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HANDS UP!

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LOST CABIN-MINE

THE ISLAND PROVIDENCE

A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS

ABOVE YOUR HEADS

DEAD MEN'S BELLS

MY LADY PORCELAIN

HANDS UP!

BY

FREDERICK NIVEN

NEW YORK

THE JOHN LANE COMPANY

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CHAPTER I

WHY I WENT WEST

There has been a good deal of talk, one way or another, about the Apache Kid. The Yellow Press made capital out of him just as they have made capital out of many another figure on the frontier—Texas Jack, Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane.

Now, I knew the Apache Kid. I was mixed up in the last wild days of his life, and, while not seeking to white-wash him, I should like to tell—to all whom it may concern—my view of that extraordinary man.

It is common knowledge that he was liked. Not only cowboys and miners who knew him, but your moneyed person, your capitalist even, can find a sigh for Apache Kid, the hold-up man. I have known two men, prominent, respected, one "interested in mines," the other a great ranch-owner and dabbler in booms, both of whom had met Apache in their travels about the West. Both spoke of him with regret, with much more of a shake of the head over his misguided, or rudderless life, and his wild end, than with the "jolly good riddance" air that might be expected. There was reason for it.

I had better, to begin with, explain how I came to the sage-brush country of the Apache Kid, because, in a new country, the men one meets there have had some concussion (good or bad) in their lives to boast them so far. And the reason for their being in the new country is a kind of striking of the pitch-fork to get their key.

That beginning of things I must tell quite frankly, bolstering myself up to the explanation by the thought that most young men—boys, let me say—for I was but a boy (and though I say "most young men" I am talking of myself!) have a kind of what the Scots call "daftness" in them, and are generally exceedingly sorry for themselves, magnificent in their woes and grandiloquent in their hopes.

I had wanted, in the old country, to be a sheep-farmer. My mother had, however, coaxed me to go in for a scholarship at my school. We spent our summer holidays, I remember, that year, after I had sat for the examination, in the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde, an island that appeals to the youngster because of its moors, its cliffs and corries, its high rocks and adders in the heather.

All through that vacation I was out and about on the hills with the shepherd and working in the dips. My father would come and watch me clutch adroitly a sheep by the horns, swing my leg over it and straddle it to the tank, plunge it in, walk alongside, yank it up at the end, and send it down to the pen among the other baptised ones. I say this not sacrilegiously now, but recalling an unfortunate expression used at the time.

My mother (bless her) was of the old school, and had had hopes that I might become a minister of the gospel, which several boyish escapades had dashed. My father and she had little in common; and one day, as he watched us working in the dips, my mother came along, under her sunshade, from the farm and stood looking on, half-sad, half-proud. My father was wholly proud of me at the moment, because I had pinioned a particular recalcitrant ram between my knees, and, wriggle his head as he would, I was his master. The farm-boys stopped to laugh and egg me on—just as I have seen, since then, cowboys roar with laughter when some branded two-year-old (who slipped through unbranded at one-year) has arisen and made a disturbance in a corral.

My father turned about, and, seeing my mother, gave his sniff that prefaced a jocular remark and said he:

"I think you'd better be glad that the boy can baptise sheep instead of mortals."

My mother stiffened under the sunshade, held it up rigidly over her head instead of letting it make a pretty circle behind her head and shoulders. She walked sadly back to the farm and wrote a letter straightway to her minister, asking him his views on sheep-farming for a young man. The parson wrote back that sheep-farming was a lazy life.

My father was a queer old fellow. He was a determined enough man, but very "jack easy" as the word is. He would dismiss things with a "Pshaw—don't worry me," just when the looker-on expected him to fight to the end for his own view, would give his shoulders a dismissing shrug and retire to the library to read his "Don Quixote" in Spanish, with his feet on the mantelpiece.

When this letter arrived my mother handed it to him and he read it with eyes widening and widening, held it in a

trembling hand and bellowed out:

"What has he got to do with it? Perfect nonsense! What a woman! What a woman! He's a shepherd of souls that—that—that—*parson!* What does he know about mutton?"

And then my dad seemed to listen to the echo of his voice and, alas, saw the humour of his remark. He sat back and laughed at himself, then got up, flicked the letter, said: "Far better give the boy a chance. I wish my father had let me follow my instincts—" and retired to smoke many cigars and read "Don Quixote" in the Spanish.

But evidently he could not settle. I think, looking back on him, that he tried too much to dismiss things instead of to mend them. He had, nevertheless, quite an ordeal of it dismissing that letter. It came on a Friday and all Saturday he was glum and on Sunday so glum that he spent the forenoon yarning with the stable-boy and the ploughman. To my great delight, from where I sat (glum as he, before the farmhouse) I saw him dancing and snapping his fingers, explaining some Spanish dance to the farm hands. They looked upon this townsman, spending his summer vacation with them, as a "great card." He had spent his younger days partly in Chili, in the nitrate business, partly in the Argentine, and lived a deal in the past. He was now giving them an exhibition of some Spanish dance; and presently he began to sing, in response to some request from the stable-boy, a Spanish song.

My mother came out and looked at him sadly. I was old enough to see both sides—to see that, in one way, my dad was making a motley of himself for these boys. But, at the same time, he was having what, out West, we would call "a good time." He was enjoying his summer vacation.

The trouble was that it was Sunday; and my mother thought he had been better employed singing a psalm to the boys—and he knew that she thought that, when, looking across the stableyard, he caught her eyes. Result: he sniffed twice, blew his nose loudly and retired quite inside the stable where the boys followed—and sang, a little more quietly, another Spanish song a little more extravagant. Also my mother wept just two tears, and no more, and retired to the garden seat with the New Testament.

That Sunday was to me a long, long day, for on the Monday I expected to have news of the scholarship and I hoped, most ardently, that I had not won. But Monday was a long day too—because news did not come.

I know nothing in life worse than *waiting*. To act is good; to rest is good; to loaf is good. But to wait, to wait is horrible, undermining, breaking-down.

The post box, for the old country, was, in the Isle of Arran, very primitive. We might have been in the last ranch of the West so far as the post box went—for it was merely an old mustard box covered with zinc on which the Highland rain played tip-tap between blinks of sun, an old mustard box on top of a stake driven into a bank at the roadside, just where the cart track to the farm debouched from the fine road that runs round the island.

My father walked down with me on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, walked down eager and impatient. He had his own mail to expect, of course, but I know he was eager about that letter for me.

Even on Wednesday it did not come. He had, however, a large mail of his own and among it some newspapers. He slipped his letters into his inside pocket to read afterwards and, with his walking-stick under his left arm, opened a newspaper, held it wide, scanned the pages, frowned under his hanging brows, puffed his moustache, pouted, and bent his head. I thought some speculation had gone agee; but no—he handed me the paper and pointed.

The newspapers had received the list of prize-winners before the letter announcing my place had come to me. Yes—I had won a scholarship. My name looked out on me, in hard print, from among the twenty under the heading, "Result of the —— —— School Bursary Examination."

My father said not a word—just tapped my shoulder twice lightly with his walking-stick, then put it back under his arm, folded his hands behind his back, and walked up hill looking at the pieces of Macadamised rock glittering in the road.

"You see," said he at length, after a long pause, "your mother had hoped that Jack would go in for some profession at home."

Jack was my elder brother, and he had gone to the Panama Canal first of all, then left the canal to embark in the rubber business in Guatemala, then left that and gone to Venezuela where he was now, according to his letters, managing a horse

ranch. Spanish was a language my mother looked upon with regret; for Spanish had carried my brother to all these places.

"Well," said I to my father, "I would rather be in Jack's place than in a university."

Up we trudged a few yards more and my father merely sniffed.

"Yes," he said at last, "yes, I quite understand. Well—well—you may learn engineering eventually. And engineering needs education. And engineering can take a man to the ends of the earth if he wants to go."

Of course I jumped at that idea—anywhere, anywhere out of the world of crowds!

Up we came to the farm and my father handed over the mail that had come for my mother.

"Has Will had no letter?" asked my mother, as she took the bundle.

My father smiled and shook his head. Then he prepared to give her a surprise with the newspaper, sniff-sniffing and glancing at it to get his finger on the place to spring it on her. She liked what she called "pleasant surprises," and he liked to surprise her pleasantly.

She opened a certain letter first, curious, womanlike, because she did not know the handwriting.

"I don't know this writing," she said, turning it over and over.

"Well, bless my heart, my dear, why not open it?" said my father. "Eh? What?" and sniffed, and got his finger to the list of Bursary winners.

My mother opened the letter, and one in her handwriting dropped out. She let it fall, looking puzzled, and there it lay—for her strained face held our gaze. She read the letter, let it fall, sat down on the seat before the door and stared into vacancy. My father cried out:

"What? What? What? Not that! Not that! Not that!"

He had an intuitive sense, or quickness of perception, of the kind called Celtic. He lifted the letter and read it. But he had little need to do so. He had known, looking on my mother, that it was to tell of the death of my elder brother; and his jaw went tight. Slowly, stiffly, his head rose and he looked up at the sky and, in a voice I shall never forget, he said:

"Oh, God! And he was a man! He was a man! I shall never forgive you—God!"

"Oh, John! John! Come to me!" cried my mother. "John!" (my father's name) "take care John!"

But my father was walking to and fro in the yard at a quick step as if on a quarter-deck. He walked to the gate that led to the road down hill; he walked to the gate that led to the moors; to and fro, to and fro.

The people who owned the farm-steading came to peep and look. In a near field the farmer stood, rake upheld, transfixed, watching that march. From the door of the farm the old mother peeped. At the stable door there were faces. It was terrible. My father walked to and fro with his jaws locked and grim and his hands clenched. My mother ran after him clutching his shoulder and saying:

"John! John! Let your wife console you."

He turned once or twice in his walk and looked at her, but with no expression save a kind of puzzled one, as if he thought: "Who is this? Why does she hang on my steps?"

Once I thought he was going to strike her and leapt forward to intercept; but it was only a gesture of dismissing her that he had made; and as I leapt forward he looked at me, and his eyes were so blank—looking at me as if I were a stock or stone—that I gave a choking blub in my chest.

Suddenly my father cried out:

"And he was a man, Oh, God! He was a man!" and raised his fist to the heaven—and fell down in the yard.

It is too painful for me to tell the rest; but the end of my father was that he was led away from that farm where we had come on summer vacation, taken away like a little child, led by the hand of a man who had come from Renshaw Asylum for him.

Having gone in for the scholarship, and won it, I now continued my studies, still in Glasgow. Home was very subdued and sad. A great gloom hung over it in which my poor mother moved like a withered leaf. I noticed, when I accompanied her to church—which I always did now, never inventing excuses for staying at home as had been my wont of old—that a new petition had come into the parson's prayer: ". . . and for those whose minds have been blinded we pray for light."

I think if I had looked into my heart during these months I should have been by way of flattering myself that I was an ideal son. Indeed, I think at times I did so look and see myself upon the stage of life as something of a heroic figure. Youth is histrionic.

Sheep-farming was over; in another month I would be sitting for a fresh examination; if I came out near the top a Bursary would be mine again, carrying me on from the grammar school to our university; if I came out a little lower I would have at least a scholarship. I was already looked upon by my class-mates as distinctly in the running; and yet a university career was the last thing that my heart desired.

When I passed Westward by Kelvinside and saw the towers of the university against the sunset they interested me well enough to carry the vision of them home in my mind so that I might make an impression of them in red chalk. From the exterior there was something airy, romantic, about these towers. After seeing them one evening, as I walked home, many raucous voices of a Salvation Army Choir fell harshly on my ears, the discords of cornet and tambourine, with the words, "Far, far away, like bells at sunset pealing," and I wanted to take the choristers up to the end of Charing Cross and ask them to look on these towers as they dissolved in the mists of night—so that they might understand something of the beauty of the words they sang.

When I passed down University Gardens late one night from visiting a friend there, sudden, over me, there was a boom; the half-hour had sounded. And I stood stock still in that broad, deserted thoroughfare, and listened to the waves of sound trembling into distance. That experience made me think of a meteoric stone fallen in the velvet purple of some lake and sending a circle of waves to the surrounding shores. As the words of the singers conjured up the misted towers, fading out so beautifully as to make me annoyed at their insulting discords, so the boom of the bell conjured up a picture. The art of words is not my forte; but I consider, thinking thus, how all the arts are one. To all this I have been led by speaking of the exterior of the University of Glasgow.

As for the interior it had for me no attraction, and yet I was about to sit in an examination in a grand endeavour to achieve that for which I had no desire. So I saw myself, if not a "greenery yallery, oh such a good young man" as—in the phrase of old women—a "good son." Yes—there is no doubt that youth is histrionic.

You will readily understand that a young man of such calibre as this had his calf-love; and if the lady smiled, at times, a little on the sardonic side, I do not know that the young man was any the worse. He is the last, at the time, to perceive the sardonic dimples at the edges of his idol's mouth. He will see to it that she remains for him the Holy Grail, the Light that never was on land or sea. She has her amusement, he his ideal; and I think these things are well.

I think women like things to be a little secretive; an apple, if it be but a crab apple, is preferable to the luscious pear. Really, I do not think, looking back on that idyll from the sanity of middle age, that the secrecy of our meetings was essential; but I do know, whatever the cause, My Lady, with very solemn eyes, suggested to me the advisability of not calling too frequently at her home. I remember that, at the time, I used to marvel much how Fate cast us together, how frequently we, as it were bumped into one another, and I used to take it as a sign that Fate smiled upon us.

But, looking back now, I remember that when I bumped into her—let me say at Queen Street Station—at two of a Saturday afternoon, she really had dropped, in conversation the preceding Monday, that she expected to be in town on Saturday afternoon. When I had made up my mind to visit the Institute of Fine Arts upon a Thursday evening, changed my mind and decided to go upon Friday, I think it quite probable that I really remembered the fact—before the changing of my mind and not after—the fact that she had said that she intended to go to see the pictures at the Fine Arts Institute on Friday evening because the band played on that night.

On so much of my calf-love, then, do I look back with smiling tolerance; no—I think I should say with approval, for he who worships a Goddess in spirit and in truth is not likely to slide too often from his chair beneath the table, at a

smoking concert, and, though no puritan, I have observed that a Spartan menu is conducive to a healthy body, and a healthy body is the fit home for a healthy mind.

A celebrated Scot has said that the Scotsman without religion is apt to drop into the public-house; an irreligious young man, I would add, with no blasphemy, but a knowledge of mankind and romantic views, can make out of a West End young lady with bowed lips and russet locks, a Divinity as effectual as a stone Virgin between wax candles. Still, your Divinity must have her whims, and not all her whims can shatter her in the eyes of her worshipper. I really don't think that the secrecy was good, but that is a detail. As luck would have it (I remember how, in the agony of the time, I thought some hideous Fate stepped in upon our family ever) as luck would have it, out of my romance came tragedy.

Thrice I had conveyed My Lady to her door and, by her request, parted from her behind some trees that overlooked her father's house. I suspect there was nothing more in it than the chaffing of her brothers; certainly they used to cock an eye in a roguish way upon me at times, and I fancy indeed that we were looked upon as something of a joke. My Lady would have it, at any rate, that I remain in the shadow of the rhododendrons until she had rung and till the flood of light upon the gravel had announced the opening of the door, its extinguishment the closing. I was to count ten—or something of that kind—and then depart.

This kind of parody of Romeo I can quite understand is titillating to a young lady who owns a ticket of the Circulating Library, but there are many types of minds in the world and while some deck the sinister with the romantic, others see in the romantic the sinister. One such had spied upon me; and on the third, or perhaps fourth occasion of this secretive departure, just as I was turning away, he laid hold of me—a perfect type of dirty-scarved, greasy-capped lurcher.

"Half a minute young man," said he. "I've been watching you."

"Well?" said I.

"What's it worth?" said he.

"What do you mean?" said I.

"Why," said he, "your little game. I'll keep my mouth shut for a quid."

My dander was by no means up; there was a trifle of almost amusement in my mind.

"If you don't give me a quid," he said, "I'll step right over and tell the gentleman that you've been trying to get round about his daughter."

Of course, as the saying is, I saw red at that and hit out; and there we fell to, he, with his hooligan methods to aid in the victory, I with the intense madness at the sullyng of my idol. I write with a certain air of levity of these incidents. I do so because there is no other way. When I think of the sequel of it all it seems a very silly play.

At last I landed him a blow that not only laid him flat upon the ground, but kept him there.

I was blown, my heart going like a piston, the sweat was cold on me suddenly in the autumn night. I looked at my antagonist again. The horrible, pallid light of an arc lamp at the corner sifted through the hanging boughs of a lime-tree and glistened on his teeth. My heart, that had been going like a piston, seemed to clutch, and clutch, and clutch; an immense panic fell on me. I bent down and felt his heart and could find no beating.

I remember the torture of the moment, how I was maddened with annoyance at myself because all I could feel was the throb, throbbing of the blood in my own hand. I almost wept. I put my ear to his breast and what I heard was like the echo of my own heart-throbs in my ear. I could hear nothing outside of my terror.

I stood up and said to myself over and over again, "Be calm! Be calm—be calm!" I pressed my lips together; I went over the alphabet, all in a mad endeavour to collect myself. So I gained some measure of calm, at least enough to hold his wrist again, not with my thumb—remembering that there is a pulse in the thumb; but there was no pulse of life in his wrist.

You can conceive my panic. No time now for histrionics. As quick as a knife-thrust I saw the gallows, my mother's agony—her death with a broken heart—already nigh enough broken by the tragedy of my father's madness. I walked home. I wanted to run home but I controlled myself. I walked home.

My mother had gone to bed. I sat all night in my room. It is a wonder I did not go grey as I have heard men may in a night. Time after time I was possessed of a desire to go out and run, run, run. Where? I would ask myself. And there I sat all night reasoning myself into a course of wise action. Wise action! It was the biggest blunder I ever made in my life.

I appeared at breakfast. My mother remarked upon my haggard looks. I made some excuse—I know not what—of neuralgia, of neuralgic pain, of a chill. I have had some moments of suspense in my life. I have had some times of anguish. But they concern myself only, or those who are not my blood kin. I wanted to tell her all; and anon I dared not. I wanted to bid her farewell—and could not. I made my morning's farewell over-cold instead of over-tender—I left the house, I made haste to my bank and drew my little all, and thence to a shipping office.

I saw a clerk who cannot, I suspect, have been a youth of much penetration; for, though I schooled myself, I can hardly think that my face was free of signs of anxiety. I told him some airy tale of wishing to get the first possible boat for America. There was one in a fortnight. When I said, in as nonchalant a voice as I could muster: "Oh—that is some time, and my business demands haste," with a "Just a moment" he withdrew to the side of an elderly man at a rearward desk, an elderly man who had that air as of being ready to jump into the breach at a moment's notice, which I, observing, took for a sign that his suspicion was aroused.

Nothing of the sort of course; he was only eager to book a passage. He came over to me at once and echoing the "Just a moment" of the younger assistant, departed into a partitioned off room at the end of the office. Through the dulled glass I saw him take a receiver from the rests of a telephone. I made a turn on my heel to run from the door, sure that he was ringing up Duke Street, and then I gripped myself. I was going to see it through.

He returned (after about a hundred years) to tell me that that evening I could sail from Liverpool; there was just one berth, second class, if that would suit.

There is no pummelling worse than that of a guilty conscience. I leave it to the reader to imagine, upon these lines, the pummelling of the ensuing days and these last, and horrific, pummellings on the coming alongside of the Doctor's launch, on the coming alongside of the pilot boat, on the coming aboard of the Customs men; on the descent of the gangway.

That, then, is how I left home.

CHAPTER II

AT BLACK KETTLE

I find that others have felt, as I first felt on going West, "there is nothing here but the railway." The feeling is, of course, absurd. But it is very comprehensible. For mile after mile there is nothing to be seen but the wilderness. The sage-brush lands, after the East is past, roll everlastingly North and South.

I sat looking out at them, and instead of feeling more lonely and miserable, felt more at peace. For these spaces asked me as it were to live up to them, to put something in myself that they possessed. So, instead of the sage-brush lands depressing me, they made me adopt this outlook. I did not wish to weep for tangles and misunderstandings in the little isle back there across the Atlantic. The accepting mood was stronger. Very good; if that be Fate, let me bear it. It was only the mountains that depressed me.

As the train entered these cañons of the West where there seems hardly room for aught but the rivers that foam through them, though engineers have found a way, I felt again the fatuity of much of life. Restrictions and constrictions seemed a great part of life; also misunderstandings.

The train screamed on through the mountains; hummed, on a hollow note, across trestles; roared through cañons; and I was glad when we emerged at last, mounting upward, at Black Kettle which I had selected, looking on the great map in the railway booking-hall back East, because its name appealed to me, in the centre of a string of appealing names, thus: Placer, Antelope Spring, Adobe, Black Kettle, Lone Tree, Fort Lincoln, Montezuma. But by the time that we reached Black Kettle I had quite decided that there was nothing for me to do in that country but to help to keep the railway in repair!

Take Black Kettle for example. It consisted of seven houses: one hotel, one store, one boarding-house, four residential houses with their vegetable patches. The inhabitants were: the hotel proprietor, the store-keeper, the store-keeper's wife, the barman, the Chinese cook, four section men (including the section boss), a telegraph operator (who was also station agent).

Everybody was very decent to me when I went in. The hotel proprietor offered me a free drink before I had booked a room; the telegraph operator (a thin, wiry little Scotsman with a thin, wiry moustache, stained with tobacco juice) introduced himself to me when, after a wash, I came out again and walked on the deserted balcony, introduced himself and begged me to come and drink with him all in one breath. The store-keeper, when I stepped over past his door and caught his eye, gave me a nod and said "How-do" abruptly, but friendly enough; he looked an abrupt man, a philosophic dry old stick, very like pictures of Uncle Sam. The section men, when they came over to the hotel in the evening, stood near me as if to give me a chance to talk, if I wished to; and, when I did not speak, as I had read that in the West attempts at making acquaintance quickly are sometimes resented, their boss said: "Perhaps the gentleman setting there would care for a game?"

I turned my head.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "Kind of lonesome for a stranger in this town. Would you care for a game of chequers?"

And so I played a game of draughts with the boss on the first evening in Black Kettle. He was a Michigan man, all bones and joints and elasticity, with a great foot for a double shuffle, a nose like a door-knocker, chunks of cheek-bones, a thin, determined bony chin, and glittering eyes.

I have spoken of getting used to the strange surroundings. The surroundings were—across the railway track—green and silver benches (because of their grass and sand) going up, up, up, in rolls, as if they were for giants to sit on and watch some play going on in Black Kettle. These benches fascinated me. The immense sweep of them, and the way white clouds would look up away beyond the last one, and not as if just behind the last, as if, rather, there was immensity between them and that last roll of hill, charmed me. To lie on the verandah of the Palace Hotel of Black Kettle and watch the clouds go up behind the benches, all to the sound of grasshoppers chirping, seemed all that one could do in Black Kettle. If one had not to work to live, I think it all that one would desire to do also. I am no hobo, but I love to lie on the Palace verandah and listen to the silence.

So do all men who visit Black Kettle. And to see a cow-puncher with his back to the wall and his legs stretched half across the verandah there, while his horse waits for him with drooping head, almost too lazy-looking to flick the flies, is to see a picture not easily forgotten.

But, as luck would have it, no cow-puncher was there to suggest, when I arrived, by his presence, that there were homes and work back from the track. Black Kettle was all alone with its handful of people for three weeks. The sitting-room of the Palace, inhabited by a dull suite of furniture, the bar-room inhabited by stolid casks, a few small tables and chairs empty beside them, and a white-faced nickel-in-the-slot hurdy-gurdy, and a large spittoon, plunged me in terror. The barman sometimes woke in that desolation. The proprietor sometimes coughed in the kitchen. Ah Sing sometimes sang, among his pots, in a high, thin, plaintive voice. I made up my mind that there was no room for another barman, even had I cared for the job or been considered capable. I also made up my mind that there was no scope for another hotel, even if I had the money to start one.

So, as the third week drew near an end, sick of doing nothing but worrying on the verandah, I approached the section gang boss and asked him if he knew of any work to be had in the vicinity.

He looked at me sidewise.

"What kind of job?" he asked. "Anything to do for the time being?"

"Anything at all," I said.

"Well, there's an extra gang coming to work up there—seven miles up the line. I reckon I could say a word for you to the boss. He'll be coming up with some men on the passenger train to-night."

The train was not due for an hour; but the inhabitants were already arranging themselves in picturesque, open-shirted attitudes, on the platform. By "inhabitants" I mean the three section men, hands in pockets: one standing, leaning against the wall of the little station house, one sitting, leaning against it and nursing one knee, the other leg thrust out; one sitting on a truck; the telegraph operator inside his room with his shoulder against the jamb, his hands in pockets, his neck stretching out ever and again as he spat across the platform on to the track.

When we appeared he spat and said: "How goes it?" and the section boss replied: "Well, how are you making out?"

The three section men looked stolid; silence fell. Then the operator spat again and said: "I was just telling the boys of when I was running one of the stations in Columbia for a gold-mining company there;" and he plunged into a story about yellow fever and how he kept the men all working and how they dropped "like flies, gents; yes, sir, like flies," and all the while his instrument behind him was giving little jerky "tick-tacks" as if some drowsy old woman napped over her knitting within.

Then the booming whistle of the approaching train sounded, the track began to sing. The engine shrieked, rounded the curve, and the "passenger" ran into the depôt with a whirl of dust and an odour of oil and hot iron. The conductor and one man alighted. A tin box shot out of one of the cars; the conductor called "All aboard!" and then, as the train moved on again, he stood, holding out a hand to catch a rail, foot slightly raised ready to step on when the end of a car would come level, and—"How-do gents!" he hailed. "How's things up here? On the boom?" laughed, stepped aboard, waved his hand; and the train slid out and we sat looking at the tail-light dwindling—then looked at the man who stood on the platform in the dusk.

I saw him loom big and heavy and withal easy despite his avoirdupois. The section boss advanced on him, he on the section boss, and they pump-handled each other cordially and stood chatting.

The operator said: "Oh, well!" and slipped in to his room and presently a slab of light fell from his door across the platform, and the sound of his instrument broke out. A little chill fell and the scent of sage-brush blessed the night.

"Cold," said one of the section men, rose, and drifted away with slow, heavy steps.

"Aye, aye!" said section man number two, and rose.

"Um!" said section man number three, and came erect from leaning against the wall. They followed their mate.

"Come here, sir! I want to introduce you. I've been telling the boss—this is Alf Douglas, boss of the extra gang coming

up here; I don't know your name, sir?"

"Eh—er—Williams," I said. Why "Williams" don't ask me. It was the first that came to my mind, and so Williams I would be for the future, at least till I had an English paper and had my mind relieved. "John Williams," I said next. Why "John" don't ask me either.

"How do, sir?" said the boss. "Englishman?"

"How do you do?" I said. "No, I'm——"

"Oh—a Scotsman," he broke in. "That's better. Well, Mr. Dunnage, he told me you want a job. You want it badly?"

"Yes," I said.

"Um!" he said, and shook his head. "The trouble is that I've got only a gang of Dagoes to work for me and I never heard of a white man working with Dagoes before. The money's all right, two and a half, just as if they were white, but maybe you wouldn't care to tackle that—even temporar'y till the white gang comes up?"

"There is a white gang?" I asked.

We were standing near the operator's door and the light showed Douglas's face. I thought he gave a quick, keener look at me, as if thinking I was none so eager for work after all; and we in the Old Country are told to look eager in the States!

"In about a month," he said.

"Good," I said. "I can work in the Dago gang till then."

I saw that they both felt a little bad about it, then, as if they liked me for taking the job on, but felt some remorse for having nothing better to offer me. Still—I had to work and, as I have explained, being green to the country, there seemed to me to be no other work in the country but railroad work. The place looked, to my new eyes, wholly a void—with the railroad running through it.

But things were not so bad as I had prepared to find them at the Gravel Pit. Black Kettle lay seven miles away and to my imagination the place was quite cut off from the world!

The passage of occasional freight-trains served but to emphasise the loneliness of the country; for, after they had gone screaming past, even before the dust swirls by the track side had settled, the silence came again. Facing a great hill, a little west of the pit, a steam shovel had been set. That steam shovel, in its own little siding, that steam shovel, all covered with tarpaulins, seemed a melancholy sight. I could hardly believe that white men would be coming anon to get steam up in it and set it nosing and scooping into the hill. It wore the air of having been left there for the Spirit of the Dry Belt to cover over with sand, and blot out, and forget.

The camp consisted of two old freight-cars, one used for a store-house and dining-room and kitchen and sleeping-room for a Chinaman; the other used for a "bunk-house" for the men, with bunks fitted up inside it and just the end partitioned off as a boss's room. In the boss's room were two bunks, and one of them he told me I could occupy.

"I can't see a white man sleeping with these Dagoes," he said.

It was very good of him and I appreciated it very deeply. That was the only difference made between me and the gang. I slept in the cut-off apartment with the boss, but, at work, I was treated just as a unit of the gang. When Douglas chose to be abusive he was abusive to us all; his curses rang in my ears as sharply as in the ears of his "Eye-talians."

Our work was to undermine the hill along the railway track, with pick, shovel and dynamite, preparing a path for the steam shovel. Here was new work indeed for me; but what made it trying was the attitude of the "Eye-talians." They resented my presence; and I went upon the principle of ignoring their resentment. If a man working above me let a boulder plunge down on me without any shout of warning, I slipped aside, as if it was all in the day's work, never so much as looked up—and went on working. I acted also upon the principle of showing, as well as no resentment, a good example. If I was working above an Italian and loosened a boulder I would shout: "Look out!" (or "Look up!" when I found that "Look up!" takes the place of "Look out!" in the West). In a way it was a mistake. These Italians seemed mostly of the order of humanity that requests and begs to be brow-beaten. Douglas's wild language, and the way he had

of raising a clenched fist after a command, accelerating the gang's movements, he had learnt, doubtless, just as I was learning. I sometimes saw his eye on me after such episodes as I tell of—when a boulder rolled towards me without warning and I merely dodged—saw his eye on me, and at first wondered if he thought I was not agile enough! Saw his eye on me when I shouted: "Look up!"—thoughtful, watchful, considering. He seemed to say: "He'll learn!" That was what, eventually, his glance seemed always to imply when he looked on such scenes.

I did learn too.

At the end of the first week the boss called to me and one of the Italians and told us to lift a log that lay by the railway track and throw it down the further side of the embankment.

I stooped to lift one end; the Italian stooped to the other. I lifted the log to my right shoulder; but the Italian, who was a left-handed man, lifted by the left and eased his end on to his left shoulder. Thus we were back to back; and when I started off in a slow step, never thinking of left-handed men, I headed one way and he the other way. Thus he fell backwards. I felt the jar, and looking round smartly, saw him also looking round, off his balance. Instead of trying to hold the log—though, just at that, he regained his balance, with legs spraddled like a slack pair of compasses—he flung it from him. My shoulder and collar-bone received a pretty jar, for I—still unlike the "Dago Push," as they were called by the Black Kettle section gang—was bent upon, as I would say, being "decent," and was clutching the log to save the Italian. Down went his end thud, and he called me what no man may call another in earnest.

My blood boiled. I wanted, in one stammering speech, to explain to this Dago what I thought of him—and his gang. I wanted to tell him that I had tried to help him when I saw what he had done, to tell him that he and his fellows deliberately rolled boulders upon me without warning, that I always warned, that—every single item of the strained week. Instead, at that oath, and seeing the Dago come for me, I simply saw nothing but his ugly face and determined to pound it. I made three swift steps to meet him. I had no intention to stand him off. If he thought he could advance on me and I do the standing off he was all out of his reckoning. I went to meet him mightily rejoicing.

He paused then and made a grab for a pinch-bar, snatched it up and rushed afresh on me. There flashed into my head a yarn told by the operator at Black Kettle that ended: "Fists are all very good, but in a brown gang of any kind a white man is going to have no show with his fists. If he ain't got a gun let him take the edge of a shovel." So, when the whole gang dropped their tools and came plunging on me I grabbed a shovel and rushed at them. I was glad they all came on me. That one was not nearly enough. I could have knocked Italy off the map of Europe at the moment!

They simply parted feebly at that, made abortive swipes at me and circled wide. My man even dropped his pinch-bar, so I dropped the shovel and smashed him with my fist. There was a thud of feet in the sand, a bellow of oaths, and I was caught by the shoulders and sent flying.

"Come on! The lot of ye! Get a move on!" And Douglas, having flung me from my enemy, shot past us to the gang, routing them back to work. I stood up and looked on the scene. The "Eyetalian" rose with bleeding nose and held out his hand.

"All right," he said. "We shake hand. Everyt'ing all right."

And he meant it—as you shall hear. I took his hand and we shook.

"Come on! Come on! Get a move on!" came Douglas's voice.

We went back to our log. The "Eyetalian" lifted by the right this time and was very careful, when we had carried the log across the track, to lower from the shoulder to the carry in unison with me, even said "Ready?" waited for my "Right!" and then we flung the great log over.

He was then my very good friend and kept repeating, as we clambered up to the gang: "All right. Everyt'ing all right. Ver' good."

But there was a man, Pietro, in the gang, for whom I had, as the West says, "no use." And, as luck would have it, I was sent off in his company to bring up a push-car load of cord-wood that had been thrown from a train for the camp, but thrown off beside the steam-shovel, a quarter of a mile away.

"Here Scotty—and you Pietro—you go down and get the push-car on the track and fetch up a load of cord-wood from down at the steam-shovel."

Pietro gave me a malevolent look and Douglas, I noticed, smiled. We placed the wheels on the rails and the push-car atop and trotted off behind the car along the track. Just round the bend a grade begins and the car required no pushing but, instead, had to be kept hold of by the handles. A little further on was the trestle bridge, built, as you know these bridges are, quite open, so that any one going over has to step from tie to tie and can look clear down to the bottom of the gorge below.

Suddenly, as we came near the bridge and were hidden from the gang by the bend, Pietro said: "Why you not run?" and began to speed the car toward the bridge. "Run! Can you no' run?"

"Take care at the bridge," I said.

"You scared!" he cried, and leant on the car and sent it fiercely before him. I gave but one glance and then saw his game. He was getting ready to leap to a sitting position on the car when we should gain the bridge. I noticed his left shoulder (he running on my right) edging toward me.

What I expected happened.

Suddenly he leapt, intending to spin round and sit on the car, at the same time intending to jolt me with his left shoulder. Just as he leapt I dodged—with the result that he did not cannon off me on to the car, but fell between me and it. I hung on to the car and yanked it to a standstill and waited for him to rise. He scrambled to his feet, muttering, with his eyes glinting on me.

"You missed it," I said.

"Yes, I miss," he said, and took hold again and we trotted on afresh. Now came my turn.

"Run," said I and, full tilt, I started for the bridge which was just about a score of ties distant.

I like nothing better than taking his own weapons to a man who is determined to prove himself a menial person. He gripped tight to his handle and fell into step. I put on every ounce of pressure I had in my body. I stretched my body too, and my arms, so that I could see the ties before coming to them, and thus not lose a step; for I knew that we were almost on the bridge. Then we were on it! And I was glad that I had stretched out so—for our speed was now so great that I could hardly keep up with the push-car; and the ties, and the depth of the gulch between them, made, together, just a blur below me.

"Run!" I cried.

He simply caught tight hold of the car and hung on. Suddenly he slipped. But I was ready for that, to grasp him if he showed signs of falling between the ties. No! He was too fond of life. He clung to the car, and to life, so tenaciously that he made a drag on the car as, with his body stretched out, his toes caught, caught, caught on the edges of the ties. He had almost stopped the car by the time we gained the opposite bank. There he scrambled to his feet. And now I had my eye on him.

"What you do?" he said.

"What you tried to do to me," I said, "and don't try again."

We trudged on thoughtfully to the cord-wood pile. He was silent; but, as you can surmise, the air was full of trouble. It broke at the cord-wood pile.

"You block that wheel to keep car from running down," he ordered.

At first I resented the order—you see by now what kind of kid I was and will understand me doing so. I thought to tell him to do the blocking himself, but quickly argued: "What's the sense? I don't want to dominate him. I only want fair play;" so I blocked the wheel, with a billet of wood from the side of the track, and as I rose from doing so, I saw a shadow leaping along the ground—gave a jump sidewise to keep whatever caused it from falling on me, and smack came a billet down on the car-end just where I had stood.

I had been far too patient with him. I should (as I expect you have already thought) have made him block that wheel. However, he had got so much rope that he was eager to hang himself.

"Oh!" he said. "I not see you—I begin to load car."

"If you are going to load the car like that," I said, "you'll have to do it yourself," and I stood back.

"I not notice where you stand," said he.

I was pondering exactly what to do. Again I made a mistake. I did what is called "leaving it at that"; I walked over to the cord-wood pile and began loading the car. When I was at the car he would be at the pile—when I was at the pile he was at the car. So we came and went.

Then, just as I was putting on what looked as if it would have to be the last billet, he yelled: "Look up!" and flung a billet, from where he stood, right to the top of the load, with the result that it all came rattling down to both ends of the car. More intent on saving the work of reloading than in attending to Pietro, I leapt to an end and thrust up the pile there, balancing it. Pietro stood watching me, grinning. Then he pointed to some billets that had rolled off at the other end.

"Lift these—too many!" he said.

That was enough. He had coaxed the fight out of me in earnest and I lifted a billet as he ordered—but sent it bang at his head and followed it up with myself. I had never learnt to box; but that which followed was hardly a boxing contest. I assure you that before we were through I was battered black and blue, and yet I felt not one single blow, knew no pain until afterwards. All that I knew was that every now and then I got a smash in at Pietro, keeping my eyes on his all the time.

The most terrible thing to remember is when I found myself on the top of him, after he had fallen, and with my hands on his windpipe. It was his eyes, protruding, that brought me to myself, horrified.

I cannot tell you the relief I felt when he lurched to his legs and staggered to the car, kicked aside the billets that blocked the wheels and began to strain against the car to set it in motion.

I walked over and leant to the task with him and so, both bleeding and bruised, we urged the car back to camp. When we gained the other bank, beyond the trestle, I stopped and held out my hand.

"All right?" I asked.

He looked at my hand. He half extended his. Then: "No!" he said and swore in Italian.

"Oh, all right," I said, and we pushed on, rounded the bend, and came back to where the gang worked on the gravel slope.

Douglas stood by the track-side; the gang toiled up on the hill-face. As we passed Douglas I squinted up at him, where I bent pushing the load, and he looked round hastily, was just going to look away again—and then he saw our faces, wheeled about, looked at Pietro—at me—back again—then chuckled to himself. That was all. But the incident was not closed.

When we had unloaded beside the cook's car and lifted the push-car off the wheels, and the wheels off the track, we returned to the gang and clambered to our places on the hill. Immediately Pietro began to talk wildly in Italian while using his pick. But he became so excited anon that he ceased to wield the pick.

"Pietro, you so-and-so," came Douglas's voice. "I've got my eye on you."

Pietro cursed under his breath, but either wonderful is the carrying capacity of atmosphere in the Dry Belt or else wonderfully accurate was Douglas's knowledge of his man.

"Don't curse at me!" came Douglas's voice.

Pietro picked on, and quietly his mates discharged questions at him. As I picked into the hill around a boulder I saw their eyes glinting towards me.

Pietro began again; and one or two of the gang now grew so excited that they ceased to work too. Douglas's voice bellowed, and they fell to work again.

We were now confronted with rock.

"Is that rock?" hailed Douglas.

"Yes!" we shouted down.

"All right," and he clambered up to us and the two men who did the blasting as a rule fell to work making the holes for the charge.

I don't know how it befell—for Douglas generally erred on the safe side and drew us off far further than seemed necessary when a blast was made; indeed I have heard the men laugh at his care over them, and they have looked at him so insolently when he ordered them to go well back, that he has had (as the phrase is) to put the screw on extra tight afterwards—I don't know how it befell, but this time he neither ordered us off nor went off himself.

Always, I must say, he stood far nearer than he allowed any man to stand when a charge was made. I grew to admire Douglas immensely, and I want to note that fact about him. However, this time he seemed hardly thinking about the detonation; stood just at the foot of the hill, and we twenty yards along the grade.

"Boom!" and up went a cascade of dirt and rocks.

It was so vigorous that we raised our shovels and held them over our heads to shield us from the falling shower of dirt and stones. Suddenly we saw that Douglas had been hit. A chunk of rock had smashed his head. I ran to him at once and bent over him. The gang followed.

"He hurt bad?" asked one.

"My God!" I cried. "Look!"

His head was gashed frightfully.

"He dead!" cried Pietro. "He dead!"

And then he gave a screech—there is no other word for it—and leapt on me.

I slipped aside, but they seemed all to be upon me, these Dagoes; and wildly I clutched a shovel and whirled round with my back to the hill. And then that left-handed man, with whom I had had the altercation, showed his genuineness. He gave a kind of scream.

"Ver' good. Everyt'ing all right. I stick to you!" and he snatched a shovel and stood beside me and poured forth a cascade of voluble Italian on the gang.

A showman in a cage of wild cats must feel somewhat as we felt then. They rushed on me and I brought down the shovel on a pate, felt my legs wobbly with fear and my heart big with determination all at one time; swung the shovel round and smashed again, standing away from my one friend so as not to hit him.

And then there came a whoop and a slither of stones, and the gang fell back, and I too stepped back and gave a quick look up hill in the direction of their gaze. And coming down the incline, with forefeet taut in the sliding soil, hind legs bent, sliding down in the wonderful way that they have the knack of, came a white Western pony, with a big, broad-chested man upon its back, he balanced exquisitely like the God Apollo to my eye.

But there was nothing of ancient Greece in his weapon. His left hand lightly held the reins, his right was raised in air, holding a long-nosed Colt, raised with the elbow toward us and the wrist backward, ready to slam down forward, and aim, and fire, all in one quick gesture.

