’re talkin’ blue checks, Jim,’ says Maggy, through her apron. ‘I don’t reckon I’ll ever get too gay to hurt me, nor Pete, nuther.’

“Very well,’ says the minister—and we had the weddin’. Charlie High-ball burnt punk that smelled strong but fine, and swung his arms, Jim and the rest of the boys sayin’ ‘amen’ every time there come a stop, and all the proceedin’s goin’ on grand, till the preacher got to the last of it, and then Pete broke in:

“I copper that statement,’ says he. ‘I wouldn’t run against you for the world, old man, but here I got to. We ain’t “man” and wife, for I ain’t never been a man since I growed up: Maggy, she’s the man and wife both. Say “husband and wife,” to oblige.’

“The preacher looked at Pete mighty kind.

“Husband and wife,’ says he. Then Maggy busted out, ‘He’s the best man that ever lived!’ says she.

“May you live long and happy years together,’ says the preacher, and he had a different look on his face—more’s if it was a pleasure instead of business he was attendin’ to.

“Whilest we stood there, kinder awk’ard, Charley made a high play. He gathered all his winnings in a heap. ‘For laly,’ says he, makin’ her a bow.

“Maggy, she cried. Everybody’d been so good to her, she said, and she weren’t able to turn a hand for her part, and so forth, and we was all kind of pleasantly miserable for a while, till Jim sings out, ‘Here, this ain’t no weddin’ hilarity—guide right to the bar!’

“There we all lined up, Charlie High-ball and all.

“‘What’ll you have, sir?’ says Jim, askin’ the minister first out of manners.

“‘The same as the rest,’ says the minister like a man.

“‘Mr. Scraggs?’ says Jim.

“‘Ginger ale, says I. And every man and woman took ginger ale, which is a beverage that ’ud drive a man to drink. Howsomever, we showed that preacher he didn’t hold over us, speck nor color, when it come to a showdown. And he savvied the play, too. He watched the line drinkin’ its ginger ale.

Page 50

“Gentlemen,’ says he, ‘I’m glad to know you—I think I’ll stay in your town a while, but now’—and he kind of twinkled around the eyes—‘I hope you will excuse me.’ With that he vanished, leaving us to take a little antidote for that there ginger ale.

“And Pete and Maggy? Well, dear friends and brothers, you never saw nothin’ like it—they think as much of each other as two men would! And the way Pete can iron a b’iled shirt is a wonder. . . . Yaas; he found his job at last; plain and decorative ironin’. Often I’ve seen Maggy, holdin’ up a batch of clo’s, with pride just oozin’ out of her, and heard her say, ‘There ain’t a person in these here United States that kin slip a flatiron over dry-goods the way my Pete kin.’”

VII

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

“Once upon a time,” said Mr. Scraggs, “there come a profound peace on my household. It was ‘Zeke, what kin I give you for dinner to-day?’ and ‘Zeke’ this and that, until I says to myself, ‘We’re going to have cyclones followed by a heavy frost if I tarry here,’ so I pulled my freight to Arizona, till this unnatural condition of things passed away. I understand Mrs. Scraggs in her war-paint, but Mrs. Scraggs with her eyes uprolled to Heaven and a white dove perched on each and every ear is a thing I’m not goin’ to witness the spoilin’ of, if I kin help it.

“I loafed around a little town, wearin’ the counters shiny, entertainin’ myself every minute by wonderin’ what in thunder I’d do with the next one, till Fate, that’s always seemed ready and eager to butt into my affairs, sent me down to the railroad station one morning.

“There got off’n the train a little stout man, with a clean baby skin and clean baby eyes. He looked as if he’d got born into this wicked world with a bald spot, gray side-whiskers and a pair of gold-rimmed specks. He made me feel sad—not that he weren’t cheerful enough, but his rig was that of a parson, and a parson naturally reminded me of matrimony, and there was only one thing worse than loafing around Jim Creek, and that was matrimony. ‘Yes,’ I says to myself, lookin’ at that nice, clean old gentleman, ‘he little knows the trouble he’s made in this world. And yet,’ thinks I, willing to be square, ‘I don’t know as you could have kept ‘em apart, even if there weren’t no ministers. Man is born to trouble as a powder-mill is to fly upward. Male and female He made ‘em, after their kind; and it’s only reasonable that they’ve been after their kind ever since. And more’n that, that gentleman would have checked my wild career—he’d have held me down to one. So why should I wish to walk on his collar?’

