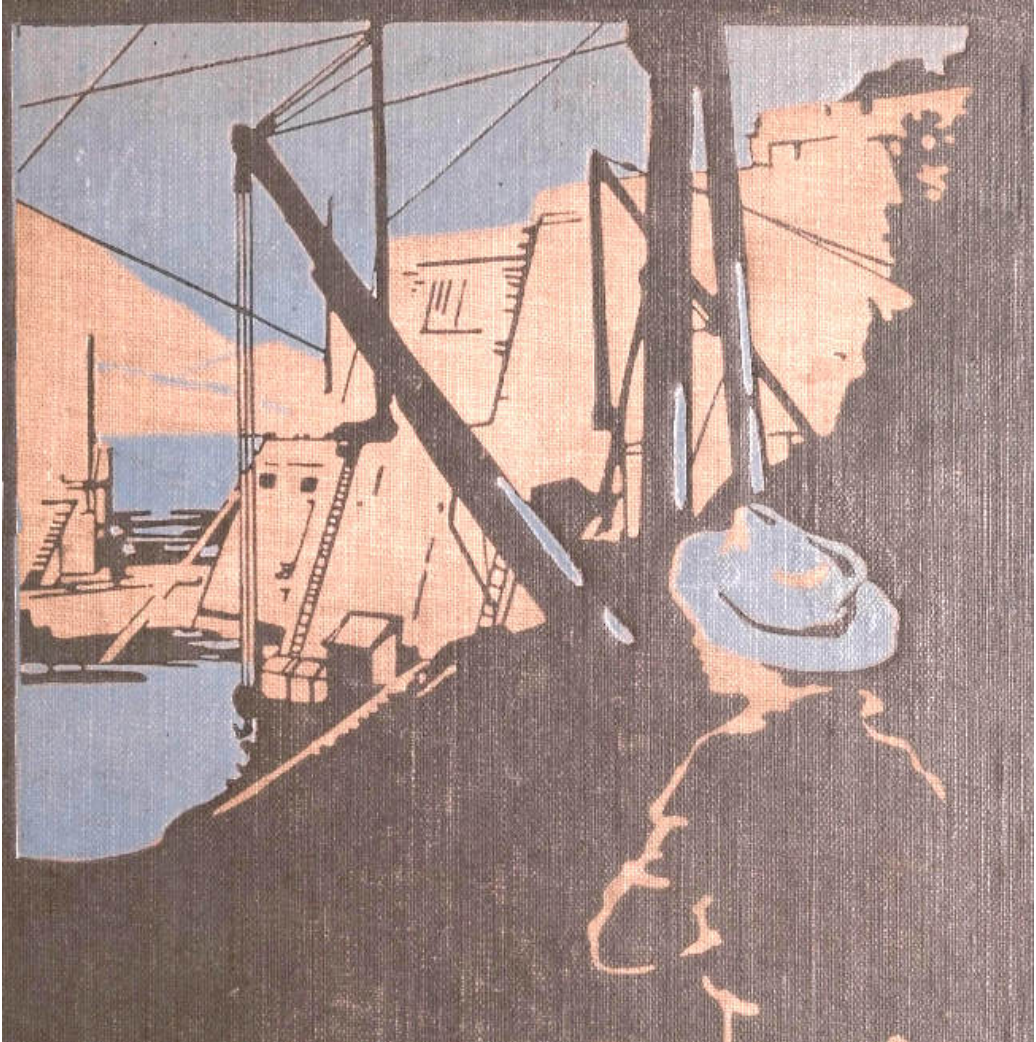

UNCLE SAM'S OUTDOOR MAGIC

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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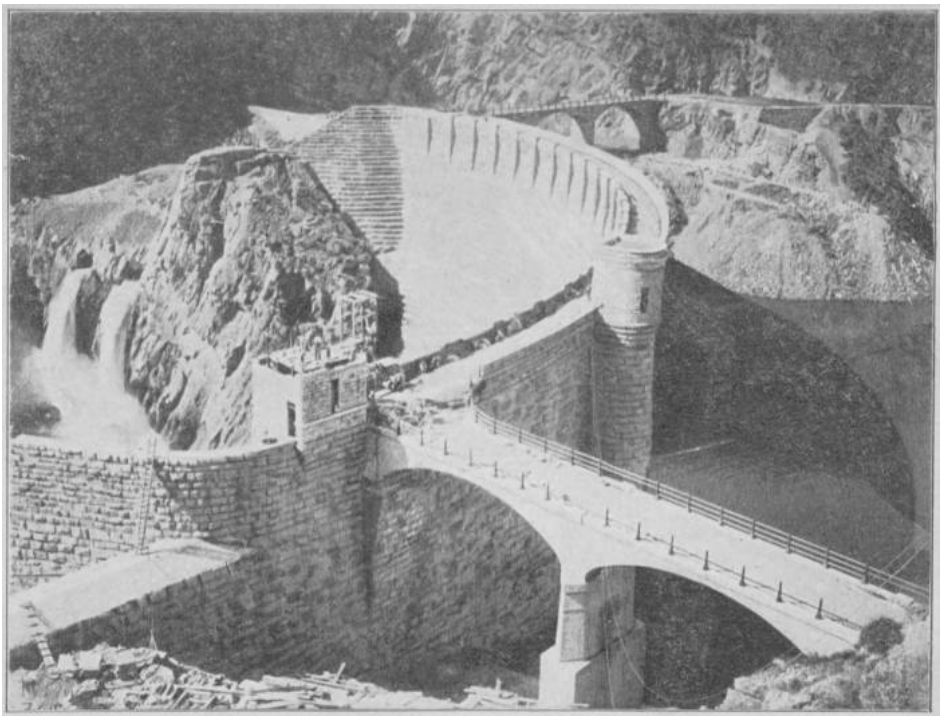

ROOSEVELT DAM, ARIZONA, JUST BEFORE ITS DEDICATION BY EX-PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT, MARCH 1911

UNCLE SAM'S OUTDOOR MAGIC

BOBBY CULLEN WITH THE
RECLAMATION WORKERS

BY
PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

ILLUSTRATED

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Away out West where the cactus grows
And the land is parched and dry;
Where stuff won't raise
And cows can't graze
And the sun is hot in the sky;
Where the sage-brush grows
And the sand-storm blows
And the drought it stifles and kills—
Old Uncle Sam, with his sleeves rolled up,
Is makin' a lake in the hills.

"I'll give it a drink of water," he said,
"And I'll do it right," said he;
"And I'll dig a ditch—
No droughts and sich
Can do as they like with me."
So he dug a ditch
Through all of which
The water began to flow,
And seeds were sowed
And crops were growed
In the land where the sage used to grow.

CHAPTER I
LITTLE DROPS OF WATER

Bobby Cullen emerged from the house, looked about him like a ground-hog in the spring, hoisted his school-books up under his arm, side-stepped a puddle in front of the porch, and reached the sidewalk just in time to fall in with Mr. Bronson, who was on his way to catch the eight forty-five.

"Ah, Robertus," said he, cheerily, "how was the vacation?"

Bobby's name was not Robertus, but people—and especially men—had a way of showing their liking for him by calling him all sorts of nicknames.

"Punk!" said Bobby.

"A fizzle, eh?" Mr. Bronson laughed.

"A drizzle, you mean. Gee! that was the limit!"

"Well, now, do you know, when I was a kid we used to like a rainy day; we'd get up in the attic—"

"Yes, but I bet you didn't like a rainy week!" interrupted Bobby. "Gee! I've been hearing that for ten days now—what my uncle did rainy days when he was a boy. It's got on my nerves."

His companion laughed again. "We always used to think of rainy spells as opportunities for reading. We used to hit up Jules Verne. Ever hit up Jules Verne, Bobby?"

"It's about the only place you can find any adventures nowadays—in books," said Bobby, cynically. "In those days there were stagecoaches and Indians and things; and fellows lived on farms and frontiers and places like that, and they didn't have so many parents and uncles and things. *Now* all there is is movie shows."

"And rain," added Mr. Bronson. "Look out for that puddle, Bobby; you should have worn rubbers."

"When it's clear," said Bobby, "all there is to do is to sit on the porch and read, and when it rains you stay indoors and get in people's way and listen to what they did when they were kids. That's one good thing about fellows in books—usually they don't have any parents, or their parents don't care where they go—like Frank Nelson and the Black Ranger."

"Yes, I guess those youngsters didn't have many restrictions."

"You said it," said Bobby.

They walked on together for a few minutes in silence.

"I like fire better than water. Don't you?" said Bobby, suddenly.

"Yes, a good fire's an interesting thing to see if you don't happen to own the building that's burning. But water causes great havoc now and then, too—there's quite a lot of punch to water at times. Take a shipwreck, now."

"Oh, sure, out on the ocean," said Bobby, as he planted his worn shoe plunk in the middle of another puddle; "but I mean rain. I've got no use for rain; it hasn't got any

adventure in it. And it always rains in vacation. Did you ever notice that?"

"So?" said Mr. Bronson. "Well, the spring will soon be here and then you'll be out canoeing; that's another good thing about water. You have a canoe, haven't you, Bobby?"

"No; never had one."

They parted at the corner, Mr. Bronson hurrying on to the station and Bobby plodding up the hill to school. Once Mr. Bronson turned and looked at the boy and smiled to himself as the receding figure hoisted his books higher under his arm and planked his gray shoe heedlessly in another puddle. Somehow Bobby always amused him; and this morning he felt a certain sympathy for the boy, perhaps because he had been getting in people's way all through that dull, disappointing vacation week; perhaps because, with a river fifty yards distant, he didn't have a canoe. Mr. Bronson had two boys of his own, both of whom had canoes and wore rubbers when it rained. Moreover, Mr. Bronson did not like Bobby's uncle, although he was not going to give Bobby the satisfaction of telling him so.

Whatever the reason, something prompted him to turn about just as the boy was starting to pick his way gingerly through the drier spaces of Blakely's field.

"Never mind, Robertus," he called, cheerily. "The worst is yet to come. Cheer up!"

They were prophetic words, as Bobby was to know before he was a day older.

He had some reason to feel disgruntled. From Good Friday until this second Monday morning it had rained incessantly straight through the Easter vacation, and the evidences of the week's storm were now apparent on every hand. The crossings were transformed into muddy swamps, the gutters were running rivers, the whole atmosphere was permeated with the odor of the wet earth, and Blakely's field, which afforded a short cut to the schoolhouse, was entirely submerged save for little hubbles here and there.

Upon one of these were clustered several boys who were sailing sticks about in the surrounding sea.

"Get off of that. You'll be late to school," said Bobby, as he pushed two protesting urchins into the water and passed on. He was in one of his worst moods.

In school the teacher "rubbed it in," as Bobby whispered to his nearest neighbor. She observed to the class that as it had rained during the whole vacation, she had no doubt the boys had availed themselves of the unusual opportunity to study and were prepared with their lessons. She represented the rain as a sort of blessing which had come to the boys most providentially in the Easter vacation.

"Gee! Can you beat that?" whispered Bobby.

"Was that Robert Cullen who spoke?" asked the teacher. "Stand up, Robert, and tell us the industries of Arizona and the chief facts concerning that State."

Bobby stood in the aisle, feeling the water in his sopping shoes, but made no response.

"Take your book, Robert, and read the answer you should have learned."

Bobby took up his book and read: "Arizona has a hot, dry climate. Rains are infrequent and the land is parched and barren. The sage-brush grows profusely. The

sun's heat is intense and almost continuous. The principal river is the Gila, which rises in the eastern part of the State and, flowing westerly, empties into the Colorado. The capital is Phoenix. Mining and sheep-raising are the chief industries. Farming is unsuccessful by reason of the lack of rainfall. Me for Arizona!" added Bobby, gratuitously.

"What is that?" asked the teacher.

"I said, 'Me for Arizona,'" repeated Bobby, recklessly.

"Indeed!" said the teacher. "I'm sorry I can't accommodate you, but I'll do the next best thing and try to bring you in closer touch with it. You may remain after school this afternoon and write the first sentence of your geography lesson three hundred times—one hundred and fifty for being unprepared and one hundred and fifty for your impertinence. Be seated."

"Yes'm," said Bobby.

He had said his little say and he was prepared to take his very big dose of medicine.

At noontime he ate his two sandwiches and a piece of cake in the class-room because his aunt found this easier than preparing his luncheon at home. And all the while he wriggled and squirmed his foot in his soaking shoe and tried vainly to make it comfortable.