CHAPTER III

THE COWBOY PHILOSOPHER

Within one minute the "Dago Push" was in full flight round the bend, campwards. Within the hour, with Douglas unconscious across the saddle, my splendid ally and I came into Black Kettle. The friendly Dago, we suggested, should accompany us. But no—he said he would be all right with the gang and so, as he spoke as one who knew, we did not urge him to come with us. We came to Black Kettle, which clustered there, oblivious of all things at the foot of the benches, in the sunlight and sand. Looking round for sign of any inhabitants I saw, on this occasion, what I had never noticed before: corrals to South of the track, in a fold of the benches; and, standing in the centre of the little cluster of houses, upright in the sand, a couple of hitching posts with rings in their tops. Strange that I had not noticed them before. I suppose I had been so possessed of my half panicky idea that there was nothing in the country but the railroad that those two signs simply whispered to me in vain—of ranches backward in the hills, and horsemen, sometimes at least, riding into town from somewhere.

A hail brought Scotty, the lean, tobacco-juice-attenuated operator on to the platform, rubbing his eyes from sleep and with dishevelled hair, the ends of his sparse moustache, which he had a habit of chewing, dragging in his mouth. He simply called out an oath (in a way common to the place) at sight of our burden, and hastened, flurried and jerkily, to our aid, helped us to carry Douglas into the depôt office and lay him on the floor there, and then he rushed to his instrument to call up a doctor from Lone Tree. His tap-tapping over he turned to consider Douglas, who now broke into pitiable moans.

"By——, Apache," said he. "It gives him a twist. I think I'd rather be a stiff than like that."

"Oh, I don't know," said he who was called Apache, and raised and nodded his head in a determined fashion. I noticed then, for the first time, that he wore very little gold ear-rings. The light caught them as he moved his head so. "I'm not so sure about that. Life is not worth living for the man who can't get a move on things, for the man who is, as you might say, waiting—for a man with a mine two hundred miles beyond rail-head and he maybe sixty years old and the railway not liable to extend for twenty years. He does not want a pompous funeral, and he is not going to eat and drink his gravestone. Waiting is bad when there is no show. If you are five hundred dollars in debt to the hotel-keeper and your wages are only forty-five, it's bad waiting for that forty-five, especially if you want to buy a new undershirt and a pair of pants. It must be bad waiting in a cell for a hanging. But Life's worth living when things are moving—Life's worth living for the prospector when the track-layers are moving a mile a day nearer his prospective mine and he's only ætat fifty. If he was only twenty-one it would be futile, for he'd be broke again long before he was forty. Life's worth living if you owe your hotel-proprietor last month's grub and bed—thirty dollars—and have a hundred dollars coming to you at end of the month. You'll be liable to celebrate paying him off," he added, "and go broke again. It's all right waiting even for the hangman in the condemned cell if you've got a file up your sleeve. Yes, sir—and Alf Douglas is not so bad just now as you might think. He's putting up a fight and you've wired for the doc. Life is not a bed of roses—and only a man who thinks it is, is going to go and say anything so damn futile. There's something to be said for pain, too, my friend. Pain will teach you how to grip your jaws together and I never heard that a cod-fished-mouthed man was much use. Got any cigarettes?"

"No—don't smoke them," said Scotty. "I got a plug of chewing tobacco."

Apache shook his head. I took more stock of him now—this man who had come so appropriately to my aid and to the aid of the boss. He was a lithe, sunburnt fellow, wearing open a loose jacket, beneath which was a black shirt with pearl buttons. Round his neck was a great cream-coloured neckerchief that hung half down his back in a V shape. He wore heavy leathern "chaps" (chaparreras). On his head was a round, soft hat, broad of brim. He was a picturesque figure, one to look at with interest, though he bore himself without swagger and apparently made no attempt to attract attention.

He shook his head again.

"No use for an invalid," he said; "but Douglas is liable to want a smoke after the doc's been along." He produced a bag of tobacco and cigarette papers and squatted down cross-legged on the floor and began to roll. "I can't stay on too long," said he. "I have an appointment."

Scotty looked out on the sunny square (I learnt afterwards that the patch of sand was called a square) and said absently: "Far away?"

"Not very far away," said Apache. "See—I've rolled half a dozen and pinched them firm. He's only got to lick them if he wants them. No, not very far."

There was a long pause.

"You working with Johnson up at his new ranch, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Kind of a gardening job for a man like you, ain't it?" This said a little tentatively.

"Well, there are sure some implements to handle."

"They tell me he ain't got no stock at all on the place—that he's one of these yere new gents that grows a rose tree in a dump of cinders."

"That's what they say," said Apache. "Maketh the desert to blossom with the rose."

"That's what they say!" grunted Scotty, still staring out, his back turned. "Don't you know yourself when you're aidin' him in his pursuits? If it wasn't a man like you I'd say you were both locoed to try and grow fruit up there."

"It's been done all right," said Apache. "I've seen these gardeners come in where you'd think the only profession, bar cow-punching, would be making lava ornaments—in a drier country than this—just a day's ride more to hell, as they say—and—" he paused—"before three years were past there were these gardeners coming down in waggons and telling the cattle man that his day was done and—" he stopped short, aware of how he was maligning what had been given out as his occupation. At the same time Scotty turned slowly and surveyed him.

There they stood: the lean, little Scotsman with his brows frowning and a grin breaking on his mouth, looking down on Apache Kid, making the drollest distorted face imaginable; Apache Kid looking up at him, his head a little on one side, his eyes dancing with merriment.

And then, in the chirring silence outside, we heard the rattle, rattle, rattle of a pump-car abruptly break out and come smartly nearer.

I stepped out and there, just whirling round the bend, were four men on a pump-car, two going up and two going down, two up and two down, with a precipitancy that must have been something of a record.

A little later on in the day I was to see a pump-car driven as swiftly, but I had never before seen such action. It thrilled me. There was something magnificent in the rising and falling bodies, two forward, two to rear, coming thus, rattling, on the jump, into quiet Black Kettle. The first glimpse of the pump-car and the men suggested some pre-historic beast, come awake in these sunny sand-hills after a sleep of a million years, and cavorting down on the little dépôt. Up and down went the bodies and then the pump-car rattled alongside the platform, one of the men snapped "Whoa!" and all four clung to the handles that had been going up and down for fourteen miles and stopped their motion. But before the car stopped, one of the men (who had been pumping facing the direction in which the car was urged) stooped carefully, to avoid a hit on the head from the still rising and falling pump-handles, lifted a little black bag and a jacket, and stepped neatly off to the platform. He was pouring with sweat. His white shirt clung to him and showed a solid, square little chest. In his mouth he held, daintily with his teeth, a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses. This was "the Doc."

He saw me and said to me, setting down his bag with the jacket over it and taking his eye-glasses from his mouth: "The Godam sweat blinds my Godam eye-glasses," in quite a cultured voice. If Douglas had not given a moan within at that moment I think I might have smiled. No wonder that these better women who do not lecture us on swearing do sometimes smile at us for the ridiculousness of our pet swears. I remember once telling a dry stick of a man, very excitedly, about a storm, and saying: "My mother tells me that she had a hell of a time in a storm off Cape Horn." He looked at me with a dry twinkle and said: "Did the good lady really say so?"

The Doc wiped his eye-glasses with a handkerchief and fitted them upon his nose. He was a capable man I thought; for, as he was thus employed, one of the men on the pump-car was lifting on to the platform buckets of water which they had

brought along with them. The Doc stepped into the agent's room at the sound of Douglas's moan; and one of the men on the pump-car, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, gave a little chuckling laugh.

"Doc would make a heck of a section boss," said he.

"Reckon we never got over a track like it before," said another.

"I never did," said the one who was lifting off the buckets of water. "He made me laugh, did Doc, when the sweat got running on his glasses and he took them off and then couldn't catch hold of the pump-handle again."

"He got his knuckles rapped with the handle, I suppose," said I.

The man turned and examined me and evidently I bore his scrutiny well.

"No, sir," he said. "But we were going to slow up for him to catch hold, and he yelled out to us to pump on. 'I'll catch the Godam thing!' says he. He makes me smile—the English way he nips his cusses."

"He's all right," said another. "I see he knew his business when he shouts out: 'The water-tank! Black Kettle ain't got water at the depôt, has it?' and when we all says 'No'—'Good,' he says, and we appropriates all the five buckets in the freight shed, fills 'em full at the tank, and sets 'em round our feet. It seemed a heck of a lot to bring five full buckets—but it's five half ones now," and he nodded at the half-empty pails.

Apache Kid came out to the platform abruptly, his sleeves rolled up, very alert, snatched up one of the buckets and hastened back again to the agent's room. It struck me that I could be of assistance and I stepped quickly after him. One of the men who had helped to pump the Doc, having dried his face and neck, followed me. We passed inside and I saw Douglas propped up and the Doc bending over him, his black bag open at his side, steel instruments glinting in it, Apache Kid kneeling beside the Doc, mopping away with a sponge at Douglas's head. I saw the Doc's hand come up with the gesture of one sewing with a short thread. I had never been in a hospital. I had never seen an accident, and I felt horribly sick. Suddenly the man who had come in with me, a great hulking fellow, said "Oh!" and staggered from the room on to the platform and I heard his boots give a foolish clatter, heard a grunt and, looking out, saw him in a dead faint outside. Some quite stalwart men are like that.

"Some more water!" I heard the Doc's voice rasp and I leapt to a pail and lifted it and carried it in.

"That'll do, you," said the Doc to Apache as I entered, and Apache rose as I set the pail down. I felt better now, though I knew my face was cold. Apache said: "He's all right now, Doc?"

"He's all right," said the Doc, and fell to sponging and cleaning his hands in the bucket, staring at Douglas the while.

Apache looked at me and said: "Hullo, you look white."

"Queer," I muttered, "I felt sick at first."

"Yes," he said, "Even a man who can hold off a gang of Dagoes may feel sick when he comes suddenly up against this side of life." He stretched erect and said: "The only way to keep some sides of life from not making you sick is to get right in and do something. He's all right, Doc?"

The Doc looked up and took stock of Apache, evidently more carefully.

"All right sir," he said. "We'll get him down to Lone Tree Hospital when the train comes in."

"Then I'll get off to my appointment. So-long Doc. So-long Scot! So-long Kid!" He trotted out. "Hullo!" I heard him say outside. "Feeling bad? Yes I know. Yes—it does make you feel mean, doesn't it? Well, when a man's built that way there's no mere looking on possible for him—he must either step right in and be of use, or step right out—go get him to a nunnery, so to speak. But there's nothing to be ashamed about, sir. Ninety-nine out of a hundred can rubber-neck over the heads of a crowd at a dog in a fit in the gutter and neither go away nor help. That's humanity. You can get sick, sir, when you aren't helping anyhow. So-long! So-long boys! Where's my bronco? Oh, there he is. Hi! Hi! White-face!"

The doctor was drying his hands, half kneeling still at the bucket, half sitting on his heels—a whimsical smile spreading on his face.

"Who is the cowboy philosopher?" he said as he put his towel in his bag on top of his instruments and cotton wool, and snapped it shut. He saw the cigarettes lying in the corner, stretched for one, wet it, and felt for matches.

"They call him Apache Kid," said Scot. "A light, Doc?" and Scot tore off a Chinese match from a block, lit it on his pants, and held it while the sulphur burned.

The doc was looking at me, and Scotty said "Damn!" as his fingers were burnt.

"You've been scrapping!" said the doc, and looked at my battered face, touching it lightly. "Oh I don't think you need anything much. If you like, a little arnica—three parts water, and bathe that jaw."

"This is nothing," I said.

"Nothing by comparison," he agreed and turned. Then he held his head forward and lit the cigarette at Scotty's second match, and blew a cloud. The aroma of the weed filled the place very pleasantly. It seemed like vespers or a benediction. Douglas stirred, opened his eyes. He muttered something.

"Yes?" said the doctor and knelt to him.

"Give me a draw," said Douglas.

Past the window, in the glaring sun, back of the railway track, the white pony charged in a quick lope with Apache Kid bending forward and urging it on. A whirl of dust rose and fell.

There was a shuffle outside on the platform of the men who had pumped the doctor up getting into a shady place to wait for him; and then again the silence, with the little ceaseless crackling in it, of the grasshoppers and, inside, the faint clicking of the operator's instrument.

CHAPTER IV

NEWS FROM HOME

I stepped over anon to the hotel for dinner. One or two men sat on the verandah with a hungry look and I eyed them with interest, wondering whence they had come; among them sat, with a dictatorial air, a tall bearded man, with a lean, red face, bloodshot eyes, and a beard like dirty tow. He saw me advance and said he:

"Good-day. Are you looking for the proprietor?"

"Proprietor?" said I. "I suppose he's inside."

The man gave a hiccough and said: "This establishment has changed hands. I'm the pro-prietor here now."

I saw the scattered men look at him curiously. They had the air of not taking part.

"Oh!" I said.

"Yes," said he, "Oh!—as you say. Do you want lunch?"

"Yes," I said, "I came over for lunch."

"Well," said he, "I'm very sorry, but I don't intend to have lunch here except for residents. I can't serve people passing through. Are you a hobo? I don't remember your face at all."

Now a hobo is a tramp, a beggar at doors, and so I looked this drunken new proprietor, as he called himself, up and down, and said I:

"Seeing that I'm not going to eat at your house—not even if you put up a free lunch—I don't see that you have any call to know anything about me. Good-day to you—and I hope you may flourish in your establishment."

I wheeled about and trudged back to the depôt, more than ever conscious of my empty stomach and intending to ask Scotty if I could obtain a lunch anywhere else, consoling myself, at least, with the recollection of the tinned goods in the store—tinned salmon, tinned tomatoes, tinned everything, all round the store in the deep shelves.

But hardly had I reached the platform, across the "square," than one of those who had been sitting on the verandah came after me with a "Mister!"

I turned about.

"Say, mister," he said, "that fellow ain't the pro-prietor. The ho-tel ain't changed hands at all. Lunch will be on within half an hour. He's only a fellow who comes in from his ranch about once a month and thinks he's a sure-thing wag. That's what he calls his fun, going on like that."

"Thank you very much, sir," I said. "I'll be over again for lunch, then. Thank you very much."

"Be careful of the wag," he suggested. "He sometimes gets nasty when people don't see that he's funny. The way you answered him just now puzzled him. He weren't sure how to take it. He carries a gun—and I see you don't." And with a nod he turned back for the hotel, but I remained, for the time being, because the whistle of an approaching train broke out far off in the hills, and I wanted to be on hand to help to carry Douglas aboard.

Scotty had come on to the platform at sound of the whistle, carrying a red flag.

"Going to flag this freight," he said, "and get Douglas in the caboosie."

The locomotive with its string of sun-scorched cars came in sight; Scotty waved his flag and the string drew slowly into the depôt—the conductor dropping off to see why he had been stopped.

"It's Douglas," said Scotty; "he's had an accident."

"The hell he has!"

So we carried Douglas into the caboose at the end of the string of cars. The pump-car on which the Doc had come up was lifted on to a flat car, the men piled into the caboose, the Doc followed—and away went the train.

I was unsettled, restless. I felt that something was going to happen. One does not often have such feelings in the sage-brush lands. Cities, jostling crowds, going up and down in elevators, hanging on to straps in crowded cars—these things breed the nervous sense of "something going to happen." The sage-brush makes one "feel good."

It must have taken us some time to get Douglas aboard, for, when I looked over to the hotel, I saw that the verandah was deserted. The men had evidently gone in to lunch.

"When do you take lunch?" I asked Scotty.

"Eat lunch you mean," said he. "I eat lunch right now. When that freight goes through I'm free till the west-bound passenger. Are you going over?"

"Yes," I said.

"Wait for me, then, till I lock the door," said he.

"I shouldn't think you need lock a door here," I said.

"It's my instrument," he said. "I love that instrument of mine. I never leave it without locking the door. You come in and I'll show you just what kind of instrument she is. She ain't a railway one. I always pack my own instrument everywhere."

And so he carried me in to expatiate on it while my stomach cried more persistently for nourishment. The sage-brush lands nurture an appetite in a newcomer that is nothing short of fierce. I think Scotty talked for half an hour about his "instrument," waving his lean hands over it, talking about it in the way some parents talk about their children.

Into us, thus employed, following a courteous knock, came the man who had strolled over from the hotel after me a little while back to explain about the waggish individual's waggish attempt to make me have a lunchless day.

"Excuse me, gents," he said. "Lunch is pretty nearly through. If you don't——"

"Oh, they always save me my lunch," began Scotty.

"I told the pro-prietor that you were wanting lunch, sir——" to me.

"We'll get," said Scotty, and waved his arm like a man herding hens, seemed to bundle us out of the room, looking at the newcomer sternly, as if he would bid him keep his eyes off the treasured instrument.

We had come to the platform steps at the end of the depôt buildings, the cowboy who had been so solicitous about my lunch a little in advance.

"What this?" he cried, looking across toward the hotel. There we stood and stared. The hay-beard person who was "in town" to have a "good time" was gathering up the reins of a very excited horse, a horse standing in the shafts of a light buck-board like a hound in leash. From far off as we stood even, we could see by the gestures of hay-beard, he sitting on the seat with legs out-thrust, that he was grandiloquently inebriated. A man ran out of the hotel door, dashed across the verandah, and snatched for the horse's head. The horse swerved away. The man who had tried to catch its head vaulted over the rail; but his feet sank so deep in the sand that he half fell. As he did so hay-beard gave the whip a wild sweep, yelled, wheeled away from the hotel, and fiercely urged the horse. It plunged through the sand, found firmer footing on the waggon-road that twined past the hotel and up to the railway track, which it crossed on planks laid between the lines. Up came the buck-board, hay-beard wielding the long lash of the whip. He drove splendidly—too splendidly. There was too much drunken swagger about it. He caught sight of us as he swept along the waggon-road, waved a mocking arm to us, wheeled the buck-board abruptly at the bend on to the track and—well! The next thing we saw was the horse galloping across the track with a shaft hanging to left, a shaft to right; the buck-board overturned; hay-beard on his chest, legs in air, chin sticking out like one swimming, still clutching the reins. Then he went head over heels at the sloping planks that led up to the track and rolled over and over there. The horse simply crossed the track, wheeled about, flung its head up and, turning round, trotted back to the hotel verandah—and stood there.

Out of the hotel poured the men, and ran in the direction of hay-beard. We, on our part, merely watched from the

platform. Hay-beard rose, aided slightly by the man who had tried to catch the horse from the verandah, stood staring and feeling his side, felt his arm, and came over to the depôt, the cluster of men to rear, with evidently the owner of the horse and buck-board strutting beside him with determined jowl.

"Is the Doc here? They tell me the Doc is here. Is he gone?" asked hay-beard.

"Yap! Gone!" snapped Scotty.

"I've broke my arm, by——!" said hay-beard.

Scotty stepped down.

"Let me feel;" and he felt the arm. "Maybe it's only twisted. Yap! Broken!"

"When's the next train?"

"You know the trains."

"I mean a freight train. Any freight before the passenger?"

"Nope! Not another;" and Scotty moved off.

"Oh well, I'll set in the shade here and wait for the train;" and hay-beard, with his arm hanging loose, moved off to the end of the station buildings.

"Couldn't you wire for the Doc again?" I asked.

"For him! No! He ain't got no appreciation. He's the kind of man if I wire for the Doc he would think me his slave—and he would like as not try to stand off paying the Doc his fee and I would go and offer to pay it and the Doc would be indignant and say 'Call off—Call off'—and that coyote would think he had done a smart deal. That's the kind of man he is. Come and eat."

The little crowd thinned, even the owner of the buck-board departing with a mere: "Well, mister, you're going to pay for a new buck-board when you get on your legs again." We went to "eat" lunch, Scotty and I, in the sun-blinded cool rear room of the hotel.

There had been plenty of incidents in that day. But I still felt more looking on at a show than as if they were my own incidents. You understand me? These were not my affairs.

We ate lunch and sat on the verandah afterwards with the remaining boys. One by one they departed—disappearing from the verandah and anon re-appearing on horseback and riding out of Black Kettle, one (who carried no blanket roll on his saddle) riding away by the waggon-road across the railway and straight up hill. Another (who packed a blanket, I noticed) rode away back of Black Kettle into the great plain striped with brush, and anon with sand and anon with grassy stretches. From the end of the house one could see him fade in that immensity.

I sat there smoking, watching two more riders cross the track. I heard the flap-flap of the boards as the ponies stepped across the crossing, watched the horses go up and up—noted how they seemed, as they took the last roll, very tall, and their riders very tall, then how they went over the last roll like little boats over a wave, and disappeared.

At last one said: "It do seem a pity for him over there. Reckon I'll step over and see how he's making out," and he stepped off the verandah and went ploughing over to the depôt buildings.

Just there he stopped and we who still sat on the verandah looked up. A frightful yelling broke out Westwards and grew louder. Then a metallic rattling. What was it? Was it the Dago gang? Had they come by some liquor up there at the camp, and were they coming down to Black Kettle?

The rattling grew in volume—the rattle of a pump-car. There is a kind of agitation comes over one when any noise breaks out that one does not understand. It was a relief to recognise the sound of a pump-car. Then suddenly round the bend came two horsemen, riding parallel with the track; they were whooping, screaming; and on the track, urging their pump-car and whooping and yelling, came the section gang, the gang whose boss had been so decent to me.

It was only an arrival in town.

The men on the verandah smiled and tilted their chairs afresh and leant their backs to the wall, puffed their cigars into a glow. The horsemen, with final yells, rode clean up to the hitching-posts, flung off their horses, and came over to the hotel (less elegant on foot than on horseback, for they were both bow-legged with much riding) clattered up the steps and entered. The section men's car slid into the depôt beside the platform before they could stop it. They stepped off laughing. Then we saw them talking to hay-beard and presently hay-beard got up from where he had been lying limp, and with much grimacing with the pain of his arm got over to the pump-car and stood on it. The men all piled on again and away they went, hay-beard propped in the centre beside the pump.

"That section boss is a very good sort," said a man, bringing his chair down from the tilt, rose, said: "Well, so-long, gents," and departed.

Scotty also rose, and stretched.

"Come over," he said. "I got to get over."

I strolled across with him, loafed for an hour or so about his door, merely acclimatising myself, letting the air of the place lull me, but still with that sense of waiting.

"Say! I forgot to give you your mail," said Scotty. "Something for you," and he handed me a fat packet that he had discovered.

It was a bundle of Old Country papers from a New York agency. I opened them easily—thinking how cute I had been to write, before I went up to the extra gang, for Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, London papers, all together, and not to write for those only on and after the date of my encounter with the black-mailing tramp, but for a full month before that date.

It was, of course, only the *Glasgow Herald* I troubled about now. I was the boy to cover my tracks, I thought. I was a "cute" individual. I opened the *Herald* of the day after that trouble with the lurcher. I glanced it through. No—no "Horrible Discovery."

I glanced through the next day's. No, nothing. I looked through the *Heralds* for the whole week. Nothing! Nothing at all about the body behind the bushes.

I looked up abruptly and found Scotty scrutinising me under his thin brows and biting the ragged end of his yellowed moustache. He let his gaze lose its intentness, did not look away, but gazed as it were absently through me.

I returned to my perusal, but with a manner guardedly easy, looking up and down the columns more lightly; I hoped not too lightly, lest my change of manner might but increase Scotty's curiosity. Suddenly I saw this:

"The tramp who was found in the park overlooking Drummond Terrace three days ago and taken to the Western Infirmary has regained consciousness. Although he has clearly been assaulted, and is suffering from injuries received, he will say nothing of how he came by his injuries."

I sat back in my chair. I forgot all about Scotty again. I only thought: "I need never have bolted at all!"

Scotty's beloved instrument was tick-ticking and he bent to it. The tick-ticking went on. I sat looking at a muss of type, a haze of print. I sat with the papers on my lap, staring—and then, slowly, my eye seemed to focus to the print again. What was this? I choked, and stared, and looked at the paper.

Suddenly, at Jamieson Gardens, Jane Elizabeth Barclay.

If that accursed tramp had been within reach I would have killed him indeed then! He lived—and my mother was dead—no need to ask how—of a broken heart at my non-appearance, at my disappearance. I stood up, so Scotty told me afterwards, and raising my fist to heaven cried: "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

But at the time Scotty was eager on something else and he only shouted: "Shut up! Damn it!"

I sat down it seems. The instrument ceased to click its long message. He turned to me and said:

"Say! Say! What do you think? The passenger has been held up at Antelope Spring."

"Oh!" I said and sat with gulping breaths.

"Held up!" he shouted. "Who by, do you think? By the Apache Kid! What do you think of that? They're going right through to Lone Tree—non-stop to get next to the Sheriff there."

"Eh? Oh—that's very interesting," I said.

"My God!" he cried. "You—you're bug-house!" And he fled out to pour his news into some more sane ears.

I heard anon a whistle scream outside—heard the roar of a train coming into Black Kettle—heard it pass on, without cessation. The room hummed with its passage and clatter—and then a whistle beyond Black Kettle pealed out—another further off—and silence fell again.

CHAPTER V

GOVERNMENT BONDS

Enter to me, where I sat among the piles of Old Country papers, the cowboy who had been so anxious about my lunch, a tall, rudely handsome man, with bright eyes and bad teeth; in loose, cotton jacket, striped black and white; and with leather chaps over his pants, belted and gunned in the manner of his kind.

"Cheer up, mister," he said.

I looked up, more in amazement at his attitude toward me, I think, more wondering what he bade me to cheer up over, than with any other thought.

"If you're gone broke, why I have a few dineros and you just got to say the word and any little I can do—why there you are. I hear there's the superintendent of the division coming up to see into the trouble at the gravel pit where you bin working. Your money from the railway is safe enough."

"It's not that," I said and rose and laughed. "I didn't think I looked worried about it."

He looked at the pile of papers on the floor, looked at me, looked at them.

"Bad news?" he asked.

"Very bad," I said. And then: "It can't be mended. There—it's past. It's over."

He stood thoughtful a moment, hitched his chaps, put his thumb in his belt.

"Do you want a job?" he asked.

"I do," I said. "I don't suppose I'm bound to wait here till the white gang comes to the steam-shovel."

"Oh!" he cried, "that was the idee was it? No, sir—not you. A man like you don't want a moling job. I see—you was broke and so you went on with the Dago push till such times as the white gang would come along?"

I nodded.

"Pshaw! A man like you don't want to go burrowing in no railway excavations. It's an outsider's job—making railways, hittin' spikes in ties, and boltin' on fish-plates, and fillin' up trestle bridges. When I heard you was on the railway I took no note of you. Then I heard you was the one white man in a Dago push and I thinks to myself: 'He's either plumb locoed, or else he's too green to burn, or else he's lookin' for trouble.' Then I heerd the way you talked to Mike Mills—him that meddled with Jamieson's high-stepper. Jamieson says he's going to get the price of that busted buggy out of him so soon as he comes back with his arm mended. I says to the boys: 'Is that there, then, the white gent that has been working with the Dagoes?'—'That's him,' they says. So I considered you was just ignorant here, though maybe wise where you came from, and a pilgrim in a strange land. That was why I stepped over to post you about Mike Mills's wit. And now, friend, I'm riding over to the ranch and if you care to come with me—why—I guess there's a job for you right there. You savvy horses do you?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Steers?"

"No," I said. "I know a little about sheep."

He seemed quite taken aback.

"You ain't ever bin a sheep-herder?" he asked plaintively.

"No," I said, "but at a place in the Old Country for two months every year I used to do nothing but work among the sheep."

"I see—in your college vacation. College man you are?"

I nodded.

"I've met no end of college men," he said. "I had a partner in the Panamint Country once—college man—Harvard—he was a teamster. Then I took out once into the country back of the Tetons, a college gent who had come West to photograph elk. He was all right. He was quite a white man, and if he didn't savvy a thing he asked and learnt. But he didn't have to ask much. He had the savvy, and could figure out most things with looking at them thoughtful. Then once, right here, on this yere platform, there comes along a hobo; he had got flung off the freight half way between here and Lone Tree. Some devilment makes me throw a lariat of friendship over him and corral him over into the ho-tel and put tongue-loosener into him—Harvard man—Oh, straight goods! He wasn't bluffing me. He told me a heap about his means of livelihood—low-down and mean and all that, from my point of view, made me sick now and then, but he had a kind of edge of humour on him that laughed at himself, and I was not out to criticise him, but to hear more about other kinds of life than my own. He asked me if I ever seed initials up on water-tanks. 'Sure,' I says,—'That's us,' he explains. 'Now I put up my sign N.Y.Y.T.' 'Like a registered brand,' says I.—'Sure,' says he, very friendly, 'And N.Y.Y.T. stands for New York Whitey. I'm the poet of the hoboes,' he says and I asks him for one of his poems. It ha'nted me so that I got him to sing it three times, him being that full of song and stagger-juice. Here it is," and my new friend (Panamint Pete, by the way, was his picturesque name) began to carol to me the ditty of N.Y.Y.T. in a friendly attempt, as I understood afterwards, to "chirp me up some!" He acknowledged his aim later, when we were better acquainted. I had no idea, at the time, of his sympathetic intention as he sang:

*"It was at a Western water-tank
One cold December day,
Within an empty box-car
A poor dying hobo lay.*

*"His comrade sat beside him
With sad and drooping head,
And patiently he listened
To what his dying comrade said.*

*"'I am going,' said John Yegdom,
'To a land that is fair and bright,
Where the weather is always warm enough
To sleep outside at night;*

*"Where hand-outs grow on the bushes,
And folks never wash their socks,
And little streams of alcohol
Come trickling down the rocks;*

*"Tell my boy down on Clark Street,
The next time his face you view,
That I've taken the Great Eternal Freight,
And I'm going to ride her through.*

*"Tell him not to weep for me,
In his eye no tear must lurk,
For I am going to the land
Where no man has to work;*

*"Hark! I hear that centre whistle,
I must take her on the fly.
Good-bye, my dear old comrade
'Tis not so hard to die.'*

*"He closed his eyes, he bowed his head,
He never spoke again,
His comrade left him lying there,
And took the guts of an Eastbound train."*

"Yes, sir, that's the song of N.Y.Y.T.—New York Whitey—which he was named because he was what they call prematurely grey—with a white head of hair that would have made anybody gentle with him, and fatherly. Well—say—do you figure on coming up with me and touching the boss for a job? You can get your wages from Scotty here if——"

Scotty entered and Pete turned to him.

"Say! You could get this gent's wages and hold them for him till such times as he calls?"

"Wages! Wages! Say! Have either of you touched my instrument? Wages! Wages! Pshaw! There ain't no wages! The train's been held up, by heck! Express safe emptied."

"You told me so an hour ago," said Pete, "and your little instrument's been sneezing there powerful."

Scotty put his hand in his trouser pocket and drew forth a plug of tobacco with a bite out of it, took another bite, and sat down to his instrument.

As it tip-tapped, Pete turned to me and quietly said:

"What do you think?"

I nodded.

"Thank you very much. Yes, I'll come."

"That's right. You can git a hoss from old Colonel Kemp over at the store. He runs a kind of livery stable. We'll look in again, Scotty."

"All right!" snapped Scotty, and off we went to Colonel Kemp, the silent old store-keeper of the gruff but amicable "How-dos."

Yes, he had a "hoss." I would take care of it? I could have it for two dollars up to the ranch.

"What about bringing it back? When will we be coming in again?" I asked Pete.

The Colonel rose from the tub on which he sat and stared at me.

"That's all right," said Pete. "The colonel's hosses can come home fifty mile, let alone fifteen. We raise sech hosses in old pigeon houses in this part of the world and they learn the homing instinct from the smell of the homers. Things is different here from back east."

I had but six dollars and out of that I paid the Colonel for the hire of a restive cayuse.

I paid my bill at the hotel, bought a grey blanket at the store, as the blankets I had bought when going up to the gravel pit were still there; and then we rode over to the depôt, where I stepped off on to the platform and walked down to ask Scotty to see about getting my wages from the railway.

"Better leave me a note," he said, "so that I can show it to the pay-clerk when he comes along." He pointed to a pad and pencil on his table.

"What shall I write?"

"I don't know—say—there's been a great hold up, Apache Kid and some other man not known—just the two of them. Eh? Oh well," he scratched his hair, already dishevelled with much scratching. "Well—Oh heck!—I don't know. Say 'Dear Scotty, please get my wages due for work on Dago gang when the pay-clerk comes up. I shall call for them when I'm in town again.' By heck! A hold-up in this division—Apache Kid and another not known! Ah! But that ain't all! Say, don't you tell anybody! I ought not to tell you this, but you are not everybody—they've not only got a haul of express money,

but they've got a bunch of Government bonds! Government papers! By heck! Apache Kid is up against it this time. He was suspected once before, you know. I'm sorry. Liked that man."

"So did I."

"So you would, so would anybody. All right." He snatched my hand. "So-long—I'll keep it for you all right," and he tapped the note I had written.

"By heck, Government bonds!" I left him muttering: "That'll cinch up Apache tighter than anything."

But Scotty had not as long a head as the Apache Kid. A good many people were to be astonished at the use that the Apache Kid was to make of these Government bonds.

I stepped out again, mounted the Colonel's horse. We rode across the track, where the loose planks at the crossing said "Whack! Whack! Whack!" under the ponies' hoofs, and took the roll of the first bench out of Black Kettle.



CHAPTER VI

DIAMOND K

We mounted up the rolls of the benches less inclined for talk than for relishing the motion of the horses under us.

There was something, that I can find no word to describe so well as "callousness," had come into me—or perhaps I do myself an injustice, perhaps I was merely stunned with regret, remorse. The words of the newspaper announcement still danced before my eyes, but I refused to consider them. I could not.

My deepest memory of these benches is my first. I seemed to look at them out of the torture of humanity and see them as amazingly great, spacious, and healing. Had I stayed over at one of these little hamlets down in some deep cañon, with a dark river thundering past and the high cañon walls shortening the day, I think, on receipt of the news, on comprehending the needlessness of my flight, and considering the result of it, I should have gone mad and dashed myself into the turbid creek. Had I been in a city I think I should have run amok. And yet I do not know. When, later, I told Apache Kid something of these feelings (for I was to meet him again as you shall hear), he listened with a more robust thing than sympathy—with pity—and then, with puckering eyes looked into the distance, taking his pipe from his mouth and tapping his teeth with the stem in a way he had.

"Yes," he said. "I know. The trouble is that many men who feel things that way only go and get drunk."

We rode up, Pete and I, silently, to the topmost crest, advancing into the golden sunset and lingering day, and turned around on the crest, with hands on ponies' haunches looking back on Black Kettle. I remember a queer thought I had then that, as a kid, I had pictured myself sitting so, had sat so, aged seven, on a rocking horse, imagining. Some dreams come true. But we change. I had not thought of the manner of man I might be when the picture part of the dream should be fulfilled.

We looked down into the valley and already the railway line was dwarfed. It was the merest, insignificant thread coming out of a hardly discernible little hole in the hill to North-East, sweeping round the foot of the benches and lost in the sand-hills South Westward. Even the handful of roofs of Black Kettle, that from the car windows looked so whimsically trivial in the landscape, seemed, from this high vantage, far more important than the railway.

I was gaining a better-balanced view of things. We topped the rise, riding on, and then I gasped. I think a good tonic for human misery, and for human woes that lead us not through a narrow and darkened way into some better prospect but lead us instead into a cul-de-sac, is change of scene. We took the rise, and a high wind that stirred the bunch-grass and the sage-brush and flicked the horses's manes, came freshingly on my cheeks. But the great thing was, the farther view burst upon us: a valley, sloping and widening beneath us with the silver of a creek in its depth, with dotted trees low down, with belts of trees above, with the green and grey of bunch-grass, sage and sand still higher, and, far off, the white of snows glinting on the peaks of the loftier mountains.

We took the slopes to left and rode on along a half trail, half waggon-road, feeling very high and airy. The valley had the appearance of knowing two periods of the day at once; the Western slope already showed the hue of twilight, the Eastern had the aspect of late afternoon. There was just that indescribable sense of warning spoke to one out of the colours, the lights and shadows, the kind of warning that savage peoples, living close to nature, perfectly understand; as do those fashionable persons of the East, where it is the habit to ring thrice before dinner, understand the significance of the gong—to wash, to be finished dressing, to file into the dining-room.

There was no attempt at ballasting on this half waggon-road, the passage of hoofs and occasional waggons giving a kind of surface hardness which made easy going for the ponies. They, too, freshened after climbing the benches, tossed their heads in preparation for a quickening lope. At a declivity they went with a swirl, at a rise they slackened.

Then suddenly raising my eyes I saw before us, by the trail-side, a little house.

"This here," said Pete, "that we're coming to is what they call an experimental farm. A man they call Johnson has come along up here and reckons he can grow fruit-trees in the sand. We'll pull up and bid him good-evening. You'll find him a diversion."

But my intuitive sense, very distinctly wakening, and I aware of its awakening, told me that the cabin was deserted. It was not only the intense silence of the slopes told me no one was there. Town folk, or Easterners, may smile at this remark, and I do not blame them; but it may have befallen them to come to some house in the city, to ring the bell, to hear the bell clang within, and to have felt somehow that it clanged in an empty house. I do not say an unfurnished house, but a house in which there was no human being. If my reader still disagrees—good, it is no matter; let us shake hands and pass on to my yarn. Anyhow, the house was deserted.

We rode up to the door. Only silence. We dismounted. Only the breathing of the ponies. Pete, with the reins in his hands, knocked at the door.

"Maybe sleeping," he said, "but I don't think so. Seems to be from home."

He looked in at the little window.

"Say," he said, "the sight of that tea-pot on the top of the stove sure invites me in."

He went back to the door and pressed it with his palm several times, vigorously. Each time it gave a little. He gave a hard push and stepped back so that the door sprung. Something fell within. He gave the door another push and it opened.

"Nobody in," he said and put the reins of his pony over a hook at the door, and entered. I followed.

"Stove still hot," he said. "Well, we'll make some tea and leave a little note to tell Johnson that we looked in in passing and that his blamed tea-pot looked so sociable that we took the liberty of using it."

He took up a stick, smartly whittled a pile of shavings into the still warm stove, blew upon them, dropped in a match, and presently we were tasting the rankest, but most relishable tea I think I ever imbibed. Pete sat on the little table, swinging a leg; I sat on the edge of a bunk.

"Sorry about that Apache Kid," he said suddenly. "I worked with him once up Kettle River way. I remember the marshal of Baker City discussin' hard cases with me, and saying that there Apache Kid was one of the most interestin' so-called 'bad men' with whom he had ever had any dealings. Up at Baker City some of the old timers is as full of stories of the Apache Kid as a story book."

"Well," I said, "I think I may say that I owe Apache Kid my life."

"You mean up at the Dago gang?" he said.

I nodded, thinking over the affair.

"Can you recount that story?" he asked. "It was only a kind of a hint of it I had from Scotty. Course we all knew something had happened when Douglas got his head smashed. I was going to ask Scotty for the rights of the story when he got plumb locoed over the news of the hold-up that he got off what he calls his 'little instrument,' of which he's more fond than a widower of an only girl. There was no use asking him for the story then. Was it a Dago hit Douglas, anyhow? Shorely not."

"No, no," said I, and I told him the whole story. I had just come to the point of saying: "And when that white Dago, as I suppose you'd call him, came over to my side, and we stood there to put up what we both, I expect, thought was going to be the toughest fight of our lives, over the little rise above the pit—perhaps you know it?—"

"I know it," said he, "the old trail to Black Kettle goes down from here round that way, on to the other side of the valley."

We had, then, just got that length, and I was saying: "Well, over the top, and sliding his pony down to us, came the Apache Kid with his revolver——"

"Gun!" said Pete.

"Gun," said I, "in his hand——"

"What's that?" said Pete suddenly, and rose, and I was aware that as we had talked the twilight had been running into night. His face was indistinct in this little interior, his rising form merged with the shadows behind it. There was a

slapping of ponies' hoofs outside the door, a sound as of a cavalcade, a rush and a whirl, the creak of a saddle as some one flung off, dismounting abruptly, and then a "Hallo! Look up!"

Pete, who knew his country, relieved the situation.

"All right, gents," he hailed.

"Who's yere?" came a voice from outside.

"That you, Mr. Johnson?" said Pete.

"It's me. Who are you?" Mr. Johnson did not come into his own shack.

"It's Panamint Pete," said my friend, stepping out to the door; "your tea-pot kind of invited me in and I accepted the invitation which I knew you would have given. No offence, I hope?"

"No—that's all right," said Johnson's voice and he came to the door. Suddenly he stepped back.

"Friend with you?" he said.

"That's all right," came another voice that I thought I knew, and very smartly past Johnson and Pete, with three lithe strides, came the other man.

"Apache!" I cried.

"Hallo, Kid!" he said. "It's you." He struck a match on his pants, lit the lamp. "Come in, gents," he said.

Pete stepped in, his eyes watchful in the new lamp-light. Johnson stood scowling. Pete sat down on a stool. He looked from Apache to Johnson, then back.

"It's all right, Apache," he said. "We've heard the news."

Apache swung round quickly, but not towards Pete. It was towards Johnson.

"He's all right, Jake," he said. "And now, gentlemen, would you be so kind as to turn your faces to the wall and count twenty."

With a laugh Pete turned, and I turned also. There took place a great rustling as of stiff parchment, a muttering between Johnson and the Apache Kid, and then the Apache Kid's voice: "That's all right."

Pete turned.

"Only got the length of eighteen, Apache," he said.

"You always were a white man," said the Apache Kid. "Some men might have counted forty in the time. Well, so-long boys. So-long, mister," to me.

I stepped over and held out my hand. The two train robbers moved outside smartly, we heard the saddles creak as they mounted. There was a "Get up! Get up, you!"—and away they swept in the growing darkness.

Pete strode over to the door and looked after them.

"Two led saddle horses," said he, "and two pack horses. They're going to travel."

The dust fell on the road, the sound of the hoofs died abruptly.

"Well," I said, "I'm the last man to set up as a judge of the Apache Kid, but do you know I was glad to shake his hand just now. It's a very strange thing, but I never thanked him for what he did for me up at the gravel pit. All the way down to Black Kettle, with Douglas, I was trying to think out some way of thanking him. I would look at him and begin, and then—no, couldn't do it. He didn't seem a man that one could thank."