“Whilest I was Hamlettin’ to myself like that the old boy talked to the station agent. Billy leaned on the truck and pointed to me. ‘There’s your man right now,’ says he; ‘Mr. E. G.

Washington Scraggs, the most famous guide and hunter in Arizona. I ain't got a doubt you can secure his services,' and off goes Billy.

Page 51

“Railroad men get used to takin’ life on the run, from eatin’ to jokes. Bill never waited to see the effect of his little spring on me.

“My friend comes up to me. ‘Is this Mr. Scraggs?’ he says.

“‘I am a modest man by nature,’ says I; ‘and yet I cannot deny it.’

“He made me a bow. I made him a bow.

“‘I am told, Mr. Scraggs,’ says he, ‘that you are a celebrated guide and hunter?’

“‘If you go through this land believing all that’s told you,’ says I, ‘you’ll have a queer sensation in your head. However, I can do plain guiding and hunting, all right. What am I to guide, and who am I to hunt?’

“‘I shall explain to you,’ says he, taking off his specks and tapping his hand with ‘em—he was a nice, home-raised old gentleman, but he sure did think his own affairs was interesting. ‘It is this way,’ says he: ‘my ministerial labors have—er—exhausted, that is to say, prostrated me. My physician insisted I should come to this climate, where I am told it is exceedingly dry and healthful, and live entirely out-of-doors; to return to our healing mother, Nature; to salute the rosy youth of Morning from a couch of sod, to bid farewell to Day from some yearning height, far from the petty madness of cities—what did you say, Mr. Scraggs?’

“‘I said “Ya-a-s,”’ says I, quick, because I’d forgot myself a trifle.

“‘Ah!’ says he, waving his specks in enthusiasm. ‘The abiding peace of a life like yours!—I beg your pardon?’

“‘I have an attack of this here bronco-kitus,’ says I. ‘I cough almost like conversation—go on.’

“‘To live,’ says he, ‘in the great peace of these enormous spaces—to spread God’s clean sky above you and pass into a sleep where this sweet air shall hush me through the night, like the wind from angels’ wings. With what a sick longing have I looked for this!

“‘That’s it!’ says I. ‘Pardner, you’ve struck it. There ain’t one man in a thousand thinks of tuckin’ the sky around him when he turns in, but many a time when I’ve shoveled the last batch of centipedes and tarantulas into the fire, petted a side-winder good-night, and fired a farewell shot at a scalplock vanishin’ over the hill, I’ve thought that same thing. Oh! the soothin’ gooley-woo of windin’ yourself up in a bright-colored sunset and lyin’ down to peaceful dreams! I sleep too hard to remember about the angels’ wings.’

"I spoke so earnest he swallowed me whole. 'Centipedes and tarantulas,' says he, musin' (evidently he hadn't figured on 'em); 'an' what is a "side-winder," Mr. Scraggs?"

"A "side-winder," sir,' says I, 'is a rattlesnake who travels on the bias, as I've heard my wife remark about her clothes—he's a kind of Freemason; he lets you in on the level and out on the queer."

"Rattlesnake?' says he; 'ha—hum—rattlesnake, yes, yes, yes—not dangerous, I hope?"

"Oh, no!' says I. 'He bites you up somewhat, but it's only play.'

Page 52

“Right here he got off a joke. It took some time—I see it comin.’

“Rather dangerous *play*, that, Mr. Scraggs, heh?’ says he. ‘Ha, ha, ha!’

“Well, I reckon I enjoyed that joke as much as he did—the two of us laughed for five minutes. But, somehow, he looked so simple and innocent and foolish, my heart bucked on guyin’ him. There wasn’t no bad pretensions about him; it was only that the old ladies had told him he was a wonder so long, he’d been more’n a man if he hadn’t come to believe it—it’s pretty medium hard to keep to cases under them conditions. That’s what made him cough so deep and important, and stand there with a frown on his brow, lookin’ as if he knew a heap more than he could understand.