When the class passed out after the afternoon session Bobby settled down, a lone figure in the middle of the big, empty room, to pay the penalty of his recklessness.

Arizona has a hot, dry climate.

He wrote until he had filled several sheets with sprawling repetitions of the awful sentence. Then he took them to the teacher's desk and waited while she counted the sentences and credited him with forty-seven. Back he went to his desk and, resting his head wearily on his left hand, began again.

Arizona has a hot, dry climate.

His third trip to the teacher's desk netted him a credit of one hundred and seventy-four sentences.

"Do you still wish to go to Arizona?" asked the teacher, as she counted the sentences.

"No'm."

"Did you ever read the story of the man without a country, Robert?"

"No'm," said Bobby.

"He was an American sailor," said Miss Arnold, "who cursed his country and said he hoped he might never see it again. So they took him at his word and kept him on the ocean, and he died without ever seeing his country. Suppose that when you said, 'Me for Arizona,' we had taken you at your word and sent you away from your friends and parents—"

"My parents are dead," said Bobby.

"Well, then, from your uncle who takes care of you."

“I wouldn’t mind being alone,” said Bobby. “The only reason I wouldn’t want to go to Arizona is because it makes me thirsty.”

“Makes you thirsty?”

“Writing about the hot, dry climate so much.”

He moistened his lips with his tongue, and Miss Arnold, looking sharply at his flushed face and tousled hair, seemed almost at the point of weakening and commuting his punishment to two hundred sentences. But Miss Arnold was not a quitter, and Bobby went back to his desk, where, after sneezing once or twice, he fell to again on what he considered his “baby punishment.”

It was considerably after four o’clock when he laid down his blunted pencil, having written *Arizona has a hot, dry climate* for the three hundredth time. The dreadful words were beating in his brain, his head was aching, and he felt uncomfortable and hot and stuffy—like Arizona.

“Now, if you are ready,” said Miss Arnold, “you may recite the lesson in geography.”

Bobby rose, stood in the aisle, snuffled, and began: “Arizona has a hot, dry climate. Rains are infrequent and the land is parched and barren,” etc., etc.

The teacher was already gathering up her papers and her fancy pen-wiper and her mottled glass paper-weight before he had finished. The session had been rather longer than she had expected it would be, and she had missed a pleasant afternoon party.

It is a pity that Bobby could not have known that, for it might have afforded him some satisfaction.

CHAPTER II
BOBBY HAS HIS WISH

Bobby took his belated way down the hill toward home. He still sullenly maintained his wish to be alone in the world, although he hoped never to see Arizona nor to hear of it again. He could not rid his mind of those dreadful words, the very thought of which seemed to stifle and suffocate him; and to make it worse, he was on the verge of a cold.

The house of Bobby's uncle was close by the river and separated from it only by a large field. It was a simple little cottage, in very poor repair, for Mr. Clausen had always found it difficult to make two ends meet—so difficult indeed that it seemed to Bobby as if the two ends were never within a mile of each other, and the space between filled up with debts and arguments and bickerings, just as several of the broken windows were filled up with rags.

Mr. Clausen's business was somewhat varied. He kept chickens and sold eggs; he had mushrooms growing in flat boxes in the cellar; he solicited subscriptions for a farm journal; and when he had nothing else to do, which was about two-thirds of the time, he sat in the kitchen and played an accordion.

Bobby had lived with his aunt and uncle almost ever since he could remember. His father had died when he was a very little boy, and he remembered something of the life which he and his mother had spent together afterward. It was a pleasant life, in which he had done pretty much as he pleased. Then his mother died and Bobby remembered being driven by Mr. Bronson in his buggy, over to Bridgeboro, where there was a river. The memory of his mother's death was fresh in his mind at the time, and curiosity about his new foster-parents was not lacking; but from the moment when his future home was determined the thought uppermost in his mind was that he was going where there was a river. But sometimes when the floods came he had heard his uncle express a lazy man's wish that he could move to a "hot, dry climate," and he had even heard him mention Arizona.

The Clausen cottage was, indeed, as near to the river as any boy could wish, for it was at the end of one of the streets which fizzled out in the marshland bordering the stream. Just at the point where the marshland ceased to be marsh and became more or less dry land, stood the Clausen cottage. The river was about fifty yards distant, and the edge of the marsh about twenty yards distant. You could tell the Clausen cottage by the piece of brown paper which had replaced the glass in the kitchen window. There was also an "encumbrance" on the cottage, and there had been a time when Bobby had searched diligently for this, thinking that it might be some architectural feature or novelty, until he learned from the disputations of his aunt and uncle that it had something to do with money which Mr. Clausen ought to pay but never did pay.

As Bobby entered the house on this particular afternoon his aunt greeted him with her customary word of warning. She was like a signal in his path, indicating what was ahead of him. But his mood this afternoon was too sullen for her remarks to make any impression upon him. He was so thoroughly disgusted with his vacation, with the day's

experience, with everything in general, that he felt his fondest dream would be realized if he could be alone in the world like the Black Ranger, or even in Arizona, despite its hot, dry climate.

"Where have you been, Bobby?" she asked, not unkindly. "Your uncle has been looking for you since three o'clock. You'd better go right down; he's in the cellar. Things are in a dreadful state. You should have been home two hours ago. You've only yourself to blame; you'd better go right down."

Heedless of this ominous hint, Bobby descended the dark, narrow stairs and presently became aware of a condition which he might have anticipated. The cellar was flooded. The entire lower step of the stairs was under water, and his uncle's precious mushroom-boxes were floating about clumsily. Mr. Clausen, in shirtsleeves and high rubber boots, was standing on a grocery box close to one of the windows, manipulating the dilapidated galvanized-iron pump which, first and last, had pumped water enough out of the Clausen cellar to make a lake.

Bobby had never seen it like this before. The week of incessant rain would naturally have caused high tides, but the clearing, coming with the full moon, had brought the water clear up over the marsh; it was now coming into the cellar through the cold-air box of the furnace, and it was evident that if flood-tide were not already reached another hour's rise would submerge the adjacent land and bring the water level with the sills of the cellar windows.

"Where've you been?" demanded Mr. Clausen, pausing and turning indignantly to Bobby.

"I was kept in."

"Kept in till five o'clock?"

"No. I stopped at Bronson's; they have a flood there, too."

"What were you kept in for?"

"For not knowing my geography and for saying I'd like to go to Arizona."

"And do you suppose I'm going to stand here pumping my arm off while you're loafing up at Bronson's?"

"I didn't know the cellar was flooded."

"You knew it would be."

"I didn't think about it, but if I *had* thought about it I'd have plugged up the air-box opening under the porch."

This remark had the effect of a red flag before a bull. Bobby, in his customary humor, would not have said such a thing, but his sense of accumulated wrong and dissatisfaction made him reckless of consequences, and he knew that his uncle would not miss the sting of this guarded shot. Mr. Clausen, like most lazy and inefficient men, was morbidly touchy on the point of his shiftlessness, and Bobby's reference to a small piece of work which any intelligent person living so near the river would naturally do in the spring, precipitated the climax of the wrath which had been brewing all the afternoon.

"Oh, you would, would you?" demanded Mr. Clausen, sneeringly.

"Yes, I would," said Bobby, with sullen frankness.

"And I must not only do the work that belongs to *you*, and that any boy that has a home given him free and nothing said ought to be glad to do, but I must hear my duty told me, must I?"

"I didn't say you ought to do it; I said *I'd* have done it," Bobby corrected.

"Then why *didn't* you do it?" roared his uncle.

"Because I didn't think of it," said Bobby. For a moment he thought his uncle would strike him. "Do you want me to pump?" he asked.

"Do you think I want you to stand there and watch me?" retorted his uncle, vacating the grocery box. "You pump now till the tide turns, if it ever does, and we'll see about your telling me my duty—we'll settle that when you've finished—and whether your home is furnished you so you can loaf up at Bronson's. Maybe you'd like to live at Bronson's!"

"I would," said Bobby, sullenly.

"Well, sir," said his uncle, icily, "when you get through pumping you come upstairs and we'll talk things over. If you stop pumping I can hear you."

"I ain't going to stop—not till I have to."

"Know what's waiting for you, hey?"

Bobby was not afraid of what was awaiting him; it had awaited him too often, and his uncle's vulgar inference as to why he would stick to his work made him indignant and ashamed.

"I meant I'd stick to it as long as I could—because I don't feel good. I got a cold, and I feel hot—and it makes me dizzy. If I got something coming to me I'd rather have it now and have it over with. I'm not scared of it."

Bobby was so honest that it stuck out all over him, and what his uncle called impertinence and insolence was usually simply the expression of his downright straightforwardness. He had a way of speaking frankly and bluntly about the whippings he received which sometimes nettled his uncle.

Mr. Clausen stamped up the stairs into the kitchen, where he forbade his wife, who had overheard the conversation, to go down and interrupt the boy, even on the pretext of giving him a cup of coffee.

Bobby began to pump, pump, pump, as he had done so many times before. The little boy who had come to Bridgeboro in high glee because there was a river there had come to find that it meant only work for him. Most of the Bridgeboro boys had canoes; their fathers were all members of the boat club; there were fishing and motor-boating and swimming; and already they were talking of the Commodore's Run, which was to open the boating season in a week or two. Bobby could not go on this because his uncle had been dropped from the club and now denounced the club and forbade him to accept any of its hospitalities.

"If I ever hear of your going near the boat-house or taking any favors from that crowd, I'll skin you," Mr. Clausen had said. So Bobby eschewed the tempting boat club, just as he eschewed the Scouts because young Mr. Sprague, the real-estate man, was Scoutmaster and was not on friendly terms with Mr. Clausen on account of some mortgage or other. Yet all these people appeared to like Bobby himself, which seemed

strange to him, for he had grown up to believe that a man's enemies were also his son's enemies, and he had never quite overcome his surprise that Mr. Bronson treated him in such a spirit of comradeship, when all the while Mr. Clausen owed Mr. Bronson some money and was forever denouncing him.

So it befell that when Bobby had a little time to himself, which was not often, he was still barred from many of the pleasures which the other boys enjoyed. He had come to hate the river, and even the springtime, for that season, which meant the painting of canoes, the overhauling of balky engines, and the hoisting of bright colors upon the boat-club cupola, meant only monotonous pumping for him. When the high tides came and the boys flocked down to see the larger boats launched, Bobby was usually in the cellar, and he would watch his schoolmates and companions enviously from the cellar windows as they went down the raised board-walk across the swamp to the boat-house. By hanging around they were pretty sure to get free rides in the "try-outs."

As he pumped he realized that the pumping would continue now more or less for a couple of weeks. Then he would have to get out the collection of trusty old barrel-staves and lay them along in the mud outside from the front door to the back door and from the back door to the woodshed.

On this particular black Monday the water was higher in the cellar than he had ever before known it to be, but undoubtedly the tide was near to flood and would recede before the level of the windows was reached. A good deal of water was percolating through the stone foundation, however, and a good deal more coming in through the air-box.

As Bobby pumped his head seemed to swim, so dizzy was he, and he was hot and uncomfortable. If he needed any proof of his theory that no fun was to be had with water, here it was in abundance, for even after the rain had ceased and the bright spring sunshine come at last, the water still bothered him and made him weary and discouraged.

"I was right, anyway," he said to himself, as he pumped away. "And that will be a good argument for Mr. Bronson when I see him. Gee! but up there it's better—*that* kind of a flood."

It *was* rather more interesting—the flood up at Bronson's—than this accumulation in the gloomy cellar with the mushroom-boxes floating aimlessly about. They were getting some fun out of it at Bronson's, too, and it would never reach the house, that was sure, because the ditch that wound its way through the rhododendron bushes would carry off most of the water before it got that far.

There was an idea, thought Bobby, as he worked the long pump-handle up and down—there was a bully idea! His uncle had been talking of getting the little three-horse-power gasoline engine which Warren had discarded from his boat and using it to pump in the cellar—sometime or other—if Warren would let him pay for it at some future time. Why wouldn't it be a good idea to dig a ditch along the side of the house so that the water would flow into it and be carried off to the sewer, maybe, or back to the river?

This idea, which he believed wholly original, struck him so forcibly that he resolved to make a venture upon it. He would pause for a few minutes' rest, go up into

the kitchen for a drink of water (for he was very thirsty), get his leather glove, for the pump-handle was blistering his hand, and tell his uncle about his idea.