"Yes, I know," said Pete. "Here's to him, anyhow," and he raised the tin panikin and drank the cold dregs of his tea.

And then we put the log back against the door, opened the window, put a stick under it to hold it up as we crawled through, for it was innocent of pulleys and weights—crawled through, mounted under the first stars and rode on, took a narrow trail hitting off from this trail, and at length, in the deep purple of the valley, a light flashed up like a dropped star.

"That's the Diamond K," said Pete, and put spurs to his horse—which, indeed, hardly needed the spur, being as keen as he on that final spectacular rush home—let out a whoop, and a scream; my pony, not to be outdone, stretched himself in pursuit, drew nearly level, and so, with Pete screaming like eagles and howling like wolves, we swept down on the Diamond K.

CHAPTER VII

APACHE IS SENTENCED

As it was so late when we arrived we did not send the horse back that night, put him, instead, in a corral; and next morning led him out, turned him head homeward; he received a resounding thwack with the flat of Pete's hand on his haunch, and off he went, loping away, lonely, to Black Kettle. A droll sight to my eyes, that riderless horse, loping away along the rough track.

For the first fortnight there was nothing of the glorious life about it. Pete had been right in saying that work was to be had for the asking in his outfit; but I spent my time "bucking wood" as they call it, and cleaning horses, helping the cook, and in any "spare time" shovelling the stable dung on to an old stiff-hide, which the stiff old "chore-hoss" would drag away and I would overturn beyond scent of the ranch-houses. I do not know that I was a very cheerful new hand. I have an idea that I was often scrutinised curiously when I was not supposed to see. And, indeed, I felt pretty glum.

I was sensible enough, or callous enough, if that is the word, to know that Time would heal what, for the moment, I simply had to keep dismissing from my mind. The fatuity of my flight from Glasgow, if I pondered on it, was enough to have driven me mad. And I think it would be easy to go mad in such scenes, for there are times when the height of sky and the great sweeps of the land strike one as so high, and so vast, and so heedless, that, if one cherish any kind of contempt for oneself, one must inevitably feel more insignificant.

Behold me, then, at the wood pile of the Diamond K, splitting wood, in my belt, as the phrase is, swinging the axe and scowling as I kept ousting the thought of my mother's death from my mind. Behold me at the stable door, shovelling away on to the old hide, stopping at a hail from the cook (an old rheumatically Virginian, who had known the old cattle business and showed it on face and form), and stoking his stove, winding up water for him from the well, or wiping my hands to mix flour for him when he was baking.

The only relaxation was in listening to theories regarding where the Apache Kid might now be, and to stories of other road-agents, train-robbers, and the like, which the Apache Kid's exploit, so close at hand, made the sole topic of conversation. That was the only relaxation; that, and revolver practice, with a discarded and battered pot-lid tied on a pole for a target. I had my favourite horses and took a great interest in learning their little ways. There was one, a waggon-horse, that would not allow any one to come to it on the near side when it was in the stable without trying to pin whoever came so against the wall. Go into his head-stall on the off-side and he was wholly friendly. There was another that, every time it crossed the threshold of the stable, stood on its forefeet and flung up its hind legs in a vicious kick like an attempt at a somersault. Nobody tried to cure these things. They were looked upon as individual characteristics.

It was the custom, at the Diamond K, it being so near to Black Kettle, for some one to ride in once a week for the mail, but the Apache Kid's little escapade was too interesting for us to lose any link in the story of it, and so every day saw some man ride into town. The owner, indeed, now a good friend of mine, got so excited over the hold-up and the chase that when, on the third day, he rode down to Black Kettle he simply stuck there. On the fourth day no one rode in, but on the fifth the foreman (now no friend of mine, and you shall hear why) took it upon himself to send a man in, ostensibly for mail. He saw the owner, of course, that bogus mail-seeker, but the owner was not the kind of man to jump on him. He told us that on his return the foreman had asked:

"Did you see the boss?"

"Shore," replied the bogus mail-man.

"Asked you what you were in for?"

"Shore; and I says: 'For news of Apache Kid and the great hold-up,' and he gives me a stack of papers he had bought from Scotty. 'Take these back to the boys,' says he. 'The local colour was made in an office but they've got the facts anyhow.'"

The local gossip from Black Kettle was carried home with that bundle of papers and discussed. The newspapers were read and re-read with much criticism—sometimes expression of disgust at a "newspaper gent's" lack of "savvy," sometimes with expression of amazement at how much the "gent" knew.

A further budget of Old Country papers came for me, handed over by Scotty with a message to say that the railway pay-clerk had not yet arrived, but he would remember. And in one of these papers, in three lines at the foot of a column, my tramp, or hooligan, was dismissed for ever with the words:

"The man who has been in the Western Infirmary suffering from injuries received in an assault has been discharged."

I leapt up distractedly, and flung down the paper and trampled on it. I thought no one was near, for I had gone outside the bunk-house to read; but the old Virginian was sitting outside at the gable end, having lived so long and heard of so many hold-ups that he was little interested in hearing the odd fragments of the story, content to wait for the finish.

He rose and looked round the corner.

"'Tain't advisable," he said, wagging a finger at me. "I knew a man with a face much after your kind who used to do that sort of thing frequent and free, and one day he tried not to, when something vexed him, and he went bug-house."

I laughed.

"Well," said I, "that means that he should have used his safety-valve."

"Pshaw!" said the old fellow. "I don't know about that. I would advise rather that a man don't have no call for safety-valves. Never do what you don't want to do. When you want to do a thing, do it. If anything goes wrong—well, you've done your best. If it went wrong because of you—you know what to mend in future; and I guess every man is always learning. If it goes wrong because of outside folks—well, that's hoomanity, and men is mostly fools, like mules, and you don't start out expecting them to be like horses. Some folks expect them to be like these yere Senators."

"Senators?" I thought, "Senators?" But I did not ask him what he meant. Only, coming nearer, I saw that he was reading a 'Frisco Sunday paper, discarded by the boys inside, and on the first page it had, in the American fashion, a drawing in blent line and colour of a centaur, all mixed up with the columns of print; and a great heading across the page blazoned forth the words: "The Land of Centaurs—The Tehulches and Gauchos of Patagonia."

Just then the foreman came over to me, and said he:

"Say, what is your name? I want to put you down in the pay-book."

"Barclay," said I. "William Barclay."

The old cook, who had come stiffly along to lecture me and had sat down on the form where I had been sitting, looked up, stared at me, looked down at the bench and puckered his eyes.

"Right," said the foreman, and walked away.

The old Virginian lifted from the bench the wrapper that had been around the English papers, sent to me from the New York agency. He lifted it up, frowned on it.

"'John Williams,'" he read, "'Black Kettle P.O. To be called for.' My son—it ain't my business, and I don't want to hear; but you see, as I said, a man's always learning. This here Apache Kid that they are talking about wouldn't do that. When you take to running water you don't want to blaze a tree beside the creek to show where you went in and then blaze another to show where you come out. That would be plumb foolish. I hope, all the same, it ain't anything serious."

Pete that day had gone into town, and in the evening, when the boys were all in, after all the latest news of Apache Kid, which was practically nothing, had been told, he turned to me:

"Oh!" said he, "Douglas is back at Black Kettle. He was asking for you. Thinks a heap of you, he does. Scotty told him about you bringing him in, you and Apache Kid. 'You tell that kid Williams,' he says, 'that if ever he wants to go back on the railway he has only to come up to me. And first time he's in town anyhow, ask him to look me up.'"

The foreman, sitting at the table, looked up.

"Williams? What did he call him Williams for—Barclay is his name," said he. But as among ourselves we bore only

nick-names it was not a question which any one was going to enter into with interest. Besides, there were newspapers to read so as to keep posted on the Apache Kid.

The full story of the hold-up was being told by now in the papers. The engineer was interviewed, the conductor was interviewed and photographed, and his wife too. "Conductor's Wife Hears News. Plucky Woman," said the glaring headings.

"A Former Hold-up Told by the Hold-up Man. Just Released from a Long Sentence," one of the men read out. "What in thunder has that got to do with Apache Kid?"

Grumbling, his voice went on reading down the headings.

"Oh say! Now this is too bad. 'Apache Kid and the Kelly Gang of Australia. The Hold-up by Apache Kid Recalls the Doings of the Famous Kelly Gang of Australia'—and then three colyumes about the Kelly Gang of Australia. Say! Now! That's a very or'nary kind of bluff."

It was on the sixth day after the hold-up that we had the astounding news of the capture of the Apache Kid. Excitement died a little then and we settled down to await news of the trial.

He had absolutely no show, neither he nor his partner Johnson. But it made curious reading. The ranch above Black Kettle (that experimental ranch where roses were to grow out of a heap of cinders, you remember) had been visited and it was proved that the experimental farm was a bluff. It was only a place from which to go forth to the hold-up. The land had been rented genuinely enough, rented for a year—and the first instalment paid, which looked as if the hold-up men had been certain of a big haul some time. Hold-up men don't generally do things so deliberately. And besides that, there was a fair sum of money in the train they had robbed; fifteen thousand dollars. How did they know of this? Or did they know? Was it by accident or design that they had held up the train on that special day?

These were the facts of the hold-up, shorn of all unnecessary embellishments.

At Placer, Johnson, who had been down there looking at some experimental fruit farms where some fruit growers were working on the irrigation principle, had boarded the train. At Antelope Spring the Apache Kid had come aboard and just after the train pulled out, when the conductor had passed through to the end, they had walked on to the forward platform of the first pullman. Apache Kid had marched straight on into the baggage-car, very quietly indeed, with a paralysing suddenness. Johnson must have jerked open the door for him for he was in the doorway before the baggage-man and the express-man were aware, with a heavy revolver in either hand, and the wonted: "Throw up your hands!"

One safe was open, I do not know why, but I have heard of open safes on trains before. The other was shut. To begin with Apache bade his men to keep their hands up and then, dropping one "gun" into a pocket, he rummaged the contents of the large safe into a bag, walked backwards to the door, dragging the bag thither, dropped it there. Then he ordered the express-man to open the other safe. The express-man said he had no key, told Apache Kid that the keys were in duplicate, and that one was kept at either end. Apache, with his other "gun" now in his left hand, plucked forth again, after dropping his bag at the door, walked over to within seven paces of him and said:

"I'm going to count three. When I say one I expect you to think about it, when I say two I'll expect you to drop your hand and fork out the key. You have a little Derringer in your vest pocket. Don't try to touch it. A Derringer is small. It's a good 'gun' for a vest pocket; but without arguing whether you'd get it out slick enough, allowing even that you could—which I guess you couldn't" (and he laughed, a mad laugh that I was yet to hear more of), "I guess it wouldn't kill me instantaneously—and then I'd plug you sure. Now then—One!"

The express-man stood firm.

"Two!"

The express-man went pale but stood firm.

"Three!"

Apache Kid pressed trigger but it missed fire.

"Hm!" he said. "It won't do that again. It doesn't happen twice. And I may tell you that if you don't act at two this time,

you and this other gent both get it," and he nodded determinedly and said: "One—two!" very quickly.

"All right," said the express-man.

The baggage-man said at the trial:

"I got to admit that I don't think that was a miss-fire. I think that chamber had no shell."

There was a gasp in the court and Apache Kid broke out:

"You're right, sir! But I wasn't going to say anything about that. Some other humane person in my profession might try the same bluff, and I didn't want to spoil him if he did. Now he daren't! I don't mind telling you that when I saw what kind of man—" and he was ordered to be silent; but reporters suggested the hiatus was: "—when I saw what kind of man the express-man was I knew he would be moved if I said I'd kill both of them."

It is well known how such incidents weigh juries. A bit of fine gallery play, if only it be good enough to seem not gallery play but the "real thing," will weigh immensely; in France perhaps more than in America. Of late years it has been very noticeable in English trials, though in England it generally leads not to the pardoning for the sake of a sentiment, but to the conviction of one, the making of him into a scapegoat, this especially if it is a dull season and what are called "the pipers" have had time to get photographs of everybody concerned, and one of the suspected persons happens to have a wart on the top of his head, or some such thing that offends public taste.

The judge seemed in a panic lest Apache Kid might say too much and win the jury's heart. Johnson was safe enough; he would not come off worse than Apache, for Apache was the leader of the action. The jury, listening to the story as mere men, might think Apache was the better man and consider that Johnson had a snap, but they could not make Johnson the scapegoat in face of Apache's leading in the hold-up.

The safe was opened to him at the word "Two!" on that second attempt. He treated its contents as he had treated the contents of the first, and backed to the door with them in a bag.

One of the journals contained an interview with the makers of the special kind of bag that was used—to give the public something at least connected with the case while the chase was yet hot after Apache Kid, and before it could be either said that the robbers had got clean away or, on the other hand, that they were certain to be captured.

I give you the story in the way I got it—bits of gossip from Black Kettle, an article in this paper, an interview in the next.

On the steps Johnson stood guard. What was he supposed to do there? He was asked that question point-blank at the trial.

He laughed and said:

"Why, shore, if the conductor had come out there again I would have politely asked him to keep me company a spell, told him that there was a gent in the baggage car transacting a little bit of business at which he must not be interrupted."

But the conductor did not come out. A mile on the other side of Adobe, Apache stepped over to the two men, with whom he had been chatting, or rather, before whom he had been conducting a monologue, and annexed their weapons, for both were armed. Then, with a warning to them to stay where they were till the train not only stopped, but had started again, he retired, backwards, covering them still, and gave Johnson a leg up to the baggage-car roof—no mean feat of gymnastics that, for the baggage-car roof had overhanging eaves. Then Johnson ran along the roof, jumped to the tender, and held up the engineer.

"What did he say, engineer? What were his words?"

"Oh, he just says: 'Say, engineer—pull her up!'"

"And you pulled her up?" the engineer was asked.

"Yes—he had a Colt in his fist and he had the drop on the cab from the tender."

The train pulled up. Apache Kid, on the instant, had flung off the two bags, leapt off himself and ran back from the train to where he could have an eye on the engineer, and on the baggage-car platform, and the platform of the first car.

The conductor came running forward when the train stopped. Johnson was jumping down via the tender, so the conductor did not see him. Apache hailed the conductor:

"Get back into that car, conductor—lively!"

Johnson, alighting at the track side, waved a "gun" at the engineer, called out "Go ahead" and the engineer was only too eager.

"Did you see any one waiting where they got off?"

"No."

"You saw the horses?"

"No; I expect they were back in the bushes."

Apache Kid was asked if there was any one holding the horses.

"You are doing the trial," said he, "you'll have to find that out—" and again was called to order.

The train sped on to Lincoln, not stopping at either Black Kettle or Lone Tree and there the Sheriff had an Indian tracker ready from the Lincoln Reserve and a posse sworn in ready to go back to the scene of the hold-up.

The judge commended all this promptitude, and commended the railway servants for getting a special train into the siding at Lincoln, ready to go East. The Indian tracker from Fort Lincoln reservation accompanied the posse, sworn in by the Sheriff, the special train ran back. The papers were very glad of that Indian tracker. He gave them a help in keeping up the interest during a lull. There was an article (and a very good one too), in the *Times* on "The Redskin's Sixth Sense."

I have seemed to jest too much about "the papers," and so I had better say that that article I cut out and kept with one or two others. You will think I am only mentioning this fact to show what a good judge of letters I am! It was initialled with initials I did not know at the time—but in after years I came to know them as the initials of one of America's most interesting writers on matters pertaining to all the "Back of Beyond," from the forgotten trails of Arizona to the men who keep the line secure in Alaska.

There was no doubt that Apache Kid's hold-up made a stir. There was still a deeper reason than the reason merely of the doing of it. It came out that a great deal of money had been going on that train, and many people wanted to know how Apache Kid and Johnson knew of it. Had they "somebody back East in the know?" Was there some magnate, some man in high places, before a roll-top desk, frock-coated and tube-trousered, and immaculately groomed, instead of in hand-me-down store clothes, with chaps over his pants, and dishevelled hair under Stetson or sombrero? But not even a slick reporter, with that suggestion behind him to egg him on, could find a great secret of intrigue. It made a fine heading picture, a road-agent shaking hands across the top of six columns of print, with a double-chinned, clean-shaven gentleman, in the neatest Broadway cut. But there was no reading matter to make the picture good, as they say. The reading matter only suggested. Perhaps a shrewd guess that, if there were such a person, he would not be found, made the editor decide to use the heading over the article that suggested his probable existence instead of holding it over to head the account of his discovery. Besides, if he did exist—and were discovered—his discovery would need no picture head. It would be a big enough matter without that.

It was rather amazing to learn, after such a daring performance, that the road-agents had been run to earth within a week, surrounded, held up with their boots off, both sleeping by the fire—and never a shot fired.

All that Apache Kid said when he woke to the hail of "We've got you covered!" was:

"Well gents, you might have made a record for quick capture on somebody else. We never expected this. You see, we reckoned we might get but little sleep next week, so we were taking a little this."

The judge broke in that it was not necessary to hear what persiflage the prisoner had indulged in. It was well enough known, he said that representatives of the law and road-agents, and men of such kidney, often (as it is called) "josh" one another.

"There has been too much," said he, "of this irrelevant comment."

There is no doubt that the judge wisely saw the danger of Apache Kid's insouciant methods creating a picturesque glamour round him and blinding the jury to the fact of a very calmly planned, well-considered hold-up.

Its perpetration had indeed been long in the minds of the two men, if of no others, their suspected accomplice in the East, and the possible holder of the horses at the place where they alighted. The experimental farm was a bluff to keep them in the vicinity. They had built their shack there, but had done little besides. About all they had done was to make a rough irrigating sluice, such as placer miners use, from a little lake in the benches. To the eye of the scarce-interested, somewhat aloof and bantering cow-man, riding past, it looked as if some work was being done. The sluice was visible, and boards had been hauled from Black Kettle and were stacked beside the shack as if there was intention to continue the work. That was all. Another man, higher up the valley, one Mike Mills, was similarly employed and had been there long before Johnson arrived—so the irrigating ditches were thus less of a novelty.

I began to suspect that Apache Kid was the chief mover in all this. He had been in the country some time—had worked a year on the range of one of the chief cattle companies. It seemed odd that, when Johnson came in to experiment with vegetables, Apache should quit the ranch and hire on with him. The hold-up, too, was chiefly in his hands. At the trial he was more to the front. Johnson may have been nominally the boss at the ranch. Apache was boss of the hold-up.

The trial hung fire a few more days while further evidence—as if there were not sufficient already—was sought for. At the Diamond K work went on as usual; and sport too, in the evenings. The everlasting poker was played. Our rope expert practised "stunts" outside. Pete and I shot at the pot-lid. I got a discarded revolver to practise drawing and snapping with, for Pete explained that to snap an unloaded revolver much spoiled the action, and to practise drawing and potting with a shot every time would run away with too much ammunition for a poor man. But that very night, on which we received the report of the first day of the trial, I ceased to be exactly a poor man, for one of the boys who had ridden into town brought me my railway wages from Scotty. I don't suppose I was named by Scotty. It would likely be: "You know that fair young fellow that's just gone up to your outfit? You give him this;" so far as this matter went there was no confusion. What I was called among the boys, if ever I was mentioned, would be simply "the cook's bitch." When I was addressed directly I was "Scot" because of my accent.

To us all this man brought news which Scotty had received over the wires, of Apache Kid's sentence (and Johnson's too)—Johnson, fourteen years; Apache Kid—life!

Again a day or two's expectancy and then came papers with the full account of the trial.

"Well, that's the end of that," said the foreman.

"No, it ain't," said the man, who had been into town that day. "I got a crusher to tell you. Scotty—the brass-pounder—is bug-house down at Black Kettle. Came tearing along the platform to tell me, seeing I wasn't everybody and could keep it Q.T., an astounding piece of news—what do you think?"

"What?"

"He says there's some arrangement for the papers to keep dark about it."

"Oh, pshaw! Them papers—" and the foreman indicated the paper-carpeted floor—the papers under bunks, the pictures from them tacked on the wall.

"Well," said the man, "Scotty told me with his eyes sticking out like a frog's when a swamp runs dry, that the Apache Kid and two troopers were coming down the line from Fort Lincoln."

"What!" we cried.

"That's what. Apache Kid and two troopers coming down from Fort Lincoln to-night by special train. He thinks they're going down to where the hold-up was. What's that for? He's sentenced already and by rights he's in the Pen', and begun his hard labour—and here he is travelling down the line in a special cyar like a millionaire, with Government attendants."

"Queer story," said the foreman. "Was there a mail for the boss?"

"Yap."

The foreman departed. When there was a mail for the boss he always went over to the boss's bungalow lest there might be some special instructions to give.

As it happened there were. He came back presently, into the talk, with a letter.

"Say," he said, "you, Steve—and you—and you," selecting three men, "you start right away in the morning. There's a letter here from the X Diamond X to say that a bunch of our steers is on the headwaters of Number Three Creek. You know that bit of country, Steve, don't you?"

"Yap."

"Well, you start right out to-morrow. Tell the cook to-night that you're going. It'll take you a week I guess. He says they ain't bunched very good, but straggling up and down in the gulches."

In the old days, I may mention, this kind of thing was unknown, but in my time it was one of the common events of ranch life. In good weather, and if the ranches passed en route were friendly ones, such a trip was looked forward to.

I wished I might go off with these boys. It would be an experience. But in the morning they were gone and there was I doing what is called "jumping lively into the wood pile."

The foreman came over and looked at me.

"Say," he said, "you want to quit that. You go and saddle that sorrel with the streak down its back, and take your blankets, and get some grub from the cook, and pile after these three men. You know the way. Down by the waggon road from Black Kettle, but when you get down about five mile you'll see a trail cutting across to West—it's clear enough—and there's a blaze anyhow on a fir where it takes off. You go on there, it's maybe till noon, and then the trails fork again. The one straight on is the Three Bars. You take the other; but if you burn the trail some you're liable to catch them up thereaways. I guess you can fry bacon and beans and flip a flap-jack?"

"I guess I can now," said I, and laughed, "and make bread too."

I went off as gay as a chipmuck, speeding down the waggon road towards Black Kettle with my eye lifting for the blazed fir which, of course, I had not noticed on my way out to the ranch, it being dark on that occasion.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE HOLLOW TREE

The pony was fresh and I let him take the gait he wanted, rejoicing in his motion under me, the flip-flapping of sand from his hoofs, reminiscent of the spraying of waves from the cut-water of a sailing skiff. I prefer the long stirrup leathers of America to the short ones so much in vogue in the Old Country; I, for one, get into better harmony with the horse, riding so.

Away we went, bringing the solitary pine tree by the trail-side closer. I chanced to look round once, and a pennon of dust behind the horse's heels exhilarated me. It seemed to swirl away behind about the eighth of a mile—like the flying wake of a sailing skiff. I promised myself, sometime, when my horsemanship improved, to ride lying back with my head on the pony's haunches, seeing nothing but the sky over me and imagining myself on Pegasus.

And then came into my head my sorrowing mother as last I had seen her; anon ticked in my ears Scotty's beloved instrument as we flip-flapped forward. Loose ends of recent occurrences fell away altogether when at the bend I saw, ahead of me, a little flutter of dust. It struck me that the three cow-punchers, on whose track I sped, must have ridden very easily. Then it struck me that the little cloud was not passing ahead of me, but drawing nearer. It fluttered and was dissipated downward, and there was disclosed—nothing at all.

I could hardly think it was a dust whirl in a wind, for it had quite the appearance of the dust raised by loping hoofs such as my pony was raising in less volume. I rode on, wondering a little, and then came to the high fir with a blaze on it, standing back from the trail on which I had been riding, and saw the old trail running past it. It was here that I had seen that flutter of dust.

"Perhaps," thought I, "it was, after all, Steve and the others; and I saw the cloud just as they turned aside. Perhaps they had made a dash into Black Kettle to hear more of the strange story about the Apache Kid and two troopers coming down the line. No! They could not have ridden to Black Kettle and back to this point in the time. And yet the cloud that I had seen had been advancing to this point as if from Black Kettle."

My pony whipped about a little here, having evidently expected me to ride straight on, taken unawares by the pull of the off rein and the pressure of the near thigh; and as he wheeled in the agitated manner of these Western ponies, I looked at the sand of the trail. I could see the fresh marks, of the hoofs that I had been following, turn aside here; also there was another fresh track coming from Black Kettle, wheeling round here too and whelming with the track of Steve and his two companions. Perhaps, in telling the story to you now, you, because of the clue of my title, if nothing else, have your suspicions aroused; I, at the time, had no suspicions. I merely rode gaily on down the trail.

Up hill, down dale, a rise and a dip, a rise and a dip, a rise—and then I reined up; for, below me, beside an old withered tree with a great cavity in it, were two blue-coated troopers and another rider whom I at once recognised as the Apache Kid. Something in the air made me rein up. I remember how I took in the whole sweep of this dip, saw a long-eared jack-rabbit scuttling up hill and bounding off, saw some little chipmucks on the slope jumping on stones—sitting up like six-inch kangaroos, jumping between stones, jumping up again and sitting with heads as incessantly twitching left and right as some little wren in an English hedge.

I saw Apache Kid back his horse away from the two troopers, stretching his legs out from its flanks; I saw him make a gesture of his hand to the hollow tree. One of the troopers sidled his horse closer to Apache's pony. The other trooper, looking almost suspiciously at Apache (I noticed the turn of his head), shook the rein, rode smartly to the tree, dipped his hand. Apache raised his head and said something to him, then gave his attention again to the trooper by his side.

The trooper by the tree drew off the thick gauntlet from his right hand, thrust his arm in the hollow again, more deeply, and then drew forth a sheaf of papers.

And just at that, too quick for me to follow the action, I saw a quick motion on the part of the trooper who sat his horse beside Apache's, saw a quick motion of the Apache Kid; he had grasped the trooper's wrist.

He who had drawn forth the bundle of papers was thrusting them under his thigh with his right hand, turning his horse about with the left. Apache adroitly backed his own horse, kicked the horse of the trooper, whose wrist he had grasped,

in the belly, so that he drove it forward, and thus put this man between him and the one who had drawn forth the papers. A deliberate dog that latter! He took his revolver from its holster as a slaughter-man might take the knife to cut a trussed sheep's jugular and rode towards the two. He was going to make no mistake of it.

I sat spell-bound for a moment, looking on; then I put spur to my pony so sharply that he leapt forward as if he had been ejected from a spring gun, and I held my revolver up as Pete had taught me, raising and lowering my fist so that every time I brought it down I had the trooper covered.

All looked up and saw me.

"Don't shoot!" I shouted.

Perhaps it was as well that this was my first adventure of the kind; there are times when greenness is a defence. Had I shouted the more usual "I have you covered!" or "Throw up your hands!" I am inclined to think that the trooper might have let fly at Apache, and chanced me. As it was he held up, as if to discover my business and so, reining up, I came down into the dip beside them.

The belligerent trooper sat with his gun-hand lowered; I rode down with my hand raised and looking along the sights, my hand as steady as if that trooper's head was the pot-lid on the twisted juniper behind the horse-corral back at the Diamond K.

Apache Kid's voice broke out:

"Thank you, my son. If he budges that right hand then let her go. It's too good a hand to pass, and if you do pass this one you'll never sit in to another game."

I felt the beginning of a nervousness. I felt the beginning of a self-consciousness—a tremor in my hand.

"Drop that gun!" I said to the trooper; and when I heard my own voice snap out I knew how very deeply I meant it.

So did he. He gave me one short look that was as full of the longest thoughts as any look I had ever seen up to that date. Then he dropped his gun.

Apache and his man were still performing a kind of mounted wrestle, the trooper wriggling his wrist, Apache holding on. The devilment of the thing woke in me; I rode over and, my gun-hand raised, calmly lifted the holster flap on the trooper's saddle, while Apache's left hand slipped across and appropriated the weapon.

The troopers had still their rifles in the buckets, but it was safe for Apache then to let go his hold. He backed his horse from them; I also backed a little, keeping both under surveillance, for Trooper No. 1 was up to some game. His mount was twisting and twisting and twisting in the sand, not wholly because of its own nervous build, for I could see the trooper's thighs pressing. He was looking powerfully thoughtful. I think he was speculating on the chances of a strategic wheel and the throwing up of his rifle; but Apache saw it all.

"Well, gents," he said, and he tapped his chest. "I have my paper here, you have your papers there. If I was sure that this little game of yours was all your own I would plug you both and leave you here with the bonds, fulfilling my part of the bargain; but I don't know but what you've been put up to it. You can have the benefit of the doubt. Go on! Mosey!"

Trooper No. 1 backed his horse, backed and backed. Apache had his gun-hand raised with the confiscated gun at the ready, so I ceased to devote my attention to his man, but kept an eye on Trooper No. 2. But Trooper No. 2 was not going to risk laying a hand to his rifle.

"Mosey!" said Apache to him in turn—and he "mosied," not backing from us like the other, but riding slow, and laughing to himself, back to the trail.

As they mounted the hill over which I had just ridden on them, Apache and I rode up the hill ahead, cutting across it diagonally, looking back on the two troopers. When they had fairly gone on the back track Apache turned to me and said no word of thanks, merely held out his hand, which I took, and leaning each to each from our saddles, we grasped hands warmly.

"Where on earth did you come from?" I said.

"From going up and down on the earth, from wandering to and fro," said he, and I can remember still the strange look in his eyes, something lurking in among their speckled hazel as he turned his head and looked at me. It was like the imp that looked out of the bottle. It stands to reason that there was some kink in that man. I ignored the warning of devilment in his eye at the time. He had saved my life, I had saved his, and though he was a road-agent and so forth, as far as he and I were concerned there had been nothing but straight dealing. With me he was white—and would always be white. And yet there was that look in his eye then. I suppose I had spotted that in him which brought him in the end with his back to the old Pueblo wall at The Triangle outfit.

"Well," said he, and I let slip from me the discussion that had begun in my own brain, very quickly, as to whether I had got into exactly what you might call "good company"; "I have just come back," said he, "from a very horrible place that must be nameless. As I daresay you have heard," his voice was what, as boys, we used to call simply "cheeky," "I was recently tried on a charge of having held up the Chicago Sonoma, and S.W. The evidence was absolutely all against me; which, considering I was guilty, seems a little droll." He gave me the imp twinkle again. "At any rate I was sentenced, perfectly justly, to a term of life imprisonment. And then came a tug-of-war.

"Behold me in my cell, waiting, for the Governor. And my expectations were not disappointed; the only difference was that I was taken before the Governor—I was asked to visit him instead of him visiting me.

"Now Apache Kid,' said he, 'I suppose you have secreted the money?'

"No doubt about it,' said I.

"Was there anything else beside money?' said he.

"I looked at my two gaolers on either side.

"Governor,' said I, 'I have something to say to you. It is going to be a pretty big deal, and it is going to come off; and after it comes off you won't want any one to know anything about it. Tell these two men to step outside and I'll show you my first card.'

"He looked at me thoughtfully, and then he nodded to them, and they slipped out.

"Yes?' said he when they had closed the door.

"May I have a chair?' I said.

"He signed to a chair and I sat down.

"You want to ask me about some Government papers, do you?' said I.

"I expected he'd arranged some plan of campaign for himself, had it all cut and dry; but he was not dealing with some ex-hobo who'd graduated through the various classes from intimidating lone ladies, through shop-lifting and watch-snatching, to holding up a gun at some man, and the first thing he knew being landed on his back before his bousy finger could press the trigger."

Apache stopped.

"You'll pardon the egotism," he said, "but I was doing a pretty big deal—Apache Kid versus the United States of America, so it wasn't likely I was going to stand talking to its first representative." He gave a snort. "Don't you mistake me either," he said. "I don't mean that I was at all liable to end standing up and answering the President. I fully expected to have to face half the railway magnates and half the senators in these states before I got through; and I was determined, as each man went down, and his boss came up, to sit easy in my chair. I could see myself, at the end, in the White House with my feet on the stove. That's the only way to go in for a big deal. That was how I felt anyhow. In the language of the country I felt good," he snapped.

"I had my plan of campaign," he went on, shaking the rein and clicking to the pony, "I was going to put all my cards down to each one in succession, and I knew from the word 'go' what I was going to ask. I got it! No, sir, I didn't. I had to let one of my chances go."

He reined in his horse, shook his fist in the air, cursed for five minutes.

"Just a little more sand and I might have got it," said he. "Well—I'll tell you. I said to that Governor:

"You want some bonds. I can get them for you, and in return I want a full pardon, signed, sealed, in my breast pocket, and a full pardon for Johnson, signed, sealed and in his breast pocket.'

"I sat back.

"That's all,' I said.

"And then we sat and looked at each other; we sat such a heck of a long time that the two gaolers came in before they were rung for. The Governor looked at me again, and after having glanced up at them, sat and looked at me again for another heck of a long time and then he said:

"All right, take him down.'

"I was left alone the rest of that day.

"They came for me the next morning and walked me up, opened the door, ushered me in and stepped back, closed the door. There was a big-bellied man with gold armour across his paunch sitting beside the Governor. I knew then that I had won the first trick. I had half expected some return to mediæval tortures, but no—this new man was a Congressman, and a Congressman with a very big interest in the C.S. & S.W. Railroad.

"Well, my man,' said he.

"Pardon me,' said I. 'I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance. Introduce us, Governor.'

"You are the Apache Kid,' said the Congressman.

"You forget, sir,' said I, 'that though my fame is scattered broadcast and my portrait, I have no doubt, decks the front page of all the best Sunday papers, politicians are not so popular as train robbers.'"

Apache chuckled.

"That buck laughed. 'Sit down,' he said, 'I'm ——,' and he gave me his great name.

"Pleased to meet you,' I said.

"I did not put my heels on the table. I fully expected to see a better than him yet.

"Now,' said I, 'there is a little bit of business we might discuss.'

"About some bonds?' said he.

"About some bonds,' said I. 'Let me put the proposition before you. I want a pardon in my pocket, a pardon in friend Johnson's pocket, and the bonds will be yours.'

"He sat and looked at me. He sat and looked a heck of a long time, and then he turned and looked at the Governor and nodded his head. After all it does stand to reason that a man does not become a political big bug without having some kind of savvy when he has met a man who is liable to call the deal on him. He stood up and smiled at me. He stepped over and held out his hand.

"My boy,' he said, 'I'll do my best for you,' and I was on my guard. If ever a man calls you 'my boy,' shakes hands with you, and puts his left hand on your shoulder while he's shaking; or if ever you're having a discussion with a man and he says to you 'as between one man and another'—keep your eyes skinned; he's got wax on his nails.

"The warders came in then and I hiked back to that cell. No hard labour yet, no talk about it. No cessation of grub, no beginning of starvation. Three days passed and then I am walked up again—Governor, Political Big Bug, and a man I couldn't fail to recognise, Senator Davis, railroad magnate, steel king, wheat-cornerer. I nodded to the Governor; I nodded to the man who was going to do his best for me; I stepped over to Senator Davis and I held out my hand.

"I said: 'Well, Senator, I do not think we need an introduction, so we may as well get to business.'

"He looked just mad and amazed all in once.

"The Governor frowned. The man who wanted to be good to me giggled, a sick giggle, and wagged his head as if to say: 'I told you so!'

"Senator Davis pointed to a chair, and I sat down.

"'Now,' he said, 'I hear you've been giving final propositions. You're the kind of man if you were selling a horse and wanted a hundred dollars for it you wouldn't ask a hundred and fifty and let them beat you down,' and he paused and waited for me to signify my assent. But I just sat in that chair listening; so he went on.

"'You would ask a hundred dollars, and if they offered you seventy-five you would say to hell with them.'

"I nearly shouted: 'That's the kind of man I am!' but I didn't. I only said: 'You're on the way to an understanding of me.'

"His little eyes just gave a little roll and looked at me; the man who wanted to be good to me wasn't looking at me at all—he was looking at the Senator; the Governor had his head down and he was either looking at his chin or the second top button of his waistcoat.

"The Senator opened a paper with an official seal on the tail of it, and said he:

"'Well, you can flatter yourself that I've come from Washington specially to see you. That's pretty big, isn't it?'

"'It's pretty good,' I said.

"I could feel the others looking at me. There was a bit of a pause, and then the Senator said:

"'Let me hear your offer again.'

"'Full pardon for Johnson,' I said, and I saw him wilt; 'a full pardon for me, and you have these bonds.'

"He practically knew what I was going to say, but I had no sooner finished than he leaned forward and said:

"'You'll have the pardon, and the pardon will be sent to Johnson. Does Johnson know where the bonds are?' he asked easily.

"I looked in his eye for five minutes and then I looked at my finger-nails.

"'Trumps,' said I. 'Try again, Senator.'

"The political bug No. 1 gulped a little 'By God!' under his breath.

"'You don't think it's a square deal?' shouted the Senator.

"'It is—on my side,' I said.

"'Very well,' said the Senator. 'I tell you what. Johnson will be brought here to-morrow. You will be brought here. You will have your pardons. A posse will accompany you wherever you wish.'

"'And then?' says I.

"'Then you and Johnson are free.'

"'How many are in this posse?' I asked.

"'Call it eight,' said he.

"'Four apiece,' said I.

"The Senator leant across the table.

"'Damn you,' said he, 'it's a wonder you didn't say six to you and two to Johnson.'

"I only looked at him—I was considering.

"'We armed?' I asked.

"He sat back again.

"'No!' he said.

"Then there was another long pause. I knew what it meant. I shook my head. He tapped on his table and said:

"'Mr. Apache Kid, we were talking about horse selling. You are the kind of man that when you want a hundred dollars for a horse you say a hundred. I'm the kind of man that when I want a hundred I don't say a hundred and fifty—I say a hundred and twenty-five; and when the other man says "I give you a hundred," I change my mind. I say: "Call it a hundred and fifteen." Now that's me.'

"'It's a very common type,' I said.

"He got right up then. He looked as if he wanted to yell at me. But he didn't yell. He did what is worse. He put his forefinger on the table and pressed it down hard.

"'Mr. Apache Kid,' he said, 'I'm open to consider one alteration, and one only, and not for all the bonds of all the governments do I budge. When a man tries to make a deal too close there is always another way out.'

"'Yes,' said I. 'When some dealer or another kept cornering wheat, the Government stepped in, if I remember rightly, and lowered the tax on wheat from the Argentine and Canada.'

"I was having a dig at him. It was a mistake. He took it another way.

"'Yes,' he said, 'there are some individuals tougher even than Government.'

"He opened his sealed parchment.

"'I've been sent down to settle this,' he said. 'You don't like the size of the posse—is that it?'

"'The size of the posse would be all right,' I said, 'if I had a gun in my hand.'

"'Well,' he said, 'that's out of the question. Government wouldn't stand for that, would it? I tell you what. Two troopers, and to hell with Johnson. A pardon for you.'

"I was going to shake my head when he said: 'You called that horse down to a hundred. I've said a hundred and fifteen.'

"'What about if I happen to refuse—just theoretically,' I said.

"'If you happen to refuse,' he said, 'I go back to Washington and report that you have destroyed the bonds, that your brain is touched, and that you have some crazy idea, common to deranged minds, to create a sensation—and Apache Kid is forgotten, wiped out. Speaking theoretically, that is.'

"There was another long pause. I could see myself going to the State Asylum instead of to the penitentiary.

"'You never come down to the hundred on that horse, do you?' I asked.

"'I've come down now,' he said. 'I'm at the hundred.'

"I sat and felt cold. I remembered some little tricks that Johnson had played on me.

"'All right,' I said. 'Two troopers and a gun——'

"'No,' he said, 'two troopers!'

"'Two troopers,' said I, 'a full pardon, and then we walk down to the depôt, board a train, and four days after you have the bonds.'

"'It will take that long?' asked the Senator thoughtfully, and his little eyes jumped at me.

"I think he was beginning to think that after all he might have tried some other method, pumped me as to where the bonds

were."

We were still at a standstill, Apache yarning on, and I looked over my shoulder, suddenly wondering if the troopers might not be following us.

"They won't follow now. Besides, there's a buzzard on that hill we've just come over; they'd raise it coming up. Two days later I got the pardon. You saw the end of that business. But I ought to have held out till I got my feet on the table and a pardon for Johnson too. And two troopers," he said. "Two troopers!" he yelled vigorously. "By heck! Now that I think of it I was a confounded fool; I should have killed these two men."

He wheeled his pony, which I recognised as the same white mount I had hired from the Colonel at Black Kettle, evidently hired for this trip too, wheeled madly, plunging the spurs in its flanks, and tightly grasping the gun appropriated from the trooper, he sped away in the back track.

Around I wheeled, determined to prevent this daring "bad man" who had saved my life six weeks ago (and won a pardon for himself with such tenacity that I could not but admire him) from committing a hot-blooded murder. He would be hunted to the death if he did that.

The ragged-winged bird shot up from the crest behind us, where it had alighted, shot up as we dashed back, an ugly bird with a bald head. There was just it sweeping up into the sky, and Apache spurring down the slope on which we had halted, down it and up the other side of the dip at terrific speed, his horse going at a maddened gait, all a gathering together and swinging apart of nervous legs and flying of sand.

And then over the crest—two men—against the sky line—topping the rise, sweeping down to meet him, then suddenly aware of him and wheeling. He rode back with such speed that he was nearly up their length already—and he saw their blue uniforms. They dismounted as quick as light, and both were down on a knee, and both fired. The darting light of the fires flashed, the reports burst. Apache fell from his horse and rolled wildly down hill into the scrub in the bottoms.

I don't know whether they thought he and I had parted company and that he had been coming back to trail them—as they had been, after all, following him. But in their excitement, in his dash up hill to them, in their exultation as he rolled bumping down that hill, and his horse ran round excited, plunging, they gave a simultaneous whoop.

One leapt to his feet and, heedless of his horse, dashed down hill after the body. The other ran to his horse, it also plunging, caught the bridle, and swung to the saddle, then rode down hill. I was a pretty person to go after Apache, counselling not killing of these men in hot blood! And they were pretty specimens to take his in cold blood!