“I side-stepped. ‘I gather,’ says I, ‘you want to go campin’,’ and you want me to pilot you?’

“He just beamed on having the puzzle solved so simple, ‘That’s it exactly,’ says he.

“‘I guessed it almost from the first,’ says I. ‘Well, we want a team and blankets and a camp kit; that’ll cost something.’

“‘It isn’t a question of cost,’ said he, pulling out a cucumber and skinnin’ much money off the top of it. ‘You take that and secure what we need.’

“‘I’ll do what’s right by you,’ says I, and meant it. That afternoon the Rev. Percival Mervin and Mr. E. G. W. Scraggs pulled out with a team of mules for parts unknown. I had no more idee what kind of land we were runnin’ into than Percival himself; howsomever, one country’s a great deal like another, after all. But I gave him the history as we journeyed—oh, sure! Hadn’t he come out for pleasure?

“‘There,’ says I, p’inting with the whip, ‘is Dooley’s Pillar, so called because a man by the name of Dooley, helped only by his widow, stood off eight ravagin’, tearin’ savages there for three weeks.’

“‘Good-ness gra-cious!’ says Percival. ‘And did they escape?’

“‘The Injuns? Oh, yes; they got away.’

“‘No, I mean the Dooleys.’

“‘Yes, they got away, too; everybody got out all right—only the name stayed.’

“‘I should have thought there would have been bloodshed,’ says he, astonished and a little disappointed, too, for all he was such a kind-hearted little man.



“‘It come mighty near it,’ says I; ‘mighty. The only reason there weren’t was because the Injuns couldn’t get at ’em—don’t you notice that cliff at the bottom?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Well, that goes completely around, and it ain’t climbable, so the Injuns had to stay down.’

“‘I see,’ says he; and we rode three mile before he said: ‘But how did the Dooleys get there?’

“‘They was ketched by a tornado in Sore-toe Canon, over yonder,’ says I, ‘and blowed right to the top—the Injuns chasin’ ’em horseback and shootin’ at ’em on the wing.’

“Percival he cleaned his glasses, looked hard at Dooley’s Pillar, and give me his honest opinion.

Page 53

“‘It,’ says he, ‘is very remarkable.’

“I looked at him. It was; but too much like taking a loan out of a blind beggar’s hat. ‘F I’d been a decent man I’d quit. There was a fatal fascination about Percival, though—you wondered how much he *would* swallow—kind of spurred you up to heave something at him he’d see wasn’t so. It needed a better man than me to do it. You never in all your life heard of such things as took place along that route. As he said, it made him glad to think he’d got holt of a man who had the history of the country at his fingers’ ends.

“He showed nothing but a thirst for information when I pointed out Grant’s Leap—the place where General Grant hopped to safety with three Apache arrows sticking in the fulness of his pants.

“‘Why!’ says Percival, ‘I never heard that General Grant was out in this country.’

“I shook my head wise. ‘No,’ says I; ‘he kept it dark.’

“‘Nothing against his good name, I hope?’ says he, anxious.

“‘Not at all,’ says I, warm. ‘He done it to oblige a friend—it was told me in confidence, so I can’t say more.’

“Just then we made a turn that brought Grant’s Leap into better view. I’d thought it was a narrer slit, but it ’ud be a good horse-pistol that could carry across.

“‘General Grant must have been very agile as a young man,’ says Percival.

“‘Not at all,’ says I. ‘It ain’t mor’n fifty feet, and that was before he was all wore out runnin’ for the Presidency.’

“‘Oh, I see,’ says Percival. ‘Don’t think I meant to doubt you.’

“‘I didn’t,’ says I, my conscience biting me again.

“There was no help for it, though; he had to have a story of every queer-looking hole, rock, tree, or mud-puddle we saw. There was one spooky-looking tree, dead on one side. ‘Now,’ thinks I, ‘I shall lay you out and quit.’