He found his aunt and uncle in the kitchen. Mr. Clausen was sitting with his feet in the oven, and it was evident to Bobby that his aunt had been championing him, and that his uncle was in a very disagreeable mood.

"I got an idea," said Bobby. "It ain't what I came up for—I came up to get a drink and to give my hand a rest for a minute."

"Does your head ache, Robby?" asked his aunt, looking at his flushed face.

"It don't exactly ache, but I was thinking if sometime I dug a ditch along outside the house like the Scouts have when they go camping—that's one thing that put it in my head—Roy Blakely told me about how they dig drain ditches to keep the water from getting into the tents, and up at Bronson's—"

"Have you pumped all that water out?" asked Mr. Clausen, in ominous disregard of Bobby's great idea.

"Let him tell us," urged his aunt, weakly. "Yes, Robby?"

It was characteristic of Bobby that his sullenness should have all but vanished in the light of his sudden inspiration, and that he should have forgotten even the threatened punishment in his generous anxiety to lay his idea before his uncle. And now, as he stood, with his enthusiasm somewhat dashed by Mr. Clausen's icy tone, his sopping trousers clinging to his legs, plainly sick, and embarrassed at the unexpected turn of affairs, he was a pitiable figure. He was quick to take the little grain of encouragement his aunt offered, and he smiled at her and began again.

"I was—"

"Have you finished pumping?" interrupted Mr. Clausen, coldly.

"N-no, I haven't— I just— I'm going down again—"

Mr. Clausen withdrew his feet slowly from the oven, pushed his chair back, arose leisurely, and said, "Go up-stairs."

"Let him tell us," urged Mrs. Clausen.

"Go up-stairs," Mr. Clausen repeated, ignoring her.

Mrs. Clausen had learned from bitter experience not to cross her husband. More than once she had flared up, only to find that her protests made Bobby's lot all the harder.

"I'd—I'd—rather have it now, anyway," he said to her, "because then I can pump without having to think about it—and, anyway, it gives me a rest—kind of."

He went manfully up the stairs, his uncle following silently, and left his aunt wringing her hands and crying in the kitchen.

The little "rest" was soon over. Bobby came down the stairs drawing quick, spasmodic breaths, and descended into the cellar. Mr. Clausen walked grimly over to the kitchen cupboard and stood something in a corner within it. Presently the rattling of the loose old pump-handle could be heard again.

When it was nearly dark Bobby pushed up the slanting bulkhead doors and stole quietly out to look about him. Evidently no one was in the kitchen. His head was aching cruelly, his hand was blistered, his arm stiff and weary, and a sense of

humiliation was upon him, not from the thought of anything wrong that he had done, but because he had been the victim of a whipping and he hated to face his aunt and uncle afterward. He always felt that way; he did not know why.

Moreover, he was conscious of another feeling which he had not known so much as a little boy. His uncle's continual reference to his dependence, to the fact that he was "given a home," were beginning to sting him and, together with the frequent punishments, had begun to touch his pride. He was more stoical about the whippings than he used to be, but they left him with a sense of shame which he could not overcome.

And now, as he stepped wearily out into the waning light, all the disappointment and sense of wrong of that trying week, that long-anticipated Easter vacation, descended upon him. He had done nothing so very wrong, but he had had endless trouble.

"Cracky, but that hurts!" said he, shaking his blistered hand. "There's some kind of stuff—some kind of ointment—the Scouts use. I wish I knew what it was."

As he looked about him he realized that he had never before seen such a tide. A little way down-stream toward the boat club the whole field was flooded, and the willow-trees on the club-house lawn seemed to be growing out of the water. Bobby noticed that the floats were higher than the boat-house porch, so that the gangways slanted up to them rather than down. The rectangular "slip" in which the launches floated in their outriggers was entirely obliterated, and the water, encroaching up as far as the tennis-courts, was lapping against the blocks under the boats which were not yet launched. The gangway which extended across the marsh from the boat-house up to River Street looked like a floating pontoon, the water so high beneath it that its supporting timbers were not visible. If the water kept on rising for another half-hour, Bobby thought, the boat-house would be cut off from approach except by rowboat.

Along this walk, which now formed the sole connecting link between the boat-house and the town, a group of club members, with the usual trailing accompaniment of boys, was wending its way homeward. They were evidently taking the high tide as a matter of course, though never before had any of them got their feet wet walking on the wooden gangway.

Bobby, looking from the open bulkhead of the cellar, could hear their laughter as they passed along. There was Tom Van Arlen, with two boys after him, carrying gasoline-cans. There were Wood and Blakely laboring under an inverted canoe, their heads buried in its interior. There was Warren, with a long boathook and a can, probably a paint-can, on the end of it, trudging along like a peddler with his pack. As Bobby looked some one in the rear stooped and, rising, threw a saturated bailing-sponge at one of the boys ahead. Bobby could hear them laughing as they passed out of sight.

Something, he did not know what, made his eyes fill. Perhaps it was just because he was unhappy and disappointed and not feeling good, but it was odd that this boy who could be as stoical as an Indian under physical pain often found himself crying for some reason which he could not explain. In any event, as he looked at the colors on the boat-house cupola, the emblem seemed bespangled, because his eyes were full of tears,

and he saw something else, too, which made him rub his eyes with his sleeve to get a clearer look.

A little apart from the other boats and closer to the slip stood Mr. Wentworth's big cruising launch. Only the upper part of its blocking could be seen, for the land on which it stood was quite submerged, and as Bobby looked at it the bow, which faced him, seemed to wabble a little.

He blinked his eyes and wiped them with his sleeve again and looked hard and long. Sure enough, it was no trick of imagination—Wentworth's boat was, not exactly moving, but just staggering a little in its blocks. It was still confined, but it was floating.

It would be hard to say just what prompted Bobby to start across that flooded marsh toward Wentworth's boat. His first thought was to find the anchor, if he could, and cast it into the submerged land to prevent the boat from drifting away. But I suspect, too, that he was glad of an excuse to get away from the house and to be by himself, whatever the consequences. His mood was reckless and perhaps this heedless errand offered him the chance he wanted. Perhaps he was curious to see the inside of that wonderful launch, though, goodness knows, he might have had a hundred rides in it if it hadn't been for his uncle. For Mr. Wentworth called Bobby "Bobboriums," and was in the habit of plucking the boy's hat from his tously head and handing it to him politely when he met him, which was a sign that he liked him immensely.

CHAPTER III
WENTWORTH'S BOAT

Anyway, it was the beginning of Bobby's adventures. He stole cautiously through his aunt's little kitchen garden, around behind the woodshed, and went plodding ankle-deep across the edge of the marsh, heading for the point where the board-walk terminated at River Street.

By a circuitous route he could reach this end of the long plank-walk and, traversing it, could come to a point within twenty feet of Wentworth's boat.

Reaching the point on the board-walk nearest to Wentworth's boat, he put his foot cautiously from the flooring to see how deep the water was, and found that it was above his knees. He rolled his trousers up, removed his shoes—though they could scarce have been wetter than they already were—waded through the intervening space to the boat, and, grabbing the combing, vaulted up to the deck and let himself down into the cockpit. Wentworth's boat rocked perceptibly as he did so.

He found himself in an enchanted spot. He had often wondered what the inside of those cruising launches looked like, and now he could satisfy his curiosity undisturbed. He slid back the roof-hatch, rolled open the door, and entered the tiny cabin.

Mr. Wentworth had been beforehand with his spring preparations, and the launch was not only freshly painted, but lately stocked as well, for there were canned goods in abundance which had not yet been put in the lockers; there was a complete set of aluminum cooking-utensils strewn on one of the seats; there was a tent rolled up and all sorts of provisions and camping paraphernalia. The cabin was very inviting with its chintz curtains at the portholes, its cushioned locker seats, and the little oil-stove in the corner.

Bobby could feel the boat rocking and knocking against its side supports occasionally, and he knew that if he was to moor it no time was to be lost. It was almost dark, but, groping about in the seat lockers, he found a folding anchor with plenty of rope coiled about it. He opened the anchor and locked it, then, climbing over the cabin to the little space of forward deck, he plunged it into the water, letting out ten or twelve feet of rope, in case the tide should still rise a little, which he thought most unlikely.

Then he returned to the cabin, for, although his errand was accomplished, he was in no hurry to go home. He knew his uncle would make him continue the futile work of pumping, and he felt that he could pump no more that day. Here, in this cozy cabin his fond wish to be all alone in the world was, for the time being, realized. He saw the lights appearing in the Bridgeboro houses, and he could distinguish the one in his uncle's kitchen. He thoroughly enjoyed the sensation of being alone here in this little home, surrounded by water, with no one to bother him and remind him that he lived on charity. Even the lonely glory of the Black Ranger could not compare with this!

He looked for matches, but could find none, although the usual riding-lights and a hand-lantern were in the cabin and filled with oil. He lifted a canvas tarpaulin and there was the engine. The fresh aluminum paint on its cylinders and fly-wheel shone in the

gathering darkness. He did not know whether the motor had been overhauled and put in adjustment, but he had not lingered hours in Bradley's garage to no purpose, and he turned on the gas, closed the switch, gave the wheel a few swings and threw it over. There was no "kick," but the buzzing of the coil told him that the batteries were alive and that the ignition apparatus was in order.

Bobby knew perfectly well that he had no right to take these liberties with another person's boat, but his mood was still reckless and he quieted whatever misgivings he had with the thought that if it had not been for him Mr. Wentworth's boat might have been lifted out of its supports and floated away altogether.

He brought the wheel slowly up to compression and heard the buzzing again. Turning off the switch, he removed the wire from one of the plugs, opened the hand-lantern and laid the wick against the plug. Then he closed the switch and began rubbing the end of the wire against the plug so that it touched the wick as it passed. Presently his lantern was burning cheerily and casting a pleasant glow about the little cabin. That was something that even Robinson Crusoe couldn't have done.

Bobby would not have undertaken to run any boat, but, seeing that there was a clutch, he saw no reason why he should not start the engine and get a little warmth. So he hauled the clutch over to neutral, turned the wheel over, and, sure enough, after two or three turns, he got an explosion and she chugged merrily away, running like a dream.

Pretty soon the muffler was hot, and he removed his shoes and socks and laid them on it. It was warm and pleasant in the little cabin, the rocking of the boat and the sense of remoteness pleased him, and it was easy enough to forget that the launch would pretty soon settle prosily down again, and that he could walk back across the board-walk and so home.

He lay down on the cushioned locker seat to rest and pulled the tarpaulin over him.

"Gee! this is great!" he said.

The next thing Bobby knew he was awakened suddenly by a loud crash and a jar which threw him clear off the locker seat and upset and extinguished the lantern. As he scrambled up and groped aimlessly in his half-sleep, another jar knocked him off his feet and he stumbled over the engine. The wheel was still and the cylinders cold. It was as dark as pitch outside, and within his feet encountered something at every move he made.

At first he thought he had been dreaming and was just trying to get his bearings and remember where he was when there came a great sound of ripping and tearing; he was conscious of being swung around, and the next thing he knew he was wallowing amid all sorts of things on the floor of the cabin.

Then he realized that he was wide awake and in Wentworth's boat. The launch was lunging this way and that, for all the world like a balky horse straining at its bridle; then, suddenly, there was more crashing near at hand and the boat seemed to find sudden release as he heard the sound of tearing very near to him.

Not daring to venture out into the cockpit, he opened the forward port and felt about the deck to see if the anchor rope was fast on its cleat; but the whole cleat—as nearly as he could make out—had been wrenched away and there was no sign of rope. A few

yards away he could see a long, shadowy object moving heavily, and just at that minute a realization came to him of what had happened. If the long, shadowy object was the wrecked board-walk, then Wentworth's boat had somehow gotten past it, the anchor had caught in it, halted the rushing boat and pulled it around, tearing the cleat away. Even as Bobby strained his eyes trying to distinguish the long, swaying mass, the boat rushed away from it, knocked against a great solid structure close by, and went driving on in its mad career.

He could see the lights of Bridgeboro, and as he looked many of them were extinguished, one after another and in groups. It seemed odd that all the people of the town should be going to bed at the same time.

Then he heard voices, thin and spent by the distance, but crystal-clear across the water, and in strange contrast to the pandemonium about him. The voices sounded uncanny in the darkness, and the distance seemed to rob them of excitement. Bobby distinctly heard some one far off say, "Can we make the hill?"