I gave a yell—thinking, of course, that they were after his pardon, intent on filching that from the corpse before they left it—gave a whoop of 'No, you don't!' and dug my heels into my pony's flanks, and with a great snort he took the hill, nearly somersaulted, then stiffened his legs and away we slid down.

Round whirled the first trooper—he who was on foot—and down he went on a knee to aim at me, careful and steady—and "puff!" came a whirl of smoke from the bushes in the bottoms, disconcerting my eye. The trooper lurched forward on his gun and, as he fell, it cracked aimlessly.

The other trooper, the mounted one, was trying to take aim at me, but his pony danced at the sound of the firing. He threw off his horse to fire at me from the off-side, clutching the bridle in an intention to wheel the horse between us; but it wheeled too far and, brushing aside that gulping, nameless something in me that nearly made me yell, and gritting my teeth, I reined up abruptly, brought down my gun—and got him right. We fired almost simultaneously—and he fell.

Then out of the scrub, where he had cunningly rolled for shelter, apt as an Indian in the strategy of such affairs, came the Apache Kid.

CHAPTER IX

ALIAS BILL

A very sane and rational person would have let Apache Kid go, would have considered that he was too dangerous to make a friend. A measure-for-measure person might have argued: "He saved my life the other day; now I have saved his. Now let him go—he is not a 'safe' friend."

But what could I do with such a man?

He rose from the scrub, and the first thing he said after he had caught his horse was: "Hi! Hi! My friend! First thing before I thank you, I want to tell you right here that I killed both these sons of—— and you have to get that impressed on your mind."

I am no killer. That one shot in self-defence is as much as I wish ever to fire. It has satisfied me. I was bemused with the incident, now that the two men lay dead, and the sky and hills looked quietly on, and the two horses snuffed herbage on the slope.

"But I——" I began.

"Pshaw!" he said. "Can't you bluff yourself? I can assure you that if I get up against it and am taxed with killing these men I shall say: 'Where are your witnesses?' and if you chip in and say you finished one I shall chip in and say: 'Don't you listen to him. He's bug-house. I plugged them both.'" He swung to his saddle. "Theoretically I did," he said and glared at me.

Thus it was that I became one of Apache Kid's friends, nay—an advocate, as you shall hear. I had been full of admiration for him for the way he had won his freedom, and now—well, he was white with me.

"You ride on your way, friend," he said. "You shake a hoof, pull out. Nobody knows you were in this except le Bon Dieu, and he'll say nothing this side Time. You quit—now," and he held out his hand.

"I would like to see you out of this," I said. "What are you going to do?"

He considered the landscape, then stepped down from the saddle and moved to where one of the troopers lay, half way down-hill between the trail and the bottoms, levered him with his foot and sent him crashing into the bottom brush where the other had rolled already. Then he took one of the horses and led it down into deep scrub till the girths were touched, and shot it so that it fell crash, as when a beast is pole-axed. The other horse, at the shot, bolted, but only ran a few yards, for the reins trailed—and then it stood. Apache mounted again, the easier to catch it, and rode to it, caught the reins, and led it down likewise—and despatched it too. Then he rode up again.

"I feel doing *that!*" he cried in a hoarse voice. "Well, so-long!" He held out his hand; "And thanks! You're a white man."

And then over the crest came a rider. I looked up and saw the foreman of the Diamond K.

He rode down to us with loose rein, raised his head, looked astonished, and pulled up. He just gave half a nod to Apache Kid after the look of astonishment had passed, and turned to me.

"Say," he said, "you can ride back to the ranch and take your time."

He produced a note-book and pencil.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"You ain't ridin' quick enough after Steve," he said. "That's all."

"Sure that's all?" I asked.

"It's enough, ain't it?" he said, and added: "Alias Bill."

"Oh," I said, "that's it, is it?"

"I ain't arguin'," he said. "Here is your time check. If the boss asks what's the trouble—you didn't get a move on you quick enough, for my taste, after them boys that was going over, in response to the X Diamond X letter, to No. Three Creek. That's good enough I guess. You tell him that."

I took the time check from him, tore it into little pieces and dropped it in the sand.

"I don't want to touch the money of a ranch with a foreman like you," said I.

"You be careful," he said.

As we spoke we could hear a high bellowing voice, bellowing a ditty about cows and women, and it was a slightly coarse ditty, in a somewhat inebriated voice. And then, over the crest came the rider—saw us, yelled, swooped down waving his hand in air. The foreman hailed him as he came up, laughing at his condition.

"Been having a good time?"

"Yap—and goin' home again to the outfit."

The foreman looked him up and down.

"I'm looking for a good roper," he said.

"The hell you are," murmured the drunken cowboy. "Well—I guess you'll find plenty of 'em in this State," waved his hand grandiloquently to all of us, and jogged away.

Apache urged his horse on at that. I followed. A little devil in me saw that it was an auspicious time for leaving the foreman, just after having viewed this ignominious response to his offer of a job. I don't say a little angel in me. I quite acknowledge it was a little devil.

Apache looked over his shoulder.

"Why are you not straight?" he called to the foreman. "Why don't you ask a man to come and work for you instead of looking him up and down and telling him you're wanting men? I suppose you'll go around now and tell people that you doubt if Yuma Bill is as good a roper as he's cracked up to be! And why didn't you tell this gentleman what the real trouble was?"

"It's been my policy," said the foreman, "not to look for trouble. There's enough trouble without looking for it."

"Oh well," said Apache Kid. "There's room for all kinds in the world. But it's my opinion that your way of trying to dodge trouble leads to more trouble in the end than if you were to be outspoken. Look at the case of me for instance. You haven't asked what I'm doing here? No—you ain't looking for trouble. Good! But first thing you do is to proclaim that you saw me here. You think I've broken gaol somehow, but you won't say so. You ain't looking for trouble. But first thing you'll do is to find out about me and see if there's a reward for information about my whereabouts." He put his hand inside his jacket and produced a blue envelope. "See—to save you trouble—read that," and he held out a long parchment with a red seal at the end of it and the red letters "This is to Certify!" at the top, and several "Whereases" down the side.

"I don't want to see it," said the foreman. "I want nothing to do with your business, Apache Kid."

"You've got to see this," said Apache grimly, and rode back.

Fully expecting more trouble I trailed after him and halted at his heels. The foreman looked stonily at the parchment.

"Well—is that enough?" he said. "I ain't interested."

"Good!" said Apache Kid. "And you keep not interested too."

"Are you threatening?" said the foreman. "You've had a heap of trouble already, you know."

"No—I'm advising. No, I'm not! I'm threatening. You keep not interested—that's my advice to you," and he half wheeled again.

"Well, I'm glad to hear this, Apache," said the foreman, "I'm glad to know of this pardon. Let me shake hands with you."

Apache looked at him.

"No thank you," he said. "If you had tried to hold me up right now, and then I had shown you the pardon, it would have been different. I would have shaken then, maybe. Mind! I don't say you're wrong. I may be all wrong the way I see things; but I don't—frankly—I don't have any use for a man like you."

The foreman looked almost like a corrected schoolboy. He seemed grieved, pained. I could see myself forgiving him if he looked like that!

"Maybe I am too quick," said the foreman to me, and I knew that he had seen that Apache was angered for my sake, furious at this "firing" of me. "Say," he said, "can you explain how you happen to have two names?"

He turned to Apache.

"You must admit, Apache," he said, "that it's a suspicious circumstance to see this gent hob-nobbing with you here and to know he should have been down at Rattlesnake Crossing by now."

"Two names?" said Apache Kid. "You do know a lot. I don't even know one of his names," and he laughed.

I sat there considering; and then said I: "It's a long story—too long to tell now—and I assure you that it doesn't signify anything very far wrong."

"Ah—you'll have to tell it," said Apache, with the trace of a jeer in his voice. "We can't accept your assurances."

"Well," said I, and I laughed, "it's a long story; and, seeing I'm leaving the Diamond K anyhow, I think it's not worth while. I'll take the horse back and leave it at the ranch."

"Oh, say!" said the foreman. "Better let me make you out a fresh time check. I'm sorry you quit like that."

"Go on," said Apache to me, "you take the time check. They would wonder what had happened if you left so sick of the ranch that you wouldn't have your wages and the foreman would have to explain. Help him out!" and his lip curled.

"You're a bit hard on me, Apache Kid," said the foreman, and wrote afresh in his pocket-book and tore out a page.

"Take it," said Apache. "It's due to you, anyhow. You're quitting the ranch now—you're not getting fired for being in my company, or for having two names, or for taking too long to ride wherever you were riding."

The foreman abruptly shook his bridle and rode on.

"Well," said I to Apache, "what are you going to do?"

"I?" he said. "I'm going to Black Kettle. It has just come into my head that this pony was hired. I've got to take him home."

"So far as that goes," said I, "he'll go home himself. He carried me up to the Diamond K and went back alone."

"It's very kind of you to be so interested in keeping me out of Black Kettle," said he, "but after all, why shouldn't I go back? And besides, what should I do afoot in the hills? What are you going to do?"

"Pull this forty dollars," said I.

"And after that?" he asked.

"Oh, go back to Black Kettle," said I.

We had ridden back on the trail and come in sight of the high blazed fir. He held out his hand.

"Well—so-long!" he said.

I took the hand and pressed it.

"Take care of yourself," I said.

"I killed two—remember," said he.

"Very well," I said. "Then I know nothing about it."

"That's right," and we wheeled and parted.

The owner of the Diamond K, Maxim, paid me in person.

"Going to quit?" he said a little astonished. "You've hardly come yet."

I did not reply.

"Been fired?" he asked.

"I don't know whether I've quit or been fired," said I.

"Oh!" he said, counting out the dollars. "Had trouble with my foreman?"

"Either that, or the foreman had trouble with me—I don't know which," said I.

"I am sorry," he said.

He watched me unsaddling the horse and rolling my blanket.

"Take care of yourself on the way back," he said. "Some of those steers in the valley are liable to make hay of a man walking." And then I set out, my face towards Black Kettle.

But half way to the tree I saw a rider coming in my direction. It was Apache Kid.

"It just struck me you would have to walk," said he, "so I came up to meet you. There are no trees in this stretch with branches under thirty foot up, and I pictured you waltzing round a tree playing tag with a steer."

But the wildness of the steers was really the other way about; those that we came on on our tramp to Black Kettle headed away from us, with tails in the air, the moment they sighted us. I half expected Apache to say something when we came to what had been known, prior to the hold-up, as "Johnson's Experimental Ranch," and, after it, as "The Hollow Fraud" because of the newspaper headings, but I was not going to broach the subject.

We passed in silence. A quarter of a mile past he wagged his head.

Said he: "You didn't ask me anything about the ranch when we came past."

"No," I said.

"Interested?" he asked. "Shake," he said, and we shook solemnly. "I like your reserve," but he didn't say anything about the ranch nevertheless. A little bunch of steers, breaking away before us, turned him on to the subject of cattle, and he asked me if I had ever worked on a ranch before, and hearing I had not, and what I had been doing at the Diamond K, told me how difficult I would have found it at first to have estimated the ages of the stock.

"These three that we raised," he said, "one was a two-year-old and the other two were three years. It's like rolling off a log to tell them by the teeth. Milk teeth the first year, two big teeth the second, four the third, six the fourth, eight the fifth."

"The trouble is," said I, "cows don't always yawn at you or smile."

"Oh well," he said, "you get on to the horns. Rattle joints in a rattlesnake's tail, rings on a cow's horns, crow's feet round a man's eyes; with the knack of quick seeing you can tell them all."

Then abruptly he cried out: "There—you can hit Black Kettle on your lonesome now," dug in his heels, and went off in a whirl of dust.

And when I crested the hill above Black Kettle I just saw the white spot of the horse, and the black dot atop, drifting across the shining thread of the railway track and gliding across to the tiny store that showed all roof, with the merest

speck of a black door peeping out from under the eaves.



CHAPTER X

APACHE TALKS

Apache and I sat on the verandah of the splendidly-styled Palace Hotel of Black Kettle, in the evening. It was a clear night, almost cold already, as is the way in those parts after the hot day. The benches were bathed in starlight. As for the stars that put their glamour over the land—I am a little afraid to speak of them lest I be high-falutin. Only artists in words—and astronomers—can write about such nights and not be high-falutin. I remember recalling a phrase from Professor Lowell's book which I had studied once for an examination, in which he comments that even in America, thanks to the smoke of industrial towns, one cannot see the stars, fairly, east of the Missouri.

Apache nodded to the Great Dipper.

"I once spent a summer with the Blackfeet up near Browning, Montana. The end star of the handle of the dipper makes a circle round the North Star once in twenty-four hours. The sky is their dial and the star its hour hand. It's a heck of a great clock," said he meditatively, and not at all flippantly despite the way of expressing himself.

I sat and looked on the "heck of a great clock," the clock of eternity. I have said that I shy at talking about stars lest I be high-falutin. I shy at loving them too well too. For I have found that as soon as I seem to gain a period in my life when I may be at peace, something comes along and boosts me into torture. Fate puts a charge as of dynamite into my quiet. If I sit down to bask in grass there comes a rattlesnake. If I sit, like Omar, considering the stars; or remember how, for Emerson, coming out of a political meeting, the stars looked down and said: "Well? Why so hot, little sir?"—if I come to a period in my life when I can sit by a creek-side and allow myself to be bewitched by whorls of water, there is always Fate stealing behind and saying: "Hands up!" and as I do not throw up my hands tamely there is more "scrap." Like many another cow-puncher I consider myself at times a philosopher or poet gone wrong! And yet, perhaps, these moods that come at times are ridiculous. I might have failed as a poet. And I see from the papers that when a man fails as a poet he generally becomes a critic and explains to poets how to read their verses. Better riding the range—despite the parts of the life that I never care for much, which the cow-puncher of to-day has to attend to and the cow-puncher of yesterday never dreamt of doing.

I may be laughed at for saying that I am a man, by my instincts, of peace; may be laughed at, seeing that my story is so much about eruptions; but I save out of my life of much tempest, such times as this: sitting at peace on the verandah of the Black Kettle Hotel, thirty-five dollars and two bits (or a quarter) in my pocket, a prime supper digesting under my belt, a pipe in my teeth, and the stars so bright as to make particles of sand before the hotel glitter as if there were frost in them, and the shadows of the hitching-poles show blue, or indigo, in the sand.

"I think those troopers acted on their own initiative," said Apache breaking the silence.

"Oh," said I. "You don't think they had orders?"

"No, I don't. If I had worked a pardon north of the line and been sent off with two N.-W.M.P. men they would never have played such a trick. They would have known that it wouldn't have helped them one little bit. They might have found themselves in Stoney Mountain for life if they had gone back with news that they had killed me. So, even granted a member of that force dirty enough to try it—which I doubt, for it's a small, picked force, and they are absolutely bug-house about being the whitest force of police in the world—even granted one member fit to try such a trick, he would have known it was useless for promotion. All the same I don't mean that the U.S.A. go in for that sort of thing. Only I do mean this—that if these two men had killed me and gone back with a yarn of me trying to play some game on them they would have had no censure and very probably they would have had promotion according to the story they doubtless meant to put up—I tried to plug them. The American army is all right. It holds some good soldiers, plenty of them—but America is too full of the graft spirit."

The drollery of a train robber sitting in judgment on the United States, to praise or to censure, never struck me. I listened to Apache with the greatest interest, simply listening as it were to the expression of an individual's views.

"I've always suspected that Sitting Bull business," said he. "I was over at Rosebud, S.D., when it happened. The agency police went to arrest him. Now he was a damned nuisance was old Sitting Bull. There was no doubt that Uncle Sam would be glad to be shut of him. The agency police went to arrest him. Did he evade arrest and let them plug him? No.

He got on his horse; but—hearken! After he started there was sign of a rescue being attempted—so 'Biff!' and Sitting Bull is dead. These kind of things happen a great deal—and then there's an inquiry when the people shout for it loud enough. But the dear people, having instigated an inquiry, are content. They guess that the inquiry is going ahead with its inquiring. So doubtless it is—and it will, in the end, put in some kind of report which will appear in print when nobody is interested. But that's not the United States, my friend—that's life. That's humanity. Doesn't an individual behave just that way with himself? Isn't that just the way ninety-nine men out of a hundred go on dickering with evil week-days and salving it all on Sunday—playing knucklebones with brain, heart, conscience, and what are called primitive instincts? And ninety-nine men out of a hundred don't know that they're playing bluff with themselves. An honest man is up against it, and the one that comes through to the end is a white man to love, by heck! Most men go down—and the most of them go down bluffing. Life's all a bluffing and a robbing and a being robbed. You can choose to be a robber or a robbed from. It's all part of the scheme. Even Judas is in it, you'll observe."

He turned and looked at me, and his eyes had quite a mad glitter, showing like a cat's in the star-glow.

"Quite so," he continued, "I'm bug-house! Bug-house! Crazy! But anyhow—when it comes to stringing me up I'm not the kind to say: 'Kind friend, be lenient, remember me with a good word, Alias Bill. I may have stolen a bunch of horses, or held up a bank, but I once saved your life.' Confound that! That's sheer dime novel."

"I wish," said I, "you would not talk about getting strung up."

"Hang it all, man!" he cried. "Can't you understand me? I've taken a fancy to you. I thought you could understand me. I'm a man who simply didn't ever have a chance. I was the robbed, all the way along, from a kid up; and when I sat down one day and sized it up I simply quit. Apache Kid was born out of what had gone before, and the other man died—he was quite worn out, I assure you."

He was silent so long that I began what he had somehow reminded me of, to tell him about my own life in Scotland, and of the reason for my coming away.

"You heard the foreman of the Diamond K call me Alias Bill—so now you'll understand," I said, and told him of the name Williams, how I took the first name that came into my head.

"I know," he said.

I finished my story, telling it to him just as you know it, and he said:

"There you are! What kind of show did you have? Of course you might have stayed at home. It must gall you—that lurcher not being dead!" He stopped and snorted. "Oh, but you're sane!" he cried with a chuckle. "You're sane!"

He too was sane next minute.

"I'm going out of all this starlight," he said. "That kind of glimmer makes me talk wild. Anyhow—I've got friends in Black Kettle."

When the cold drove me in later I found Apache Kid telling, to the proprietor and two cow-punchers, the story of how he got his pardon.

One of the boys laughed and said:

"You're open enough about it, anyhow."

"Well," said Apache Kid, and returned a roguish smile, "I've been tried and found guilty and pardoned, haven't I?"

He merely pulled out the pardon and thrust it in again and of course they did not ask to see it. If he wanted to show it—good. If he wanted only to wave it and pocket it again—good.

I don't for a moment think that either of the cow-punchers had the slightest intention to emulate Apache Kid; but they relished his talk. I suppose they picked out what was fine and daring and manly, and kept a mental reservation for themselves, had a little headshake by themselves, afterwards. A man like Apache Kid found the hearts of these men much as a *Deadwood Dick* novel finds the heart of a healthy boy. Only the unhealthy will go and try to be Deadwood Dick too—and fail.

A voice came from a corner and I turned to find that the old store-keeper was sitting at a side-table, over a glass.

"You know what it is, Apache Kid. If you do it again—mark you, I don't say you've done it before—if you do it again and keep on doing it you're going to stop a heap of lead one day."

The two young men looked round at the voice, looked very feelingly back at Apache Kid and then said, in duet: "That's what!"

"And you can't blame 'em, Apache, for all your clever talk. You're the smartest bad man I ever see—and I came into this country in '49, mark ye! You're the prettiest bad man I ever see, and when an old man like me says he wouldn't mind having a boy like you it means a heap."

Apache's mouth dropped, and I saw his eyes suddenly fill and the two cow-punchers said: "That's what!" in quiet voices.

"But mark you, Apache Kid, hoomanity is so built that if road-agents wasn't stopped with lead they'd be nothing but road-agents. It's something like this yere Socialistic talk about state support for this kind of man, and for that kind of man, and the next kind. A little bit of stretching and who, I ask, is going to pay in to the state bank to support them that's drawing out of it? There's going to be a kick coming."

I don't know if the Colonel's logic was sound in expression, but I think it was good inside his old head.

He rose and retired.

"The Colonel," said the hotel proprietor, "is bug-house about these political ideas. He's been reading a bunch of English papers that Scotty brought over to him from the depôt, and he rings state support into every subject he talks about—but _____"

"He's all right in the main," I said.

"That's what!" said the cow-punchers, looking still sadly upon the swaggering Apache.

"Come now," said Apache, laughing, "you're all ag'in' me."

None of us had noted that the Colonel had paused in the doorway, before leaving, and had heard all this. He shuffled his feet.

"No, we ain't," he said. "We're all for you, sir. There's just one kink in your head, like a thorn under the saddle, and if you could only pull that out there would be peace."

I wondered if he meant for the rider or the horse. Doubtless so did Apache; but it would have been unfair to have pressed the Colonel's metaphors too far, as a dialectician does when his opponent's views are sound but the metaphors faulty. Even the warped (if he was warped) Apache Kid knew that the old man spoke wisely and from his heart, and from a big experience.

"Thank you, Colonel," he said.

"I'm afraid that's all that will ever be to it," said the Colonel. "I had a young kid come in one morning and asks for a job. I gave him it too, round about the store. He owned up that he had been hoboing and beating the country on the cyars—but he wanted to settle down and work for a living. All right—I gave him a chance. Then one day I sees him run like hell over to the depôt when a train comes in. He rubber-necks at the train and comes back. 'What you rubber-necking at the train for?' says I. 'Mother come West for her lost boy?' He laughs, and says he: 'It was a new kind of cyar they had on and I was looking to see what kind of perch the rods underneath would make.'—'Perch!' says I. 'I thought you had quit hoboing and beating your way.'—'I'd like to try that new cyar, uncle,' he says. He called me uncle. A week later he disappears. Where had he gone? Then I took a tumble and over I goes and asks Scotty: 'Say, was there a curious new cyar went through to-day?'—'Sure,' he says, 'there was.' That's all."

We laughed, and the Colonel shuffled off.

CHAPTER XI

BUCK JOHNSON

Doubtless you know that whimsical feeling, if not of proprietorship in a place, of belonging to it. On this return to Black Kettle, when I came down to breakfast in the morning, I found myself wearing quite the air of an old inhabitant—of being a citizen of Black Kettle. The railway meant less to me. I had seen a little way into the country beyond—and I was known. True, of cattle I knew just about as much as Apache Kid had told me as we returned. The cowboy's life had been for me, so far, grooming horses, splitting wood, mucking stables and mixing flour. I could at least say: "I have worked with the Diamond K outfit," if I could not say: "I've been riding the range for the Diamond K outfit"; and here I was in from the ranch, back in Black Kettle.

The charm of new countries, for the pilgrim, is that he feels himself very much playing a part in them. It is all so new to him that, looking round on all things, he stands outside himself and sees himself too, in the new setting.

Biting a toothpick, in the fashion of Black Kettle, I sat in the hotel sitting-room, content, with the dollars from the Diamond K hardly touched. I was so much an "old resident" that when the "westbound" came in I did not trouble to go and look out. I was in the position to size up, quietly, any one that might drop off the train.

I wandered, instead, over to the Colonel's store and strayed round there, considering various interesting objects: saddles with silver-mounted pommels; saddle ropes; saddle blankets; chaps, of leather plain; of leather fringed; of sheep-skin with the hair outside. The Colonel paid no heed. He never stepped forward and rubbed his hands and said: "What can I do for you?" He had the air of taking it for granted that one always came into his store simply to look round and blow smoke up into the low rafters.

I considered that when I got my next job I would buy a pair of chaps. As it was I had had to stitch, laboriously, a seat of leather into my ordinary pants.

The Colonel, using his pursed lips for a pen-rack, was fussing deliberately with accounts.

I saw a curiously patterned blanket among a heap at the end of the counter.

"What kind of blanket is this?" I asked.

The Colonel looked up, looked at the blanket over his uneven spectacles, which he always put on (to look at a paper or an account) with an air of being unfamiliar with them.

"Navajo blanket," he said; "a twenty-dollar one."

"Oh! A Navajo blanket! I've heard of them," I said. "Is this then a genuine Indian-woven one?"

He looked blankly at me.

"A twenty-dollar one," he repeated, more deeply.

The Colonel was going to rob me of that sense of being an old inhabitant. I could feel that. Evidently the fact of saying it was a twenty-dollar one was tantamount to saying it was not an original Navajo. There is one trait in my character that I never condone. It is, to me, quite disgusting. I kick myself badly for possessing it, and one of these days I'm going to cut it out, destroy it. This trait: it is a way of trying to look as if I know things that I don't know. It has made me not know things sometimes; for a man has begun about something and said: "You know?" and I have nodded my fool's head and said: "Oh yes,"—and he has simply said no more at all, instead of going on and letting me gather the facts of which I was ignorant. Many people are like that.

"Oh! Twenty dollars you said," said I, as if I had thought he had said "ninety." That is the strategic way of one with that absurd trait in his nature—such as I have.

He looked at me again blankly.

"Yes, that's what I said," said he.

These quiet old men do make a greenhorn, when he is just beginning to play-act to himself that he is in the swim, feel he is a greenhorn indeed—and so I retired. But I was to astonish the Colonel later, that very evening, and show him that, after all, it does not follow that because a man is not posted on Navajo blankets he does not know a Colt from a Derringer, a 44 Winchester from a Sharpes.

I walked back to the hotel. The train had evidently dropped some human freight. There was a stranger (to me at least) on the verandah. That was enough to make me think of Apache Kid.

"What does Apache keep staying around for?" I thought, for I had seen him, after breakfast, showing no sign of departing. "Sooner or later those two troopers are going to be hunted for—when they don't return."

I considered, however, that the newcomer might be the original founder of the place, who was just looking in again on it, and not a first, solitary sleuth, come gently and blandly to Black Kettle to make inquiries about the troopers. I did not, at any rate, advance on him and welcome him to Black Kettle and invite him to a drink as Black Kettle was lonely to a stranger. The Navajo blanket incident had stuck in my mind. I left such hospitality to others.

I went into the bar-room and sat down to wait for dinner, hungry already! I sat meditatively and stared at the blank face of the nickel-in-the-slot hurdy-gurdy. And presently Apache Kid came in from the sitting-room and sat down beside me.

The man outside had looked in once or twice already, while I sat there alone, and now he looked in again, rose, entered and walked over to us.

"How do you do, Apache?" he said.

"How do," said Apache. "What are you drinking?"

"I don't know that I am drinking," said the man.

"Sit down then," said Apache, "and get your trouble off your chest. I've been expecting you."

I looked from one to the other. There was a grimness in the air.

"Expecting me?"

"Sure," said Apache.

"Friend of yours?" asked the man, indicating me, and sitting down heavily; he was a heavy man, heavy-handed, heavy-browed; heavy cheek-boned; heavy-mouthed with a moustache like walrus tusks.

"Yes," said Apache. "Let me introduce you—Buck Johnson—Alias Bill."

"How do, Alias, pleased to meet you."

"How do, Mr. Johnson?" said I.

"Er—could I have a word with you, Apache?" said Buck Johnson and pulled his long moustaches.

"Right here," said Apache. "I have no secrets from my friend, Alias Bill."

"Oh!" said Johnson, and raised and lowered his brows, and nodded, and darted a quick, slanting glance at me again. Apache, I hasten to say, did not mean to drag me into his troubles. This was just his easy, insouciant, cheeky way.

"Well—I guess everybody knows," said Buck Johnson; "the papers don't say—but everybody knows."

"Knows what?" thought I. He shot a glance at me again and I looked at the table.

"And I came along over to see you," he went on to Apache. "I want to know why my brother ain't setting here in Black Kettle along of you."

"Yes," said Apache, "it's quite an understandable question. From anybody but Jake Johnson's brother it would be a question too much; but from Jake Johnson's brother it shows a fine brotherly spirit—and a genuine spirit of that kind is a thing I admire."

"There ain't no need to butter me about it. But I'm glad you take it that way; for I bin feelin' mighty bad about it; and I feels—" he paused and he looked heavy indeed; "I bin feelin' I want an explanation, bin feelin' as between brother and brother, and man and man, an explanation's reasonably expected."

"Sure!" said Apache, but at the phrase "between man and man" our eyes met.

"Well sir," he said to Johnson. "I fought the Governor first—and then I fought Judge Radford, and then I rode no less a man than Senator Davis. I rode him as you might say on a hackamore. If he'd been bitted I'd have got your brother out too."

"Well, why in thunder didn't you, Apache Kid? You was both in the trouble. Couldn't you both pull out on the same deal?"

"I tried it," said Apache. "It was my fault. I set out determined to do it; and we played a few games—Government and I. The Governor set in first and I just looked at his hand—and he quit. Then Judge Radford sat in to the table, and he dropped out. Then came Senator Davis."

"Yes, I know. He *is* the railway."

"He *is* the railway pretty nearly, as you say; and he's the roof of the White House too, you might add."

"Yes? I ain't disputing it must have been an all-fired tough game."

"It was. I've kicked myself a bit. I set out to win; but I didn't know the game was to be so tight. I knew it was going to be tight—but I didn't know just how tight. In the last deal I had a good hand too. I had three queens and I reckoned that was enough; but the Senator had four aces."

"I know—the table was strange to you, and the cards was a new pack in your hands, and you hadn't ever played a Senator before—but I see three queens was somehow strong enough to get you off against his four aces. Why in heck didn't it get off Jake too?"

He paused, and then with the air of an inquisitor he said: "He wasn't in the pot, Apache, he wasn't in the pot. That's what it is."

"He was in the pot all right," said Apache.

"Well, he didn't come out," said Buck Johnson.

"No—and this is why: now I talk quite straight to you. Another man might consider that we each should have put up our own game. We didn't. Jake had not the savvy to put up such a game. So I did. And, as I say—wait a minute—" for Buck Johnson was about to interrupt—"I put it up for both—and I won every deal but the last; but it's the last that counts when you're playing all your belongings, down to your saddle. I was right up to the place where we were both to get a pardon, and then come out and take some men to where the bonds were, and say: 'There ye are, boys, and good-bye.' I was right up to there. But what was the posse to be?" He paused for Johnson to see the position, to let it soak in. "I said two troopers—he said eight. I considered and said: 'Make it eight men picked by me, just ordinary citizens that will see the thing through.'—'No,' he said. 'Eight troopers or nothing.'"

"Pshaw!" said Johnson. "I wonder you didn't think of that before you sat in to the game."

"I'd point out," said Apache, "with all respect for your brotherly love," and he smiled, "for all your solicitous interest in Jake, that he didn't even think out a game at all."

"Um! Still you was both in for the thing, and you should both ha' come out."

"Well—I'm not very patient, and I'm explaining to you—because I appreciate the brotherly spirit."

Buck Johnson was bulging his lips.

"And the last deal?" he asked.

"That was the last deal. It was just this—'Take it, or leave it. We don't play again—we've played the last game, and you

and Johnson leave here with eight troopers—that's your guard. The Government is very easy about this—but the Government can't run the chance of the scandal of two armed train robbers moving about like that. If you don't like it so I tell you what I'll do. I'll make it two troopers, and you alone.'—which would you have accepted, Buck Johnson?"

Apache put his hands on the table and glared at Johnson.

"You! You'd never have tried to get your brother off," he said.

Down went Johnson's arm—and Apache's darted across the table and he caught Johnson's wrist.

"I'm not armed now, Buck Johnson," he said, clutching the wrist; "and Black Kettle is pretty free, but if you pull on me when I have no gun—! Besides—Buck Johnson—" they were wrestling across the table, Apache still gripping Buck's wrist, "—besides, Buck Johnson, if I was out of it where would you get any one to tell you where the dough was hid? You're not the man—" Johnson ceased to struggle—"you're not the man to force me to show you the dough—not to force me—as I forced the Government to show me a pardon. And what you really want is a share of that wad."

He sat back. The bar-tender leant on the counter, staring, watching intently.

"Now you're talking," said Buck Johnson.

"Of course the other way is for me to keep Jake's share till he gets out," said Apache.

Buck gave an ugly laugh.

"He'd be an old man then," he said.

"And ready to retire," said Apache, and laughed back at Buck. "Now, Mr. Johnson. I've explained all that I think you are entitled to know, and——"

"Dinner's ready, gents. Come in and eat," came the proprietor's voice.

Dinner was eaten in silence and after it was through Apache rose.

"Going up for a lazy siesta," he said. "I feel tired."

Johnson sat glaring after him; then, ignoring me, he rose and marched into the bar-room and called for a drink.

I sat there considering that I liked Johnson not at all. If his brother, Jake Johnson, were anything like him he would be much more what I thought the typical hold-up man than was Apache Kid. Not but what Apache Kid was a very unusual man—and with a streak of something almost crazy at times in his composition.

Ah Sing came in to clear away the last dishes, so I passed to the bar-room.

I had another look at Johnson. He was drinking, and thinking, leaning heavily against the bar. He half turned and glanced at me.

You know that feeling of being aware when a man is thinking of offering you a drink, weighing up the chances of being able to pump you? I felt that then, and so I decided to move away and settle Johnson's argument with himself as to whether I was open to be useful to him by absenting myself. I rose abruptly and marched off.

Then it struck me that there was going to be bad trouble for Apache Kid.

"I'll go up and advise him to go off to-day," thought I. "How long will they give these troopers? How long will they defer a search for them? It is at Black Kettle that inquiries will first be made. Apache will be found here, and arrested, to begin with—till they are heard of."

I went upstairs. I found Apache's room and knocked.

"Come!" he called and I walked in and was confronted with a revolver!

He was lying down on the bed, fully dressed.

"Wasn't sure of the step," he said, lowering the gun. "Sit down. Cigarettes?" He tossed tobacco bag and papers to me.

I sat down on the one chair and rolled a cigarette.

"Have you thought," said I, "that it is only a few hours' journey from Fort Lincoln to here—and that, at any time, troopers may arrive?"

He lay looking at me, an arm supporting his head as well as the pillow, which he had pulled from under the coverlet.

"I told them we would take nearly a week," he said. "There's plenty of time. I was waiting to see how many spongers would want me. I have four days yet in Black Kettle to receive personal enemies."

"Oh, yes—of course," I said. I rose, blowing smoke.

"Look here," he said, and he spoke very quietly. "Remember—I killed them both. But, seeing you are so much interested in me taking care of my neck, you could do me a heck of a favour."

"What is it?" I asked.

"To take a packet for me up to Mrs. Johnson."

"Where?"

"At Johnson's ranch."

"Mrs. Johnson! There's no one there."

"Yes there is. She is back there again now. She only left on the day of the hold-up because Johnson told her and she would have nothing to do with it. But she's back now. You see, legally, she can sit in that ranch-shack for four months yet. The place was rented—for an experimental farm, money paid down too—for six months. She's back there by now."

"But she didn't come by Black Kettle. How do you know?"

"Well, I'm willing to bet she is there anyhow," said Apache. "She'll be longing for some news. And she knows me a little bit. And she knows that I know no other place, bar one, where she might be. And as she has friends at the other place I expect she's up at the ranch—so as to have both houses open to me in case I have anything to communicate."

I considered.

"And are others not likely to watch for you at these places?" I was really thinking of his safety—not of my own in the chance of me going up to the ranch as he wanted. His quick look made me add: "Oh, of course, you can't go up yourself."

"Yes—but so long as I stay here Buck Johnson stays here too. You can take a horse and so for a little *passer*, and he will think nothing. I'm here—that's all he'll think of. He's going to watch my movements."

"I'll go," said I.

"Good!" said he.

And I don't think that it was just a memory of the help he had given me at the Dago gang that made me eager to help him.

CHAPTER XII

JAKE'S WIFE

Mrs. Johnson was a large, hard-looking woman, or perhaps I had better say strong-looking woman, with kind eyes. She must have been a very resolute woman to live alone here—that is, judging her from the standards of the Old Country. I had ceased to judge men from these standards, but she was the first woman round Black Kettle with whom I had come in contact, and I think my first thought on coming in sight of the ranch—with the afternoon shadow of the great fir-tree opposite it running across the waggon-road, up the wall, and resting on the roof—and seeing her pass round the gable and then look up, hearing me, was that she was a very resolute woman indeed.

Of course, it was hardly to be expected that Jake Johnson was the kind of man to marry a timid little mouse. When I saw that tall, square figure fold its arms and stand rigid at the gable-end I decided that I was to meet a virago.

A dog plunged out of the ranch and came baying towards us and I heard the woman's voice calling it back. It was a homely kind of voice and caused me to pull up and doff my hat in an open frame of mind.

"Good-day, ma'am," I said, reining up.

"Good-day, stranger," said she.

"Are you Mrs. Johnson?" I asked.

"That is my name, young man," said she.

I passed the little packet to her and said I:

"The Apache Kid sent me to you with this."

Her face lit, and then she frowned. She held the parcel and looked at it, and turned it over, seemed undecided. Suddenly she looked up at me and said:

"Do you know the contents of this parcel, young man?"

"I do, ma'am," said I.

"Friend of Apache's?" she asked.

"Well," said I, "considering that Apache practically saved my life a week or two ago I do not suppose I am an enemy."

"Very well put," said she. "I see you're a white boy. You'd better tie your horse up and come in and drink tea before you go back. And say, young man, you can put your hat on again."

I slipped off the white horse who lowered his head to exchange, I presume, some greeting of what we call the "lower animals" with the mongrel dog. They exchanged breaths, and I followed Mrs. Johnson into the shack.

A black tea-pot stood on the stove, the veritable black tea-pot that had invited Pete in here so short a time ago, and yet it seemed ages ago. So much had happened since he and I passed here; it all flashed through me as I followed Mrs. Johnson—the swirling arrival of Apache and Jake Johnson, the recognition, the departure, the bucking wood and mixing flour and reading the garish accounts of the hold-up, the queer position of the "John Williams or William Barclay" incident, the pleasure of being ordered on "the range," the flutter of the incident of the hollow tree, the strained talk with the foreman of the Diamond K, the thoughtful mien of the Diamond K owner, the kind of flurry that had filled my heart during the last two or three hours, the sense of unreality, to one but recently come from class-rooms, and lectures, and policemen regulating traffic at the corners.

A tap, tap, tap gave me a little jump and brought me back to Johnson's ranch and the knowledge that a woodpecker was at work in some tree near by.

"So you're the young man that worked with the Dago push on the railway," said Mrs. Johnson. "There's some folk would think the less of you for that, but I ain't one of them. A young man, green from the Old Country, who can hold down a job

like that—he's got the real thing in him. Have I to open this parcel?"

"Perhaps you'd better," said I, "in case there might be an answer."

"Just in a minute," she said, took a dipper from a bucket, filled the kettle and put it on the stove. Then she undid the packet and out rolled wads of bills and gold coins all over the table.

"For the land's sake!" she cried, sat down on the stool and fell into thought.

"There's a note in the bag," I said.

She fumbled and drew it out.

"Read it me," she said, "I ain't got my glasses."

I unfolded the paper and read: "Jake Johnson's share," and put the paper down on the table.

Suddenly she got up.

"Well," she said heavily, "every nickel of that goes in the bank. I told Jake what—I told him that if he kept on at these kind of things I wouldn't touch a nickel of it. There's wives would leave a man for the like of this. I told him that if he went through with that hold-up I would go down into Montezuma and start a laundry. I reckon Montezuma would rally to a white woman and let the chink go somewheres else. It's real white, this of Apache—that's the worst of it. A woman like me that's seen a lot sees all that side of it too. I was a nurse in the Civil War, I was. Man is queer. When you come right up against that kind of thing, men screamin' and swearin' and dyin', and men not lettin' themselves scream and swear, and askin' you to write letters to their folks and all that, it shows you right inside. I was never the same after the war. I got a different idea of men. I got to see men more like a man sees them—good and bad—don't seem to matter much so long as a man is white. Apache Kid, he's white, and my man, Jake Johnson, he's white too. Do you like it strong or weak?"

"Not too strong."

"Not too strong," she said, "no. Well, Kid, you take an old woman's advice—you keep on the rails. Here's this Apache Kid now—I've bin swearin' at him these last few days, and now he plays up white. Well, I take back all I bin saying. I was through the war, you see, and a woman who's bin a nurse through the war, she gets a different view of things. If Apache's white to my husband he's white to me. Maybe I don't like my husband's ways, maybe I threaten to leave him, and I reckon I would have left him too—and you don't find no other man come cavortin' 'round me. That's his affair and mine, and this here hold-up, that was Jake Johnson's and Apache Kid's."

She sat and looked at the money—at the heap of gold and paper.

"Where did you see them after the hold-up?" she asked.

It suddenly dawned upon me that she did not understand.

"I've come from Apache just now," I said.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"Apache's out," I said.

"Out!" she cried. "Escaped?"

"No," said I, "he's pardoned."

"Pardoned! And Jake?" She had poured out the tea. "I got to sit down," she said. "You tell me about it," she said.

"Well," said I, "there were some Government bonds in that train and after the hold-up they put them in a hollow tree. Now, Apache saw that he could not use these bonds as a lever before the trial, or at the trial; the country would have to know all about the trial. He waited until they were sentenced and then he asked to see the Governor, and the Governor sent for him."

"For the land's sake!"

"And then Apache said: 'Now you want these bonds; I know where they are; you will have them if you give me a full pardon.'"

"For himself?" broke in Mrs. Johnson.

"For both," I said.

She leapt up and cried out: "Then Jake's a-comin'? You're a-breakin' it to me? This here's a surprise party?"

"I would to God it was," I said; for the affection of this hard, kind woman, who had been through the war and had her outlook changed, who looked like a woman in her prime but who must have been on the threshold of age, touched me very deeply. "If you will compose yourself," I said, "——"

"Compose myself!" she cried. "And me through the war when you was in long clothes! The way you men do go on! Women that don't know men all says that every man is a child to a woman. You tell me your story, young man."

The voice was very hard, and I said:

"Believe me, Apache Kid did his best to get Jake off—Mr. Johnson I mean."

"Well," said she, "I ain't decided yet that he didn't. But you tell me and I'll see what I think myself."

So I told her the whole story, she interjecting little exclamations as I told, now concentrating her brows, very thoughtful, anon nodding her head and keeping up the nod, nodding. After I finished she sat frowning. She was chewing the cud of the story. Then she rose, pushed the money altogether into one heap.