“So I told him about how the vigilantes had wrongly suspected a man who peddled rubber hose of a murder, overtook him under that very tree, and, lacking rope, strung him with a section of his own goods, riding away without a look behind them. When the poor lad was yanked off the horse the hose stretched so his feet touched the ground: he gave a jump, went up high enough to loose the strain, swallowed a mouthful of air, and so forth. His hands being strapped behind him he couldn’t help himself, but for



three days he hopped up and down there, securing light refreshment by biting the leaves off the tree, which, strange to say, never put out green leaves on that side again.

“And then he was rescued? Who did it?”

“He was—the vigilantes did it. The reason they suspected him was that they found a receipted bill for fifty feet of garden hose in Ike’s, the murdered man’s, pocket. Knowing perfectly well that Ike never paid a bill in his life, that looked suspicious, but when they come to look at it closer they see the bill was made out to another man, and they hustled back. The pedler was game, though weary. They raised an ax to free him, but he hollers—one word to the jump—“Don’t—waste—too—much—hose!”

Page 54

"Percival put his hand on my shoulder. I thought my little effort would receive at least a smile, and was preparin' to join in, when he says:

"Think of the state of that innocent man's mind for those three days!"

"Well, I tried to, to oblige Percival, but I just naturally couldn't; if it hadn't been a nut come loose under the wagon there'd been nothing left for me but to die right there.

"Only one thing marred the trip. We run across a man who asked where we was going.

"Oh, out a little way!" says I.

"He looked at Percival. 'Here a minute!' says he. I went over to him. 'Look out for your eye!' he whispered. 'The 'Paches are up.'

"Well, I never paid any more attention to a man predictin' Injun troubles than I do to a farmer's kickin' about the weather, so I thanked him and we strolled on. I explained to Percival that the man was the well-known desperado, James Despard, of the Bloody Hand, and he was askin' me if I'd met any of his enemies.

"He didn't look fierce,' says Percival.

"That's his lay,' says I; 'he goes up to a man and don't look fierce, and the first thing you know there's a funeral.'

"About sunset we hit the place we aimed for: a nice, high spot with a pool of water, overlooking the valley for miles. It was straight on three sides, and a hard pull for the mules on the other; but a patch of grass to the back, timber handy, and the lookout it gave you, together with the water, made it worth the climb. Besides, it was the very spot where the Roosian Prince Porkandbeansky camped, time I guided him ten years before. I told Percival all about the Prince whilst I was cooking supper, thus giving him a line on the proper way to behave. It was enough to say the Prince done so-and-so—or didn't—to bring Percival into line easy for the rest of the trip.

"Well, we couldn't get under that blue coverlid of Percival's any too quick that night. I didn't mind a blanket thrown in, nor him, neither, for it was colder'n sin. We was good and tired. Broad sun-up when we woke.

"Percival, he flew around like a cock-sparrer. Happy! The Lord save us! He sung little hymns, and trotted every step he took, his sun-burnt little nose gleamin' with joy. It done you good to look at him. I took as much pride in him as though he was my sister's eldest—taught him to do this and that, till he was fit to bust with the glory of bein' such a camper. And forty times a day he'd explain to me how glad he was that I'd been his guide; how much he'd have missed otherwise. I suppose them yarns I told him had

added to his romantic ideas about living uncomfortably out-of-doors, but every time he said it I felt mean again.

Page 55

“Still, Satan mischief always finds for idle hands to do. After about five days of loafin’ I turned the conversation to the uncertainty of things in general; we talked a good deal about it. I gradual come to particulars, and producin’ a pack of playin’-cards, proceeded to show Percival how odd five of ’em dealt at a time would come out. He was interested, and I suggested that he sh’d take five, too, and he did; and the first thing you know I had everything that Percival owned, owin’ to his misjudging the way them cards would fall. Then we divided again and went at it. At the end of the next week I was proud of Percival. He fronted me out of a plump jackpot without a tremble of a gray whisker, but, to save me, I couldn’t get him to play cards. He said it was wicked and led to gamblin’—I dunno but what he’s right at that. We had lots of fun with the Uncertainty of Things, anyhow, and saved our morals.