The lights grew dimmer and fewer, the voices hardly distinguishable, and suddenly the boat struck something with a terrific impact and stood plunging and rocking like a mad thing; then there was a sound of scraping beneath him, the bow went up, Bobby was precipitated against the after bulkhead; for a few minutes the boat seemed to be on a pivot, then water came rushing into the cockpit and cabin, again she seemed to extricate herself, and there was the sense of freedom and of rushing madly onward.

Once the launch rushed past a building which was canted over with its roof no higher than the boat's cabin, and which was bobbing and lurching. Voices came from it, and some one cried, "The bridge, it was the bridge!"

A little farther on a frantic voice called, very near as it seemed, for some one to throw a rope. Afterward Bobby thought the man had tried to hail him; but his dismay and fright prevented him from answering.

Getting a light from the ignition spark was out of the question amid the lunging and tumult, and Bobby could only cling to whatever stationary thing offered and wait, breathless and panic-stricken, for the next crash.

Presently the boat seemed to move more tranquilly, though still at a rapid rate, and then, at last, there was a sensation of dragging, the hull canted over the least bit and the mad race was over—Wentworth's boat stood still.

For a few minutes Bobby waited, his nerves on edge, for another wild rush or another deafening crash, but as none came he gathered his wits, stumbled across the flooded cabin floor, and clambered upon the locker, where he sat, still fearing that something more might happen.

But nothing more did happen. Wentworth had always boasted that his boat would stand up against pretty nearly anything, and he came within half an inch of being right. But if she was not a physical wreck as a consequence of her frantic race, she seemed to be suffering the sequel in a complete nervous collapse, for she kept settling and canting more and more, as if with utter exhaustion, until the locker on which Bobby sat inclined so much that he slid from it and sought the one on the opposite side. This was so much lower than the other that for a moment he thought the boat was sinking and that presently the water would come through the port-hole. When a few minutes more

elapsed and it did not, he threw the port open and reached down outside. The first thing his hand encountered was some marsh grass, which he pulled up.

"Jiminy crinks!" said he, clutching it with a feeling of relief. "This is some adventure, believe me. I—I had a ride in Wentworth's boat, anyway."

That one little handful of marsh grass made him regard the whole experience simply as an adventure.

CHAPTER IV
THE SCOUT LAW

When the day broke Bobby went out into the cockpit and looked about him. The boat stood careened in the midst of a large area of marshland. Several hundred yards distant the swollen river flowed briskly, but not a familiar sign in all the country round about could Bobby see.

He looked up the river for the railroad bridge, but no bridge was to be seen. He had certainly not been carried up the river, for there was no marshland above Bridgeboro, and how could a rising tide have carried him down? He had no doubt that the tide, phenomenal in its volume, was responsible for this. It had carried him several hundred yards farther ashore than the highest tide known and had left him marooned—marooned as completely as ever pirate marooned a hapless captive, and Robinson Crusoe on his desert island was hardly more alone than Bobby seemed now.

He had regarded such things as this as being part and parcel of story-books only, but here he was, and how to make his whereabouts known was a puzzle.

He looked about him again. Far up the river was a steeple which he thought might be in Bridgeboro, but if so the boat-house cupola should have been near it, and there was no boat-house cupola to be seen. You could always pick out the higher buildings in Bridgeboro all the way down to Ferrytown, but he could distinguish none of them now, though he thought he recognized some of the familiar residences in the fashionable hill section. But if that were Bridgeboro, where was the rest of it?

He opened the sea-cock and let out the water which had washed into the boat. Then he opened a can of salmon and, spreading it on some crackers, made such a breakfast as he could. The morning was chilly, so he started the engine and dried out his clothing and then he tried to tidy up the little cabin. He was feeling better than he had the previous evening, and he was not greatly concerned about his predicament. He could probably make himself heard in some way when he really wished to do so, and, having eaten, and dried his clothing, he settled himself to see what the day would bring forth.

After a while boats began to pass on the river, some of them going slowly along close to shore, as if in search of something.

It was getting on toward afternoon, and Bobby was beginning to think that he had better raise his voice to summon help unless he wished to prolong his adventure through another night (a plan which he had seriously considered) when he noticed a rowboat pushing up through the rushes toward him. Sometimes it was quite hidden among the reeds, then it would become visible again, and after a while it reached the area of shorter growths and he could see that its progress was becoming very difficult.

Presently it became necessary to ship the oars altogether and pole the boat, and after what seemed an interminable season of tedious and arm-racking work it was near enough for Bobby to recognize it as a flat-bottomed punt containing Mr. Wentworth and one of the Bronson boys.

"Hello, Will!" called Bobby. "Where am I at, anyway? Where did *you* come from? I'm marooned."

"Hello, Bob!" called Mr. Wentworth. "Have a good ride?" His tone was pleasant, but sober, too, and, although he did not seem to be angry, Bobby somehow had a feeling that something was wrong. "You're a hundred miles from nowhere," said Mr. Wentworth, as they pushed the boat over the submerged land and came alongside.

"I—I went down to try and anchor your boat," said Bobby, "because I thought it was going to float away, and I fell asleep in it. I wasn't going to touch the salmon and things, but I had to this morning because I got hungry."

"That's all right, Bob," said Mr. Wentworth. "You're welcome to the stuff. Old battle-ship behaved pretty well, hey?"

"Oh, she's a peacherino!" said Bobby, with genuine enthusiasm. "You said it!"

"All right. Love me, love my boat; that's the kind of a fellow I am. She's all I've got left, Bob. Guess I'll have to camp in her."

"Is Bridgeboro up there?" asked Bobby, pointing. "I'm all balled up. What happened, anyway?"

"Dam up at Milton busted," said Will Bronson.

"Get in, Bob," said Mr. Wentworth. "We'll leave her here till to-morrow."

As they poled slowly back through the tall grass Bobby told his story.

"I had a ride in her, anyway," he said in conclusion, "and that's what I've always wanted. Gee! she's a pippin! I guess my uncle will be mad, all right, but, anyway, I had the ride. Even if he licks me I won't mind, because I've had the ride."

Will Bronson looked significantly at Mr. Wentworth, and Mr. Wentworth frowned at him slightly.

"He won't lick you, Bob," said he.

When they had come into the river Bobby began to see strange sights. There was a house canted over right in the middle of the stream, its windows broken and its roof fallen in. The railroad bridge was a mass of tangled iron and broken wood. As they rowed up-stream he could see the shores and adjacent land strewn with all sorts of wreckage.

The first familiar object they reached was the boat-house. It was an utter ruin, its porch and understructure quite gone, and it lay sideways, toppled over like a box.

They made a landing near by and started up through the devastated town, and then the full realization of what had happened came to Bobby. This very part of town where he had lived was scarcely recognizable, and he trudged along with his two companions, bewildered and dismayed, but saying very little.

"You see, Bob," Mr. Wentworth said, "the old dam up at Milton gave way. The flood hit us at about two this morning. There are only a few of us left, Bob." This was by way of breaking it gently to Bobby, and he began to understand.

"That—isn't that where my house was?" asked he.

"'Bout there. See that shed? That was brought all the way down from Milton and cast up here. Let's cut across here. You recognize this, Bob? This used to be River Street."

They started to pick their way across a mushy area on a crazy sidewalk, some of its flagstones standing almost on end, and on either hand were half-recognizable buildings and piles of debris. Outside of one house was a pile of window-shutters, and there were people crowding into the doorway, while a man tried vainly to form them in line. Two men came silently toward the house, carrying a shutter with something on it. The people made way for them to pass within.

"Is—is my aunt and uncle—" Bobby began.

"There are a lot of folks missing, Bob. They may have made the hill; there's no telling. You'll just have to wait."

"You're coming up to our house, Bob," said Will Bronson. "My mother said if we found you to bring you; but, jiminy! we had no idea you were in that boat. You had a narrow escape. What do you say we paddle up to Milton to-morrow and take a pike around? I'll show you how to paddle. There's no school for a while, anyway."

But Bobby was too shocked to answer. He had often wished that he were all alone in the world, and only the night before he had given way to that feeling; but now when it seemed likely that his wish was fulfilled he felt strangely dismayed. It seemed hardly possible that only yesterday he had pumped out the cellar in a house which was no more, and that he might never hear his uncle's grim voice again.

They passed up Main Street, where nearly all of the buildings were standing, but the store-fronts were mostly in ruins and all sorts of merchandise was strewn about the streets. Hardly a ground-floor window was intact; but the big Methodist church, apparently undamaged, reared its towering height above its neighbors and was being used as a refuge for the injured and homeless.

"And what do you think, Bob?" said Will Bronson. "Our old shanty hasn't got a broken window even. There are only nineteen houses in the lower town that aren't damaged; Roy Blakely and I counted them; and we named our house Old Gibraltar. Isn't that a peachy name?"

It *was* a pretty good name, for there in the middle of its beautiful private park, stretching right down to the river, stood the big rubblestone house just as it had stood before, except that meadow grass was plastered here and there upon its walls, and a clean line upon its face indicated how high the water had come.

Mr. Wentworth left them at the gate, and the two boys made their way up the winding gravel walk through the garden, where the bushes looked as if a whole herd of cattle had trampled them down, and the walk itself reminded Bobby for all the world of a piece of cloth in which the colors had run, the gravel being distributed thinly here and there beyond the border line, widening the walk several yards or so.

It was on that first evening after the dreadful catastrophe that Bobby Cullen had the talk with Mr. Bronson which was destined so deeply to affect his future life. He had submitted to the kindly ministrations of Mrs. Bronson, had taken medicine for his neglected cold, had been furnished with a change of clothing, and was about to join the Bronson boys after supper in another excursion about the ruined town, when Mr. Bronson called him into the library.

"Sit down in that big chair, Robertus," said he. "I want to have a little chat with you."

Mr. Bronson seated himself in one of the big leather chairs, stretched out his legs, lighted a cigar, and looked up at the ceiling quite as if he and Bobby were old chums settling down for a talk about old times. It put Bobby very much at his ease, for, though he was not in the least afraid of Mr. Bronson, he had been somewhat uncomfortable in the palatial residence. He seated himself in one of the big chairs and waited.

"Well, Bob," said Mr. Bronson, soberly, "you see there's quite a lot of possibility in water after all, isn't there—even adventure. I think you were speaking about adventure. Water can do a lot of damage when there's criminal negligence back of it."

"Is somebody to blame for all this?" asked Bobby.

"Yes, the water company's to blame. We'll know more about it when the engineers have looked things over. The State engineers will be up to-morrow. But they can't give back the lives that are lost, Bob."

"No, sir," said Bobby, after a moment's silence.

"Well, now, Bobby, this is what I want to say, and I want to say it before you go out into what's left of the poor old town. You're going to stay right here, my boy, at least until we can look around us and see what it's best to do. And you must feel that this is your home. Mrs. Bronson wants you to do that; but *we* haven't anything to say, anyway, for the boys run this place."

Bobby was biting his lip hard and trying to keep from crying. It may have been the reminder that he was left an orphan for the second time, or it may have been just that he was not in the habit of being talked to in this way. He could only say, "Yes, sir."

"I'm very much afraid your aunt and uncle are lost, my boy, and you've got to be brave and think about it that way. And there's something else. You know, Bob, I knew your uncle long before you did."

"He didn't know you as well as I did," said Bobby, "else he wouldn't—"

"Never mind that, my boy. Now, when you go around town you may hear things said about your uncle. You mustn't let it make you feel bad, Bob. See? People don't always stop to think what they're saying. You mustn't listen to them. If the men in the stores or any of the boys say things, you just walk away. You have to think of your uncle as if he were your father, Bob, and you must be loyal to his memory."

Bobby was intertwining his fingers nervously. It was almost at that same time the day before that he had been whipped for taking the time to make a suggestion. Oh, how clearly the whole episode arose before him now.

"Once—once I read something about 'My country, may she always be right, but my country right or wrong.' Is it—is it something like that—you mean?"

Mr. Bronson tightened his lips. "Something like that, yes, Bob."

"And the Scouts, one of their laws says a fellow has got to be loyal. He's got to be loyal to his Scoutmaster and his home and his parents—especially his parents. He's got to be loyal to them, no matter what. My uncle wouldn't let me join the Scouts because he didn't like Mr. Sprague. And if he didn't like me, either, maybe he couldn't help it."

"Well, it's a good law, Bob."