"Apache Kid did his best," she said quietly, and then suddenly the dog gave voice outside. Mrs. Johnson started, I ran to the door and the first thing that struck me was that the white horse had gone.

"Where's the horse?" I cried.

"There he is—in the bottoms," said she, just as I caught sight of his white head raised among the long grass of the bottoms and his ears pricked to the sound of the dog's voice.

Mrs. Johnson thrust me suddenly back into the shack.

"You go in there," she said and pointed to the little rear room, curtained off by two hanging blankets. Scarcely had I entered and dropped the curtains behind me than I heard a subdued chink of gold. She had only time to push it to the back of the table beside the wall and throw her apron over it when a horseman pulled up at the door and the dog barked afresh, and a man's voice hailed: "You there, Mrs. Johnson?"

"Come right in," called Mrs. Johnson. "I ain't got no matches."

"Good-evening ma'am, no more have I. Want a light for the lamp? Allow me, ma'am," and he opened the door of the stove. "Got a piece of paper."

Peeping through, as it was safe to do, the shack being now so much in shadow, I saw her take up Apache's note and twist it into a spill which she handed to the newcomer. He lit the lamp. I saw the glow striking up on his heavy face, the long moustaches making him look like a walrus. He turned up the wick as the mist cleared in the funnel.

"Just come up to see how you were getting on, Mrs. Johnson," he said suavely. "It's the least a brother-in-law can do."

Mrs. Johnson snorted.

"Well, it's real good of you, Buck," she said, "but I don't think I stand in need of any consolation. You see, I bin through the war; and a woman that's bin through the war gets a different view of things and I ain't askin' for no sympathy."

"That's a good way to take it," said Buck Johnson.

"It's my way anyhow," said Mrs. Johnson easily.

He sat quiet for a long time.

"Ain't you going to be sociable?" he said.

I think she had sat down to some sewing, by the sound. Said she:

"Did any one know you was coming up here?"

"Why sure," he said. "I says to the proprietor of the hotel: 'Well,' I says, 'I'm goin' up to Mrs. Johnson. She's liable to be wantin' somebody up there, and train robbery or no train robbery,' says I, 'it's the least a brother-in-law can do. I'll go up,' I says. 'She might want a man to stop with her over-night. It's a kind of lonesome place.'"

There was another long pause. I could hear the faint sound of Mrs. Johnson's stitching. Also the dog gave a growl.

"You can go right back, Buck Johnson," said she, "and tell the pro-prietor of the hotel that Mrs. Johnson said: 'Thank you kindly for comin' up, but she'd rather be alone. It's a gossipy country and there's no Buck Johnsons coming around to take care of a lonesome woman!' Do you hear me, Buck Johnson?"

And then I heard a long, low whistle from Buck Johnson.

"Oh!" he said. "He's been and gone has he, then?"

I heard his quick step across the floor and the sound of his hand crushing a bunch of bills. The dog, roving round the room, sniffed at the blanket curtains, wondering why I hid there.

"I'll just take a handful of these, Mrs. Johnson," said Buck Johnson.

I slipped my gun from the holster and stepped right out.

"Put up your hands, Buck Johnson!" I called. I was absolutely alert, and calm, and saw my whole plan of campaign.

"If you move," said I, "I fire." I stepped more close to him. "I'm going to take your gun off you."

"Don't you!" he said.

"Don't you move," I said quickly. I took his gun, I undid the buckle of his cartridge belt, and I put both on the table.

"Now, Mrs. Johnson," said I, "Mr. Buck Johnson was so solicitous on your behalf that he left you his gun and his cartridge belt. Do you think you could get my horse, Mrs. Johnson?" I added.

"I guess I could," she said, and passed out.

"All right," said Buck Johnson to me, sourly, "you have it on me this time."

"I have," said I.

"I'll have it on you one day," he said. "And you won't get off easy."

"You're tempting providence," said I. "Better not discuss this affair any more."

"I've got him!" came Mrs. Johnson's voice from outside.

"Thank you," I called, "we're coming. Now then, Mr. Johnson, step out!"

He marched to the door.

"Now," said I, "you're going to mount, and you're going to ride a length ahead of me; and if you make it two lengths," I went on determinedly, "my gun goes full cock. And if you make it three——" said I.

"His name's Dennis," put in Mrs. Johnson, "and I don't blame ye. Don't you trouble to raise your hat, sir; and my compliments to the pro-prietor of the hotel."

And so we mounted and rode off from the "Hollow Fraud."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TWO TROOPERS

The scene, when we came to Black Kettle, was laid in such a way as to appeal to Buck Johnson.

The Eastbound was just drawing into the station, slowing up, the bell clanging.

Johnson evidently decided that he would rather not have me tell the Apache Kid, while he was "in town," what had happened at Mrs. Johnson's shack. When we gained the metals at the crossing he slipped from his horse, gave it a thump on the haunch, and ran helter-skelter to the platform, a black shadow in the blue night.

Very well—if he wished to go he could. Knowing Apache Kid somewhat by now I decided that it was a good way out—otherwise Apache might get into more trouble; for, if Apache heard from me of the affair at the ranch, there would be trouble between the two,—and Apache had probably found out by now that Johnson had not stayed on in the bar-room.

I reined up and saw Johnson board the train and then I rode wildly on to the Colonel's. The old man was at his stable door, opening it for the horse Johnson had ridden.

"Back again?" he said.

"Back again," said I.

"You didn't see the gent that had this horse, did you?"

He was looking up at me keenly. I suppose it is what you would call chivalry that came up in me then. I remembered what Mrs. Johnson had said about gossip. I never thought that Buck Johnson had not told the hotel proprietor where he was going when he hired the horse to follow me, remembered only that he had said that he had done so.

"Colonel," said I, "if you are interested, I can tell you a whole lot about the man that rode that horse."

He looked more sharply.

"You haven't killed him, have you?" he asked.

I thought again that he had wind of the story in some way—but I was wrong, as I found out later.

"He's just gone out on the Eastbound," said I.

"Oh!" said the Colonel. "You saw him?"

"I waited to see him board her."

"You did?" thoughtfully.

"I did."

"Did you see where he came from?"

"I did. He came from Jake Johnson's ranch, in front of me all the way. And I want to tell you, the oldest inhabitant of Black Kettle—whose word goes here, as they say—that if you hear any story about Buck Johnson having gone up to the ranch and stayed there to protect Mrs. Johnson, it's all lies. I suppose he told you that was what he was up to?"

"He told me nothing. He just hired a hoss for the afternoon and evening. You met him you say?"

"I had to carry a message to Mrs. Jake Johnson, I brought Mr. Buck Johnson back into Black Kettle in front of my gun and he elected to take the train. I didn't stop him. I thought it better not."

"Say," said the Colonel, leading in the white pony, I having dismounted, "Black Kettle seems to be getting to be a storm-centre. I think you know a heap; but I think you'd better keep tight holt of it till you're more posted up on what's been happening in Black Kettle since you've been away these few hours."

"What has happened?" I cried. It struck me that perhaps Apache and Johnson had fought, after all, when I went off. "What has happened?" I cried.

"Two dead troopers brought in on a waggon from the old trail this side of the Diamond K."

"Oh!" I said.

"And they're the two troopers that went out with a man you're becomin' tolerably friendly with. And he's lit out."

"He's gone?"

"He's gone. Now, young man, you've got some tall thinking to do; and be thankful you didn't get more friendly than you did with that gent. He's a man I admire; but he's a whole jag of danger to a bosom friend."

He closed the door and seemed by his manner to signify that the talk had finished.

"You come to me, young man, if you see a square deal of a way out; but you want to go around and have a look at the play before you take a hand. It ain't fair to let you buck into a game like this with the idea that the table lies just the way you left it."

"Thank you, Colonel," I said, and crossed to the hotel with a great deal in my mind to consider, and a certain trepidation.

There was no one in the hotel. A hushed air reigned supreme in the bar-room. The barman sat at a table, writing arduously, with a bad pen, and tongue going in and out in time with the pen's scratching. The proprietor looked sharply at me when I entered the room, and the tone of his "good-night, sir," was reserved.

I asked no questions. I merely awaited developments.

Supper-time came, Scotty's supper-hour came, but Scotty did not arrive. At the meal—and I was the only supperer—what I wanted for supper was all that the proprietor seemed to be interested in. I might have been a new arrival. I thought that perhaps I was about to be tabooed; but I did not know the proprietor. This was no taboo. He simply was not going to talk—for my own sake too. Black Kettle was as desolate as on the night I first struck that deceptive "city." The nickel-in-the-slot machine stared with blank face on the winking leaden spittoon; the stars looked under the eaves; the dim lamp-light shone outward and cast an orange slab on the verandah. With a queer feeling of being on the edge of a volcano, waiting for bad news, a sense of suspense, I sat in the dim-lit sitting-room; then I passed to the dim-lit bar-room; then to the verandah; then back to the bar. I did not want to go over to the depôt. I knew that the troopers lay there.

The troopers were brought in on a waggon, so much the Colonel had told me. But who had brought them in? What had been said? What had been done? I had plenty of questions to ask, but I asked none, and barman and proprietor evaded me. Perhaps to-morrow would speak, of its own account. I went to bed, with my gun under my pillow, and slept, being quite tired.

I ate a lone breakfast. The proprietor was mute. Scotty came over for his breakfast and merely nodded his head to me, snapped "Morning!" and sat down to eat, morose and wolfish. He was really too excited to speak at all this time.

Then there came (after breakfast, when I stood on the verandah asking myself what my plan of campaign was to be), trudging down the benches, a man packing blankets and looking as if he swore—whose shape I knew. It was my old friend Panamint Pete of the Diamond K.

"Hallo, Pete!" I hailed, as he marched up to the "Palace."

I could have fallen into his arms. This mute Black Kettle was telling on me.

"Hallo, Bill!" and he flung his blanket roll down and came up the steps and pump-handled me. "Still here?" he said.

"Still here," I said. "But I'm getting sick of being idle. Do you know of any jobs?"

"Looking for one myself," he said.

"Quit?" I asked.

"Sure! I can't stand that foreman. What are you drinking? Let me stand. I got my time with me."

We passed into the bar and liquidated. Then, plump and straight to the point, I asked the barman, unable to stand any more silence, whether patience and reticence were advisable or not: "Do you know what's become of the Apache Kid? What happened last night?"

He shook his head slowly.

"And I don't want to know," he said. "That Apache Kid is all right. As a man I got no kick against him. I never saw him any other than a white man; but he's a storm-centre. Yesterday afternoon, just after you rides up the benches, two dead troopers comes down here on a waggon from the Circle Z—wonder you didn't meet them," and he looked at me, as I thought suspiciously. "They goes aboard a freight passing through" (so I was wrong in thinking they were at the depôt) "and now I ain't interested. I don't want to hear anything more. There's things I am interested in. There's boys I don't want to know no more about. Them two troopers is of that brand. I ain't got no use for them. They was the two troopers who went up in the hills with Apache Kid. Now—what I say—it stands to reason he didn't shoot them like that. He had just got out of trouble. He wasn't looking for fresh trouble. There's a heap of questions goin' to be asked in Black Kettle mighty soon—and—I said enough. I'm trainin' for silence—no savvy, that's my motto right now."

"Just you tell me this," said I. "Did Apache have a gun when he went out with the troopers? I wasn't around then you know. I was at the Diamond K."

"Gun? A gun? Say! I don't think he had! No—by heck, he hadn't! I'll swear he hadn't—but I don't want nothing to do with that case. Apache should have stayed on here. Them two troopers brought in on the waggon sent him off. He should have stayed on here and proved himself innocent."

"Not necessarily," said I. "He may have had business in Black Kettle and just finished it."

"What kind of business could he finish so sudden—that he was right there on the depôt when the waggon came down and when Scotty turned to look at him he had plumb evaporated."

"Oh—it was like that?"

"It was like that. You mark my word, there's going to be inquiries in Black Kettle, and Black Kettle is going to get a name for a hot burg. You pulls out maybe about two o'clock. Ten minutes after, Buck Johnson pulls out. Apache comes down about an hour after. He asks for you——"

"For me?" I cried.

The barman looked a little amazed at me, or curious.

"For you," he said. "I tells him I see you ride over to the benches—guessed you had gone back to the Diamond K. 'Oh yes,' he says. Then he says: 'See friend Johnson around?'—'No,' I says, 'I ain't seen him around for some time. May-be he's at the depôt.' He strolls over to the depôt and as he goes over the waggon comes down. Scotty gets plumb excited. Scotty suggests sending 'em—that's the two corpses—to Lincoln, on first freight. In comes the freight right then and Scotty and the teamster look sidewise for Apache Kid—and he has plumb evaporated. Train pulls out. Now I'm quit. I've said all I'm goin' to say."

In bounded Scotty. I thought it was some fresh turn of Apache's affairs that brought him hither. But no. He was mute about Apache still.

"Hallo, you boys! Want a job?" he cried.

We turned about.

"I do," said I.

"If horses is its name," said Pete, "I'm open."

"Well—Henry has wired to me to see if I can send him up some men."

"Henry? Oh! That's for round-up."

"Who's Henry?" I asked.

"Henry and Stell," said Pete.

"Yes, I've heard of them."

"Well he's wired to say that if I hear of any men looking for a job he's sending in a waggon for some stuff—and to send them out to him. There you are, boys."

"Have something on me," said Pete and nodded his head to the bar.

"No—no—no! Excuse me this time, Pete. I want to keep on the water-waggon. If I take one glass I might take two—and then I talk."

"Oh, pshaw," said Pete. "Can't you get off once and jest wag the whip?"

"No—nothing—You'll excuse me," said Scotty.

"What in hell! You scared you blab something in your wild moments—something of your wild past?" asked Pete.

"I say, Scotty," said I, "can I have a word with you?"

He looked at me and then shook his head.

"You go to Henry's and get to work," he said and dived out of the hotel.

"Bug-house!" said Pete. "Time he was on the water-waggon."

Then suddenly: "Say," he said and startled me as if he had fired his gun. "Did you see that there pardon of Apache's?"

"I did," said I.

Another long pause.

"You cast your eye over it?"

"Yes, I read it."

"It was straight goods?"

"What do you mean?"

"It wasn't a bluff of Apache's?"

"No, it was no bluff. It was a genuine pardon."

"Well, you wouldn't be fooled. You're a college man. You were satisfied about that pardon?"

"I was, absolutely. But I tell you what I wasn't satisfied about?"

"Oh! What was that?"

"Well, the pardon was all right, but it was a tall story——"

"The pardon makes the story true, don't it? If you believe the pardon you believe the whole story."

"It's not that. These bonds were wanted very badly. Good, give him a pardon, get the bonds, and then——" I left it in air.

"Government wouldn't play a game like that."

"That's what even Apache Kid was not sure of," I fired off at him.

"I had better tell the story," said I and I told him, as lightly as I could, the whole affair of the hollow tree just as you know it.

"Say, this is a curious story," said Pete when I had ended. "But it has the brand of truth to any man who knows the curious ways of life——"

"Well," I said, "you know it all now."

"One thing I settle anyhow," he said, "and that is that I don't throw no lariat in this contest. I lay off and look on. I see all the various possible moves, but I says right now that the game is a crooked game to begin. It begins with a hold-up. There you are! When a game is crooked I reckon the turn of the cards is crooked too."

After a long pause (in which he had been considering the whole affair, and my part in it, and Apache's determination to be responsible for both, which had brought from Pete a cry of "That was a white man—but only right!"), he extended his hand.

"This here hold-up," he said, "ain't no or'nary hold-up. This here hold-up is an almighty business—and I want to shake your hand. As a friend of civilisation you was plumb wrong. But as a gent and a man you was white, and I want to shake. But don't you tell everybody."

"I've told no one else," I said.

"So far as that goes you ain't told me," he said.

He gave my hand another pressure—and then we discussed Henry and Stells, otherwise known as "The Triangle," because of its brand, or "The Pueblo Wall," because of the remains of what was regarded as an old Pueblo beside it. That subject waned and his mind reverted again to Apache Kid; abruptly he turned to me and asked me to repeat the story of the hollow tree; and interjected many questions regarding details. When I ended, said he:

"Now remember Apache Kid's words: 'You didn't shoot anybody.' He shot them both. They're goin' to get Apache sure—and there ain't no sense in swingin' with him only because you happened to be on the trail that day, and because you was friendly enough to chip in on that deal the way any gent would do. No, sir. Don't you forget, there ain't a gent from Idaho to Arizona would say you killed one of them troopers. When a marshal shoots a hold-up man he ain't a murderer, but the State is dispensing justice. Well, when you shoots that trooper you was only preventing him from committing a murder. You ponder on that and get it fixed proper in you—no hair-brand—but plumb well in. And don't you go trying to help Apache with evidence, for you'll be cross-questioned. You want from now on to have only heard of Apache Kid casual—and be very little interested in him."

Good advice, but——

CHAPTER XIV

COW-SENSE

It was riotous—and dirty—work.

Always fond of horses, at the Triangle ranch I grew to love one or two.

I know it is the fashion to say that the cow-puncher is dead. But he is not. True he does not trail herds now from Texas to Dodge City; also he pays more heed to his stock nowadays in the way of breeding; also he puts up at least a little hay for some animals. Yet he is not dead. It was not only at the Triangle that I decided the cow-puncher was not dead—later (as I shall tell) I had ample proof that he was not.

Cattle-ranching on the old-time scale is, of course, only to be found now in Mexico. They say that General Terrazas, the Mexican cattle king, owns a million head of cattle. But I fear it will be little use for the cow-puncher of these States, when sheep have finally ousted him, to hit the trail for Durango and strike the boss (*El Padron*) in Chihuahua and Sonora; for the *vaquero* draws but a few dollars a month and is always "in the hole," tied to his store-bill.

At the Triangle, at any rate, I learned to love a horse. I remember well the one that, at four of the morning, my first morning at the Pueblo Wall, I selected from the saddle bunch. He stood on his hind legs and pawed the air as soon as I got my rope over his neck. Perhaps he thought, seeing that I cast the rope a good dozen times before I attained my end, that I was as poor a seat on a saddle as a hand with a rope.

It was, at the moment, all very fine to remember how Catlin, in his *North American Indians*, tells of the Cheyenne Indians lassoing wild horses, tightening the noose, and then coming closer and closer to the horse, still tightening the noose, and at last getting the lassoed horse's head down and "taking its breath." It reads as possible. I quite believe that the Cheyennes did the trick. A cat or dog will smell a man's breath to gain an understanding of him. A horse may very well know that a man is friendly, although he is half throttling it, by smelling his breath. But I decided that I was not built after the pattern of the Cheyenne Indians of Catlin's day. I merely hung on, dodged him when he came down, hung on again; two men came to my aid then and we threw the brute and saddled him where he lay kicking on the ground. Then I straddled him, all of a tremble with the struggle—as excited as he. Then a yell—and up he rose—up we rose. But that was the worst of him.

It was another horse, on another occasion, one who let me saddle him as if he was a rocking-horse, who unseated me! He hung his head and looked round and watched me saddling in the most lugubrious fashion; so dejected did he seem to be that I determined to practise roping and thus be able to pick what horse I fancied instead of taking what horse came nearest. But he was bluffing and smiling at me. As soon as I was on his back he trotted forward, still bluffing, and then suddenly bucked the glorious buck that flung me over his head and under the lowest bar of the corral. I spent that first day in doing nothing else but riding these two horses. I christened the first Submissive and the second Meek—and sat in a bucket at supper-time, to the intense delight of the outfit.

"Pete's partner is sure an original gent," I heard one say.

But the trick was not mine. My Quixote-loving father had told me (when I rode a donkey once in Arran, without a saddle—which, for discomfort, is like riding a cottage roof in an earthquake) that he had lived in the saddle by day when first he went to Venezuela—that was before his Chilian days—and sat in a bucket to his meals, and slept on his face!

But the incident gave me a new name. I was "Bucket Bill" thereafter, so far as the Triangle was concerned. An unfortunate nick-name it was to become, when later I struck a saloon with the boys, for it gave strangers the impression that I drank neither from glass nor bottle but from—a bucket.

Cowboys, in the old days, obtained more wages than sheep-herders. Sheep-herders, indeed, very often obtained a bullet. But now, when the sheep-herder has his caravan and can run a home around with him, on wheels, and has sixty dollars a month, the cowboy has only forty. I have heard folk say that the fact that there are still plenty of men to ride the range shows that the old romance of the riding calls, and twenty dollars more a month does not, as they say, cut any ice.

But, though there is something in that I think it is not all. Miners say: "As crazy as a prospector"; but cowboys say: "As

crazy as a sheep-herder." And plenty of men fight shy of the sheep-herder's lonely life: "Baa! Baa! Baa!" from morning to night, and nothing but the hills, and the sky; and the clouds coming up, and going over, and going down; and the sun going up and going down—and the great dipper circling round, and Sirius a blue flame, and Mars a red, and nothing else but little winds, and silence, and sniff-sniff-sniffing of sheep. It is not every man who can hold down a sheep-herder's job.

The cow-puncher's life is different. A man may be alone for hours; but he is hunting cattle, yelling to them, following them—to meet another man with another bunch. And then there is the dinner, all together, about noon; after that, work all together; and then at night there is the company—the rise and fall of cigarette glow around the fire, the cans of tea that is like nectar, the beans, and flap-jacks that are fit for kings—eaten in company. People condemn solitary drinking. But solitary eating is enough to drive a man to solitary drinking.

At the Triangle, as at any ranch, there were discomforts. You do not ride up hill and down dale from four of the morning till noon, driving cattle, without getting hot, nor do you get hot without sweat; you do not work in, or around, the corrals, without more sweat. A round-up outfit knows the meaning of "the dust and heat of the day."

There were representatives from half the ranches in the State, although the Triangle practically conducted its own round-up, its herds numbering well over the forty thousand.

One day I would be sent out on a near reach and be in before noon. Another day I would be on the farther circles, and proud too of it, and come in late, drop off my horse and seize a tin plate with the best of them—but mighty happy and "feeling good" if the bunch I had added to the day-herd was a worthy one.

Tea! Tea has been my tippie ever since these days. It has never been the same tea, but I drink it nevertheless. I remember one night as I took up the pan of tea, feeling so "good" and happy, recalling a phrase of Heraclitus, and I spilt some of that nectar on the ground before drinking, and looked up at the stars. My shirt was sticking to my shoulder blades and I was cold after the day's work, but I poured a libation to the Gods—all on my lonesome there.

There was a funny little pang the moment after (one gets sentimental too on the range); the pang was at the thought that I was quite alone in the camp—that "Bucket spilt his tea," if any noticed at all; I doubt if any did. Certainly, that Bucket was worshipping, none would know. Perhaps all worship should be like that; and the worship that has most flummery and pomp and circumstance, and takes place at stated times and hours, and to stereotyped words, is not worship at all, but a kind of attempt at a bluff on God.

The fearfully, quiet, reserved, thoughtful impenetrable boss of my waggon gave me my first congratulation that night, the night of the libation.

"You're breaking in well, Bucket. You never rode the range before, did you? What was you doing at the Diamond K? Cook's bitch?" and he smiled, or his grey eyes did, in the fire-light.

I nodded and laughed.

"I mind a man in Oregon," he said, "called himself an engineer. The engineer on the stern wheeler was sick and he got the job. He got us up all right, with a hundred and forty-five pounds of steam, and her certified for eighty; and when we were squatting in to Columbia Landing he comes up on deck and asks for his wages. 'Anything wrong?' asks the Captain.—'Why,' he says, 'I've got up this length, but I've had enough. I never seen a stern-wheeler in my life before —'—'Ain't you a engineer?' says the Captain.—'Well,' says he, 'I stoked a lifting crane in Portland, Oregon, for one day, loading wheat. But this gauge on this here boat puzzles me.'"

My waggon boss laughed and turned away and I went, perfectly contented, to help myself from the Dutch oven. But my head was not swelled. I knew that after the round-up was over there would come other work when I would be expected to do more than sit a horse.

I confess that by now I was forgetting home, and the face of my mother was fading further from me. In the Dago railway gang I was never free of it—it haunted me in a most heart-rending way—for when what is done cannot be undone one would not forget the loved—and yet to remember is anguish. When I read, at Black Kettle, of the hobo's recovery at the Western Infirmary, I kicked myself; and the misery I suffered at the Diamond K, because of feeling the utter lack of any necessity for ever having fled from Glasgow and broken my mother's heart, tortured me.

Here I began to relish life again—sadder and wiser, and often philosophising that I would never again tangle myself up

with mortality—with other lives. I was feeling miserable still, but I fear that, in contrast with the recent agony, I was almost happy.

Thinking that all that was necessary to make life perfect was a bath in the evening, and a suggestion to some of the boys not to pick their teeth with a fork—both changes absurd to hope for—I fell asleep under the stars; the saddle, smelling of horse, for my pillow; a grey blanket round me like a cocoon; and so—I fell asleep.

Some time in the night I wakened and saw the stars, and far off, in the valley, a deeper darkness of the herd; and, sitting statuesque across the dip, on a ridge, one of the night-herders.

Then asleep again—and I wakened abruptly in grey haze to the cry:

"Tumble out, you sons of guns! Tumble out!"

The oven was the only brightness, the cook working before it, with illumined face and hands. A scent of wet sage would be in the air, wet sage, and coffee, and biscuits. Out of the wonderful mystery of haze, before the day would come, came the herd of ponies with the "horse rangers"—and another day's work was open before us—and another day had dawned on the great Dry Belt.

To you it is not as to me—you are waiting for the Apache Kid. I had nearly forgotten him in writing of these first range days. He was, of course, discussed about the fire, but as often as not his name only led on to some tale of another brigand, train-robber, hold-up man; or some horse-thief, brand-faker; or townsmen (for I was not the only man at the Triangle who had begun life in a city) would tell of some cracksman.

These townsmen interested me, but not so much as the men who had been at the life all their days: they drifted to the range for this or the other reason, mostly for love of space, and chance to waggle an elbow without jostling some one—other reasons, too, doubtless, moved some, to judge by their expressions. There were one or two who looked mighty tough and talked little.

Pete, knowing what would be coming anon, gave me many a wrinkle. When we had the opportunity, as once or twice when he rode in with me during the days of "circle riding," he would tell me the ages of some animals, and then let me state what ages I believed others to be.

"Your waggon foreman," said he, "is pretty good to you. Shouldn't be surprised if he would allocate you a cow-pony one of these days and put you off that tarnation lonesome holding the herd, put you to do some cutting out—but he's struck on you and he'll allocate you a pony that will do half the work for you. Some folk try to scare men off the range by telling them none but an expert can lasso. No others need apply, they says. You wait and you'll see. Half the lasso-throwing ain't throwing at all. You get a good cow-pony and he'll see where you're heading and carry you there, through a hull herd. Then you just drops your lariat over the horns and the pony walks out. It's all right. He'll come."

I feel that I must interject a comment here that an old cow-puncher was speaking; and these are not my sentiments. Pete, with a long enough rope, could lasso the moon I believe. He was always the kind of man to make light of his work, and also he was an encouraging man, perhaps because he was successful himself at his work. I have noticed in all professions and callings that the bluffers, they who are really incompetent and hold their jobs by bluff, are generally the ones to advise a beginner to go back to where he came from.

"Well," said I, "I suppose I've to report to the boss that a cow with the Triangle brand got away from me to-day."

"What was that for?"

"Well—you know how they all start going, heads down, tails up, as soon as they hear you yell—the long-horns I mean. All you have to do is to ride along the tops of the buttes?"

"Yes, that's right—with long-horns; different from them —— Suffolks and Surreys and Jerseys."

"Yes, you can run them down two gulches at once if they're Texans, just by coming from one side to the other and whooping——"

"Sure! But where does the eloping cow come in that you mentioned in last week's number?"

"Oh! She ain't calved yet," I said. "I'm coming to her."

Pete wagged his head, appreciating, hardly smiled, and remarked:

"You're learning the cattle industry, sure thing. You're getting repartee, and you'll be a credit yet to the Pueblo Wall. Well, what about the curious cow?"

"Oh, she was up on the top and I came quite close to her, and drove her a bit. She didn't run."

"I see. She was lonesome—not with a bunch."

"That's right. She was on top. I had to drive her and drive her, a cow, Pete, a cow—drove her and drove her, and then she turned bang round and charged me. This pony just jumped."

"Sure thing. Wiser than you."

"And when we dodged she charged again. The pony wanted to run——"

"Didn't you take his advice?"

"Why no! I got back again at her. The end of it was that we dodged her again, and the pony slipped on the edge—and we did a somersault."

"A somerset?"

"Yes. It's a wonder I didn't get my neck broken."

"It is, sure. You want to go down to Mexico City and be a Toreador—Oh Toreador! and stick rosettes in the bulls and get bookays from the señoritas. Well, go on—I'm interested. It's only this invigorating air making me pert."

"I rolled to the bottom after the somersault and the pony came down to meet me—and I left her—I left that—cow, because when I got up again farther along I found that the bunch in the next gulch had turned and was straying away back again."

Pete smiled and considered.

"It's a wonder to me," he said, "that a man like you, self-educated in cows, so to speak, enough to run two bunches that a-way, with crossing from one to the other, didn't have the savvy to leave that cross-grained cow alone."

"I did."

"Yes, eventooaly. But you needed a tumble first, and had to see, with your own eyes, the ninety and nine a-straying. You didn't ever go to Sunday school, if you did go to co—" He stopped, for joshing is joshing, but it is not considered according to Hoyle to chip a man too much about being a college man. There are men on the range, as everywhere, who announce that they are "college men"—but the real "college man" don't like too much "college man" slung at them.

"You want to learn by sad experience," he ended.

"Well, what about the cow?" I asked.

"Oh, you can mention her if you like, but I wouldn't mention your draw-poker game with her—not unless you want to be amusing."

"I never thought a cow would behave like that," I cried, wheeling aside to gather in a steer that was trying to lead away a little section of the herd, and riding back again.

"Only cows will, my son," said Pete, paternally, when I rode to his side again, "at least generally speaking. A bull will argue it with you right there, sometimes, but when a cow gets that way—argumentative—leave her—to hell with her—she'll come in at the next round-up—or she'll go into another round-up and be cut out and drove where she belongs; or she'll think it over and follow on later when she gets lonesome. Never argue with a woman, my son."

It was late on the night of the day of these lessons when a screaming of wheels announced the arrival of another waggon

into the plain from the home ranch.

The steers rose—they had already settled—and the clicking of horns began again. We tumbled out (we who had already loosened belts and boots) and caught what ponies we could, and rode over to help the herders, riding round and round the herd till the outsiders, that were trying to break away, milled again and lay down with many grunts.

Then we came circumspectly back—no whooping it up, with a night herd of that size and nervousness; left them with a thought like that in the old song:

*Lay nicely low cattle,
Don't heed any rattle,
But quietly doss till the dawn.
For if you skedaddle
We'll jump in the saddle,
And head you as sure as you're born.*

We left the herders singing to the herd, and drove quietly back to camp, the herders' voices following us, fading, mellowing with distance, dying away—to find a cluster standing at the fire—an excited group, around the new arrival, glimpses of fire darting between their legs, lighting up the undersides of their faces, giving a wild, almost eerie look, to the camp.

I really think it is such pictures that constitute half the lure of the round-up camps to-day, even as yesterday.

As I dismounted and unsaddled, I heard, from the crowd:

"Well, I'm sorry for Apache Kid. I ain't got no use for hold-ups, no more'n for horse-stealers—but he ain't no or'nary low-down horse-thief. I was working at Colonel Nye's when he went out after that there lost cabin that I guess you all hears of; I heerd all that story, and I heerd how he was suspected of two hold-ups but got off. Reckon he was guilty——"

I became irritated at the long-windedness. I passed over to the group.

"Well, he's up against it now," I heard. "They're going to fill him full of lead this time."

CHAPTER XV

AG'IN THE GOVERNMENT

Side on to the camp-fire stood a teamster reading out the news about Apache Kid. I do not remember the exact words of that latest published information regarding the train-robber; I did not keep copies of the newspapers, but they went something like this—and were thus read by the teamster:

"The worthy train-robber or 'hold-up' man, who rejoices in the—rejoices in the—in the—(Oh to hell!) of 'Apache Kid,' has leapt again suddenly to the fore-front in the public eye. Only the other day he was safely ensco—ensco—(Oh to hell! Another long word!)——"

"Ensconced," prompted a man who sat nursing his knees by the fire and looking up on the reader, listening with open mouth and some contempt.

The teamster yelped: "Am I reading this —— paper or are you?"

My waggon-boss poured oil on the troubled waters.

"That's all right. Don't you interrupt," he said. "Do you think you could read it any better?"

The corrector quailed at this implied threat, dreading a request to give an exhibition of his power to read a newspaper more accurately.

"I don't say that," he fired off.

"Well, go on," to the teamster; and then to the corrector: "There's college gents here, content to listen without correcting. And if a college gent can get the savvy without interruption I reckon there ain't no call for any gent to correct." To the teamster again: "You go on, sir; you're doing very well."

Thus appeased, the teamster continued. It was a queer story that he read. It would appear, according to the newspaper version, that the gaolers had brought some pressure to bear upon Apache Kid; but what manner of pressure was not stated. There was a clever suggestion, which the reader could take or leave, that gentle torture had been perhaps employed, or maybe threatened! At any rate, Apache Kid had gone out, under some compulsion, with two troopers, to show them where certain valuable stolen property had been hidden. And now they were dead—and he was wanted. A reward of one thousand dollars was offered for the capture, alive or dead, of Apache Kid.

"Oh!" cried out one; "but there's something behind all this. You ain't bin to Black Kettle recent or you would know. Apache Kid was in Black Kettle. Now, he must ha' bin in Black Kettle after shootin' up the two troopers. Scotty, the brass-pounder, over at Black Kettle—the agent—he says Apache went out with them all right. They came down there all on the jump, in a special train, with their own horses, and Apache rides a horse that Scotty went across to the livery stable and got for him. Then Apache went up to the hills with them. Next thing he comes back."

"Alone?" asked somebody; and I waited for the reply from this man who had the real news to add to the newspaper news.

"Yap, alone;" he said. "Scotty says that he asks the Apache Kid about the troopers, and Apache says as how they had hit the trail over to Lone Tree instead of coming back to Black Kettle—fearing celebrations there. But Apache Kid had a pardon for the hold-up all right," he fired off as a final crusher.

"A pardon!"

"A pardon?"

"Sure thing. Everybody in Black Kettle heerd of that. He had a pardon for the hold-up, a full pardon, on consideration that he would show where these here Government properties was cached. Now—Apache ain't goin' to shoot up the men that come with him to git that property—and him with a pardon in his pocket."

My heart gave a series of clutches. I felt like one about to take a plunge on a chill day.

"Did any one see this here pardon?" asked the boss.

Something told me to be silent; and then everything went hazy; and with a feeling of being unwise and yet, somehow, right, I stepped forward.

"Sure!" cried Pete. "He waved that pardon about considerable," and he thrust me back, and shook his head at me.

"Did any man read it?" asked the boss.

"I did," said I, and came clear into the cluster, which fell apart. Pete let out a long, great sigh and stood back.

"And more than that—I saw the shooting of the two troopers," I continued. Pete fell back with a hopeless toss of his head and gesture of his arm.

It was a thunderbolt for them.

I had decided to talk; and I told them the whole story, all except the part of it relating to my journey to Mrs. Johnson with her husband's share of the hold-up takings. I told them all about my shooting of one of the troopers, and what Apache had said on that head. At that point I knew, by the cries of admiration, that they were Apache's friends.

"And now, gentlemen," I ended. "What I want to know is—where do I come into this? If Apache is captured have I to give myself up and tell the story as I've told you?"

The boss stared.

"What!" he yelled.

The crowd circled closer. There was an odour of singeing trousers and scorched sheep-skin leggings. They forgot the fire in their eagerness.

"Well," said I, "I'm a witness to the thing—to tell how they tried to kill him. But I shot one of the men."

"Say," said the boss, "if you do anything so foolish we'll put you under restraint, we will. What do you say, boys?"

"Sure!"

"Sure!"

"Sure! We'll cache you where you'll not be heard of till Apache has played his game."

"Sure! Apache is playing a lone hand from now on. You just stepped in where he was liable to loose, and says you: 'These gents have got their cyards stacked,' and you gave him a fresh chance. But he plays a lone hand all the same."

"Sure! He'd have passed in his checks then if you had not stepped in. Now—just you leave off chipping in. He's the kind of man any gent is liable to help, but he is dangerous as a friend. He's a road-agent and train-robber; and when you chips in with him as a man, you are sure preparing for getting locked up later as a brother road-agent. You leave it to somebody else to save him again——"

"Ain't you a white man?" a gruff voice demanded of me, and one of our toughest hands—an old timer, with mahogany face, and heavy tusks of moustaches that looked cream-colour against his bronze—gripped my shoulder.

"Well—I want to be," I said.

"Pshaw!" he growled. "Just you be. A crooked man may want to be white; but a white man, if he goes around splitting hairs to be white, is going to get plumb pallid and ghost-like."

"That's right, and put like an expert orator," said Pete. And then to me: "I tried to keep you from talking at all to begin with, if only you could have seen."

"Oh!" said the waggon-boss, "I saw you signalling; so I knew he had some card in reserve for play when it was wanted. Well, my son, and college gent, I'm glad you showed us that card before you played it, for now we threaten you that if you show any signs of going into the game we are sure going to put you under restraint. Ain't that right, boys?"

It made my eyes haze a second to hear the unanimous: "Sure thing!" and to see the faces (that I am sure, in the mass, would have terrified a New York, or Boston, drawing-room), bronzed and blackened, and with the fire-light playing tricks on them, all turned on me determinedly.

There was not a man there who would make a bid for the thousand dollars offered for the arrest of Apache Kid. But they were determined to keep me out of his story, considering that I had gone just deep enough to rescue, but that if I went deeper I might drown with him.



CHAPTER XVI

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The life and adventures of the Apache Kid were not to interfere with the work on the range.

I did my share in the exciting and dirty work of cutting out; and sometimes was told off to lend a hand at the branding during the succeeding days.

I think the foreman was giving me a chance to learn all there was "to it," as he would say. The old timer I have mentioned remarked to me once, in a lull:

"Which I don't know what wages you're gettin', my son, but you are sure ropin' in experience."

Pete's expectation was fulfilled. I had cow-ponies to work with, during cutting out, that were all "experts." In the herd I found no recalcitrant cows; steers might fight there, clash horns together, create dust and circlings, move to the outside, and be turned back by the herd guards. Now and then a thoughtful cow would walk deliberately from the herd, a string following her, but they would all crowd back again, as soon as one of us headed them off.

The cutting was in full progress—steer cut, and cow and calf cut. My job, one day, was to look only for the Triangle brand on cows. The calf would be by the cow's side, bewildered and clinging. Then all I had to do was to drop the lariat over the mother's horns and start out. What fascinated me was the way the pony would note, firstly, what cow I had selected, and then, secondly, when my lariat fell—and start edging out of the herd before either knee or bridle had prompted him.

Another day I was told off to assist two men from a neighbouring ranch in the work of cutting out the cattle bearing their brand that had strayed amidst our herds. Again, I was told off to join a branding crew; and I think I was looked upon with a certain measure of pride (instead of with annoyance as an interloper) wherever I went, looked upon so not for myself, but because of my connection with the affair of Apache Kid who was now making our section famous—or notorious.

There was also a certain air, among the boys, of watching me, as if they feared I might stampede, stricken by some sudden mad idea to throw in my lot with the fortunes of the Apache Kid. But I saw by then, quite clearly, that it would do no good for me to make any public confession. Apache had killed one trooper anyhow. It was his trouble. The arguments of the outfit had convinced me as sound. And if a generous cow-puncher advises a man to turn no cards in a certain game, you can be sure that the game is bad indeed. A cowboy is not the kind of man to advise merely a "safe deal."

Work in the corrals will put all other thoughts out of any man's head, especially if he knows that he is there as a favour, because he is liked and not because of his superlative skill. What he lacks in skill he will have to balance by determination and sheer output of muscle.

Here is where you will see the real roping. Here you will see a calf noosed by the horns and snubbed, and, next moment, a rope twirl before him, just where his forefeet are going, twirl before him—a flick, and his forelegs are roped, and down he goes. When the ropes caught the calves by the hind legs the work of throwing and holding was far easier than when the neck was caught.

It is wild work: a lariat spins near you and disappears. You wrestle a calf, and as you wrestle it a tautened rope, between some other saddle horn and roped calf, appears before you, ready to trip you. You learn to be a sooty, ensanguined gymnast.

All day the work went on to the sound of calves and cows bawling each to each, shouts of the tallyman sitting on high where the revolving gate gave entrance to the large corral, shouts for the iron, shouts when calves rose, cut loose, indignant at the treatment accorded them. Representatives from surrounding ranches sat on the top rail beside the tallyman, smoking and at ease.

I soon learnt how to kneel on the head and grasp the forelegs of a downed calf. Then would come the shout for the branding iron, the sound of it, the sizzle, the smell. On some ranches there is a man told off at the swing gate between the corrals to ear-mark, cutting the ears with the ranche's cut, as the calves pass through. On others this is done by a man who is in the actual branding corral beside the iron man. It is all very slick work. Even the gate man has a very lively job

swinging the gate now left, now right, according to what animals come along, according to whether they be for branding, or for running aside into the neighbouring corral where the strays of other ranges bawl.

By sundown every one in the branding corral was splashed to the eyes with dung and blood, black with dirt and soot. I had several knuckles a-bleeding, and my nails were torn with grappling. Outside the corral the roar rose and fell all day—of calves and cows calling to each other, upset by the sundering of them.

I have no doubt that I was far more tired than necessary by night, because there is a trick in throwing calves—as in most things—and though I watched it performed intently, and imitated it eagerly, I often had to put on much more muscle than necessary to compensate for what I lacked in the ju-jitsu of the business.