“At the end of three weeks us two was twin brothers. Old Percy told me in confidence he hadn’t had a real friend for years before. And I liked him, you bet. We all has got our faults—why, even Mrs. Scraggs isn’t free from ’em—but you scratch them off the top of Percival and you found a white man—the most trusting little critter in God and man, the kindest-hearted and the best-natured that ever lived. Honest, I couldn’t sleep nights sometimes, thinking of the lies I told him, and if I’d never slept I couldn’t ‘a’ quit—it was like leaving a starvin’ nigger in charge of a hencoop.

“So things ambled along—not a jar. No rain, no crawling thing to spoil our fun, till one day just before dinner—Percy and me sittin’ there with the blankets between us and our beans counted out at the side, raisin’ and cross-liftin’ each other, him having drawed one card whilst I took two to a pair of tens and a kicker, and made four tens—a shadder fell on the blanket. Percy was too busy wondering whether he’d better see my last raise to notice, but your Uncle Zeke has lived so long in lonesome and sometimes unhealthy places that the chill of that shadder, comin’ so noiseless and unexpected, fell on his soul. Before I raised my eyes I looked at the shadder close; yes, there was a gun, and it was also an Injun.

“There ain’t anything an Injun likes better than to sit tight and enjoy a cinch. He won’t kill you as long as he can get some fun out of you.

“I ain’t savin’ what I felt, but old pink-and-white Percival was there, babe in the woods dependin’ on me, and me covered by an Apache rifle!

“‘How!’ says I, throwin’ it careless over my shoulder.

“There was a still second. Then the Injun answers, ‘Huh!’

“Percy looked up, pleased and surprised.

“‘Why, there’s an Indian!’ says he.

“Go on with the game,’ says I, cross. ‘Don’t stare at him—he has feelin’s.’

“Percy got red. ‘I beg your pardon!’ he says to the Injun—then to me: ‘What does he want?’

Page 56

"I made up my mind Percy wasn't goin' to be scart if I could help it. If he *had* to go let him go quick, without waiting. They made me wait once, and while it didn't come to nothing, I don't think I should ever really care for it.

"'He wants to rassel me,' I answers. 'Great people for sports, Injuns, and curious how they go at it. He expects me to surprise him—let's see, how many have you got there?'

"I bent over, to get my legs loose, so I could jump, and also to get a quick peep at circumstances. There wasn't but the lone buck. I worked the cat racket. You know how a cat does? She sits still, thinkin' 'I'm goin' to move fast in a minute—I sure *am* goin' to move fast in a minute,' until she gets such a head of steam on, she's off before she knows it. That's just what I done, exactly. I was all over that Injun, kicked his gun out of reach and heaved him over the steepest side before you could say 'Keno.'

[Illustration: "I was all over that Injun."]

"Percy was surprised and displeased. He put on his specks and trotted quick to the edge.

"'Washington,' says he, 'you have hurt that man!'

"'Oh, I guess not,' says I. 'He's used to this country.'

"I hadn't hurt him half as much as I'd liked. If you slapped a white man straight down a hundred foot on top of a pile of rocks he'd depart like a Christian, but my red friend and brother promptly wriggled off behind the boulders.

"I dassen't shoot. There might be a twenty of 'em in hearing, and, besides, no need of worryin' poor Percy, trustin' E. G. W., any sooner than I had to.

"'It seems to me, Washington,' says Percy, 'that's very rough play.'

"'Percy,' says I, 'as you may have read, an Injun don't care so much about being hurt as he does for supportin' his family pride. If I'd only chucked him fifteen foot or so he'd thought I didn't respect his powers of endurance proper, and like enough wouldn't 'a' spoke to me if we met.'

"'Well, of course, *you* know all about these things,' he says. 'But to me it is very surprising.'

"'Percy,' says I to him again, real earnest, 'if a man took note of all the things in this world that are surprisin' it wouldn't be no time before every tree in the forest looked like an exclamation mark to him.'

"'I suppose,' says Percy, waggin' his head, wise, 'that's quite true.'

“And if there’d been fifty million Injuns ready to fricassee us the next minute I couldn’t ‘a’ helped havin’ another attack of that bronco-kitus that troubled me so.

“But your Uncle Zeke wasn’t so cussed hilarious for the next four days. I expected that Injun back with his friends every minute, and what with watchin’ all night and joshin’ Percy all day I was plumb wore out. He made me kind of mad by not noticin’ things was wrong, although that’s the impression I’d labored to create upon him, as he’d say.