"They've got some good laws, the Scouts; but I never thought about that one before," said Bobby.

"Maybe you won't hear anything at all, my boy, but your uncle had business affairs which caused disputes, and people might talk about things they're not familiar with. Just you walk away and say to yourself, 'He was my uncle and I'll be loyal and remember he gave me a home and brought me up.'"

"Sometimes it made me feel like—kind of like wishing I was all alone when *he* told me that."

"He used to tell you that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hummm!"

"But I know what you mean—I got to be loyal."

There was another pause during which Mr. Bronson smoked in silence.

"Yes, just the same as you must be loyal to your employer," he added, softly. "You might feel that he wasn't fair to you, or perhaps not paying you enough money, but as long as he is your employer you must be loyal to him—that's the idea."

"If you couldn't be loyal to both—to your parents and your employer—then what would you do?" Bobby asked.

Mr. Bronson smiled. "That wouldn't be likely to happen, Bob. Just you make up your mind to be loyal and, most important of all, don't let anything you hear make you feel bad. See?"

"Even if I did feel bad I could keep it to myself and no one would know. That's one thing I can do, anyway—I always could. But—but I like to talk to you."

Mr. Bronson looked at the boy as he sat in the big chair, and noticed that his eyes were brimming over.

"That's all right, Bob. If there's ever anything you want to talk over, just come to me. That's the way Will and Dory do."

"Sometimes I have ideas," said Bobby.

"Well, they're bully things to have," Mr. Bronson encouraged.

"And if somebody tells you it's a good idea that helps you to improve it, don't you think so?"

"Surest thing you know, Bob." As they rose to leave the room Mr. Bronson laid his hand over the boy's shoulder. "You must learn to swim, Bob," said he, "and don't puzzle your brains too much."

"My uncle wasn't so bad as the water company, anyway, was he?"

"No, indeed!" said Mr. Bronson. "Well, good night, Bob, and keep the boys out of mischief, won't you?"

But still Bobby lingered. "He gave me a quarter once," said he.

Mr. Bronson almost winced. "Yes?" he said. "Well, that's good."

He did not altogether understand Bobby, but he had understood Bobby's uncle well enough, and defending him was about the hardest job he had ever tackled.

CHAPTER V
SOME JOLLIERS

Bobby did hear things about his uncle, for he couldn't help hearing them. People spoke kindly of his aunt and toward him they seemed even more pleasantly disposed than ever before; but for his uncle they had no word of praise or of regret.

Some spoke half-contemptuously of him as of a ne'er-do-well, making allowance for his inefficiency, while others hinted at matters he had been concerned in before Bobby's time, and these made the boy uncomfortable and left him curious.

But all such talk aroused his indignation. He heard hints about some funds belonging to the fire company, of which Rafe Clausen had once been treasurer, and about some money which he hadn't turned over to the people who published the farm journal. Sometimes he heard Rafe's treatment of himself criticized—for every one seemed to know about it—and once in Bradley's garage, which was the most enticing spot in the world to Bobby, he forgot Mr. Bronson's advice and indignantly cited the memorable occasion when his uncle had given him a quarter.

"That's all right, Bob," they had said, but Bobby never entered Bradley's garage again. The one quarter that his uncle had given him, three years back, was his sole answer to these aspersions, and he now treasured the memory of it as he had once treasured the quarter itself.

What he could never understand was that the people who were strongest in their dislike of his uncle were the very ones who seemed to like *him* most.

The days passed and Bridgeboro began to build itself up anew. For some days Bobby worked with the Scouts, who were organized for rescue work and had their tents near the Army headquarters, for Uncle Sam was lending a helping hand to the stricken towns along the river and was making his headquarters in Bridgeboro.

The tents with their telephones and complete equipment and the Stars and Stripes floating over them, the comings and goings of the officers, the privates on guard at the two banks and outside the wrecked buildings, and the Red Cross workers going about their work among the homeless and injured, formed a war-time picture to Bobby, and he seemed, after all, to be living in a world of adventure.

He had, too, a glimpse of Scout efficiency, and was proud to become a "tenderfoot" and take his oath to obey the good law which he had cited to Mr. Bronson, and which he had already obeyed with stubborn loyalty.

He was a universal favorite with all of Uncle Sam's company, from the officers down, and liked them one and all; but he had no use for the engineers who had descended upon the neighborhood like a pest and who gave learned opinions on the cause of the catastrophe. Some of them were summoned by the Milton Water Company, and these said that the "unprecedented freshets" were responsible for the disaster and that it could not have been prevented. People said they were paid for saying so.

These men were in no sense connected with Uncle Sam, but their presence in the town was due to the catastrophe, and their suit-cases were carried to and from the

makeshift hotel by the willing Scouts, whose watchword is “Service.”

“Cracky! I’ve got no use for engineers,” Bobby volunteered one evening, as he and half a dozen others sat in the Scout tent after a day of distributing provisions in town and up the river. “They call them civil engineers; but, gee! I don’t call that last one civil.”

“Civil don’t mean polite, you gump,” said Dory Bronson. “It means—sort of—not military.”

“I don’t care what it means,” said Bobby; “they’re all the time talking about collateral resistance and things like that—they get on my nerves.”

“You mean lateral resistance,” said Roy Blakely; “if you jump on a board and it don’t bust with you, that’s lateral resistance.”

“You get E plus,” said Will Bronson.

“I asked one of them what convergent pressure meant,” said Bobby, “and he went right on talking to Mr. Wallace. I bet he didn’t know himself.”

“Was that the one with the long black coat and the scowl—looked like a minister, sort of?”

“Yes,” said Bobby. “He said there’s too much fiction. But if we all read histories, I don’t see how that would prevent a flood.”

“You’re crazy,” said Westy; “he said *friction*.”

“Well, anyway, he’s an old grouch,” said Bobby.

“Men that are all the time figuring, they get kind of crusty,” Roy added.

“Colonel Wade, he used to fight the Indians out West,” said Bobby. “He was telling us about it last night. That’s the kind of life! That’s one good thing about the old times—the massacres. These engineers, you can’t understand what they’re talking about. You can bet your life if there’s any more of them to be rowed around the river *I’m* not going to do it. They kind of remind you of professors. I held a tape for one of them—the one with the whiskers—and, gee, I was scared of him! I like the Army men best.”

“Construction engineers aren’t so bad,” said Roy.

“They’re all the same,” said Bobby, disgustedly.

“There’s different kinds of civil engineers,” said Roy; “some of them aren’t so terribly civil.”

“They are all the same,” said Bobby. “I’ve got no use for any of them.”

At this point Colonel Wade’s aide appeared in the open doorway of the tent. “Which one of you boys will chug up to Milton in the launch to-morrow and bring down a gentleman—an engineer? He’s going to leave the train at Milton and come down the river so he can look things over.”

A dead silence prevailed for a moment.

“Bobby Cullen’s the one for that,” shouted Roy. “There’s your chance, Bob.”

“He loves engineers,” said Westy.

“Sure, he loves them like a rainy day,” added Dory.

“Engineer is his middle name,” put in Will.

"He's coming up on the nine-fifteen," said the aide, turning to Bobby. "He'll want to look the dam over and then come down the river leisurely so as to inspect the banks for mattressing. Craig is his name." He waited, evidently for an answer, and Bobby rose slowly.

"I'll go," he said, reluctantly, as he raised his left hand in the Scout salute.

When the soldier had gone a peal of malicious laughter rang out.

"*I'm not going to do it*," mimicked Roy.

"No sooner said than stung," said another.

"What in the dickens is mattressing?" laughed Will Bronson. "I've heard of springs up the river, but I never heard of mattresses there."

"I don't see what the Army's got to do with it, anyway," said another boy. "Anyway, you'll have a swell time, Bob. Don't forget to ask him about convergent pressure."

"You fellows make me sick!" grunted Bobby.

"I bet he wears a plug-hat and gold spectacles," laughed Roy. "He'll look real sporty, I don't think, coming down in the launch."

"You can have a nice long talk about *friction*; oh, happy day!" taunted another boy.

"We must get Colonel Wade to tell us more about that massacre in the morning," said Westy, "while Bob is up the line with old Highbrow—What's-his-name?"

"Craig."

"Professor Craig, LL.B., C.B.L., X.Y.Z.—"

"You give me a pain!" said Bobby.

"Crusty Craig," taunted Roy. "Tag; you're it, Bobby."

"Gee! I'm easy, all right," said Bobby, sullenly.

"Uncle Sam put one over on you, Bob."

"It wasn't Uncle Sam; it was you fellows."

"Well, you know you're a tenderfoot, Bob, and you've got to be initiated."

"Tell Crusty Craig about the midnight ride of Paul Revere Cullen in Mr. Wentworth's boat; he'll be tickled to death."

"I'll tell him nothing."

Just then the bugle sounded, and the boys adjourned to Uncle Sam's tent A, where they stood in formation as the beautiful emblem, resplendent in the dying sunlight, was hauled down. And as Bobby thought of all it stood for, of the shot and shell that had whizzed about it, of the red Indians in their ambush who had watched it from afar, of the peril bravely faced for its sake, and of the adventure—above all, of the adventure which it spelled to those envied officers and their gallant men, the business of engineering—be it civil or uncivil—seemed more prosy and monotonous than ever, and he thought these sturdy men of action and adventure must regard the mathematical civilians, with their blue-print maps and frictions and convergent pressures with a sort of tolerant contempt.

"Not for mine!" he said to himself.

CHAPTER VI
"CRUSTY"

Capt. Ellsworth Burton Craig, Army engineer, field geographer, revetment specialist, drainage and hydraulic expert, and a few other things, stepped briskly from the train at Milton and was immediately taken in hand by the officials of the water company and other important individuals who were waiting for him. Bobby stood in the background and eyed him curiously.

He was of a trim physique, about thirty-five years old, and wore a green khaki suit with pleated and belted jacket, which fitted him to perfection. Encircling his brown wrist was a leather wristlet, and he wore a Rough Rider hat with a lead-pencil stuck in its cord. Despite the earliness of the season, he was tanned almost to the hue of a mulatto, and he had a small mustache as black as ebony. He wore rimless glasses through which sparkled a pair of sharp brown eyes. Bobby had his instructions, and at the first opportunity he stepped forward with as much self-possession as he could muster.

"I came up from Bridgeboro, sir," said he, "with a launch to take you down. I'm one of the Scouts helping Colonel Wade in rescue-work. He said for you not to hurry, and for me to bring you down as slowly as you want. I am to do any errands for you."

"Thanks," said the captain, tersely. "I'll be with you shortly."

Bobby did not dare to venture upon the ruined dam with the group that accompanied the visitor; but he stood at a little distance on the lawn of the Water-Works, with his eyes riveted upon Captain Craig, who looked over the situation quite casually, as it seemed to him. The man kicked one or two stones from the broken masonry, and as he talked he picked up pebbles and scaled them across what was left of the lake. Sometimes he seemed to be indicating something with his foot as he moved about. He was quick in his movements, with a way of continuing his informal inspection even while the gentlemen talked to him, and there was a certain informality about him which Bobby rather liked. After a while he came toward the boy. "Well, my boy," he said, "suppose we go along down and take a pike at things and see what we see."

Bobby smiled and looked rather curiously at this engineer, who said "take a pike" when he meant "inspect" or "survey," and who looked like a spruced-up Rough Rider. He felt rather at home with the man, and yet there was something about the captain which rather disconcerted him. In spite of his offhand manner he had a quick, choppy way of speaking and of waiting for an answer as if he expected it to be prompt and definite. Bobby had a feeling that if he were going to say anything he had better think it all out beforehand and get it just right.

They were soon chugging down the stream.

"How many miles an hour can you squeeze out of her?" the captain asked.

"'Bout eight; she's like a turtle; she's built more for comfort than speed."

"Any fish in the river?"

“They get perch.”

“Dam fell all over itself, didn’t it?”

“It sure did. It put our town out of business. My home’s gone, and my aunt and uncle, too. We lived right near the river.”

The captain drew up his lips and shook his head. “Too bad,” said he. “Let me know when we come to what they call the second bend.”

“Would you like to go slower? She throttles down fine. I can run close inshore if you like.”

“No, she’d never jump her track here,” said the captain, evidently alluding to the river. “We’ll squint around down at the bend. I didn’t suppose there was wild water enough around here to raise such a rumpus.”

“What’s wild water?” Bobby ventured.

“Oh, it’s water that flops around in the mountains without any regular path and has to be diverted.”