I can quite understand the stories one hears of dukes' sons and the sons of "belted earls" going back to the range. I know, by my own experience, how the range calls its lovers back. Once, years after, a visit to the old country was shortened for me because, out of an old country open grate a spluttering coal discharged a red-hot fragment on to the hearthrug. And the vision of my empty hostess posing before me like a Sargent portrait, and the sound of her inane and ceaseless laughter, and her "Ah, doncher know?" became, instead of pathetic, revolting. A picture had been conjured up by that odour of singed rug—not a picture of the branding corral only. The corral was but the jumping-off place to which the smell of singeing took me, the jumping-off place for the flooding pictures of space, rolling land, foothills, bastions of the Bad Lands. I went home early from that house, mighty ashamed that I had ever strayed into such an outfit of *poseurs*—and I cut short my visit home too.

Perhaps six weeks later, when the round-ups in our vicinity were over, and many of our men were away attending other neighbouring round-ups, the foreman told me to hitch up a team and go into Black Kettle.

"You come from Black Kettle," he said, "so you may as well take this job. We get our supplies mostly from Lone Tree; but there's a consignment at Black Kettle for us."

So at sun-up next day I was gathering the reins and rolling out for Black Kettle, and thus again sat, content and tired, two evenings later, under the stars on the Palace hotel verandah. Who should come into my half sleepy content, with bent head, half recognising me and yet wanting to make sure, but my old railway boss, Douglas! We leapt at each other and pump-handled vigorously.

"Well," said he, looking me up and down, "how do you enjoy shovelling dung instead of shovelling gravel? I mind my young brother was terrible eager to be a soldier—thought it was all riding around in a dinky tunic. When they put him scrubbin' floors and carryin' wood he quit. There was some spirit of rebellion in his troop at the time and he joined in with the mutineers, stalled on doing chores instead of bein' a picture soldier. They were stationed up at some fort near the boundary and they just stepped across to a Canadian Mounted Police depôt over the line, the whole bunch of malcontents, and they all stripped their clothes and gets a receipt from the police-boys and was sitting around in civilian's clothes when the rest of the troop came to take them back. There was nothin' to do but laugh. By the time that any red tape arrangements could be made for lifin' them across the boundary my brother was in Australia. Next I hear of him he's in the New South Wales police. Kids is funny when a uniform is concerned."

I thought Douglas was pulling my leg with a tall story, but the bar-keep—yes, we had wandered, subconsciously, to the bar-room while Douglas spoke—chipped in:

"That's right—'extradition,' they calls it. I remember that fracas—up in Montana it was. But that was half a troop that deserted. There was a funnier thing with one of the police boys. He had got a kick against the force—which ain't usual. I ain't struck on Canucks; but these Canuck police-boys is the most proud of their profession of any soldiers I ever knew. I was up at Pincher Creek when it happened. One of the boys had a grudge against his corporal, or his routine, or something; and one day he pikes out of the R.N.-W.M.P. shack in his birthday garments, and he runs like hell for the boundary. The corporal runs after him and then stops when there was no doubt that the police-boy was in Ammurican territory. The mother-naked young man borrows a blanket from a Blackfoot squaw what was standing by, and he executes a dance, and spans his nose at his late corporal. If there had been no folks around, I surmise that corporal would have been liable to step over into Ammurica proper and pull the police-boy back again, and arrest him."

"Pardon me," I said. "You said 'American' just now. Is Canada not in America?"

The bar-keep looked me up and down, smiling.

"Not yet!" he said.

So off we went into a pleasant wrangle, in which the American Eagle spread his wings until he might have split his chest—and time flew past. At last I asked Douglas how he was getting on.

"Have you still got that Dago gang?" I asked.

"Sure," he said.

"And find them satisfactory?"

"Sure! I'm satisfied all right. I've just been down seeing the Superintendent of the Division. It seems that the Dago agent who supplies them says he's heard from them that they want to quit badly. They've filed a petition to him—kind of round-robin. He's been agitating so severely that the Superintendent sent for me to run down and see him. Am I not satisfied with them? You bet your life I am."

"The white gang is up beside you now," I suggested.

"Not yet," he said. "They delays coming. I'm the only white man up the line—and I am surely enjoying myself. Say—" his voice dropped, "Dunnage—the section-boss—tells me he was working away on the line and they stands aside to let a freight go past. It was at a grade. Sometimes they nearly looses them heavy grades with heavy trains, and has to slide back and charge it."

"I know," said I.

"Well—they was going very slow, just crawling past, and Dunnage and his gang standing by. And so they could see under all the cars. And who do you think was playing hobo, stealing a ride, lying underneath on a brace-rod?"

"Who?"

"Apache Kid," he said quietly. He looked at me attentively.

"Look here, Douglas," I said, "I've been waiting for some one to mention him. I was advised to say little about him till I was spoken to. Do you know, I like that man."

"So do I," said Douglas, and nodded.

"He may be a train-robber, but——"

"He never robbed a train of mine!" said Douglas, and laughed. "And besides, there's a story going round here about him having a pardon. Now, that night I saw him tangled up with the train trimmings, that was the day that the two troopers was brought in here. I read the papers, but there's something crooked there. Everybody here tells me that he said he had a pardon—took it out and flourished it too. But then Apache is deep."

"I saw the pardon," said I.

"To read?"

"Sure! I read every word of it, all the 'Whereases' about the hold-up, and trial, and conviction—and a full pardon."

"On condition?"

"No. No condition. It was just a full pardon."

"Um! That makes me believe the story I heard all the more. They would not put the reason for the pardon in cold print."

"No—of course not."

"Then why in thunder did he shoot the two troopers who came with him?"

"Did he shoot them?" I asked.

"Well he ran, didn't he, when they came in? He was underneath the very same train that carried them back to Lincoln!

Dropped off somewhere on the line and vamoosed!"

"True," I said, "but then he had been up against the Government—and he was going to be blamed whether he did kill them or not."

"Um. But I don't seem to find the story quite satisfying. There's something behind it. So far as I'm concerned I've nothing to say to it. If Apache Kid came right into my camp I would give him a meal and pass him on without a word. I want to have the pros and cons of the thing—even if Government is at the back of it—before I budge one way or another."

We retired to the verandah to discuss the case further; and we were so employed when Colonel Kemp came over to the verandah and said, peering up through the dusk to be sure of me:

"May I have a word with you, young man?"

"Certainly."

I stepped down to him, but he urged me back up the steps by my elbow; led me into the lit bar-room, glanced round to see that we were alone, and then held forth a newspaper, pointing to a paragraph.

"Read that," he said.

What I read was by no means pleasing. It told a pretty story indeed of some sleuth's cleverness. Apache Kid was still abroad in the land, a free man; but "our special correspondent" had probably got a clue that would hasten his capture. The foreman of a well-known ranchman had informed him that, on a trail above Black Kettle, he had seen Apache Kid in company with one of his hands, had seen him there on the very day that the two troopers (after found dead) rode out from Black Kettle with the Apache Kid. There was, he said, no sign of any trooper on the trail. He saw no blue-coat. But he discharged his cowboy on the spot—for the cowboy had been sent out to some work in the morning and should not have been in that neighbourhood. Knowing the name that Apache Kid had, and not wanting undesirables in his outfit, the foreman had fired his cowboy! Interviewed as to his reason for his suspicion he had told that it had been roused by the fact that the cowboy in question had signed on to his outfit as "William Barclay" and, later, a letter had come for him as "John Williams."

"Where is William Barclay—alias John Williams, or John Williams—alias Will Barclay?" ended the column. "Can he shed a light on the mystery of the two troopers?"

"He can!" I cried, "he can! Come here, Colonel," and I caught him by the coat lapel, so hastily that I caught an end of beard also, and apologised. "Come along!" and I marched him to the corner table, and shouted to Douglas to join us, and shouted for the proprietor, and forced them—they all much astonished—into chairs, and sat down confronting them.

"Now!" I said. "I know you, gentlemen, are all white. I have a story to tell you."

"And the title is what?" asked the amazed proprietor.

"Apache Kid," said I.

"Um!" he said.

"This Apache Kid," said I, "is a train-robber, but——"

I paused.

"You would remark," said the Colonel, "that there is more in this Apache Kid trouble than meets the eye!"

"Bar-keep!" said the proprietor.

"Sir!"

"Set 'em up on me."

And then, very deliberately, I told them the story of the Apache Kid from the day he had come to my aid at the Dago camp, leaving out only the matter of the money I had carried to Mrs. Johnson for him. When I told of the attempt on him at

the hollow tree the Colonel held out his hand and shook mine.

Douglas at that sat back.

"Do you mean to tell me that Government would tell these troopers to—" began the proprietor, puzzled-looking.

"No, sir," said Douglas, "but luck plays into the hands of railways and governments. I still has faith in the United States, but there's individuals I don't trust no more than a spread rail."

"Here's to Apache Kid anyhow," said the proprietor, and lifted his glass.

"The point for us," said the Colonel, "is that the city of Black Kettle don't have any connection with corralling the Apache Kid, or attempting to corral him. What's this?"

A wild whoop sounded without; a howl—and entered that cowboy who had been told by the foreman of the Diamond K: "I'm looking for ropers," to which he had replied: "You'll find heaps of them."

He dashed up to the bar-keep without seeing us as we sat in the corner.

"Say!" he said, "is there a gent name of Barclay, or Williams, or Alias Bill, in Black Kettle?"

The bar-keep was mute, and—so heated was the cow-puncher's manner—that I slacked my gun in the sheath before I coughed and said:

"Here I am, sir!"

CHAPTER XVII

ANOTHER CONVERT

"Could I have a word with you, sir?" asked the newcomer.

"Certainly," said I, and accompanied him over to a corner.

"You recalls me, I guess?" he asked.

"I do," said I. "You are the gentleman to whom the foreman of the Diamond K said: 'I'm looking for a good roper.'"

He smiled faintly.

"Yap, and I says: 'You'll find heaps of them in this state.' Yap—you recalls me all right. I'm Yuma Bill and I ain't no slouch. Which I don't stand for no man to look me up and down and offer me a job that always—trying to get me to ask if there is a chance of a job, instead of which he's wanting me for a job. Give me a straight game. Which the only answer possible if a man says: 'I'm lookin' for a roper,' is: 'Well, you'll find heaps.' Now, that man acts every way like that. There's bin some official person up at the Diamond K and he's told them about meeting you and Apache Kid, and put them on to me for cumulative evidence. Up they comes to the Three Bars and asks for me. They has information that I was on the trail the day them two troopers goes out for a *passear* in the hills with Apache, which turns out no brief *passear*, but leads 'em to the Golden Gates sudden and simultaneous. I looks at these officials. Here's a nice way to start with a man—kind of insinuating I had plugged them"—he paused as if for my opinion.

"If they had thought so," said I, "they would not have begun in that way."

"Well no—I see that afterwards. If they had thought that, they'd have begun with: 'Yuma Bill, I arrests you in the name of the law.' I reckon that would have made trouble too. Anyhow, they begin like what I narrates to you. So I says: 'Put your cards down and let me see your hand. I ain't playin' in this game; but I can direct you some in a play maybe.'—'Where was you,' they says, 'on the third of the month?' they says.

"'Third of the month? Third of the month? Let me see. Why, I was in Black Kettle,' I says.—'When did you leave Black Kettle?' they says.—'Before noon,' I says. 'If I had bin sensible I'd have had my siesta in the shade of the Palace Hotel and hit the trail subsequent.'—'Did you meet anybody on the trail?' they asks me. It was at this here point that I tumbles to it where they had come from, because there was a Diamond K boy guides them over and his presence enters my perception. I reckon they needed a guide, wasn't competent to follow a waggon-track, let alone a staked trail. I says: 'I met a hoss-wrangler, first day, who calls himself a foreman; and he says to me: 'I'm lookin' for a good roper,' and I says to him: 'You'll find heaps of them in this state.'"

"'Who was this man?' they asks.

"'A hoss-wrangler who thinks he's a foreman,' says I.

"They turns to Kelly, who was on the carpet. Puzzled they was. And he explains, and adds they've made a mistake if they think this man—which is me— But they interrupts to thank him for explainin' *hoss-wrangler*, and then says to me: 'Who was this man?'

"'Well,' says I. 'I told you.'

"The boss advises me to be open.

"'See here, boss,' I says. 'I punch your cows, and you give me a square deal; but these here gents comes along and gives me a guessing competition. Maybe I don't guess, and if they can't pow-wow plain and say what they got to say, well! I got to go and wrestle yearlings this morning. And if I did meet a ornary hoss-thief on the trail——'

"'A hoss-thief?' they interrupts.

"'Well,' says I, taken aback some, 'I reckon I might say it to his face if I was sure he sent you along here to cross-question me like I was a kid and you a school marm.'

"They smiles at that and tumbles.

"'Did you,' they asks, 'meet any one else?'

"'Yap,' I says. 'I met, in company with said hoss-thief, two gents, one of whom has punched cows with me and ridden the identical range for two years.'

"'Ah!' they says. 'And the other?'

"'The other,' I says, 'I don't recall ever seein' him before. He was a young, fair man with a Scottish voice; and I leaves them two gents in the company of said hoss-thief, and rides on; and then I sees—' and I pauses, 'the most astounded and surprised object.'

"'Yes?' they says.

"'I sees,' says I, slow and ponderous, 'on the following morning, where I camps, a badger sitting looking at me, and I hails him affable, it being a lonesome trail. I says to that badger—' and they interrupts some irritable, but smiling:

"'Well the badger ain't in this. Did you see nothing else noteworthy?'

"'Sure,' says I. 'I rolls my blankets and hits the trail again, and then I meets up face to face with a—a jack-rabbit,' I says, 'clawing his long off ear in a bush, and we looks at each other, and that jack-rabbit—he hits the trail. And now I got to get to work,' I says.

"The boss he yelps with laughter and disorganises his courteous demeanour. But they gives me up then, and I says 'Adios!' and pikes out, and curves back to the corrals. When I see the boss again, he tells me, to relieve my mind, that they discusses my case no more when I departs. They goes off on some other scent, and so I asks the boss: 'Could I get a day off?'

"He looks at me curious. He was at the corrals himself then, sitting up beside the tallyman, having been down helping the wrestlers and got a rib moved when a two-year old maverick objects.

"'Sure,' he says, 'you can go. But be sure to come back,' he says. 'Don't go shootin' up marshals and sheriffs just because they asks you leading questions.'

"'All right, boss,' I says. 'Thank you. I ain't no led hoss.'

"'What are you?' he says, nursing his side.

"'I ain't sure,' I responds, 'but if they take me for a maverick and tries to run a brand on me I'll sure explain how I've been running the range without a brand so long that I reckon I'm an outlaw bull, or something like that, and I'm not going to be branded yet. If these detective gents wants to call me a hoss-thief, why don't they, and get through?'

"'But it ain't you they wants to corral,' he explains. 'You see, the Apache Kid has slipped them, and he can cover his trail; but they've heard from the Diamond K that there was a kind of green partner along with him and they think if they got him he might be able to lay information——'

"'Well,' I says, 'that's how I sized it up; so I wants a few days off.'

"'Go then,' he says, 'and God be with you'; and I leaves him sitting on the top rail, nursing his side and hollerin', and I burns the trail—" he paused, "to look for the green partner of Apache Kid."

"'We'd better," said I, "join the boys. We're discussing this identical business just now."

"'You ain't so green, stranger," he asked whimsically, "as to be drinking soft drinks? There ain't nothin' but two creeks and a spring between here and the Three Bars."

I pushed a chair for him, and the proprietor explained: "Drinks are on me, Yuma;" and Yuma, with a cock-tail at his elbow, sat down, re-told his story, and I re-told mine for his benefit. He listened attentively. Then:

"Now, mister," he said, "you won't object to a question. Your narrative is straight; but it's like as if we was playing a

game and the candle goes out, and we has to take your word on the last card in the dark."

"I see," said I. "Well, I can only give you my word that I read Apache Kid's pardon—and it was genuine."

"Then the missing card is played," he said.

"You only have my word on it," I said.

"Same thing," he said. "When I symbolises this here question I had to ask, what I meant was that I wants to ask you if you had seen and read the pardon. I ain't the kind of gent to misdoubt your word." And he looked quite prepared to quarrel with me for the suggestion!

He quaffed the dregs of his glass.

"Now," he said, "I hits the waggon trail back to the Three Bars, and I tells the boys the straight goods. This here is a game between the Government and the Apache Kid. I ain't no friend to train-robbers but I loves a straight game. I ain't an old man, but I seen a man down near Nogales hanged for an erroneous game. And this here is an erroneous view of how to turn the cards."

The Colonel waggled a finger, and was about to make some comment. But we never heard it; for just then a freight was screaming through Black Kettle, slightly drowning down Yuma's voice—and next moment there was a yell, another yell, and Scotty's voice came to us, high-pitched and nervous, and agitated, and excited (just like Scotty):

"Hi! Hi! Somebody lend a hand!"

We ran out into the brilliant afternoon and whaled across to the depôt, to see a man doubled up by the track-side, and Scotty trying to lift him, and then giving it up. He stood up and shouted afresh.

We ran, ploughing through the sand.

"Come on, boys! Come on!" shouted Scotty.

The man on the track-side, doubled up, was the Apache Kid.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RETURN OF APACHE

The Apache Kid lay on a bed in the Palace Hotel of Black Kettle, his mouth puckered as if in contempt, his nose as if sneering, and his eyes as if he were in pain. For he was in pain. His left arm, and a rib, were broken. He had jumped from the freight-train, which was not stopping at Black Kettle, and these injuries were the result.

"But it was mad of you to come back," I said.

"Well, then, I am mad," said he. "You might roll me a cigarette."

"I'll get you a cigar," said the proprietor, and jumped from the chair—on which he had been sitting wrong way round, with his arms on the back, assuring Apache that he was "all right."

"No, thanks. I leave cigars to railroad magnates and senators. Give me a cow-puncher's cigarette made out of pipe tobacco. You can't call that a lady-like smoke—not like the things ladies smoke."

Scotty, who had run over to wire for Doc Taylor, and just now returned, offered a plug of blackstrap with two large bites out of it; but I was rolling the desired cigarette.

"It seems I'm at home here," said Apache, when he had inhaled and blown out a volume of smoke. "Say Scotty! Why didn't that train stop here?"

"You didn't ask the conductor," said Scotty grimly—and a grim smile went around; for Apache Kid had arrived in Black Kettle hanging along one of the fore and aft brace-rods, and, finding that the train was going through, had jumped. The speed had been too quick for a jump, taken in that position, to be wholly successful.

"What in thunder did you come back for?" asked the old Colonel, who had helped to carry Apache upstairs and now stood at the foot of the bed, leaning on the end rail as if it were a gate.

Apache Kid looked round the room from face to face.

"A little bit of business," he said.

"Well, say!" said the proprietor. "Sholly you can trust us!"

"Oh yes! I beg your pardons. I express myself badly. The trouble is that you might object to my business." He looked round again and then said: "How much do you know?"

"We know all," replied Colonel Kemp, "right down to the pardon."

"Well then—damn that arm—I've come back to interview Johnson."

"Johnson! Buck Johnson? He skipped the day you did."

"Yes I know; but he's around here somewhere. You see I've heard from Jake Johnson's wife and she tells me," he turned to me, "that Buck Johnson followed you that day. I thought he was painting his nose in the bar, and that all I had to do was to lie on the bed in my room. 'So long as he knows I'm here,' thought I, 'he will remain in Black Kettle.' I apologise to you, sir. I never thought he was after you——"

The room looked mystified. The Colonel looked at me thoughtfully, the proprietor puzzled.

"Trail's hot," said Yuma Bill.

"Thought you had told us all," said the proprietor to me.

"You said you had told them all," said Apache.

"Oh well," I said, "all about the pardon. Naturally I was not going to tell—what evidently I can tell now—about"—I turned to the others—"Apache gave me a parcel to take to Mrs. Jake Johnson. It was the day that the troopers were

brought in."

"They made me bolt," said Apache; "—— fool that I was."

"Oh I don't know. We'd have had to do our duty," said the Colonel, then looked to me to tell more.

"Well," said I. "Buck Johnson followed me. I had given Mrs. Johnson the parcel, she had opened it——"

"Read my letter?" Apache asked.

"Yes, and we sat down to have a pot of tea. Along came Johnson, and I hid in behind the curtain."

"Now," said the proprietor, "why did you hide? This here is purely a legal question."

Kemp stood pulling his long beard.

"Because I was there on Apache's business and had to be careful. I hid behind a blanket that makes two rooms of the shack. Buck Johnson arrived. He was looking for me. There was no doubt."

"Where was your hoss?" asked Yuma Bill.

"It was running down in the bottoms."

"Um! He didn't see it and waited for you?"

"No; he didn't see it; but he expected me to arrive. He waited and waited. I expect he thought I had taken the wrong trail. But he guessed where I had gone all right. Anyhow, there he was—waiting and waiting. Finally he offered to stop right there all night."

"The hell he did!" said the proprietor and Yuma Bill in harmony.

"He said a poor lone woman needed some man in the house," I said.

"He would!" said the proprietor.

"And what did you do then?" asked Yuma.

"I pulled my gun," I said, "and just then Buck Johnson spotted the money."

"You didn't say anything about money," said the proprietor.

"We all understands it was in the aforementioned passel," said Yuma. "We follows this trail easy, even when it ain't blazed or staked."

"He dived for a handful of it then," said I, "and I stepped out—held him up, and brought him back to Black Kettle."

"Who catches your hoss?" asked Yuma. "Did you go hunting together in the bottoms—you with your gun on him, or did you chance it—having annexed his gun previous? Or did the lone woman of his agonised, unselfish thoughts ride herd on him for you till you gets the hoss?"

The Colonel said drily: "When you gets interrogating, Yuma, you are a whole hogger!"

"Which I'm interested in this gent's actions behind a gun," explained Yuma.

"Mrs. Johnson got the horse," said I; "and down we came."

"Well," said Apache. "That is why I'm back in Black Kettle. And I think you gentlemen will agree that I am right to be looking for Buck Johnson. What happened when you struck Black Kettle?" he asked me.

"We struck Black Kettle over the benches just as a train was pulling in," said I, "and he decided to board her, so I let him."

"And his horse, which he had hired from me, comes over," said the Colonel.

Apache nodded.

"But why did Johnson run like that?" he asked puzzled.

"Can't you see," said I, "that he knew I would tell you, when we returned, all about his game, and that you would not stand for——"

"Never thought of that," said Apache. "But you need not speak hastily to an invalid with a broken arm and a rib out of place when the said man has come back to find Johnson and kill him for——"

"Hush!" said the Colonel. "This here is the ravings of fever. Come along, gents—come along—and leave Mr. Apache Kid quiet till the Doc arrives."

"Ravings of fever! I tell you I'm going to plug Buck Johnson!" cried Apache.

The Colonel was herding all from the room.

"Ravings of delirium," he said decidedly. "We pays no attention to such phrases——"

The proprietor broke in:

"Come along, boys! No! Say! Maybe one of us had better keep Apache company while he's light-headed this ways."

"I'm not——" began Apache.

"You stay," said the proprietor to me, and the rest bundled out.



CHAPTER XIX

THE HURDY-GURDY

There are those who contend that it is absurd to say "Englishmen are this"—"Scotsmen are that"—"Irishmen are the other"—"Americans are so-and-so"; there are those who say that it is ridiculous to remark "As for niggers I feel—" whatever it may be, or "As for Irish Roman Catholics—"; similarly do some say that one cannot generalise about professions and say: "Any teachers I ever knew were—"; but I am going to dare these persons and say that, of all professional men, I love medical practitioners best. And Doc Taylor was one of the finest specimens.

He came into the room with a little bouncing step, laid down his bag gaily, and had already, with one quick blink through his pince-nez, seen all, I think, that was to be seen.

"How do you do, Doctor Taylor?" said Apache, and held out his hand.

"How do you do?" said the doctor. "Ah! You are the gentleman who assisted me to patch Douglas when the hillside got up and hit him. You didn't tell me your name then, but there's no necessity in this part of the world to tell names, is there? Now look at me. I'm Doc to ninety-nine out of a—um—yes—well, the arm will come first. Can't you get the coat off? Scissors—" then came the "zzz!" of the cloth being cut. "Beautiful night, isn't it? It was quite a great ride up here. I'll be riding back through the dawn."

"You rode this time, Doc?"

"Yes—rode—pump-cars are very nice——"

"Ahhh!"

"Hurt? Pained a bit? I'll be as easy as possible. I heard a most curious sound on the way up, a sound like a bell. It rang—then stopped—rang again—now this will be painful—just for a minute—don't hit me with the free hand—and RANG!"

"Oh!! Yes? You were saying?"

"I forget what I was saying. That was painful, eh?"

"Sure!"

"Yes—I was saying it rang away up above me, then suddenly ahead of me—then far behind. I thought I was haunted _____"

"Um!" said Apache. "You must write to some scientist for the explanation. I heard it once when I was with some Indians on another dry belt. They didn't know what it was—or wouldn't tell. I found out later——"

"Yes? Now that's better. You found out? This will hurt just a little——"

"It was—Oh!"

"Yes. A little painful that. I'll be as easy as possible. You found out? I'm immensely interested in such phenomena."

"It's electricity in the air. That's all I can tell you. I forget the whole explanation. The dryness has something to do with it. Anyhow, the atmosphere—Oh!—I wondered if it was a bell-bird. A man I met who had been on the Amazon told me about bell-birds. I reckon if we had bell-birds in—oooh!—North America——"

Doc Taylor bounced round and said: "Give him a glass of whisky, please."

When Apache Kid came round again the doctor was sitting on a chair looking at him thoughtfully.

"Feel better?"

"Yes, thanks. Finished?"

"Quite finished."

And still the Doc sat looking at Apache Kid. Then gently he said:

"By the way—I know it is supposed to help the sight to wear ear-rings—but—eh—well, as a medical man I would advise that you remove them. They are certainly very small, almost invisible, but, as a medical man, I would advise that you remove them."

"Oh, are you against the ordinary theory? Is it a mere superstition?"

"Well—I don't know," the Doc was tucking his belongings into his little bag. "I only suggest their removal because they might aid in hurrying on a trouble in the neck and—" he rose and turned to the door, "'stretching hemp,' I believe it is called; and it is an ugly end. I can do something with a bullet wound, but—" his feet tripped down the stairs.

"I'll be back day after to-morrow," he called. "Rest—rest——"

Thus Doc Taylor joined the conspiracy.

Suddenly, as he descended, I heard strange sounds coming up to us. I could not think what they signified. Then "biff!" went a revolver shot.

Apache struggled to a sitting position. I laid my hand to my gun. There was silence below—not even the first strange sounds continued—and then back came Doc Taylor, running, with the proprietor at his heels.

"It's all right!" cried the Doc, crimson with laughter. "It's a man with sheep-skin chaps! The barman thought it would help you to have some music, and put a nickel in the hurdy-gurdy. The sheep-skin chaps man thought it would irritate an invalid, and so——"

"So Yuma tries to stop it," explained the proprietor, "and when he couldn't, he pulls his gun—and plugs it! Got it right in the works, and it gave a death rattle like a large mainspring or a bunch of rattlers—and expires."

"Day after to-morrow—rest——" and the Doc departed again.

CHAPTER XX

BUCK RETURNS

The stars looked down on Black Kettle and found it as quiet as on that day when I had struck it and thought there was nothing there but the railway platform. The barman snoozed with his head on a box of cigars. The nickel-in-the-slot hurdy-gurdy, with cracked visage, looked ruefully on the sand-filled spittoons that twinkled on the floor; the yellow lamp looked sullenly out; stars peeped under the eaves into the bar-room.

A faint odour of liver and bacon augured the advent of supper. Just as when I struck it there was nothing but quiet in Black Kettle. Then the passenger came in.

I looked out and saw the lit cars run round the foot of the bluffs, saw them slow up, heard the engine bell clang, heard the "All aboard!" of the conductor, and saw the lit cars go out, out, out, pick up speed—saw the tail light twinkle and then go snap out round the bend; then saw a shadow coming from the depôt.

"Scotty coming over for supper," I thought; but the light still showed at the rear window of his room.

The shadow drew nearer. I seemed to recognise it. Then the light went out in Scotty's room and I saw him coming across and wondered, now that I saw him, that I had thought the first man was he.

From the Colonel's store came also a figure, bulky in the dim light—Yuma Bill. Yuma Bill waddled in his sheep-skin "chaps" to the verandah, arriving there about level with the man who preceded Scotty from the depôt. I looked from Yuma Bill to—Buck Johnson!

The light from the hotel door was on them, so Johnson doubtless did not notice me sitting by the side of the door, outside. I fancy he did not, for neither did Yuma Bill. Yuma strolled in easily after him; and I, as soon as the sound of the heels had passed heavily indoors, made a bee line for the Colonel's store.

"Hullo!" he said. "I've been waiting for you. I want to suggest something to you."

"Yes?"

"I want to suggest that you gets out of town back to your outfit and tells the boys, where you are now, all the story you've told us here in Black Kettle. And you should write to Maxim, the owner of the Diamond K—who is a white man—a full account of how you happened to have two names——"

"And about Apache and the troopers?" I asked, wondering what he was after.

"No, no. Just an account of how you came to have two names and saying you feels it laid upon you to let him know you ain't no criminal, seeing how you worked for him, and seeing how the papers are telling that he employed a tough. You give him permission to publish your letter in the press."

"Um! It's a good idea. What's your whole mind, Colonel? Have you something behind? Is this an end in itself?"

"Oh well," said the Colonel, "I don't know. The owner of the Diamond K is liable then to fire his foreman for making unpleasant stories about his outfit. There's something in me would rejoice over that. You see, in the old days, you would have gone right over and shot that coyote for his clever story."

"Oh! I see."

"Well—if he wants to do you an injury and make a name for himself as clever, this idea of you sending the owner an explanation—as you feels called upon, says you—will square that anyhow. The firing of him is an after-thought, I guess. It's your health is the main idea."

"Oh! I'll leave it," said I. "I don't think I care very much for opinion." Indeed I had other thoughts at the moment—thoughts not of myself.

The Colonel stroked his beard.

"Well," said he. "I got to be straight with you. Yuma Bill tells me he is so angry about the foreman of the Diamond K having put the 'tecs on to him, for what they calls cumulative evidence, that he reckons, now that he's told you what they wanted to know about you further than the Diamond K foreman had to tell 'em—well, he hankers some to go up and kill that coyote. I advises not; for, if he does, I, as the mayor of Black Kettle, has to see he's arrested and hand him over to the marshal at Lone Tree. So I suggested to Yuma Bill this more civilised way of doing." Suddenly he scanned me more intently.

"You got something to tell me and you've been waiting to swing your rope," he hazarded.

"I have," said I. "Do you know who came off the train just now?"

"Who?"

"Buck Johnson."

"Eh? Oh! You're sure?"

"Quite positive. I've looked at him keenly enough along a gun, you know. I don't forget."

"Say!" the Colonel snatched his hat from the counter. "We'll go over and eat supper."

So the Colonel shut the store and we went over—to eat supper.

"I reckon Buck has heard that Apache left Black Kettle, and so he comes back. I reckon he has seen the papers about you, too, and he comes along to watch progress and give some more evidence if the 'tec gents come cavortin' in to Black Kettle for more news. I wonder if you should show yourself? When do you hit the road back to the Triangle?"

"Sun-up," said I.

"Um! There's liable to be trouble if you and Johnson meets."

"Not in Black Kettle," I said. "He's not going to make trouble here."

"This needs thinking out," he said shaking his head once, slowly. "Say, I think you'd better be invisible till we gets Buck Johnson to talk. His return to Black Kettle changes things a heap. You go and keep Apache company till we reports to you."

"Perhaps it might be better," said I; and the Colonel, finding that Johnson had gone into the supper room, signed to me anon that the way was clear. Up I went in the darkness and entered Apache's room. I could hear his deep breathing, and as I drew near he stirred. I struck a match.

"Oh it's you," he said, and his hand came out from among the propping pillows.

I lit the lamp and sat down.

"Had supper?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I thought I would have it up here with you. Just came up to see if you were awake."

"Awake and thinking," he said. "By God! You're very good to me. All the boys are very good to me. I think Black Kettle is the only place in the world that isn't hostile to me. Roll me a cigarette."

I rolled it and gave it to him to wet, and held a match for him.

"Give me the match," he said, angrily. "I never let any man dance attendance on me like that. No, sir—not a waiter even should ever hold a match to a man's cigar. Let him light the match—that's attentive—and waiters are paid for that. But never let him hold it while you light. The trouble is that waiters are either plumb inattentive, and throw the matches at you, or else they want to make menials of themselves. No wonder God repented Him that He had made man. I saw a kid once larruped by its mother and then it ran to her and hid its head in her lap to be comforted! I saw that on the night I held up the Transcontinental at Three Creeks—that's four years ago—and, by heck, it helped me to hold them up good! 'That's life,' I said. 'That's what we're here for—get it in the eye and then get comforted by what gave you it in the eye. Be driven

to drink by the discords of church bells and then have your soul saved by a parson. Not in mine, thanks! I wish Buck Johnson would think of dropping in at Black Kettle again. I feel myself wanting to kill him." He shot me a sharp look. "He's just the kind of man to come back, too," he snapped. "He'll hear I've gone—the papers have got that; and back he'll come to be on hand in case any lies are wanted in addition to the truths that I'm up against. It would give me great delight to hear that he was back. I'd slip down to plug him right here. And then I think I'd plug myself. I'm all in. I've had enough. I have no use for a broken arm, Alias."

I thought it was as well that he did not know that the foreman of the Diamond K had made a pretty story, lugging me into his trouble. It was because of the way Johnson had treated me that Apache had come back—looking for Johnson, to kill him for having followed me. He felt badly about that. He would feel badly about the evidence of the Diamond K foreman. Earlier in the day he had said:

"No! I will never get over that son of a wolf following you. I'd never have asked you to go up there for me if I had thought he would do that!"

If he heard of the Diamond K foreman he would get up now, broken arm and all, and ride up to interview him, even more furious than Yuma Bill. But what I said now was:

"Well, if Johnson did come back you would repay the boys here very poorly by going down and shooting him up. You know—right down to Doc Taylor—who isn't a resident here at all—they all want to give you a show. It would make them feel tired if you——"

"Yes, I guess it would. Let me see—is this fair?" He struggled up to a sitting position. "Let me see. There's one thing a man must be careful about—and that is letting sentiment hold him down. I've seen many a good man held down the way Coriolanus was held down—you remember."

I stared at him.

"Well!" he cried. "Don't stare! I've got a memory. I don't forget Coriolanus, though it's twenty years since I read it. I've seen it in lesser ways than the way Shakespeare dished it up. But life's plumb full of it. Some man gets on to a big idea and starts following it, and along comes somebody and says: 'Don't make your head ache!' Or you get it with the bell that drives men to drink in cities, kicking up its self-righteous row, and if you swear at it the parson says you're a bad one. No—perhaps it would be better after all—for the world in general—for me to kill Johnson; and maybe it's a mistake to hold myself down by saying: 'The boys at Black Kettle have been very good to you, Apache. They don't want you to get into any more trouble for a spell—take care of your arm, Apache! Take care of your rib, Apache!' Of course they mean well. I know they mean well! It's sweet of them, but—Oh for God's sake let me think. Put out that light and let me see the stars."

I lowered and blew out the light. I could hear him breathing very deeply.

Then suddenly he said: "Say!"

"Well?" said I.

"Did anybody get off the train to-night?"

Dead silence.

"It's all right," he said. "I generally think a heck of a lot about a man when he's coming near. Would you be so good as to light the lamp again?"

I lit the lamp.

"Buck Johnson is below," he said definitely.

I sat down on the end of the bed and smiled. I could see that he was, for him, pale, and that there was a burning red spot on either cheek bone.

"Well," said I, "it's a free world."

"It's all right," he said again. "Funny! I've been lying here thinking about a man with a stammer. He was in an outfit that I worked for once. I had a heck of a row with a man. I was sitting meditating how to put a quarrel on him in such a way that he would pull his gun on me. That was in 1888—and if a man pulled a gun on you in a cow-camp in 1888, and you shot him, they just said 'self-defence.' And as I was sitting meditating I heard the fellow say: 'Ca-ca-ca-can any of you boys te-te-te-tell me how to sp-p-p-p-pell *remuda*?' I don't know what it is, Alias; maybe it's weakness—well, if it is I'm weak—but it was so blamed pathetic, that voice, that we all spelt it for him with a kind of a choke. There's no doubt men are queer beasts. And after I heard that stammer I thought: 'Oh to hell with the man I wanted to kill! I guess he's built that way—to hell with him.' Then there was once in Cheyenne: I had left my grip in a boarding-house in Denver and my partner there ran up to the boarding-house to see a man whom we had got half friendly with, and he found another man, who lived in the place, with my grip open, reading some letters of mine. My partner wrote to me about it, saying he had carried the grip off and was forwarding it to me by the Express Company. Also he said in his letter: 'I tell you about this—but don't let him know I told you. Don't write about it. He would know that I had told you, as I was alone when I saw him.' Well—I thought to myself: 'Why can't my partner write: "Tell him I told you," Why is he scared? To Hades with him!' And I wrote a note to the man who had opened my valise: 'You son of a ——, I am working just now up Cheyenne way; but when I get through I'm coming to plug you.' There wasn't much consideration for my partner's request—I knew that—although I told myself that I gave no reason. Well—I decided that even to write that letter wasn't white to my partner in Cheyenne, so I tore it up. But it kept biting, biting, biting me—that skunk with the buck teeth opening my grip; and I quit the job I had and took train to Cheyenne." He shook his head—I saw the red spots burn on his cheeks. "I got on that train and somewhere about Laramie a cripple got into the car. He was the cheeriest cripple I ever struck. He hauled himself about on crutches and talked and joked, and I studied him. Once, when an empty cup he held fell to the floor and he stooped for it, the train took a curve and landed him over on my chest, and he said: 'I beg your pardon, sir, and God-damn my God-damned leg,' and I shoved him to his seat again and picked up his tin cup for him, and we sat and yarned till we came to Denver, and something about that cheerful cripple made me quite different. 'Oh confound the buck-toothed fellow that read my letters,' I said, and I took the next train back. I was surely going to kill him, and you know me well enough to know that it wasn't a scare that sent me back. You can't go and kill a man when there are cripples going around, laughing, and smoking cigars, and God-damning their legs in that way. It takes all the hatred out of one. There you are—things like that come in and hit me. I guessed Buck Johnson was below and yet these stars made me say: 'Oh, confound him. He'll be dead, and I'll be dead in a few years.' Seeing you are all so solicitous about me I shan't go down and shoot him—not in Black Kettle. But," he sat up again. "By heck! sentiment doesn't get him off if ever he and I meet outside Black Kettle. If it was some dirty trick he'd played on me personally, some bit of sentiment might get him off. But he followed you up that day to Jake Johnson's ranch. It's a trick I don't forgive. And he pretended to Mrs. Johnson that he was anxious about her, and then tried to get the dough she had. No, sir. I'm going to have a sleep now, for I feel light-headed—and I'm not going to kill him in Black Kettle. But I'm going to kill Buck Johnson some day—I know it—I'm quite sure of it. It's not because I've made up my mind to it. It's because, looking calmly on at it all, I can see Destiny means me to kill that son of a coyote. Say, I must try to sleep. Oh! Say!—no—no, you'll be all right. Buck Johnson won't try anything on you—no, not in Black Kettle."

CHAPTER XXI

SET A THIEF—

Next day I drove back to the Triangle, with a jag of supplies on the waggon.

In a novel I would have stayed at Black Kettle, and news of Apache Kid's presence there reaching Lone Tree, the marshal would have come curving into town with a posse at his heels—and there would have been a frightful scrap on the stairs. There was a scrap later on, tough enough for a novel; but for the moment things did not happen so swift. You remember in Stevenson's "Wrecker" how Captain Nares says: "Dime novels are right enough. Nothing's wrong with the dime novel, only things happen quicker than they do in life." This being my plain unvarnished life during the stormy days of Apache Kid, I, as I say, went back to the Triangle.

I pulled my freight out of Black Kettle at sun-up, before the haze had lifted, thinking a good deal about Apache Kid and wishing him well. Johnson had not, of course, got up so early, so I did not see him. The spirit that tends to give a man a "show" in the West goes in harness with the spirit of taking care of oneself. Apache was to have "a show"; but he was not to interfere with the earning of my forty dollars a month, lest I might end either as one of the fraternity that had the famous N.Y.Y.T. of Pete's yarn, for laureate, or as one of those whose Bible is "The Life and Adventures of the James Brothers"—another Apache Kid; and I fear I would not be so polished and "white" a hold-up man. Yuma Bill also went home to his outfit—the Three Bars, a two-day ride (or a three-day waggon trip) in the opposite direction.

"You write that letter," said Yuma as we drank our coffee by lamp-light; the proprietor, with deranged hair and sleepy eyes, fussing us our breakfast. "There's going to be trouble; and the owner of the Diamond K is a quiet man, but he sure has influence."

"Don't shoot his foreman if you meet him," said I.

"That's all right," said Yuma, hitching his "chaps." "This here is a law-abiding country; and I ain't going to commit no murder."

The round-ups had broken me into early rising, so I did not think myself a marvel as I drove easily through the first of the day, saw the dew on the sage-bushes, opal mists rise in the sunlight, and broad, quiet day illumine the vastness.

I had little to say on my return. I could see that, despite the friendliness of the boys here, silence was indeed golden. I had told them enough already, and if trouble came to me they would "stay with me." Any more that I might have to tell concerned Apache—not me; so, as I say, silence was the card.

My first job, on return, was to ride over to a neighbouring round-up, where a herd of Triangle steers had been cut by our representative, and help to drive them home. They were to be brought clear to the home ranch, to be branded there.

That was close on a week's job and, in the meanwhile, news—if not of Apache Kid, then of his enemy, Buck Johnson—was forthcoming.

A bunch of beeves had gone to Black Kettle and the roadmen who drove it over came back late at night, the night of our return with the strays, and broke up a discussion on the relative merits of single and double cinches by telling us that the county sheriff was hunting some cattle-rustlers.