Page 57

“The Injun didn’t come, and he didn’t come till I got mad at him, too. How was I to know that he finished up my idee by fallin’ over, further down? So I fumed and I fussed, and I yearned inside of me to get square with somebody. And at last my chance come.

“Afternoon, hot and clear as usual. Percy asleep under a rock, and then, horses’ footsteps! I jumped for the edge, and, boys, for a minute my sight give out. It wasn’t Injuns; it was a lot of Uncle Sam’s durned soldiers. I never expected to be so glad to see a soldier; I thought I despised ’em.

“I looked at ’em for a full half minute, thinking, ‘God bless old Percy’s blistered nose, he’s safe!’ and then I done what I hadn’t orter did out of that, desire to get even. I slid down the mountain and whanged away over their heads. It was like pokin’ your finger in a hornets’ nest. Up comes them soldiers, workin’ the finest of Injun sneaks up the hill. If there ever was a grand sight in Nature it’s a two-hundred-pound soldier entirely concealed by a rock twice the size of my fist.

“Y-a-as, here they come; and I flitted my red handkercher like it was a ‘Pache’s head-dress, leadin’ ’em on to where Percy was. I got there first and crawled into a cave where I could watch. I looked at Percy, sleeping, remarkin’ ‘whoow-whisssh!’ at regular intervals, his little baby face surrounded by his white handkercher, his little fat hands folded on his little fat stomach, and I could scarcely wait for the time when them soldiers’ eyes should fall upon their treacherous, fierce, and implackibble foe.

“The lieutenant was a kid, just gradooated—one of the kind that thinks it’s glorious to get killed and read about it in the papers. He led his men into the simple quiet of our camp, crouched and tur’ble, a gun in each hand . . . and there was the United States army and there was the sleepin’ Percy, face to face!

“‘What . . . !’ says the lieutenant, falling back ten foot. ‘What . . . !’ says he, falling back twenty feet and losin’ his voice. ‘What . . . !’ says he, gatherin’ himself; ‘what is this?’

“And then I come out of the cave and rolled on the ground.

“The lieutenant walked over and patted me on the back with a rifle-butt.

“‘What d’ye mean, you s-c-c-coundrel!’ he says. ‘Stop that laughing or I’ll shoot the pair of you!’

“I come to quick when I heard that. ‘Look a’ here, young feller,’ I says, ‘you can beat me as much as you feel like, but if you make a crooked play at Percy I’ll wrap you up in your diploma and send you home to your ma.’

“It just happened their half-breed scout knew me.

“‘I wouldn’t rile Mr. Scraggs, Lieutenant,’ says he; ‘it’s bad luck.’

“Of course there was more talk, but the lieutenant was a good enough kid, and when he see all the boys laughin’ he give in and smiled himself.

“‘Well, you long-legged statue of melancholy,’ says he, ‘I suppose I’ll have to let it go, but I’ll shoot you, sure as there is shootin’, if you ever play a trick like that on me again. What kind of a fool are you to stay here in the middle of an outbreak, anyhow? Now wake up your friend and come with us.’

Page 58

“‘Thanky,’ says I; ‘but hold—is the road safe to town?’

”‘Sure; we’ve cleaned ’em, all but one bunch.’

“‘Well,’ says I, ‘then Percy and me’ll just amble back together the way we come. I don’t want him to know nothing about any trouble.’

“After chewin’ for a while he consented, and away went the army.

“So bimeby Percy woke up and said he’d had a nice nap and felt refreshed and—um—invigorated, and him and me went back to town, and he never suspicioned ther’d been an Injun risin’, soldiers nor nothin’. I have felt like offering one hundred dollars’ reward to the person who’d produce something that Percy would suspect. And whenever I think of that my spirits lift to that extent I could almost go out and get married again.

“And this here ticker I set great store by, because it come from Percy and says inside of it, ‘To E. G. Washington Scraggs, in memory of our beautiful friendship, from Percival Mervin’—and that to a tough old Mormon like me! Well, he was one darned nice little man.”