“That means made to go a certain way?”

“Yes.”

“I had an idea,” said Bobby, after a few minutes’ silence. “Our cellar was always getting flooded, and I always had to pump it out. I was pumping the day before the flood. My uncle was going to get a gas-engine to pump with, but when I was pumping that day I had an idea— Don’t you think you get ideas easier when you’re working?”

“Surest thing you know.”

“I had an idea that if I dug a ditch along the side of the house the water would go into it in high tides and flow away, maybe into the sewer. You wouldn’t call that diverting—like?”

“Sure.”

Bobby hesitated. “It wouldn’t be engineering—kind of—would it?”

“Yes, in a small way.”

“And my uncle he thought the gas-engine was the best way. What would you call that?”

“Why, I’d call that just sheer nonsense. Wouldn’t you?”

This was the first time that an engineer had ever asked Bobby’s opinion, and he felt quite flattered.

The captain smiled slightly. “You can’t very well claim there are no wild beasts left in this old continent when wild water is dashing around in the mountains.”

“Well, you can’t shoot it,” said Bobby; “that’s one sure thing.”

“You can tame it,” said Captain Craig, “and make it come down and earn its board.”

Bobby stared at him, but said nothing. Then he laughed. He liked Captain Craig. “Gee! I never liked engineers,” he said. “I must say I never liked them, but—”

The captain began to laugh.

“I like adventures,” said Bobby. “I’d like to join the Army if I could be with Colonel Wade. The trouble with engineering is there isn’t any fighting in it. They just

do figuring all the time."

"So?" said the captain.

"Sure," said Bobby; "but I don't believe we'll get into a war, anyway. Do you?"

"Don't know," said the captain. "I'm so busy scrapping I don't have time to think about wars."

Bobby looked at him and laughed again. "Oh, of course," he conceded, "a civil engineer might get into a scrap the same as any one else. I've been in scraps. But I mean regular fighting. There's nothing exciting about engineering."

"No?"

"They're always talking about strains and pressures and things like that."

"Yes?" said the captain.

"'Bout the only place you can find adventures is in books," Bobby continued; "unless you go into the Army." He looked at the captain, who was half smiling. "Do—do you do regular engineering?" Bobby asked.

"I make a stab at it."

"'Cause I was kind of wondering about your uniform."

"That's on account of the boss; he's a queer old duffer and kind of likes it."

Bobby hesitated, pondering his next question. "Who's that?" he finally ventured.

"Uncle Sam."

Bobby paused incredulously. "You work for the Government?"

"That's what I do."

"Gee! I didn't know that."

They ran inshore going around the second bend, and the captain scrutinized the banks closely, while Bobby scrutinized the captain. The engineer watched the curving shore carefully for a mile or more.

"She's about two-thirds to ebb, isn't she?" he asked once.

"'Bout an hour more and it'll be ebb," Bobby answered.

"You catch any muskrats?"

"The fishermen do."

"They've got the whole place honeycombed, haven't they?" the captain commented. "Channel runs on the long turn here, hey?"

Bobby wondered how he knew.

"Ought to be some trees planted along there to prevent erosion."

"What's erosion?"

"Loose earth—slides."

"How would trees prevent it?"

"Same as straw in bricks—ties the earth together. Run across now and we'll take a squint at that point. She'll jump her traces there some day sure as you're a foot high. Guess that used to be a bar, hey? Some swamp a mile or two back."

Bobby knew there was, but he wondered again how the captain knew.

For a while Captain Craig was very much preoccupied, and Bobby did not dare to interrupt him. Then, of a sudden, he sat down and said, apparently to himself, “Well, it’s just a question of an appropriation.”

Bobby waited a little while, then gathered his courage and came out with the question he had been pondering. “Would you mind telling me about how you scrap—if you don’t mind my asking?”

The captain looked at him a moment, and a little humorous twist appeared in the corner of his mouth. Then, having found his range, he delivered a broadside which almost knocked Bobby Cullen off his seat.

“Well, then,” said he, crisply, “just suppose I tell you that while you were reading adventures in books and while Colonel Wade was sitting in Fort Something-or-other several years ago, this little old country of ours was attacked by a powerful enemy.”

Bobby stared.

“Sure as you live; it was really a triple alliance, and the main enemy’s two allies were a pretty tough proposition. Well, sir, they rushed over the land and left death and devastation in their path. There was no stopping them—it was a great drive.”

Bobby’s mouth and eyes opened wider, but he said nothing.

“Our losses were pretty heavy, all told. We lost more people than were lost in the Spanish War—where Colonel Wade was cavorting around. You’d hardly believe it if I told you that the enemy pulled off a night march of sixty miles in an hour and forty minutes—”

“They couldn’t—”

“But they did, though; they threw their flanks over a hundred miles or so of good United States territory, right here under the nose of old Uncle Sam, and laid waste about a dozen towns.”

Bobby shook his head incredulously. “I—I don’t see how that could happen without our hearing about it.”

“Oh, you were all too busy reading adventures.”

“You—were you in the fight?”

“Yes, in the thick of it.”

There was a pause.

“Jiminy crinkums!” said Bobby.

“So I don’t feel that I can let you get away with that notion of yours of engineers not fighting.”

“Who was the enemy?” Bobby asked.

“The Mississippi River.”

For a moment Bobby felt inclined to resent being made fun of in this manner.

“The allies were the Ohio and the Missouri,” the captain went on.

Slowly a light began to dawn upon Bobby. “Was it floods—and things like that, you mean?”

“Mm-hm!”

“What was the cause of it all?”

“Unpreparedness. So Uncle Sam had to get around back of the enemy’s lines, intercept his communications, and prevent future campaigns. We had to go way out to Montana to cut off his base of supplies.”

“The Mississippi River starts in Illinois,” said Bobby, incredulously. “We learned that in the fourth grade.”

“Just the same it keeps one of its munition plants in Montana.”

“How did you cut off its base of supplies?”

“Same as you would have deflected the water outside the cellar. You’re an engineer; you ought to know.”

“Gee!”

“Then we built a big national prison for a good deal of the wild water, and there it is now, under guard.”

“What kind of guard?”

“Concrete dam—’bout twenty times as big as this one.”

Bobby was beginning to understand.

“We keep the water in a big valley twenty miles long above the dam—except when we make it come down and work. Then it has to march in line and behave itself and irrigate the land—earn its board.”

Bobby pursed up his mouth and shook his head. “I bet that’s the biggest dam in the world,” said he.

“We’ve got a bigger one under way—’bout three hundred feet high—not counting the flag-pole. What would you say to that?”

“Has it got a name?”

“Sure. Roosevelt Dam.”

“Gee!” said Bobby. “You remind me of Roosevelt—I thought of that—”

“Oh, I’m just an engineer, you know,” the captain reminded him.

“Well, a fellow can be mistaken, can’t he?” said Bobby. “I—I—of course, I didn’t know everything about engineering.”

The captain laughed outright.

“I bet there’ll be a lot of wild water behind that dam.”

“Oh, a few teaspoonfuls,” said the captain.

“’Bout how much?”

“Pretty near thirty miles of it.”

“Is it near here? I’d like to see it.”

“It’s out in Arizona,” said the captain; then, with a quizzical glance at Bobby. “Still, you might see it.”

“Oh, I know about Arizona,” Bobby shouted. “It has a hot, dry climate—rains— I always wanted to go to Arizona. It’s worth while having a vacation out there—that’s one sure thing. Oh, crinkums! I *would* like to go to Arizona!”

“So?” said the captain. “Well, stranger things than that have happened.”

“And then you make the water come down and irrigate the land instead of overflowing the rivers?”

“That’s the idea exactly. And as it passes out little by little alongside the dam it turns wheels and furnishes electricity to light distant cities. Uncle Sam makes his war-prisoners work, you can bet.”

Bobby paused again. “Gee! it seems funny, doesn’t it?”

“Not nearly as funny as fighting floods with gas-engines.”

Bobby was on his guard at once. “My uncle was trying to find the best way,” he said. “I got to be loyal. He was killed and I got to be loyal to him.”

The captain looked at him sharply—just as he had scrutinized the banks of the river.

“Believe in loyalty, do you?”

“Sure, just the same as a fellow has to be loyal to his boss—same as you have to be loyal to—to Uncle Sam—like—”

“I see.”

“Mr. Bronson told me that, and he’s president of a bank, so he ought to know.”

“Think *you* could be loyal to Uncle Sam, do you?”

“Jiminy! he seems like a real person when you talk about him.”

CHAPTER VII
BOBBY GIVES HIS WORD

To say that Bobby followed the captain about during his flying visit to Bridgeboro and vicinity would hardly be doing justice to his persistence. He haunted him; he dogged his footsteps; he made a complete turn about in his opinion of engineers and engineering, to the great amusement of his companions, who called him the captain's "Good Man Friday," "Sancho Panza," "teacher's pet," and other names. He chugged the captain about on the river—for the flood had drawn Uncle Sam's attention to this obscure stream, and he was thinking of dredging it and reveting its banks—and it was in these excursions that he heard more in detail of the wonderful "Salt River Project" in Arizona, for the regulation of floods and the reclamation of arid lands.

In the Army tents he heard something, too, about Captain Craig and his relation to the Reclamation Service which was conducting this stupendous enterprise and others like it. He learned that the captain had made the storage survey for the inland sea formed by the dam; that the dam itself was partly designed by him; and that he had planned the two long canals in the country below from which innumerable smaller canals penetrated the public farm lands, watering them and rendering them fertile and productive.

He learned that the captain was called the "stormy petrel" of the service; that he was in the habit of descending upon the various Western projects unexpectedly and disappearing as suddenly, and that he carried enough detailed scientific information in his mind to drive any six ordinary men crazy. He learned that the captain was essentially a man of action, that he abominated red tape, and that he loathed Washington, and chafed exceedingly when called before Congressional committees. His pockets were always stuffed with odds and ends of paper—old envelopes, and so forth—crowded with figures, and as if all these things were not enough he must know all about fishing, shooting, baseball, splicing ropes, lighting fires in pelting rains, how to tell mushrooms from toadstools, what to do when lost in the woods, and so forth, and so forth; and he superintended the job of bringing Wentworth's boat back to the river by devising a windlass across the stream and fastening the end of the long length of rope right around the hull so that she could be drawn across the marsh with surprisingly little effort and with no straining of her frame.

"Same idea as stump-hauling," he said, as they watched the queer-looking bulk come swaying and staggering across the marsh for all the world like a great lumbering turtle. "Out at the project we pull a stump just like an old molar; you could pull out one of the California redwoods the same way if necessary, or pry the end off the Big Dipper if you had a big enough stick," he added, turning to one of the boys. "Wonderful thing—leverage."

As the days passed and the time drew near for Captain Craig's departure, Bobby was conscious of a growing desire to go out to the "project" with him. He was afraid to suggest such a thing, however, fearing that the captain would only scoff good-naturedly.

At last, one day they were coming up from a point down the river, where the captain had been making some notes on topographic work for the "geologic boys" who would be coming along later on their mapping tour.

"Bob," said he, suddenly, "how'd you like to go out West?"

"Believe *me*, it's my middle name," said Bobby.

"Do you know, Bob, in all these little spins we've had there are two thing about you I'll remember best of all—two home runs you put over the plate. You know, in the levees down on the Mississippi they have what they call crevasses—holes that get larger and larger and finally let the water through. Well, the Reclamation boys down that way get so they can tell where a hole is going to be before it begins; there are little signs they tell by. In the same way some little thing a person says may be a sign of what's in him. If I were to judge by a sign like that and then get stung it would be a black eye for me, wouldn't it?"

"It sure would," said Bobby, wondering what was coming next.

"Well, these are my two signs about you, Bob; one was your wanting to dig that ditch along the side of the house, and the other was what you said about loyalty. You might send over to Washington and get a lot of civil-service stuff, and pass an examination and get a certificate and go out to the project and loaf around and get transferred and suspended and one thing or another and be a general nuisance that we couldn't get rid of unless we threw you in the storage lake. You could bring me a letter from a Congressman that I'd only use to figure pressures on the back of. But what you said about the ditch and about loyalty—that's the kind of stuff I judge by.

"If I should decide to take you along and let you help us dig ditches, the question is could you be loyal? That's the watchword of the service. You'd have to put out your hand and grasp Uncle Sam's grimy old hand and say, 'I'm with you to the last ditch.' If a water company should come along and offer you more money you'd have to say, 'Nothing doing; I'm helping my old uncle get his big house in order, and here I'm going to stay till we raise sweet peas in the desert.' Think you could say something like that?"