A ranch owner in Sonora county, next door, had been suspect for some time. He seemed to have an astonishing number of calves in his herds; and at the round-ups, by prior arrangements, a neighbouring herd had been driven (ostensibly by accident, but really by deliberate intention) into his main herd. The Sheriff had been on the spot to keep the peace, by special request of the other ranchers, who expected trouble. And he had been required. If he had not been on hand there might have been some more swift deaths for the sake of a brand.

The owner in question had been suspect for long—and the result of that intentional stampede was to unite several mothers and calves—and two of the calves bore the brand, newly affixed, of the suspected person, while the mothers bore other brands, brands of neighbouring ranches.

The owner was in gaol, and some of the cattle which bore even his own brand, were already appropriated by the Sheriff;

anon we would hear if further suspicions were proved—suspicions that he not only lifted mavericks but faked brands. The steers would be killed, their hides stretched, the branded part cut out and left to soak. If there were previous brands they would then show up, and inquiries would be made to see if the owner in question had ever bought any cattle from the holders of these other brands.

All this had given a scare to three men in Sonora County and one in Black Kettle. The one in Black Kettle who was scared by the news was Buck Johnson. A wire had come for him, so Scotty said, which read simply: "Wanted urgently at home." Johnson had taken train for Sonora, saying to Scotty that he feared his wife was ill, but the conductor had let out that he took a fare for Placer and got off there. And thence he had "lit out" into the hills with three men who met him there.

I was glad to know, whatever the cause of Johnson's departure, that he had left Black Kettle. Apache Kid could not rest in bed all the time of his stay. But I asked our men nothing of Apache, and they said no word of him.

Suddenly the door opened and Mr. Henry, the Triangle owner, entered. It was the first time I had seen him in the bunk-house.

"I say, boys," he said, "I've just had a wire from the Sheriff. He's after some cattle-rustlers. He has already got the king-bolt but he wants to round up the whole outfit. I gather they have a fair jag of charges against them. They've headed for the Hole in the Wall country, and he wants a posse. He's jumping off from Black Kettle. He's getting men from various outfits to make his posse. He's advised the Circle Z and got one man promised; the Three Bars, too, have already promised him a man—and now he asks for two from this outfit."

There had been grunts of indignation at the "gall" of that Sheriff, going elsewhere first; but the request for two men instead of one, from this ranch, mollified somewhat. Everybody shouted at once, but Cy Carter, the foreman, coming in after the owner, held up his hand.

"Say, Mr. Henry," he said, "seeing every one is so eager, I reckon we'd better make a lottery of it"; and so a lottery we made of it. There were twenty of us, Cy and the owner included, and twenty slips of paper went into a sack—two of the slips marked with a cross; and then we each drew, and held our papers till all had drawn. Then we unfolded the slips.

Pete gave a yell and rushed out for a horse.

I put my paper back in my pocket and followed him.

"Pete's got one. Who's got the other?" I heard.

"Say—*has* Pete got it, or is he bluffing?"

"Who's got the aces?"

"Say, boss—don't they want no more than two?"

But Pete and I were saddling.

The owner came over to me.

"Say," he said. "They tell me you are new on the range. You can ride all right I know, but there may be some gun-play ahead of you."

Pete, head under his pony, drawing the cinch, blew my trumpet for me—and his own.

"I taught him, boss—I was his professor," he said, "and I certify," he withdrew his head, "upon him for an expert gunman."

All this was just before supper but there was no waiting for us. We hit the trail at once (with some grub that the boss rustled for us) and camped half way. I remember Pete's phrase as we sat by our fire there. "A hoss, a blanket, and a hobble is enough house-furnishings for any man in this here brief life." He did not often say things like that, but when he did he felt what he said, and it was, I think, the capacity to feel thus that made Pete and me such friends.

The next day was but a quarter gone when we came whooping into Black Kettle, setting a-dancing several restive

ponies, some at the hitching-posts, some at the hotel verandah, two before the store. No sooner had we arrived than we saw the Colonel running to us, and we rode toward him.

"How do, boys?" he saluted us. "You come to join the posse?"

"Sure!"

"Well, boys," he said, "you want to be posted on this here side-issue regarding that picnic—prompt. The Sheriff of Sonora wanted a man who knew the Hole in the Wall country. Apache Kid heard of all the ongoings, and he would have it that he was the man to show the way. No reasoning with him——"

"Gee-whiz! But the Sheriff will recognise him," said Pete.

"He says the Sheriff and him never met."

"That don't signify," said Pete. "Ain't his description out? And them little ear-rings he wears—it's the only thing I don't like in him—makes him some reminiscent of a Greaser—they'll——"

"He's taken them off, and he's grown a beard. His yarn is that he got hurt in the corrals with a locoed bull but is now healed sufficient to lead the posse——"

A man with a chubby face, but scowling face too, sitting his pony with very military seat, rode up to us and swept back a buckskin coat he wore so that a little badge showed, with a flash, on his left breast.

"You boys for the posse?" he asked, reining up.

"Yes, Sheriff," said Pete.

"Where you from?"

"Triangle. Henry and Stells."

"Well I reckon we're about ready."

"You got a guide?" asked Pete.

"Yes; I got a tracker from Lincoln Reserve, and I got a man called Charlie Carryl who knows the Hole in the Wall country."

"Oh! He got his arm broke with a locoed steer in the round-ups, didn't he?" asked Pete.

"Yes, that's the man. There he is on the verandah right now." And "Charlie Carryl" appeared with his left arm in a sling. Beside him was the Indian tracker.

The Indian amazed me. He wore a starched shirt. Don't jump on me and say I should call it "boiled shirt."

If the West called such an article a "glitter-shirt" I might use the phrase. They were great starchers on the Lincoln Reserve. The mission laundry had taught one art which appealed to them strongly; the glamour of the stiff, starched front of a white shirt was over the whole Reserve. So the Indian tracker came forth to trail the horse-thieves with a starched shirt showing below his broidered deer-skin coat, and waistcoat—an ordinary cloth waistcoat, store bought, and sewn all over with bead designs after the style of the swastika.

We rode over to the "Palace" at the Sheriff's heels. I was quite prepared not to "know" Apache Kid and made a mask of my face.

"How do, Charlie!" said Pete, looking up at the Apache Kid who watched us ride along. "Your arm better?"

"On the mend," said Apache.

Yuma Bill swaggered out of the bar. I wondered if the boys at his place had resorted to the "lottery" method of picking who was to join the posse, or whether he had intimidated his outfit into being its representative.

One thing was clear. The thought flashed into my head at sight of that rough diamond, Yuma Bill. It came into his head at the same moment. It came also into Pete's. It flickered from eye to eye. Yuma twinkled it rapidly; he could not help it when he saw us. Pete turned his head, fastening the slackened strap over his blanket roll, and telegraphed a quick look to me.

If there had been any fear of the Sheriff finding that he had indeed set a thief to catch a thief when Apache Kid (for the nonce "Charlie Carryl") became his guide, if there were any chance of the Sheriff finding that out, and thinking of his duty, there were at least three men in the posse who might have objections to its performance.

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL

I understand how it is that soldiers are reticent about the battles in which they have fought. As for the actual shooting of their enemies (that is, their countries') they are as mum as if they were all Freemasons.

The affair at the Hole in the Wall was a small matter compared with wars, but on those who went in for it it had the same effect.

Though I have said little about how it affected me, the shooting of the trooper at the hollow tree is a matter that I many a time wish I had been spared. Put me in the position again, show me the treachery on that hill-slope, and of course I would chip in again. But I would do it mighty seriously, knowing that all my life that trooper would have to lie spread-eagled as it were in a lumber-room of my mind. For my part, if I had to shoot somebody, I had far rather shoot a trust-boss than a cattle-thief!

We did not pull out of Black Kettle till two days after Pete and I arrived there, for two men were expected from a ranch away up on the Kettle River. The men comprising the posse were all taken from ranches that had suffered from the gang in question. That lull of a day or two, before starting out, was not good. It gave me time to think. I recalled again the incident of the hollow tree. I remembered how, after the heat of fight, I wished I had been spared taking part in the shambles side of life. I sat staring ahead of me in the Palace bar-room, while the voices swam away; but a hail of: "Belly up to the bar, boys!" recalled me and, replying to that hail, I returned to the frame of mind in which I could say to myself: "Don't you weaken now! If everybody weakened like you a registered brand would be valueless and the world a thieves' paradise."

Many a wild tale was swopped, during these days, of bad men and their doings. Stories were told of the Lincoln County War, of the James brothers, of the Dalton gang; of some man up Idaho way who was marshal, or sheriff, or peace officer of some kind, and how it was discovered one day that he was really boss of a gang of hold-up men, with representatives at the stage stations. He would chalk-mark a coach in a way his men would understand, and when it came rocking into some station one of his men would see the mark and boot along and tell his fellows and, on the next lap, the stage would be held up.

When it all came out the chief of that gang had a rough trail indeed, a kind of imitation, to the best of the ability of the miners who rounded him up, of the real thing. He was condemned to death, made a horrible scene protesting he was too bad to die, then, giving up all hope, asked for a strong drop that would ensure instantaneous death. He had been a tough character, well known as a killer, but always managing to get his enemies to pull their guns first and so, in the slang phrase, he found guilty only of taking part in "an even break"—but the number of men he had killed thus in "self-defence" was not small. When a peace officer was wanted he got the job, as I say, as a man quick on the draw—which a peace-officer must be. But "using his position erroneous," as the narrator expressed it, he was brought to book.

Happier was the tale I heard of a peace-officer in New Mexico who ran to earth a man wanted across the line in Texas, walked into his house and held him up where he stood, washing dishes! But the wanted man would not throw up his hands—and the peace-officer did not desire to shoot him. They had a rough and tumble. Then the wanted man leaped through the window, but not to escape. He only went out by the window instead of the door because the peace-officer blocked the door that gave on to the passage-way. The "bad man" simply plunged out by the window and then dived back indoors, and doubled upstairs for his rifle. The marshal, running out of the kitchen, called to him to surrender, but he had already reached the stairs and he rushed on upwards. The marshal ran after him; but, in the marshal's words (as heard, when he told the story, by Panamint Pete): "My deputy was a Mexican—all I could rope in at the time to help me—and he had no convictions of sentiment in such doings; so he just naturally runs in—from where I posts him outside—and bends a gun, and shoots that man that I was aiming to take back intact to Texas." That marshal was a good man.

The members of this parcel of cattle-stealers that we were going to find were all known as "bad men." For one Apache Kid you have fifty merely brutal murderers. To-day the "bad man" type is to be found chiefly in cities. He is practically eliminated from the ranges, and from the parts still left wilderness. But even in the time of my narrative, a decade ago, the "bad men" in the Western States, from Montana to Mexico, were as much drawn from cities as from the frontier towns. Even earlier the city-bred "bad men" were abroad. They came to mining camps chiefly, card-players perhaps,

and graduated by shooting some drunken player. Had they stayed in town they would have been hooligans, after the pattern of the fellow who was the cause of my flight from the old country—or even less worthy, perhaps.

But the men that we were after were not "boot-black toughs," as the West calls such characters who have graduated through picking pockets, knuckle-dusting—in groups—late homing merchants in alleys, breaking open freight cars, to shooting clerk and teller in some small mining camp. They were of the old order that hangs on in the West here and there.

We had word of them from a ranch three days after we left Black Kettle; and they seemed, according to the account of the man who had seen them, to be still heading for that tangle of mountains called the Hole in the Wall—a name given to more than one such natural hiding-place. I saw, only the other day, that a party of horse-thieves were standing off a posse in a "Hole in the Wall" in Wyoming, and making old settlers feel as if the old days were not dead, but unhappily revived. "The old days" make exciting reading sometimes, but——

At a ranch on the headwaters of Horse Thief Creek (which might well be re-named now, as the horse-thief in question passed in his checks to Peter there these eighteen years ago) we had word of them again. They had a good start of us; but they knew they were to be followed. They knew that, with the arrest of their chief "fence" (which is the straight word for the ranch-owner who was negotiating the sales of their mavericked animals), their game was up. When the men who are doing the work on the field are corralled first, the "mandarins" (they who are managing the business side) can prepare to look innocent and set about destroying proofs of complicity and preparing alibis. They need not take flight; if they have a big pull the men who are doing the dirty work may pay the penalty alone. Even if the captured "underlings" blab, the "mandarins" may get off, and not only get off, but raise a clamour of cries of "Shame!" that they were ever suspected. But when the "mandarin" is corralled then those who play his cards for him had better seek new pastures.

So had these men argued—and, instead of leaving the State on the instant, separating, taking flight for Mexico, or farther, as many men in trouble in the Western States have done, they headed for the Hole in the Wall. Perhaps their idea was to lie there until the storm might blow over. Perhaps their idea was to send out some member thence to a settlement, to find out how deeply they were implicated. Perhaps—but it matters little now what their design was, or whether an element of panic influenced them.

We left the ranch where we received last news of them, and struck their trail where a cowboy had seen them. At that ranch we were all supplied with fresh horses and went on eagerly, now on the actual trail. Eight days after leaving Black Kettle we camped at the spring that is the beginning of Horse Thief Creek. Away beyond, a steep triangle, a V of dense brush fills the valley's end; to left are cliffs striped with strange belts of colours; to right are "bad lands" running up into turrets and bastions that stand melancholy and weird against the last light of day.

It was a gloomy and silencing place. We made a camp there by the little spring, where water-spiders walked on the water and scuttled from the dipping-cans. That night we lit no fire; for Apache said that if we lit one it would be seen on the cliffs ahead. I remember how the Sheriff looked at him and said:

"Shouldn't we spread out lest they try to break back?"

"They'll not break back. They'll go farther in," said Apache.

"You know these parts very well?" the Sheriff suggested.

"I prospected clean through here once," said Apache. "That's not a wall up there—that's a pass all right. They're in that black bit—woods."

"You've done other work, then, beside riding the range," said the Sheriff.

"Sure!" said Apache, looking at the Sheriff quickly, and then looking away as if these questions held no menace for him, and he began to hum the air of "The Spanish Cavalier"; he sang lightly, and smiled at the Sheriff as he sang, posing gaily, as if he held a guitar on his crossed knees, and as he did so the Sheriff smiled back. We who were in the know about this ex-pro prospector cow-man, Charlie Carryl, could not look at each other. Men get too amazingly alert to read every sign, when thrown together in places as solitary as these.

The scene was laid for tapping thought-waves—silence and bad-land sky-lines, and no fire—just staring full moon flooding the valley and we and the horses clustered in the trees that grow around that spring.

Too often I see again those black, horrible, quiet pines in that valley's end to which we came before sun-up, for Apache advised that the crossing of the valley's end be undertaken at night. We rested only from about six (when we came to the spring) till midnight. Then on again. And by four A.M. we were in the border of the timber.

It appeared at first, that if the cattle-lifters had left a watch at that part to keep an eye on the valley for pursuit, that rear-guard had not seen us. But we did not know for certain. He might have been there, might have seen us, indistinctly, crossing the flats, and already ridden on after his cronies to warn them. But Apache thought that either that probable rear-guard had not seen us, or else they had all pushed clear through. For once Apache was wrong. Neither of these methods (which would doubtless have seemed the only two to choose between had he been of the flying party) had been adopted by them.

"There is a place right here," he said, "where they could work a 'stand off'—but farther on there is a better one."

"How far is the better place for them?" asked the Sheriff.

"It's a good couple of days through these hills. But I have a feeling that this would satisfy them; and if you are willing, Sheriff, I would suggest that we leave the horses and prospect into the first place."

So we passed on, leaving a guard with the horses, crept away through fading, gloomy alleys between the boles, feeling the queer quiet of the place. After an hour of this creeping advance a flicker of light showed on a tree, and we halted. So they had not left a rear-guard!

"They're there," said Apache, "in the dip. Now, Sheriff, you get ready for action."

"We hold them up, boys, you remember that," said the Sheriff. "You just back my play."

"Right!"

"Right, Sheriff!"

We crept on.

Crack went a rotten branch on which some one had set his foot—a crack that seemed to reverberate from the whole dip into which we advanced toward the flickering light. And immediately came a rushing of feet and the extinguishment of the fire. We heard water flung and wood sizzle. Then the Sheriff's voice:

"We're too many for you. Give it up!"

Then crack! crack! crack! of Winchesters—Biff! biff! of revolvers.

It was just faint morning light. I fired no shot. Several spent no shell. For this was no moving-picture hold-up of cattle-rustlers, and none of us were out to shoot our own men (the way Wild Bill shot his deputy in Abilene—an accident easily understandable, but a thing that must have given Wild Bill many a moment of remorse).

The Sheriff kept shouting: "Give it up! Surrender! Throw up your hands!"

But there was no surrender on the part of these rustlers. Their horses, scared by the shooting, were stampeding through the brush. I thought at first sound of the horses that the cattle-rustlers were trying to escape. But they were not doing that. They were still right where we came on them—putting up a fight in the dip, knowing that back of them were only the cañon walls, and that there was only one way out—into our midst.

Of course, after the first firing, we guessed there was going to be parley. But after the first fusilade of shots had passed, and, in response to the Sheriff's shout for a surrender, a second began, the last hope of rounding them up faded. We were down among the bushes, creeping forward. Our foremost men fired a return to that renewed fusilade. I could hear bullets plug into tree stems. When one of our men called on the name of God in a voice like a voice of remorse, I used, instead of more care, less care in my advance, got up from hands and knees, and ran forward on the heels of the Sheriff and Apache who were in the lead.

There was now no fear of shooting up our own party. We were all now looking down into the dip; and the darts of flame, when the rustlers fired, gave us their location easily. I clapped down beside a shadow that I saw was that of Apache. At

the same moment a voice yelled a curse at us from the bushes across the dip. Apache fired into the bush whence the voice had come, and we heard the cry of the man there: "That's got me!" in a desperate voice.

"I said I would get you, Buck Johnson!" shouted Apache.

Another shot, from a man beside me, further decreased the number of flashes from the bushes opposite us. All this seemed to take place in ten minutes, but I think it must have been a deal longer than that, and I take it that both sides were making sure not to fire wild, aiming always where a flash came from, or where, by peering and watching, they thought they saw a bulk in a bush that might be a man and not a shadow. I do know that a stump of log, beside the extinguished fire of the rustlers, was observed afterwards, by the Sheriff, to be chipped and riddled by bullets, and several of our men acknowledged to having taken good aim for it.

But why I say I think it must have taken longer than I imagined at the time is because, as I peered ahead and kept as calm as possible, determined to do no wild shooting, I saw, as I thought, a rifle thrust up from a bush, and I blazed at it—taking no sight of course, sight being out of the question in that light, but just, as they say, lining for it—and then knew it was a tree branch at which I had fired by the way that, after my shot, though the bush flurried and fell still, the projecting little line of black was just as before. And still peering at the place, I saw it all more distinct, lighter; the bushes seemed to rise up and look at us.

There was dead silence. Everybody ceased firing. It was like waking from a dream. I had a moment of wanting to yell; and then, up before me, something rose. I looked—and saw the Sheriff's hat on the top of his rifle. There was no response. He stood boldly up. No response. We could hear the little tinkle-tinkle, bubble-bubble of the spring in the dip.

One by one we rose and followed the Sheriff. The smell of gunpowder drifted away. The scent of the balsam triumphed again, and we none could look at the other in the morning light.

All this gained a mere three lines in the Eastern papers. In the Western papers it had its half column—and I was glad the names of the posse were not given. "A posse under Sheriff Lincoln Smith" was quite sufficient.

When we came back again to Black Kettle, there occurred a droll incident that not even the Western papers mentioned.

We rode our horses into the "square" and half of the posse dismounted. It was close on the supper hour and we were hungry men. The last grub we had was beans and bacon, bought from a ranch where we had gone for provisions on the slower journey home. And that had been all eaten at noon.

Then we all waited expectant, for Sheriff Smith had not dismounted; and we expected, from his sudden stern demeanour, that some legal form of disbanding us whom he had sworn in was now to be the card.

"Say!" he said. "The train comes in about now. I reckon I might as well go right aboard and get back to Lone Tree and report."

He glanced oddly at Apache.

"Oh, better stop over to-night. Sheriff," one said.

"You can ride over in the morning," said another.

"I wouldn't stay the night anyhow," said Sheriff Smith. "I got to get back. This *passcar* has taken long enough. It's a question of taking the train now or—I guess the porter will have some crackers and fruit if there ain't no dining-car. But—" his horse edged nearer to Apache's.

Apache had not dismounted. Neither had Yuma. I had.

Apache's pony became restive and edged away. Yuma Bill's pony became restive and edged between. Mine responded to a pressure of my hand on his neck and turned round between Yuma and the Sheriff. Thus two horses were between Apache and the Sheriff. The air was electric.

"Duty is duty, boys!" snapped the Sheriff. He looked at us all, with a puzzled face. "Duty may sometimes be hell; but it's got to be done," he said.

The horses moved in a little dance.

"No, Sheriff—you can't do it," came the Colonel's quiet voice.

The Sheriff looked round, and then back—at us all—at Apache Kid—at the Colonel standing there with a hand resting on the hitching-pole, the other caressing his beard.

"I should hate to do it, but—" the Sheriff began.

"You ain't goin' to," said Yuma Bill.

"No—you can't do it," said Panamint Pete from the other side of the Sheriff.

"Make a fresh deal of it," said Apache, looking at Smith keenly, with that queer twinkle in his eyes. "Take the train back—I hear it screaming now—I've got good ears, Sheriff. You will be happier yourself. Make a fresh deal. Go right back to Lone Tree on the train—or by the trail if you prefer. It's only a few hours' ride by trail. Then start a fresh game."

Sheriff Smith looked at his pony's ears, meditative. Then he raised his eyes to Apache again. He looked at Apache's left arm in its soiled sling.

"Well," he said, "for once I guess I'll be man first and sheriff after. But," he turned to us, "you boys got to keep this quiet."

"That's all right!" we said. The one or two who were not "in the know," and had not recognised Apache Kid, looked puzzled. Looking at them I saw light dawning on their faces as they scrutinised "Charlie Carryl," and I saw from the other expression, that followed upon the one of astonishment, that they were of the Sheriff's mind as it was now.

The train came in.

The Sheriff did not take it. "I'll disband you boys," said he, "and then we'll all eat supper." He swung from his horse. "It's all right," he snapped and nodded. Nobody cheered. We were all moved beyond cheering.

He stayed for supper and hit the trail for Lone Tree later. It was a very strained, excited moment when he thanked us all, we all clustered before the Palace, and then turned to Apache and said:

"Thank you especially—Mr. Carryl!"

Then he swung to his saddle, and we didn't even cheer then.

We passed indoors anon, to drink the Sheriff's health, when the dust of his going fell—and a little later Apache was missed.

"Where's Apache Kid?"

"Dunno."

We looked at each other. Then we looked at the bar-keep.

"The house is on Apache Kid for to-night," he said. "What will you drink, gents?"

"Where's the Colonel?" was the next cry.

"Where's the Colonel?"

"Here I am, gents. I was selling a hoss."

"Oh!" we cried. Some winked. Some nodded.

Nobody said anything beyond that "Oh!"

We all waited on in Black Kettle over night and of course we all were up in the morning, bright and early, calculating to see the Sheriff back.

"He rode home all right last night. He as much as passed his word," figured Yuma, over breakfast. "I thought that he would ride up and touch the court-house wall with his forefinger and then wheel and come surging back—metaphorically speaking. That sheriff would never cold-deck no man," and he selected a wooden toothpick.

"Yes—I guess he'll be back early with a fresh hoss and that Injun tracker, reckoning on Apache burning the trail prompt. He knows he gets no assistance here."

But the Sheriff did not arrive. We waited on, all the late posse. But Sheriff Smith had not arrived by dinner-time. We waited on anxiously. Even poker failed to pass the time. The bar-keep and the proprietor of the Palace wrestled with the intestines of the damaged nickel-in-the-slot hurdy-gurdy and succeeded in urging it to sing again. It sang with just a slight cough at the end of bars; but it failed to cheer—and failed even to irritate Yuma Bill.

Supper-time came—and no Sheriff.

"He's swearing in a new posse," somebody suggested, "and volunteers is tardy."

"Well—job lost or no job lost, I got to stay on here till he comes back," said one.

But the Sheriff did not come that night. Sheriff Lincoln Smith, indeed, never came to Black Kettle again.

CHAPTER XXIII

A DEPUTY SHERIFF HITS THE TRAIL

There is no doubt that machinery is very useful. Personally I have no use for machinery. From automobiles to alarm clocks I bar mechanism. Once, when I was up in British Columbia and could not get a job cow-punching there, I went to work in a saw-mill as a yard-teamster. They woke us with a steam-whistle. So on the third morning I quit. If the old pony express had not been such a temptation to hold-up men I could wish that the land West of Missouri had remained "The Great American Desert" of the earlier maps, and had known no railway—only the stage coach (in spite of all the aches it gives) and the pony express. And such is my distaste for telegraphs that, when I heard that the telegraph people had substituted steel poles for wooden ones over the Wind River Plains, because in bad winters, when teamsters were caught in blizzards there, they used to cut up the telegraph poles for firewood, I wanted to get up a signed protest. What was a quick message running along the wires, what was a little money spent on telegraph poles compared with the life of a teamster?

Progress has no use for me—which is more humble than saying that I have little use for Progress.

But we might have stayed on longer, uselessly, than we did at Black Kettle, waiting the return of the Sheriff, if Scotty had not finally been unable to stand the strain and so got on to the man at Lone Tree on his "instrument." He had enough "savvy" to make it "just for a friendly chat, seeing that things are so quiet."

And the Lone Tree man did not need to be asked questions. He began, as soon as he was called up, to ask what we had done to Sheriff Smith.

"I don't know," Scotty replied. "Why do you ask that?"

"He has quit," was the reply.

"What do you mean by 'quit' exactly?"

"He has resigned his position. He says he has held the office long enough and should make room for another man."

"Oh! What's that for?"

"Nobody knows—unless he just means what he says. But he has been successful enough. Maybe he is annoyed at wiping out that gang instead of bringing them in. He is a humane person."

"Yes, maybe that's it."

And with this news Scotty came surging back to the hotel.

We toasted, with great admiration, Sheriff Lincoln Smith; and then, one by one, or two by two, went home—each to our own work.

Apache Kid dislocated things quite enough without bringing everything to a standstill. And when we returned, Pete and I, to the Triangle, we had to tell and re-tell our experience till we were sorry we ever started out. When I was told off to ride over into Walsh County, and help to herd back to the range a bunch of our strays, from the round-up there, I hoped no one at the Walsh round-up would know I had been in the chase to the Hole in the Wall. But they did know—and I was pestered beyond words. So it was good to be back again on the road, sitting my bronc alone, holding the night herd, or falling asleep under quiet stars, on the return trip.

Pete I did not see for some time again (not till the round-ups were over, and extra hands, hired for them, were gone), as he, thanks to his cutting-out capacity, was over at other round-ups. I verily believe he recognised cows by their faces as often as not and had no need to look at either brand or ear marks.

The extra hands drifted off; where, who knows? It is always a mystery to me whither they do go, whence they come. The harvesters who flood the wheat country for six weeks, and then depart, are also a mystery. What do they do the other forty-six weeks of the year?

After the extra hands had gone, and the round-ups were over, there came a lull; and Pete, who was, as they say, a man with an "itching foot," fired me with a desire to go up to the cowboy annual sports either at Cheyenne or Denver.

"They are sure good for a man if he thinks he is a rider—good and humbling, and give a man something to live up to," he said. "I reckon on the strength of our services to the country the boss would be willing to let us lay off—so we don't need to feel homeless and lonesome while sitting around watching the diversions in the arena. I likes, when I'm enjoying myself, to be able to picture, between the stunts, a bunk-house somewheres where I know I'm going back again. I likes to see in my mind's eye a certain particular range of hills, or special secluded coulees, or some familiar bush a-waving on the top of a draw, and say: 'There is my own, my native land,' and after these diversions are through I pikes back there."

And he was able to allow himself that solace, for the boss was willing.

So, in a few days, we were mixing with the crowds, jostling the sunburnt men of the ranges, and the pale-faced of the city who gather to see the annual riding contest when the men of the sage-brush ride for the championship of the world, and a belt. That high-sounding phrase, "championship of the world," does not appeal to me very much. It is amazing in what championships the best man does not necessarily win. I have seen an Indian "crease" a wild horse—that is, fire a shot at a long range and shoot him in the loose flesh of the neck, so that the horse is stunned for long enough to be saddled. And when I have told of the incident to a fat know-all in England he has told me:

"Oh—it's very picturesque, no doubt; but these fellows can't shoot. When they come to shooting at a target with the ordinary militia they are no good."

I doubt if an Indian has ever shot with the militia at a target. And even target-shooting has its tricks, and when target-shooters come to a contest—well, there is a notable case (of which, perhaps, the less said the better) where the winner had his cartridges specially made, the powder weighed in jeweller's scales, every charge exactly the same. When a contest becomes close a little thing like that is going to count.

Then there is another case of a cup-winner, in another sport, taking cramp and being massaged while his adversary stood by and got a chill. The massaged and losing one began fresh when his winning opponent was really jaded. And he won the cup, thanks to that massage which freshened him and thanks to the chill that stiffened the other man. Such little things also count. In the West that is called "cold-decking a man"; and however the sharp East may see these things the West does not wholly admire.

"Politics" and "Sport" are all like that; and I have no use for either. I can ride a horse for the love of it. I can shoot for the love of it—but "sport" is often weariness and vexation of spirit to participator and beholder. I could work up no enthusiasm over the winning of the belt. But I was on my feet, many times, waving my hat over some brilliant recovery in the saddle, and I found myself sitting sneering like a jade idol at some piece of "stunt" or swagger.

I have seen a crowd jump on the chest of an umpire at a football match—I have heard the recrimination at a lawn tennis match. To Hades with "sport" so far as I am concerned. There is a kink in me somewhere, a spirit of "not wanting." I have seen men of my calibre coaxed into a horse race at the ranch—and do nothing; and yet, on the same horse, at the round-up, I have seen the same men doing better work and riding better than the race winner. I have tried to take the buck out of a bad pony in the corrals, and been thrown. I have mounted as cross a horse to go drive a herd twenty miles, and nary a buck. I prefer to see a cow-puncher pot a grey wolf that is worrying a calf, an Indian crease an outlaw horse, a prospector bring down a duck for his dinner, to hearing your "Oh pshaw, very picturesque" person talk about the militia at their targets.

I fear that there is a good deal of Apache Kid in me!

Civilisation seems to me a collection of people who, on the one hand, call in the police if a burglar comes along and, on the other, of persons who pay some tough to buy dynamite to blow up the buildings of their rivals so that they can corner the market. To see people fighting for a strap in a street car nearly makes me run amok, makes me hunger to pull a gun and herd them in, one at a time, at the step, as if they were cattle.

I hope there is elbow room in the Great Beyond—elbow room and no targets—only a sufficiency of game, some mountains to break the monotony, some prairies to ride over—and no patronising angel to come along and, when he sees that a few of us can ride well, offer us a belt for the best rider. Belts are like money. I suppose money was instituted to save swopping a sack of wheat, or a horse, for bacon and beans, so to speak—so many tokens, so much wheat—so many

tokens, so much horse; but now we never think of the horse and the wheat, only of the tokens, the money.

Some such thoughts were jumping about in my brain as I cannoned off one man on to another, on the crowded side-walk, and apologised to both and tried to dodge a third—wondering how people managed to steer clear on side-walks. We were on our way to our hotel, and as we came to the street in which it was situated I saw before us a man whose pliant back was familiar.

We went straight into the dining-room, choosing a corner table, and ordered dinner. And then I looked round, and my eyes fell on a man who was entering the room, and I recognised Yuma Bill.

Up I rose and shouted: "Yuma!"

No attention.

"Yuma!" I yelled.

No attention.

He moved on to the counter and then turned lightly and, with his back to it, surveyed me. His face lit and he came over to us, held out his hand, pump-handled us wildly, and sat down with us. As he did so some one brushed behind me and dropped a paper before me on the table, and looking over my shoulder I saw the man, whose back I had seemed to know, going out of the door.

On the paper was written:

"Room 17. Come up—all of you. I want to ask you something. Apache."

But we were not to know what he wanted to ask.

I remember how, after dinner, we had our meal tickets punched, Pete and I; and how we wrangled over which of the tickets was to be punched for Yuma; Yuma crying out that the only way was for him to pay his own. The meals were twenty-five cents each to us, on the tickets, but along the bottom of the tickets were figures for "extra dishes"—fifteen cent, and ten cent ones. I remember how Pete and I tossed a quarter over the matter, and how I won and had a fifteen mark punched on my ticket, and Pete had a ten cent one punched on his, to the tune of much mock solemnity over such petty fooling.

Then we strayed upstairs—Pete, Yuma Bill, and I—and something happened.

Pete and I shared a room—number 10. I had invited Yuma up to see it, handing across to him, as we rose from the table, the paper that Apache had dropped before me.

"If you've never put up at this house before," said I, "you may as well stroll up with us and see upstairs."

So up we went, passed room 10, and on along the corridor to number 17. Pete was in the lead. I was behind with Yuma.

I saw Pete raise his head, as he came to room 17, in a curious jerk. It was a movement of a man of the open, hearing something dubious, and going on guard. Yuma and I intuitively stopped. We had been chatting as we came along the corridor, but ceased abruptly—not only our chatter, but moved more slowly.

The door of number 17 was open. Pete looked in at the hinge and dropped his hand to his hip, and then missed his belt, discarded in the civilisation of the city. Yuma dipped oddly into his tail-coat, a heavy swallow-tail, such as is esteemed highly by so many range-men, and marks the occasion festive. He drew forth a Smith and Webly and thrust it into Pete's hand. Then Pete, gun in hand, backed on to our toes and, with his left hand behind him, thrust us back, turned his head slightly, and whispered: "Keep talking, you!"

"Oh! Let me see," said Yuma in a great voice, "which I suppose the hotel is plumb full, with the annual being on?"

And back, back we went—to room 10, and backed in there.

"What is it?" asked Yuma.

Pete turned fully and said:

"A gent in a blue suit, with a little silver star on his left breast, and a big silver-mounted gun in his fist, sitting in the chair—that's what it is."

"Oh! Waiting for Apache Kid."

"Well—where is Apache?"

A door at our end of the corridor slammed, as if in answer to our question, and Apache passed along the corridor whistling, with ruffled hair, and a towel in his hands.

"Come in here, damn you," whispered Pete. Apache started, and was inside our room on the instant.

Hurriedly Pete told him of the peace officer in his room. We made no attempt to greet him, or to ask him what he was doing in the city, why he risked visiting the sports.

"Oh!" he said, and paused, and gave a frown of thought. "Is the window open?"

"Can't call to mind." Pete considered. "Yes—for sure—I remember the little dinky cover on the table in the window was waving in the wind."

Apache walked to our window and looked out.

"No," he said, "I'm not a Rocky Mountain sheep. I wonder—I wonder——"

"What?"

He sat gently down on the edge of the bed and began to towel his hair.

"I see your arm is working again," said Yuma.

"Eh! What? Oh yes, sure! I wonder——"

"Can we help you out of it?" said Pete.

"Well, what I'm wondering is this: you remember the pardon?"

"Sure," said Yuma.

"Yap—heerd of it," said Pete.

"I saw it," said I.

"Well, I went to wash in my shirt, and I left my jacket in there. Now——"

"By heck! You're up against it if the pardon is in your jacket."

"Well, say!" said Yuma. "This ain't a matter for debate. This here is a matter for prompt action."

"Lend me your gun," said Apache. "Mine's in there too."

Yuma held his hand and Pete returned the gun to him. Then Yuma handed it over to Apache Kid.

"Easy now," I said. "You've to get away again without making a fresh crime."

"Sure," said Pete.

"It's dead easy," said Yuma. "I'll do it."

"Do what?" asked Apache.

"I'll run along and shout at the door: 'Say—you looking for Apache Kid? He's in the washhouse. He's climbin' out the washhouse winder on to the roof. He's on to you.' Out he comes at my excited hail, and then——" Yuma looked at Pete, at

me.

Pete wagged his head, bent to our joint "grip," and pulled it from under the bed; produced two guns, took one, and gave me the other.

Yuma held out his hand to Apache for his gun to be returned.

"Now," said Apache, "I'm the only one shy a gun."

"Well—you want to be," said Yuma.

"No—no—look here! Yuma—Yuma—," Apache began, but Yuma was gone with his gun in his hand.

We heard him run along the corridor, and then:

"Say! You looking for Apache Kid?"

"He'll raise the whole house!" moaned Pete.

"He's in the lavatory! He's going over the winder!" we heard. "He's——"

We stood at our door, pushing Apache back, all trembling with the excitement before action. Along came feet.

"Well, I got one thing I want anyhow, if I lose him—" and level with our door was the peace officer, and the feet of Yuma Bill sounded after him.

Out we leapt and crashed on the top of that marshal's deputy. It was as if I was back in the corrals wrestling a maverick. And he shouted too.

"Don't bleat!" growled Yuma, and took his head in both hands and beat it on the floor, yanked it up and smashed it down.

"Don't kill him!" Pete said, and I said—I forget what now. We hauled the deputy abruptly into our room. Yuma turned him over and he and Apache ransacked the pockets.

"Here's the pardon," said Apache—opened it, looked at it. "Yes, that's right. Not that it's of much use to me now——"

"Reckons this is where we quits," said Yuma, standing up. "By heck! I did hate using a man that way. Never did it before—but if a man has wax on his finger-nails, and you can't plug him, then the only alternative is——"

"To stack your cards," said Pete.

"Sure."

"He'll be coming round—and you'll have to do it again," said I.

Pete looked long at Yuma.

"Yuma," he said, "if it's a fair question—was it you held the hosses at Antelope Creek on the night——"

Yuma looked at Apache—Apache at Yuma. There was nothing said.

Pete turned to me.

"Apache and Yuma quits," he said. "We rescues the marshal's man. We hears sounds of a struggle, and we comes to his aid. We acts missionaries and Good Samaritans."

Yuma looked at me, and then at Pete. Then he said:

"You forgets that Bucket has been suspected some. Did you ever write that letter——"

I took his arm and turned him about.

"Git!" I said. "And you too, Apache!"

We gripped hands; and five minutes later Pete and I were listening to the silence in the corridor, Pete and I alone, waiting for the first sign of returning consciousness on the part of the deputy—when we would dash water on him and begin our play-acting.

Pete closed our "grip," and shoved it under the bed again while we waited, grim and thoughtful.

"He don't seem to be very eager about returning to the land of the living," he said.

"Shall we dash water on him now?" I asked, feeling very jumpy.

Pete frowned and considered.

"We got to give Apache and Yuma every show of a start," he said.

He puckered his brows at the man on the floor. Then he sat back and gave a very foolish cackling little laugh, as if he was a trifle demented.

"By heck!" said he, and put his hand down to feel the man's heart, knelt there, still laughing horribly.

"By heck!" he said. "Now ain't this comical? He's plumb dead!"

CHAPTER XXIV

ROOM THIRTEEN

I noticed Pete fingering his moustache in a most savage and twitching manner.

"Pooh!" I thought. "He's distraught. Now is the time to show the big capacity; now is the time to show the capacity for calm in moments when some people would get 'rattled.'"

And then I found that I was plucking at my moustache in the same way.

Pete glanced at me.

"When you are cool and collected," he said, "we'll pow-wow and then act."

"Cool and collected!" I cried. "Stop pulling your moustache. You'd let a fool see you were in a corner."

"Was I pulling my moustache?"

"I think we'd better get him out again, and then walk down and tell the proprietor that we've been trying to bring him round."

Pete looked out into the quiet corridor, nodded to me, and we lifted the body, carried it out stealthily and laid it down again outside our door.

"Now," he said, "you be throwin' water on him. I'm off. This is not the kind of play a man can think about too long before his leading card. If I don't start right now——"

"Wait a bit," I said. "Did we see any one on the way up? No—no we didn't. Pete—we're going down together; and if there's nobody in the vestibule we're going to walk right out—and go and see to-day's riding at the arena, and come back to supper full of talk of the riding—and nothing else—till we're told about this."

He pulled his moustache, then perceived what he was doing and stroked his chin instead.

"And if there's somebody in the vestibule?" he asked.

"Then we don't run chances. We go to the proprietor and say: 'Proprietor! I want to speak to you a minute'; and we bring him up here. Wait a bit! Wait a bit! Where will Yuma and Apache be? If we could get them back! Apache I mean——"

"Get him—Oh sure! I see. You think this marshal was playing a lone hand? No—I think it's as well Apache pulled his freight. But where is he liable to be? I don't know. Nobody knows now. Is that floor right in there? Look at it. Look at it reasonable and sedate, Bucket, and ask yourself is it all right."

"It's all right," said I.

"You ain't looking at it calm and cold."

"Yes—it's all right."

"No blood—no teeth or anything?"

"No——"

"We'll git down."

Down we went, and found nothing but the stove in the vestibule and a large spittoon keeping it company. The side door, giving into the restaurant, was closed. So we went straight out on to the side-walk. No loafing porter—nobody below belonging to the hotel. We strolled off. But we did not speak. Like automatons we projected ourselves to the showground—and there found Yuma Bill!

"Hullo, boys!" he hailed us. "Going in again?"

"Where is he?" I said under my breath.

"Eh?"

"Where is he? You know."

"A. K.?"

"Yap."

"Quit! Why?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Me! I've come to see the riding stunts!" said Yuma airily.

Pete said:

"We'd better get inside. Tail on there, and talk about hosses till we get through."

Of course I imagined that every other man at the gates was sleuth of some kind. Behind me, I heard some men who had just arrived on our heels.

"Bit hot in town, ain't it? I just run into a murder," one said.

"Where was it?" asked another.

"Oh, some man from Montana got too much liquor in him, and he started to shoot up a bar-keep because he wouldn't serve him no more."

I was not interested in that case!