"You make it seem as if I could almost feel his hand, kind of," said Bobby.

"That's the idea. You'd have to live rough, Bob, sleep in a cabin, and you might have to risk your life even for the sake of the boss. But, above all, you'd have to throw your heart into that storage lake so hard that it would make a big splash. You spoke of loyalty to your uncle. Do you think you could feel the same way about your other uncle—Uncle Sam?"

The boy nodded his head; he felt almost too much affected to speak.

The captain waited a minute. "All right, Bob," he said. "I understand."

"If—if I didn't do it for Uncle Sam I'd do it for you, anyway—that's one thing."

"That's all right, Bob."

"Even if you didn't like me, I could be loyal to you. My uncle—"

"You've only got one uncle now, Bob. Do you want to come out West and help him chore around? I'll talk to Mr. Bronson, and then I'll fight it out with the Civil Service bunch."

“I—anyway, it’s lucky I thought about that ditch, even if I did get licked for it.”

“Licked?” the captain asked, knitting his brows.

“Yes, but—but my uncle had lots of things on his mind,” Bobby hastened to explain.

“I see,” said the captain, dryly.

He talked things over with Mr. Bronson; he fought it out with the “Civil Service bunch”; and, as usual, he came away from the fight with bells on.

CHAPTER VIII
WHAT BOBBY HEARD IN THE WAGON

"The next is Mesa—road to Contractors' Camp."

The brakeman closed the door with a bang and came staggering through the car, grasping the seat-backs to right and left of him and trying to accommodate his movements to the jarring and swaying of the train as it made the bend just east of Highland Canal and went rattling over it to Mesa station.

Bobby rose, stretched himself, and brushed some of the penetrating Arizona sand from his clothing.

"Is it much farther?" he asked.

"'Bout three minutes," said the captain. "Uncle Sam sprawls over a pretty big map, doesn't he, Bob?"

"I never knew you could travel so far on one railroad, I sure didn't."

"You could take the rails we've traveled over and wrap 'em around Great Britain and tie 'em in a bow; that's the kind of a back yard your uncle has to play in. See those gray hills over there? White Mountain Reservation up that way. Grab that suit-case and I'll take the tripod. They'll be waiting to welcome you, Bob."

Bobby felt in his pocket to make sure of the safety of the fifty dollars which Mr. Bronson had given him for a rainy day, though, to be sure, there are few enough rainy days in Arizona. He felt strangely excited, now that the end of the long journey was at hand.

A number of one-story frame buildings were grouped about the station, at Mesa, and on one of these, evidently a hotel, was an enormous sign: HULLO BUB!

"What'd I tell you?" laughed the captain.

"Does it—It doesn't mean me?" Bobby asked, incredulously.

"Every stranger out here is Bub; that's just to let you know you're welcome, no matter who you are. That's the way they do out West."

Mesa stood on land as flat as a checkerboard, but to the east great gray hills rose, with here and there some giant peak touched with the first crimson rays of sunset. For a quarter of a mile or so plain wooden houses could be seen, standing well apart from one another and between them and beyond them a vast gray openness with isolated bushes here and there.

As they passed around the hotel another cordial sign attracted Bobby's attention and reminded him of that day he had been kept in school. It read, FREE BOARD EVERY DAY THE SUN DOES NOT SHINE. Evidently the people of Arizona had implicit faith in their climate, for they made the most liberal offers on the weather probabilities, another sign reading, FREE CIGARS WHEN IT RAINS.

In front of the hotel was a heavy wagon, on the hooped canvas top of which were painted the letters U. S.; the pole was drawn out, and no horses were visible. Out from the hotel strode an enormous, smooth-faced man with eyes that twinkled in his

expansive visage, and lips that turned up at the ends in a shrewd, fixed smile. In the corner of his mouth was a cigar, pointing upward, which seemed almost to be one of his features, so necessary was it to his expression. He wore a gray flannel shirt and a cowboy hat. It seemed to Bobby that he was singularly easy in his greeting of two people who had come such a long journey and whose arrival was something of an event.

"Hello, Luke!" said the captain.

"How do, Cap'n," the other drawled.

"Bob," said the captain, "this is Mr. Merrick. Mr. Merrick's water-master. You have to keep on the right side of him or you won't pull much of a stroke around here. This is Robert Cullen, Luke, come out to give us a hand. He's an engineer in the chrysalis stage. He's seen something of the damage water can do, and now he's going to see the use it can be put to. I believe I'll dump him on you, Luke."

Mr. Merrick screwed his cigar farther up into the corner of his mouth and smiled his expansive smile down upon Bobby. "Like to sleep in that thing, I bet, wouldn't yer?" he drawled, amused at Bobby's notice of the wagon.

"Yes, I would," said Bobby. "Are we going to the dam to-night?"

"To-morrer mornin'," said the water-master. After supper Bobby was shown to a small, neat room, while the captain and Mr. Merrick disappeared, probably to talk things over.

"You can turn in whenever you like, Bob," the captain had said, "but be down here at sunrise unless you want to hike it fifty miles."

It was in that little room, out in the strange Far West, that Bobby Cullen felt the first and only twinge of homesickness which he was to suffer in all the time he spent in Arizona. During the long journey he had forgotten everything else in Captain Craig's companionship and interesting talk; but the captain's period of enforced leisure being now ended, he had very promptly deserted Bobby, and the boy felt just a little pang of resentment, and a sense of loneliness out in this far country where everything was so different from what it was at home.

For a little while he would have given everything for just one glimpse of the Bronson boys and poor old ruined Main Street, back home in Bridgeboro.

He was a little ashamed of this feeling, for the Black Ranger, to say nothing of the Deep Sea Boys and Dan Dreadnaught, and other heroes whose careers he had followed in endless series, had all left home and parents without the slightest compunction and gone to the four corners of the earth with never so much as a lingering regret.

But Bobby Cullen was no hero, just a real, every-day boy, and he felt lonesome and homesick.

Sleeping was out of the question, so instead of going to bed he looked out of the window at the vast new country. It was very quiet outside. He missed the familiar springtime croaking of the frogs in the marsh at home. Near at hand he heard the occasional stamping of horses in their stalls, and before the door still stood the lumbering old wagon with its hooped canvas roof, looking like the spray-hood of a motorboat, and its tall pole standing up, spectral in the dim light.

Bobby *would* have liked to sleep in "that wagon." How cozy it would be, curled up there in the darkness, rattling across the country. He wondered how it looked inside. He wished they had decided to start that night.

He tiptoed from the room and stole cautiously out into the night. No one was about. He stood upon the rear step of the wagon and peered inside. There was straw on the floor and a heavy Indian blanket. He could see boxes and other articles stored on shelves, and two huge leather bags hanging in the corner. Two rifles and a fire-ax hung from the hoop ribs. It was very inviting in there.

Bobby lifted himself inside and peered about in the darkness. A hinged partition, forming a back for the driver's seat, separated the body from the front part of the wagon. There was a suggestion of gipsy life about this rough but comfortable interior; it spoke to Bobby very eloquently of the "wild West"; of pioneers crossing the prairies. He lay down on the straw and pulled the blanket over him—just to see how it would seem. He had no definite intention of remaining there for the balance of the night, but he must have fallen into a doze, for presently he was half roused by the swaying and creaking of the wagon as some one climbed into the seat beyond the partition.

"Good a place to sit as any," said a voice, and by the time Bobby was sufficiently wide awake to realize that he was eavesdropping he had become so much interested in the conversation that he could not bring himself to make his presence known.

"Well," said a second voice, "I don't see why you didn't tip him off?"

"'Cause I knew him, that's why."

"He might have dickered with the Gov'ment for water, and no secret, and who could say the tunnel wasn't his to use?"

"I'd rather he'd pay me than the Government. When you hear of me telling a man, you'll know he's the kind 'll deal with *me*. Suppose I'd have told him—just suppose I'd 'a' told him, now? He'd of paid his rates, and glad enough to do it, and every blamed desert-land entryman down that way would have to pay *his* rates, and where'd I be? I'd have 'bout as much out of it as the petrified mummies that dug the tunnel—that's how much *I'd* have. I'll get what the Government owes me, or know why."

"It's a pretty risky business," said the other. "Risky when you're dealing with a boob, yes. But I know how to hold my cards, I do. Why, if I'd have sized him up right, you don't suppose he'd of been growin' cactus these six months, do you? He could have had short-rations water six months ago. But he was for driving to church here in Mesa and shouting about Uncle Sam and starving to death on dry-farming all the while. Well, he did it, and now he's East selling his land—that's where *he* is."

"All because you didn't like his looks, hey?"

"All because he caught the same bug as they've all got around here—shouting Uncle Sam—home-builder, and 'Three cheers,' and all that junk. I had *my* experience with Uncle Sam."

"Uncle Sam's all right," said the other.

"All right for them up in Roosevelt that's got pull, yes; they're getting their money right along. But look at these people making homestead entries and paying their fees down at Phoenix for water they didn't get—an' never will get."

"They'll get it, all right."

"Well," said the principal speaker, "there's just about fifteen feet of earth between me and Easy Street and there it'll stay till I get the cush."

The other laughed. "It's a kind of a grab-bag, as it seems to me," he said. "You don't know who you'll get next. It may be ten years before he sells his land."

"Well, the tunnel's waited a few years and none the worse for it, and it can wait a couple more. I'll wait and take my chance on the next owner. If I pull a freak I'll go on waiting and he'll dry-farm it, and shout 'Uncle Sam' like all the rest of 'em, and starve—like I'm doing and have his eyes blown full of sand like—"

"Did he clear away his sage?" the other interrupted.

"Every blooming bush of it."

"Well," said the other, "I wash my hands of it. There mayn't be overmuch water yet, but I reckon there's enough for me to wash my hands of a deal like that."

"You're straight, ain't you?" the other asked, with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Oh, go ahead. You needn't worry for fear of me. You and me are old friends, only it ain't in my line. I guess I'm spoiled," he added. "I worked for Uncle Sam down Panama and got this bronze medal for two years' service, and I guess the old gent kind of spoiled me. I reckon I couldn't put one like that over on him."

"Well, you're the only one that knows," said the other man, "and don't forget I carry my gun same as always."

This ghastly hint about closed the subject, and after they had talked for a little while on other matters they climbed down and wandered off beyond the freight-station.

Bobby sat up with a queer feeling of excitement. His first impulse was to feel in his pocket to see if his precious fifty dollars was safe. Then he tried to spell out the purport of that strange talk and of the appalling hint about the gun. What did it mean? And who were those two men? A month later he would have understood such talk better, but in a hazy kind of way he gleaned that there was some scheme to swindle the Government, and that one of the men was too loyal to Uncle Sam to go into it. He wondered what the tunnel could be, and who were the "petrified mummies" who had made it.

He could not make up his mind whether the man who had the Panama medal was right in his protestations of loyalty to his unprincipled friend. "Perhaps he is loyal because he is afraid," thought Bobby.

The big, smiling, honest visage of Luke Merrick, the water-master, broke upon Bobby like a burst of sunshine in the morning as he still lay in the wagon, and it seemed to wash away those slurs against the Government which he had overheard.

"Have a good sleep?" asked the water-master. "I kinder knew I'd find ye out here. Well, who do you think ye'd like to have fer your boss?" he asked.

"Uncle Sam's my boss," said Bobby.

"Right the fust time," said Luke.

CHAPTER IX
SOME HISTORY, A LITTLE GEOGRAPHY, AND A LITTLE AGRICULTURE

The chill of the night was not yet passed when the lumbering wagon, drawn by two of Uncle Sam's horses, pulled out of Mesa.

For about two hours and a half they journeyed over a desert where no vegetation was to be seen save ugly sage-brush and gigantic cactus.

"After we hit Goldfield," explained Mr. Merrick, "we'll begin to climb up-stairs, 'n' then you can see the valley; valley b'longs to the farmers, 'n' the gulch b'longs to the engineers 'n' smart Alecks. This summer the valley 'n' the gulch is goin' to have a ball-game 'n' we're goin' to wallop 'em."

"Which are you?" said Bobby.

"Me? Oh, I'm both; when I'm up to camp I repr'sent the farmers, 'n' when I'm down valley I repr'sent the construction bunch. Blessed is the peacemaker," he added.