"There's a lot of toughs in town," I heard next. "They brings discredit on the boys from the ranges. Same class that follows up travelling shows—toughs—just the lowest rung, they are. Always around if there's a fair, or a show—watch your pockets in this here crowd—I hear there's some trouble at the hotel where I am."

I gave anxious ear again. I could almost imagine I recognised his voice as the voice of a man who was putting up at the hotel!

"Oh! Anybody killed?"

"No—nothing desperate that-away. A sneak thief got up in the bedrooms. Took away some jewels. Well! A man don't want to leave his jewellery laying about. There's a hotel safe, ain't there?"

Yuma, ahead, was saying to Pete:

"No, sir—they rides with the hackamore only, and no riding on spurs is allowed, and no buckin' straps of no kind."

We were through into the grounds, climbing down to seats, and presently were practically alone.

"Look here, Yuma, for heaven's sake!" I said. "Don't you know where Apache could be found? We have something to post him on."

"What's that?"

"That man that was waiting for him. You killed him, Yuma."

Yuma said nothing. But he raised his head and his jaw dropped, and his eyes went wide.

"And you two? What did you do?" he asked thickly.

"We did the best—we left him lying in the corridor."

"Say! And sneaked out?" he almost whispered.

"We walked out."

"Nobody around?"

"No."

He looked down between the seats to the ground below, and locked his fingers.

"Well, it ain't no good—Apache can't be posted up on these there developments. I guess he's a-sifting down like a comet into Mexico. What a dern fool I was—" he paused. "Never thought of that. I ought to have suggested doing intentional what I done by accident, and then we all walks out——"

I was horrified for some reason, yet held my peace. But Pete turned his head.

"No," he said to Yuma, "I ain't that kind of man. And Bucket ain't. And I don't think you are, if it comes to the bit."

"No," said Yuma, "you're right. Which I am not. I ain't no garrotter. No more is Apache Kid."

He sat staring at a horse that had come ploughing into the arena with four men hanging to it. "Well, partners, I guess none of us will hear more of Apache Kid again. Damn him! He's always making trouble. What does he want to go and raise a whole country for so that all the boys, who ever rode the range in the lo-cality, keeps on giving him a show?"

I heard a shout, and then a roar of:

"Leather! Leather! Touched leather!"

Evidently the competitor down there in the arena was barred.

The same thought came to us all at that shout—that we must watch the riding; and so there we sat staring ahead of us down at the arena—each thinking his own thoughts, with the Apache Kid for the king-bolt of them.

I remember little of that day's riding. I look back on it all as little as I can; and my worst nightmare is when, in sleep, I walk again into the hotel at which we put up. Not that there was, in the event, any cause for us to trouble. We were never suspected. I think that the body being at our door was even in our favour.

There was a kind of hush in the dining-room when we arrived. And from the table near us we heard the news.

"Oh! That's bad! Very bad!" I said, when a man at the next table, a nodding acquaintance by now, passed me the news.

"Give the house a bad name," said Pete, chipping in.

"Well—some folks will quit now," another opined.

"Oh—not me," said Pete. "That kind of thing ain't going to happen twice in the one hotel. What was the motive? Murderer caught?"

"No—nobody caught. His pockets had been gone through all right."

"Have they any idea?"

"I don't know."

Another voice joined in: "They tell me it was a peace officer. They surmise he was after somebody in the house."

As the days passed and we heard all the story from different points of view, Pete and I kicked ourselves afresh. Apache had, of course, been in the place under another name and, besides that, several men, in some superstitious dislike of being in the house, simply left without a word that very day of the murder. And, leaving without a word, they did not pay their bills! I think, if I remember rightly, that eight (Apache included, that is) left that floor, on which the deputy had been found, on the day of the murder—and only two paid up for their rooms and acknowledged why they were "pulling out." Perhaps the others did not like to acknowledge to such a distaste. Let us give them the benefit of the doubt and say so—perhaps they were ashamed of their squeamishness or superstition.

The police made a special attempt to trace all these men, but only succeeded in finding two—first the one who had explained that he didn't like to stay on—he had been in number 11, which was opposite number 10, and the body had been found right there, of course. He said he would feel always as if he was stepping over it.

Second, a man was traced who had been in number 13 and said that he had fled because he was plumb foolish to have ever taken a room 13—reckoned the proprietor was foolish to have a room called 13—a reasonable hotel never had a room 13. He hadn't thought of it till the murder, and he wasn't going to stay on.

A third man came back of his own accord, all unconscious of what he was coming to next day. He had been on what is called a "bender"; and what he had to do on his return gave him great chagrin—he had to convoy the police to the house where he said he had been dissipating. The proprietor told me that he was the worst scared man in America when he started out to identify the house and prove that he had been there, for he was three parts drunk and he feared he could not find the house; and then again he feared, if he did find it, and arrived with the police, that the inmates would all swear that he had never been there, lest he was involved in some campaign for getting them into trouble. The chatting proprietor surreptitiously pointed out to me that pathetic toper, and I had a sly squint at him; certainly he looked as if he had been passing through agonies. The marks, not of drink alone, but of terror, were on his face. His lips bulged, his eyes were bloodshot, his hands fidgeted. I looked at myself in the long mirror that soared behind him where he sat, and I thought: "Well, I don't look like that, anyhow."

Then in the mirror I met the eye of the chatting proprietor—and thought it was weighing me. I lay awake all night thinking of his glance—or, I should say, of what I read into his glance—for, as I have said, Pete and I were, in the event, never suspected.

And indeed there came another item of news that helped to make less suspicious the flight of those who "quit" that floor abruptly. For a man, who had been at the far end of the corridor, after much thought, came to the proprietor, and said he:

"I know it ain't considered according to Hoyle to lay information concerning no female" (I expect the proprietor jumped at that), "but I've been thinking over the suspicions that follow these men who vamoosed from the floor where the deputy marshal cashed in, and I think it only fair to them to narrate that the female chamber-maid for that floor held me up there, on the morning of the said trouble, and spoke very sharply to me—said that if she could find what man it was turned on the water in the wash-room, and turned it off, with wet hands, instead of filling the basin and then turning off, she would step along and talk severely to him. She was standing there and holding up all the gents as they came along, and explaining to them that she was here to keep taps clean, and bedroom crockery clean, but that she was no menial. One gentleman I made up on on the stairs, after I had been lectured, asked me what I thought of it, and I said, 'Well, of course she is a female, and waitress-ladies don't care for a lot of things—won't empty more than one basin-full in a room; if a gentleman washes his hands twice in a day in his bedroom he's got to wash next morning in his afternoon water, and so on—little things like that and this here tap trouble is just what one reckons to stand for from a female in the land of the free.' This gentleman said: 'Oh to hell with that! I'm not the kind of man to complain of her to the proprietor, but I simply quits. I didn't pack no more than a razor, a comb, and a toothbrush, and my belongings being so limited I naturally packs them around in my hip pocket.'"

The proprietor, hearing all this, shook his head and remarked sadly: "It's a wonder she didn't complain to me!"

The waitress, questioned, acknowledged to having held up a good many ones—some who were still there indeed. These men, when asked, said she had never spoken to them! For a moment it looked as if here was a clue. Why did they lie? Or did they lie? Did the other man lie? If so, why? What lay behind this? Only the sense of being superwhite with "females" lay behind these denials.

The hunt for clues bogged down somewhere about there and, if the murderer of the deputy marshal was being sought, we, at any rate, heard no further word of that trouble.

CHAPTER XXV

PETE DISCOURSES

Pete and I, a month later, sat one night by the side of the waggon-road from Foothills to Navajo, where it swings round into the North West. A fire blazed before us, with a coffee-pot scenting the air; and to the West were two waggons, loaded high with timber, and the waggon-horses inquiring into their nose-bags.

The timber, which we were hauling from the Morgan Strong Lumber Company's outfit at Foothills, was *en route* to a site chosen by Mr. Henry for a new corral of the Triangle. The last round-up had clinched, in his mind, the intention to build a corral over by Sand Creek. As the foreman explained it:

"'What you lose track of in the shuffle you discover in the deal,' is another of these platitudes that stand for clever thinking. And most proverbs, or aphorisms, if you follow them, considering they are whole truth, will bring you to a boggy ford where you got to hitch a string of aphorisms together to get a long enough rope to haul you out. Mr. Henry reckons we lose a few head not only in the shuffle but in the deal and he quits reciting a proverb to himself instead of building new corrals. Now we builds the corrals. There are some who looks upon an aphorism as gospel, whereas aphorisms, and proverbs generally, are half-lies. When a man says 'What you lose in the shuffle you find in the deal' he ain't stated all that is to it. Aphorisms is fragmentary—and no gent can live long on quick lunches. Wherefore he changes what was good enough for them he bought the ranch offen and, improving the stock, intends keeping closer track on them. We falls to work in the slack season, and builds a corral over to Sand Creek, where he always feels a corral should be, and sheds for the new stock, and a sub-camp."

According to all cow-punching stories that ever I read, all that a cow-puncher would permit himself to do, in connection with such building operations, would be, on occasion, to rope a log and tow it, as the spirit moved him, to the site of the corral. But that cowboy is dead. It is true that Pete, when we pulled out from the lumber yards with our team, remarked:

"If I was invited now to sign one of these here papers in which a man has to tell his name, and age, and height in stockings, and profession in life—such as sometimes a man has to sign in the land of the free—I concloods it would be nearer truth to certify myself pile-driver instead of roper."

The old tradition lingers but the new style "goes," which, in the slang, does not mean "departs" but quite the opposite.

It was a good three days' trip, loaded; and two nights we had to outspan, the first night at the limit of waggon-road, so far as it served us, the second about half way between the waggon-road bend and the new camp site on Sand Creek.

You do not haul a team thus with another man, and camp down beside him at night, without getting to know him better. Pete and I had been together a good deal by now, but to be partners among others is different from being partners, and alone, under stars.

Of Apache we had heard no word since we returned to Henry and Stells (with Yuma Bill, who hired on to the Triangle instead of going back to his old outfit); and indeed no one had been either to Black Kettle or Lone Tree for so much as mail of late.

But at Foothills we had come into the region of news. And some of the news had been of Apache Kid. It looked as if he had fallen a prey to that instinct, or whatever it be, that has been remarked by criminologists as common to all classes of wanted people—to visit again, sooner or later, the scene of the crime that put the law upon their track. It may be something akin with that spirit which prompts people to keep touching a tender place that has ceased to be actively painful—an aching tooth for example. But this sort of thing can be overdone.

The first we had heard of the re-appearance of Apache Kid was a rumour that he had got boldly off a train at Lone Tree; but this seemed too wild a rumour to be true. It had given Pete and me food for thought, however; and now it gave us subject for discussion, when we made camp and turned our toes to the companionable fire at night.

Pete, fatherly, had noticed me, before we began this hauling, and while we were still at the home ranch, very eager to know when any one was going to ride into town. I had suspected, from his expression, that he was basing conjectures on this anxiety; and I surmised he was all wrong. I had guessed that he thought he had struck a trail, remembering how, at the

hotel we put up at when we attended the sports, he had noticed that I preferred a certain table, and had said:

"Is this here scouting for the same table due to the Injun spirit in you of returning to the same old camp-fire stain, or is it —" and he had ended in a grim closing of his mouth.

I had pled guilty, at the time, without voicing any guilt—in silence. The waitress at that table had seemed more to my mind than the hard-visaged lady (the proprietor's wife, I think) who attended at the other end of the room. And, indeed, I had chatted once or twice with our waitress; but she was not the cause of my anxiety for mail, as Pete had thought. I doubt if she knew my name, and I knew only her Christian name, by hearing her called to by the proprietor's wife.

Pete, fatherly toward me, had ruminated on my anxiety for mails. The waitress at that restaurant was all he could think of as cause. But you may as well know that I had, at last, in the leisure of our holiday, written home to an uncle—father's brother—for news of the dad. Relatives are sometimes kittle-cattle, and as I did not know how he would take my letter I wearied for a reply.

It was on this, our second hauling from the Foothills, that Pete, by the fire, sitting in the odour of coffee, promulgated "females," recharging his pipe. He had been studying my face—which perhaps had shown trouble—for I was thinking, at the moment, of my father, and wondering if he was still under the cloud, or if "for they who are blinded we pray for light," could be considered, by the parson, as having been answered.

"As regards females," said Pete, "I was once struck on a girl—she was a wonderful sight, narrow shoulders, broad hips. When you was coming behind her you did sure remark the swing of her quarters, which was as easy as a doe, walked like a watching doe, she did, in kind of waves and swings, which it might have been observing her made some observing gent coin the saying: 'A-curving along the side-walk like a swallow.'"

"Oh!" said I, looking up and "cottoning." "What did she turn the scales at? Was she a Jersey? I think you said something, and I was inattentive."

But I did not put him off his trail. He seemed to like me all the better for that. He was silent so long that I looked at him, and found his eye was friendly on me.

"If your intellect is now returned to the mental reservation," he said. "I may mention that I never see her in a bunch. She was always running lonesome. Then one day I do see her with another female—with the boss's wife where I was, same being related to me, so I was welcome to drop in. And the boss's wife is speaking of a friend of hers who was a writer for the papers—him coming into the talk because one of these here reporter gents had been down on a free pass to write a whole lot about the place, because the railway had town lots for sale, and was wanting to create a stir. I see what he wrote after, and maybe anybody who had never seen the place might get his stuff by heart and come in, and see what he was told to see; but to me it looked as if I was reading about the Noo Jerusalem. And the plain fact is that at a spiritualistic séance once a gent who had lived there and died there was got in touch with, and all he could be got to say about his condition was to ask for 'em to send on his blankets. But I'm side-tracking myself. What I was saying was that the boss's wife agrees with me that what you read ain't always what you see; and to back her statements she says, not priding herself on him none—but to the contrary—having no erroneous ideas of the bigness of the job, however big the wages, she says: 'Well I know a little about these things, for my father was a journalist in 'Frisco'—which was quite true —'and he used often to tell us—' and in chips this here lady I mentions as so elegant and attractive, and she says: 'Oh, yes—my mother—eh—on the staff—Seattle P.I. (Postal Intelligencer),' but whether it was that her mother had been on the staff, or was fired off it, or had tried to get on, or had run after a man on the staff, didn't amount to a row of red apples. I looks at the boss's wife, and she looks at me, and then she gets on with her story; but I wasn't interested no more in that doe-lady. You can tell a card-player the way he shuffles the cards. What I say is, any man can have the whole indications of whether a woman is white or not from just such little things. Them little things is more vital than a whole lot; and the man who calls them trivial is going to be fooled all the way. Here, you see, was failure to understand what the boss's wife mentions her father for; and here was failure to be able to hear that the boss's wife's father had been one of these there noospaper gents, without ferreting out some relative, and going one better. I mentions later a non-existent aunt of mine that had married a college professor, and the doe-lady says: 'My uncle,' she says,'eh—Harvard University.' Now a man that plays poker some didn't need to do no more than look at her pretty face, and see how it tilts up as she speaks, to know it was a bluff. She maybe had a knave in her pack, but he was the only picture card."

I looked at Pete and smiled. I knew he was telling me all this not for the sake of shooting off a chapter of his life-story at

me, but for my sake, he being a bachelor of the ranges who respected a good woman but who feared for his friends lest a woman in their lives might mean marriage, and marriage an end of their freedom.

"Look at me," I said. "Is there a queen in my pack?"

He seemed caught up at that. He had thought that he was subtly pumping wisdom into me. Our eyes met.

"I have been asking a whole lot if the mail has come," said I, "ever since we came home; but that was because I'm trying to get in touch with my home folks, and hear about——"

"Your dad!" he cried. "Well, Bucket," he held out his hand, "shake! Now—I often wondered you didn't do that; but every man's life is his own. It was sure the only weak place in your story when you told us; but I didn't like to say more then. And is your dad still in that sad place? How is he?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm so eagerly and anxiously waiting news."

"You posts me when you hears," he said, "for I am interested in your dad. It kind of made me feel soft, the way you tells of his shouting that-aways about your brother's unexpected demise."

A little later:

"Don't you think," he said, "that I'm one of these here permiscuous woman-haters. I merely has learnt to distrust folk that put on dog, and such as ain't genuine, and gents and females impartial that toots their own bazoo and must always raise you one better—which is generally one worse; they whoops it up on you so that (all seeming friendly and sociable—which is their long suit) you gives them, erroneous, the bookays and the laurel wreaths—thereby robbing the Genuine, and joining yourself to the herd of the easily bluffed. I suppose that man is liable to make mistakes. Down in MacAlpine—since called Borax, because of the discoveries of that substance there, and now 'most entirely a shovel-wielding centre instead of a cow-man's town—I had my first signs of the kind of person that there Diamond K foreman was, into whose clutches I rings not only myself, but you. I meets up with him first in MacAlpine City. With the advent of the prospector, boraxing, and copper hunting, and silver-lead people defacing the bosoms of Nature, the red-light houses in town manifests themselves beyond all reason. And the mayor sends to various of us that made MacAlpine, since then Borax, a letter—asking us to affix our names if we considers that the number of these dives be more restricted. I gets this missive and feels someway flattered—like as if it was one of these occurrences to write home back east about to my blood folks that thought I could never take no place as a responsible citizen and inform them casual, but whatever, about me being asked to affix my name to this here progressive document, as a token of my being of some account in the gregarious world, which is sure the only world they recognises as constitootional. Not that I'm powerful interested in the question one way or another. I shows this letter to that foreman—George Washington Gay is his full name—and he frowns, and says: 'Oh, pshaw—there ain't anything in this here. What's he want round-robinning the city for this-away?' which, falling in with my live and let live ways, I kind of side-tracks, in my mind, the considering of whether I signs or not. 'He ain't asked me to sign,' he says, kind of speaking out mere meditations; but I was meditating too—meditating side-trackin' this here round robin, as I says, and pays little attention to his last remark. But that night I am kept awake with the sounds of mirth, and general debauched singing over at the red-light boxes; and in the morning, lacking sleep, I considers that 'live and let live' cuts two ways—so I signs. *The MacAlpine City Tribune*, printed entire by the mayor, comes out Tuesdays. This here was Sunday night that the Diamond K man says there ain't anything in the protest; and on Tuesday the reputable citizens is projectin' their names in cold print on behalf of MacAlpine City being some more a credit to modern civilisation, and shutting down these there red-light dives. And I see a name flaunting there—Washington Gay—which I wonders is this any friend to George Gay, who maybe sees different from his namesake, and also is asked to be a reputable citizen and tote in to the corral among the protestors ag'in the general kick-ups, and simultaneous playing of diverse music in neighbouring red-light houses. But it transpires that it is no other than plain George Gay—a-calling of himself by his middle name, putting on dog for the sake of *The MacAlpine City Tribune*—being as it were ashamed of his first name. And it leaks out that he has no sooner wet-blanketed the round-robin protest proposition to me, than he pikes over to call on the mayor, and sets up the jig-juice to him, pours flattering words in his ears, and reckons that sooner or later the mayor mentions his notion for signatures. So he does. And friend Gay applauds so sincere that he is asked right there to affix his mark to the round-robin. Thereafter the drink proposition lulls, and George Gay appears as Washington Gay in the column of selected reputable persons itchin' for the betterment of MacAlpine City—and I regrets seeing my name in such company; but I crosses the paper where my name is, and posts it to my relatives, knowing they will think a whole lot of it. I notes also George Gay's play, but makes no comment. Now I

was a blame fool. Such indication was sufficient for any man, just as no man need go projectin' around looking for the skunk once he has scented it. And any man who says that a scent of a skunk ain't a vital matter, and only to be ignored, is surely going to be fooled. But me not being a man given to petty views, I continues amicable with Gay, and in course of time, me being amicable—for though a little thing shows you a man's nature you don't quarrel with him over it—he thinks he can play a game on me. This here game I omit from my tale, for I go sick at the thought of it. The more lenient and amicable you go with some cattle the more dog they put on.

"I excuses Washington Gay for his duplicitous ways in that first play, and excuses his putting on dog. I see these here indications of the range he roams on; and I goes on ignoring them. Then comes the split between us, but he takes on so bad about it that I feels remorse for leaving him out of my tab of friends that to meet is to treat, and putting him among the mere 'how-dos.' Unable rightly to realise why he is wiped off, he mourns a whole lot, goes around town calling me a good fellow to everybody, till folks begin to think I'm some distant with one who esteems me so high, and takes the liberty of bringing us together—and there we are to be beheld, bellying up to the bar together again in the old way—which I does as a concession to public opinion. My son—never concess.

"I had sensed the smell of that skunk. I had surely seen his ear-marks, and I was to be shown him more thorough—shown his brand—when actually I knew all about him that time he pshaws away the moral document and then goes and runs his mark on it. Now, us bein' friendly, he shuffles the cards for a fresh game—begins calling me down, not too severe, but allowing how he is disappointed some. On top of that he gets foreman of the Diamond K, and (to show he is still as friendly as ever) invites me up for roper to the outfit—which I accepts, and all the world beholds how me, who has esteemed him a shorthorn, has coals of fire on my head.

"So there I am roping. And he has his revenge on me for cutting him off my special intimates awhile back when he suggests that my roping ain't what it was cracked up to be. He suggests this once, quiet—then again stronger—and so I does not let him turn the last card. Nor does I quarrel with him. It would seem plain enough to the most, but he is kind of dense that-aways, so I merely steps over and asks for my wages as I reckons to quit. 'Anything wrong?'" he says.

"'Not the slightest,' I says.

"'What on earth is the trouble?' he says.

"'No trouble whatever,' I says, and looks him fair and square—which him comprehending the many qualities in himself, at that glance, apart from any virtue in my bland gaze, the dog slides off him a whole lot for the brief space it takes me to tie up my blankets and tobaccer. But I am no sooner hitting out from the ranch than I see him swell up again, same as a horned toad. Looking at me for that spell he had been plain George Gay, scarce tolerable at that now, but not too presumptuous. When I departs he is once again Washington Gay, throwing the big bluff to men that know him better, till they comes to reckon, same as me, to accept the smell for the sight of a skunk—to take the evidence of ear-marks and not go cuttin' into the herd, and looking at a brand for full and unnecessary confirmation.

"Which the moral is, same as in the female story I narrates—follow the promptings of your divine instincts. Yuma tells me that when he met up with Apache in Cheyenne, Apache has a remark about that foreman that he bears him a grudge for blabbing to the 'tecs, just after the hold-up, about you being maybe able to give some information, and that if it had come to anything he would have burnt the trail up to the Diamond K and sent George Washington Gay on the jump to the Golden Gates with a surprised look."

I had a sudden start then, and Pete and I—looking at each other across the fire, shared a thought.

"Oh he wouldn't do nothing so foolish now," said Pete, "I guess what we hears of him being in the country is only scares—the way some folk talk of Injun trouble still, when Injuns is all mostly growing tomatoes, and growing alfalfa, and working on irrigating projects."

"I hope so," I said; "but from what I've seen of Apache he's a brooder, and—"

"Him! Why he's plumb full of sufficient for the day is the sport thereof—he don't brood any."

"Not on the future," I said; "that's the trouble. On the past, at times, he does brood, I'm certain; and then he wants to wipe out scores."

"Oh that Diamond K man ain't no account," said Pete. "The Apache Kid wouldn't trouble about him serious."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE OUTLAW BULL

The new corral was built; and at Sand Creek we had a new sub-camp, with Pete for boss. One day I was alone, and he and Yuma, with another man, were riding the creek-side "looking" the cattle for a bunch of beeves (for an order of Jules of Chicago, to be precise in this event), when I was aware, in the midst of my biscuit making, of a pounding of the ground far off, as when a herd has settled to a good gait and is moving the landscape behind it.

Out I ran and saw the dust rising North West. The herd *was* on the run, and at the speed it travelled there would be difficulty in pulling it up for lining into the corral. You know what that may mean. I have worked a day (on one occasion), with a dozen other men, endeavouring to run a herd into a corral, and no—that corral had no interest for them.

To run a herd easily into a corral you must get them bunched some way off, and string them, one at a time, in the way they head for water-holes, Indian file; and then the corral does seem a desirable haven for them; they have then "no kick" against going in.

Next moment I saw that the three men were putting up a big endeavour to check that stampede. I saw the flash, flash of revolvers going off, as they brought in the sound of their guns—fired in air—to help in the heading off. On to my horse I went, and curved away across to meet them, riding not too directly in face of the herd till I should see just how they shaped; but first I let out not only the ordinary entrance to the corral, but a whole division of bars as well. It was a wild, and great, hour that, while the four of us headed and circled that herd.

Then Pete, grimed and black with dust, breathing short, explained to me the excitement. An outlaw bull, that had dodged four round-ups, was in the herd, "and it do seem a chance to bring him in at last. He is plumb in the centre. It would sure be a good omen for this here new camp to rope him in and get it to penetrate his bull mind that he belongs to the Triangle for sure, and ain't just a gallivanterer."

And we got him into the corral. We ran the whole bunch in, and that black bull—who, if he had only known it, was in peril of his life, the boss really having outlawed him, and said that if he acted wild much more he would have to be shot instead of creating further disturbance, and cutting into herds where he had no right. There he bellowed now, and kinged it in the herd, guileless of ear-marks, and bearing no brand.

In we went to the large corral and began cutting out carefully, one by one, the rest of the herd. It was dark before we were through, and next day we were all awake early, eager and excited to complete the work.

"Which we signs on for torreador and bullfights in Mexico after we closes up this game," said Yuma when, after a forenoon's work, with casualties on our side of one pony gored, and Merry Mike—the other man with us—grazed down his leg in an ugly fashion, the bull was alone, rampaging round the corral.

Merry Mike was the one who rode over to the home ranch to tell the great tidings, and incidentally procure some liniment; and there we waited, feeling that a good omen had visited the new corral.

Next day Henry in person, with the foreman, rode over to admire his black majesty tossing his horns there and challenging the world. Henry, a curiously quiet and determined man, sat his horse, eyeing the outlaw bull, and then remarked gently:

"He goes in that bunch for Jules of Chicago—and God help the railway men."

Then we fell to to get a rope on the outlaw. He snapped two as if they had been pack-thread, getting away back with a bit of play on them, then running forward and slacking them, and next—before we could tighten up—dashing back, and snap! the rope was broken. The third rope we hung to, and held him up; but, infuriated, he charged us as if he would fain gore us between the bars. We took advantage of the charge to gather in the slack, wildly, and the foreman adroitly hitched the end to a bar—when, suddenly, back went the black king, and snap went rope three!

But after an hour or so we had him up close to the bars, where he had no play, well roped, and close roped, hauled up tight to the bars and looking through at us. Then we went to eat flap-jacks and drink tea and consider what a great fighter was that outlaw bull.

"He's like Apache Kid," said Henry.

"Have you heard any more news of him, sir?" asked Pete.

"You heard the latest I suppose? He has been all along from this ranch to that. No doubt he has been fed at outfits that say nothing; but some have talked. They say he is locoed. It looks as if he had an idea of surely running amuk. He appears to-day at one outfit, riding up, asks a horse. He gets it. Asks a meal. He gets it. For he asks it sweetly and graciously—but with his rifle on his arm. The latest, so far as I know, is that he rode up to a sub-camp of the Y.Z. on Kettle River, and somebody there, not feeling either friendly or to be intimidated, put up a bluff on him, and gave him the glad hand, fed him, told him he could have as many horses as he wanted; and then Apache camped down in his wickeup to sleep. Out went this fellow and pranced over to the home ranch, got up three of the boys—this Kettle River outfit having no sneaking regard for Apache—and back they came, making out to corral him, and carry him to that thousand dollar bid, still open I suppose. But there's a little bit of scrub half way between the home ranch of the Y.Z. and this sub-camp, and as they came ploughing through there, Apache, who had either played possum for sheer devilment, or wakened up and tumbled—after this fellow piked out—and reckoned it was his long suit, though maybe they didn't think so—well, Apache had ridden along and cached himself there in the scrub. Seeing the three coming sifting back he considered he held cards to make good—and whaled away on them. Down went two, and the other wheeled for home, with Apache after him till they struck the stage road. Then Apache quit."

There was a silence.

"That's the latest news?" I asked.

"That's the latest we have."

Pete looked up and sighed deeply.

"Not but what," he said, "there's a kind of respect due to outlaw bulls;" and he rose and went out to stand ruefully, and meditatively, regarding the black outlaw hauled up tight, with his horns protruding, at the corral bars.

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE PUEBLO WALL

Yuma Bill rode off right away to order that the team of Montana drays be put in the heavy waggon, and driven over to the sub-camp; and the rest of us, ignoring, for the time being, the black king, fell to work in the other corral driving out the not wanted, and holding back the bunch for Jules's order.

After moon-up, when we were through with that work, and the freed steers had moved away into space and disappeared, the steady plug-plug of the Montanas sounded, and the waggon came groaning in. Next morning that waggon came into play. It was backed up to the corral where the outlaw bull stood gazing between the bars, backed close up and then, after hitching new ropes around the bull, and tying them close to the tail of the waggon, we simply loosened the ropes that so far had held him, and withdrew the bar to which they had been tied.

The corral was thus now open before him—but he was tied up close to the waggon.

The teamster mounted. The men who were to drive the herd ki-yied it out, and spraddled it *en route*, and away they went, herd and beeves, in clouds of dust. Then the teamster shook his reins, and the Montanas pulled out.

The bull bellowed defiance, and stiffened his legs; but he had to go. To the Montanas, bred and raised for hauling, he was no weight at all. The waggon seemed little heavier to them than it had been on the previous night, when they came over with it light.

But that black outlaw was game. He stiffened his legs and was simply pulled out. Nary walk! He took not one step. He sagged back on the short ropes and was turned into a kind of animate plough. Henry rode behind. The foreman and Yuma and the rest had gone on with the herd, Yuma to go only as far as the home-ranch for some new ropes. Henry rode behind, and Pete and I were there too; for Henry, seeing how the bull was behaving, told us to accompany the waggon in case of being required, as the outlaw might get full mad, and be obstreperous, even there, cinched up as he was.

So we rode at the waggon tail, and none of us liked it. The sense of victory began to fall dull as we noted the bull's trail—a deep furrow between the furrows of the waggon-wheels. We rode behind, quiet, brooding.

Then Pete said.

"What you remarks last night, Mr. Henry, about Apache Kid and this here outlaw bull, preys some on my mind; and if it's all the same to you, me being mushy and soft that-aways, I esteems it a favour if you allow that maybe I ain't needed here, and I ambles on and rides with the herd."

"Sure," said Henry. "I understand your sentiments; but this bull has annoyed me considerably; and I feel that I am getting even with him."

"Which I surely comprehends," said Pete. "A man can comprehend what he wouldn't do himself—him not being whetted up by no personal taunts and reproaches, such as that bull throws at you personal these last four years," and he rode on.

But that bull kept on in his great fight.

We came to the home ranch, where the herd had been held while the boys who were going on with it—to Lone Tree, not Black Kettle, a longer drive—had snatched a meal. We could see the dust of the herd ahead again. But there we halted, and when we halted the bull simply sagged down, as near prone as the ropes would allow. We thought it was the sudden stopping of the team that put him down so, he being braced against it all the way. But when he fell he merely lay panting, with rolling eyes, and distended neck.

"You go and eat," said Henry abruptly and, for the first time in my calling, I found that my work had taken the wire edge off my appetite. I ate but little, for the hoofs of that bull were worn like nails by his determined drag—worn nearly to the flesh by the friction of the trail; and I kept seeing him as I ate; and I was thinking of Apache Kid, and understanding Pete's request to be let off standing-by at that waggon tail.

When I tumbled out again I took the reins of my pony, and walked to the waggon to see what my orders might be—

whether to accompany the waggon further on, or what. Henry stood looking at the bull, it still prone.

"I reckon," he said, "that he is tender on the feet now, and if we loosen him, and let him get up, he will be amenable to reason and walk rationally into Lone Tree."

The teamster approached, and he and I loosened the ropes and let the bull free. Still he lay there. Henry took his quirt and, bending from the saddle, flailed his flanks—and the bull rose. There he stood, and Henry by him, considering. The teamster hauled the waggon aside, and I flicked the bull to urge him on; but there he stood.

And then we heard the teamster cry out an exclamation in the vernacular, and there came a whirl of dust, and a rush of a horseman, and a horse was pulled up beside us, pulled up sharp, and fell in the dust, dead, after two great sobbing gusts of breath that make the nostrils distend pathetically. The rider was on his feet, with wild eyes, his face covered with grit, and a gun in his hand.

"Give me a horse!" he cried, seeming to recognise no one. "Lively! A horse! A horse—or I scatter your brains."

"All right! All right, Apache!" cried Henry.

"All right, Apache!" I cried.

"A horse!" shouted Apache. "Lively! Or I eliminate this whole outfit. I have no use for humanity. Lacking what I want I simply wipe out the——"

"All right! Get a horse, you! Get a horse! We're your friends here, Apache Kid."

"Oh! All right! But I've heard that before."

"Say—couldn't you *cache* here? Are they after you?" said Henry.

"*Cache* here? What's this?" he looked round. "Oh sure——"

"The Triangle! Pueblo Wall! Henry and Stell owners—I'm Henry. Here you are! Here's a horse right now! But what's the matter with *caching* here?"

"They're too close."

"We'll say you rode through hell-bent—couldn't do anything before you were through."

Apache breathed like a hard-ridden bronco.

"Give me a gun," he said. "I have rifled this blamed thing."

"A gun! A gun! Get a gun! See—my cartridge belt—hanging on the—yes."

"Better do as Mr. Henry suggests, Apache," I said, "and *cache* here. We'll swear you rode through hell-for-leather."

He pointed at his horse lying dead on the track. The man who had rushed in for Mr. Henry's belt and gun dashed back, and held them out to Apache, who snatched them from him.

"By heck!" he said, "I'm about all in. And here they come!"

They did too. A great whirl of dust swept down on the ranch buildings. The pursuers were hot on Apache's track.

He gave a great inward suck of breath through his nostrils, and his chin went out, and his head up; he braced himself and seemed to grow inches—then dashed up from the waggon-track and stood with his back to the old Pueblo wall.

Down came the riders and wheeled, and the guns snapped. We saw Apache sag down on his knees. It looked as if he were praying, but, as we found later, both legs were shot.

"Not like that!" he screamed, and with a quick motion he flung himself with his legs to right, supporting himself on his left hand, and then up with the right, and his gun spoke, and one of the riders went down. Again his revolver spoke, and another fell.

It was too much for the Triangle boys. From the bunk house came a flash and a snap, a rifle snap. The Triangle had joined in with Apache. I had blood in my eyes. I pulled my gun, which I had worn all the while at the sub-camp, and flailed into the bunch of riders. Henry, who had dismounted, flopped on his belly to dodge the riders.

There was a fusilade of shots—from the Triangle bunk house; they rattled a tattoo.

Henry shouted:

"Give me that gun—I'm your boss—I order you."

"To hell with you!" I cried.

He darted away.

The dust of the riders slackened, and they threw off their horses and drew back, to fire standing behind their mounts.

"All in! All in! Quit firing boys!" I heard a yell, and ceased whaling into the crowd of horsemen, and looked around to the Pueblo wall—to see Apache, legs still out to right, with head hanging down, and body folded forward, his gun hand stretched.

The shots ceased. The dust fell. We looked from one to another. A man went over from the posse of Apache's pursuers and looked down on him. That was the signal for full cessation of hostilities.

Mr. Henry appeared again, our boys at his heels. The posse men came after their leader, who still stood by Apache.

"He's dead," said the leader.

Yuma Bill stepped forward.

"Then take off your hat," he said.

There was a falling back of all from the Apache Kid, who lay there with his chin in the sand. There was a great silence. And in it that black bull held up his head and:

"Moo-o-o-o-o!" he moaned.

Henry looked round. There stood the outlaw, with an inch, or less, of hoof, his head up, his neck distended. His head went down and he shook dust with his horns; he pawed a hoof, but the bellow was of pain.

"God damn that outlaw bull!" said Mr. Henry with a breaking voice, and he stepped over to it. "We release you," he said, and marching up close blew out its brains and stood aside.

"You can go home now—you fellows," he said, "you who came around here raising hell on this ranch as if you were a Dalton gang curving down on us, as if you were going to hold up the outfit, so that you put us all on the shoot. You take off your dead men. I have none of them here. And you leave the Apache Kid. He lies at the Triangle—pending inquiries."

And the posse did as it was bid by Mr. Henry—and retired, subdued; and we carried in Apache and laid him on Henry's cot.

That was the end of Apache Kid as well as I can tell it; and all I need say of him, lest I say too much, is that many a worse man has died in bed, with the wafer in his hand or a sky-scout exhorting.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EPILOGUE

My sorrow for the death of the Apache Kid, during the next few days, was a little balanced by a personal joy. For, so far from my uncle having ignored my letter to him, I received a reply—from my father. He was no longer bug-house, but as sound in his thought chambers as ever. My uncle had handed over my missive to him; and, so full of joy was my father at hearing of me again, that he ended the letter he wrote by return, by saying that he had already booked his passage through to Black Kettle, and would be at New York by the time I was reading.

He was surely as sane as any man I ever met; and his first words to me, when he stepped from the car at Black Kettle, and I pranced up and held his hand, were:

"Is this Will? Ah! Will—Will! I see you are a man!"

If this seems an egotistical note to end upon, I would remind any possible objectors (one in a hundred, I hope), of the cry my father gave when he went loco; and we don't live so much for our own approval as for the approval of some one to whom we are attached.

THE END

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SOME PRESS OPINIONS OF CARNIVAL By COMPTON MACKENZIE

PUNCH:

"After reading a couple of pages I settled myself in my chair for a happy evening, and thenceforward the fascination of the book held me like a kind of enchantment. I despair, though, of being able to convey any idea of it in a few lines of criticism. . . . As for the style, I will only add that it gave me the same blissful feeling of security that one has in listening to a great musician. . . . In the meantime, having recorded my delight in it, I shall put 'Carnival' upon the small and by no means crowded shelf that I reserve for 'keeps.'"

PALL MALL GAZETTE:

"The study of Jenny, a most fascinating heroine, reveals rare and penetrating insight into that baffling mystery, the heart of a girl, and in fine, 'Carnival' is among the striking literary triumphs of the season."

ATHENÆUM: [From a column notice.

"Mr. Mackenzie's second novel amply fulfils the promise of his first. . . . Its first and great quality is originality. The originality of Mr. Mackenzie lies in his possession of an imagination and a vision of life that are as peculiarly his own as a voice or a laugh, and that reflect themselves in a style which is that of no other writer. . . . A prose full of beauty."

MORNING POST:

"It certainly marks a big stride upwards in Mr. Mackenzie's career as a novelist. It is a genuine achievement."

OUTLOOK:

"In these days of muddled literary evaluations, it is a small thing to say of a novel that it is a great novel; but this we should say without hesitation of 'Carnival,' that not only is it marked out to be the leading success of its own season, but to be read afterwards as none but the best books are read."

SOME PRESS OPINIONS OF
The Passionate Elopement
By **COMPTON MACKENZIE**

WESTMINSTER GAZETTE:

"Mr. Mackenzie's book is a novel of genre, and with infinite care and obvious love of detail has he set himself to paint a literary picture in the manner of Hogarth. He is no imitator, he owes no thanks to any predecessor in the fashioning of his book. . . . Mr. Mackenzie recreates (the atmosphere) so admirably that it is no exaggeration to say that, thanks to his brilliant scene-painting, we shall gain an even more vivid appreciation of the work of his great forerunners. Lightly and vividly does Mr. Mackenzie sketch in his characters . . . but they do not on that account lack personality. Each of them is definitely and faithfully drawn, with sensibility, sympathy, and humour."

PALL MALL GAZETTE:

"'The Passionate Elopement' is an attempt, and a most successful one, to reproduce the life at an inland spa in the days of hoops, sedan-chairs, powder, patches, and quadrille. The reproduction is perfect; at the very first paragraph we feel transported a century and a half back into the past. . . . It is seldom indeed that we read a first novel that is so excellent. . . . Those who like good writing and a faithful picture of the England of Sheridan's day will find 'The Passionate Elopement' much to their taste."

MORNING POST:

"The reader of 'The Passionate Elopement' will have no hesitation in hailing its author, Mr. Compton Mackenzie, as a very promising recruit to the ranks of young novelists. It is a work of very real literary ability, and for a first novel unusual constructive powers. . . . Mr. Mackenzie is delicate in dialogue, imaginative in description."

TIMES:

"We are grateful to him for wringing our hearts with the 'tears and laughter of spent joys.'"

ENGLISH REVIEW:

"All his characters are real and warm with life. 'The Passionate Elopement' should be read slowly, and followed from the smiles and extravagance of the opening chapters through many sounding and poetical passages, to the thrilling end of the Love Chase. The quiet irony of the close leaves one smiling, but with the wiser smile of Horace Ripple who meditates on the colours of life."

SPECTATOR:

"As an essay in literary bravura the book is quite remarkable."

SUNDAY TIMES:

"Mr. Mackenzie has wrought an admirable piece of work, which has the daintiness of a piece of Dresden china and the polish of a poem by Mr. Austin Dobson."

GLASGOW NEWS:

"Fresh and faded, mocking yet passionate, compact of tinsel and gold is this little tragedy of a winter season in view of the pump room. . . . Through it all, the old tale has a dainty, fluttering, unusual, and very real beauty."

MARTIN SECKER, NUMBER FIVE JOHN STREET, ADELPHI

Transcriber's Note

Obvious punctuation errors were corrected.

The following printers errors were addressed.

Page 25 'arcoss' changed to 'across' (across the Atlantic)

Page 113 'deside' changed to 'beside' (into the dip beside them)

Page 158 'wasnt't' changed to 'wasn't' (Wasn't sure of the step)

Page 167 'bottoms' changed to 'bottoms' (long grass of the bottoms)

Page 269 'enthusiam' changed to 'enthusiasm' (work up no enthusiasm over the)

Page 290 'surreptiously' changed to 'surreptitiously' (surreptitiously pointed out to me)

Page 297 'intead' changed to 'instead' (centre instead of a cow-mans town)

Page 309 'on' changed to 'one' (He too not one step)

[End of *Hands Up!* by Frederick Niven]