"Do you work for Uncle Sam, too?" Bobby asked.

"I'd like to see anybody stand up 'n' say I don't."

It was a tedious, dusty drive to Goldfield, where they had a second breakfast and where Mr. Merrick piled some boxes of provisions and small hardware into the wagon.

Then began a ride over the most extraordinary road that Bobby had ever seen. If he had been up in a balloon the experience could hardly have been more sensational. Before them was a range of rugged mountains, the jagged pinnacles of which rose straight up from the plains, and directly they were out of Goldfield the road began its winding ascent of the frowning uplands which were to usher them into the dizzy fastness beyond.

"There, now ye can look down 'n' see the project," said Luke. "That's Salt River Valley where ye came from. Ye can see the river 'n' the Highland Canal that ye crossed on the railroad; up northard there's the long canal. There's Tempe 'n' there's Phoenix where the land office is, 'n' where they make complaints 'gainst the cap'n. Hey, Cap'n? Down off that way ye can see Maricopa Indian Village."

As Luke pointed with his whip Bobby saw the whole flat valley with the towns spread here and there upon it like toy villages on a carpet. The river ran through the center of the valley, and branching from it on either side were two winding canals, with other canals branching from them, until far in the distance they merged together, looking like a gigantic feather. Some of these smaller canals ran out very far from the trunk lines, and these in turn had still other branch canals sticking out almost at right angles from themselves.

"Them's laterals," said Mr. Merrick. "Uncle Sam builds the canals 'n' the main laterals 'n' there he stops. Sub-laterals 'n' half-subs are built by the farmers. Now, see if ye can remember that, 'cause you'll want to know yer A B C's won't he, Cap'n? First comes the canals, the two long ones, 'n' there'll be more later; then comes the laterals

stickin' out from them; then comes the sub-laterals, then the half-subs; then the field furrows, or maybe free wash. Then there might be midget laterals. Now, where does Uncle Sam take his stand?"

"At the end of the main laterals," Bobby answered, promptly.

"Right you are. Now look off to the southard there. See that brown speck? That's older 'n you 'n' me 'n' the cap'n 'n' Uncle Sam put together. That's Cassy Grandy.[1] That was put up by prehistorics. That old heap o' stones is a thousand years old, maybe."

"Gee!" said Bobby, with difficulty locating the infinitesimal ruin.

"There was a feller out here from the Smithson[2] Institute down to Washington, 'n' he found an underground passage leadin' from that out a mile, 'n' there it all caved in —reg'lar soup-tureen passage."

The captain laughed.

"All that valley there was irrigated once by the prehistorics, wasn't it, Cap'n?"

"Guess there's no doubt of that," the captain conceded.

"Yes, sir; they was like the Incoes down Peru way 'n' the Asticks here in Mexico. They was a kind o' branch of the Asticks, I reckon—"

"Sub-laterals," suggested the captain, winking at Bobby.

"They had their ditches, miles on 'em, didn't they, Cap'n, 'n' their sub-irrigation—"

"I never saw any signs of that," said the captain.

"Well, Brunt from the Geologic Survey, he had a chunk o' something he said was a clay tile—porous clay tile, they used in their sub-mains. But I never see no sub-mains myself. Warren found one, 'n' it turned out to be a prairie-dog furrow."

"I guess so," laughed the captain.

"But, leastways, Uncle Sam couldn't tell them nothin' 'bout agriculture. They had their cities and their schools and maybe their land office, for all we know. Up here 'bove camp, if you go on a tramp of a Sunday, you'll see cliff dwellin's—dozens on 'em. It's my theory they was up there buildin' a storage lake; maybe they had a construction camp. G'lang," he added to the horses.

The panorama of Salt River Valley was soon shut out from their view, though Bobby could still catch glimpses of it now and then as the wagon wound its way up through the rugged heights. The sun was now well up and, lighting the cañons around which they passed, it painted their rocky depths in a hundred wonderful colors.

In places the road was carved in vertical cliffs, and Bobby looked into the appalling abysses which it skirted and instinctively tightened his grasp of the stanchion at his side. For a while they were close to Salt River, and he heard its echoes as it found its troubled way through the rocky chaos far below them.

"Who made this road?" he asked.

"Cap'n Craig—with Uncle Sam to help him," Luke chuckled.

Bobby looked about him in silent wonder. Not a sound could he hear save the steady tramp of the horses, sometimes echoed from the towering gray walls. High above them across the narrow strip of sky which was visible sped a great bird, hurrying

to its home among the crags. And now and then he caught the distant sound of falling water. After a while he broke the long silence.

"Cracky! if I came out here and intended not to be loyal and was going to—not be square with Uncle Sam, kind of—I'd change my mind when I saw this road. I sure would."

"It's all for them folks down-valley," said Luke.

"Is it Government land down there?" Bobby asked.

"Not much on it. On some of the projects 'tis, but not here; but that makes no manner o' difference; Uncle Sam's glad enough to give it a drink o' water, and there's lots o' land to be settled yet. Next year they'll be able to raise more on one acre than they're raisin' on three now. A man can sell half his farm and have double the crops he had before. That's what they call intensive farmin'. There's a sort of rhyme they have:

"They used to have a farmin' rule
Of forty acres and a mule;
Results were won by later men
With forty square feet and a hen;
And nowadays success we see
With forty inches and a bee.

"Pretty soon a man 'll be able to carry his farm round in his pocket, won't he, Cap'n?"

After a while they passed a little group of Indians, and it seemed to Bobby that all the persons and properties were at hand for a stagecoach attack and massacre such as he had read of, but the whole picture was spoiled when the captain called, "Hello, William!" to one of the Indians.

"Apaches," said Luke. "They helped build this road."

About the middle of the afternoon they came out into a spot which was only less wild than the road they had traversed, and here in almost complete isolation stood Frazer's Road House, where they changed the horses and had dinner. Other Apache Indians were lolling about the place, and Bobby was disappointed to find that they talked English very well and didn't call the white men "pale faces." One of them had several dollar bills which he proudly said had been paid him by a moving-picture man for posing as a warrior chief. Wherever you go you will find that the "movie man" has been there before you.

For three hours more they followed a road which, if it had been drawn out straight, Bobby thought, would have reached across the continent. It traversed depths where grayish walls rose sheer on either side, where the stillness and sense of isolation was intense, and out from the semi-darkness of these places they would pass, as from a tunnel, along some giddy height, where the waning sunlight fell upon still higher places, bathing them in its crimson glow.

At last, amid the rocky chaos in the distance Bobby glimpsed a streak of white wedged, as it were, between high, gray hills which rose and slanted away from it so that

it seemed only to fill the apex at their base, where it was thrown into bright relief against the dull grayness of the cliffs.

"There she is, Bob," said the captain.

"The dam?" he asked, eagerly.

"That's it."

Bobby did not know whether to be disappointed or not. The white streak seemed out of all proportion to its surroundings. It spanned only the lower and narrower portion of a mammoth gulch, but whether the discrepancy was caused by his extravagant expectations or because of the rugged immensity of nature, he did not know.

In a little while he saw it again from another angle and a lower altitude, and its impressiveness and the silent wonder of it began to dawn upon him. He had a good imagination and the huge structure standing there in that untamed gorge grew to seem nothing less than heroic. Not a sign of life was there; no house, no road, nothing but nature—wild, confused, tremendous, frowning, unpiled nature—and the dam. It stood there amid its wild surroundings, majestic and self-assured.

That was the view of Roosevelt Dam that Bobby always liked best.

Soon they were making the steep descent into the gulch, their wheels chained and the horses holding themselves back with supreme effort; and now Bobby began to see the detail of the great structure as he looked down upon it. It curved inward, seeming to brace itself as a wrestler braces himself, and its flanks bit into the cliffs, following tenaciously every curve and cranny of the huge bordering walls. It was in the form of a half-circle, the ends of which braced themselves in the cliffs, not sideways, but frontways, so that the impression which Bobby received was that the dam would push both cliffs out of the way before it would give way itself.

It was a good deal higher than a house, and upon its summit a little stone house was perched—a watch-tower, Bobby thought. Nestling under its shadow were several buildings of the same white granite, immaculately neat, and flying the Stars and Stripes.

"Them's the power-houses," Luke explained. "When the water's let to run through the spillway in the dam, it generates power, and while it's flowin' down th' valley to irrigate the farms, the power's chasin' 'long the wires to light up Phoenix and chore around and make itself useful."

The captain was already beset by innumerable people, and there was a general air of bustle at his arrival.

"Bob," said he, hurriedly, "I'm going to leave you to Mr. Merrick. He'll take you up to the commissary; then you can look around and get your bearings. Come into the office first thing in the morning."

In another half-minute he had disappeared into one of the power-houses, a clamoring group after him, and other men came down the stone stairway leading from the summit of the dam, demanding to know if the captain had come and where he was. Some of them wore khaki suits, some wore overalls, and one carried a big blue-print map. This general air of bustle and importance increased Bobby's admiration of the captain, but he felt a little twinge of boyish jealousy that his patron should so promptly have deserted him.

Luke led the way up the stone stairway to the top of the dam, where there was a yet unfinished stone coping. Scarcely had they reached the summit when a bugle sounded, its attenuated final strain echoing from the great cliffs.

"They'll be lowerin' the colors," said Luke, pulling off his big-brimmed hat. Bobby removed his own, and as they stood bareheaded the flag on the aerial watch-tower came down.

It was very still. Bobby looked up through the vast, rugged valley, which was fast wrapping itself in shadow. The waters of the giant reservoir washed against the foot of the dam and extended far up through the big gorge, but as yet scarcely more than covered the floor of their mammoth prison, and here and there little islands and points of rock were visible.

On the sloping left-hand shore were some two-score of pretty trellised bungalows, and near them, on a steep slope, a white structure with smoke-stacks which looked as if it were in danger of tumbling down into the valley.

"That's Contractors' Camp," said Luke; "and that's the cement-mill."

"Isn't Uncle Sam doing all the work?" asked Bobby.

"Well, I reckon. But he's got contractors helpin' him. Them contractors' boys is a lively lot. They're goin' to get beat, though, when they tackle the Phoenix team. Now, up there on the other side is what *you're* after—straight Uncle Sam."

"That's what I like best," said Bobby. "I wonder—do you think *I'll* be straight Uncle Sam?"

"Sure enough—straight as the cap'n himself; cut out the middleman. That suit you?"

Some thousand or more feet distant, on the leveler reaches of the right-hand side of the valley, Bobby saw tents and bungalows and romantic-looking log cabins.

"That's the commissary," said Luke, pointing, "and that's the hospital, and that's the office, where you'll go in the morning. That big tent's the mess-tent."

Bobby stared, speechless, at the scene before him, which fulfilled every dream of roughing it and camp life. There, perched in bird's-eye view upon the slope of the great valley with the growing lake beneath it and the wild country beyond, a full day's journey from civilization, stood the town of Roosevelt, the home of Uncle Sam's workers, called into being by this colossal "project" and destined to vanish when the work was done.

The discernment which had prompted Captain Craig to bring Bobby west with him was not at fault. The boy who had wearily climbed the cellar stairs that day to tell his uncle of his "idea" was indeed an engineer "in the chrysalis stage," and the bird's-eye view which he had gained, first of Salt River Valley, and now of the vast water-storage site, enabled him to comprehend something of the whole colossal reclamation enterprise which Uncle Sam had undertaken.

Nature, to be sure, had helped by placing there among the rocky hills this great valley with its narrow outlet and the frowning cliffs on either side. Winding through the valley came the river, carrying, as it had always carried, its uncertain and often scanty contribution of life-giving moisture to the settled lands half a hundred miles distant. In

the summer-time its supply had often petered out, and the dry land had lain parching under the merciless sun, the crops withering. Now its waters were beginning to pile up above the dam, to be kept in this mighty prison among the everlasting hills, to be doled out as needed, to be held back in flood-time and distributed through devious and intricate channels far away in the dreaded time of drought.

As Bobby looked there came to his mind the memory of that last day in school.

Arizona has a hot, dry climate. Rains are infrequent and the land is parched and barren. The sage-brush grows profusely. The sun's heat is intense and almost continuous.... The capital is Phoenix.... Farming is unsuccessful by reason of the lack of rainfall.

And here he was actually in Arizona, where he had sullenly announced that he would like to be, and he was going to help give the parched land a drink of water.

He was roused from his thoughts by Luke's voice. "Want to go down? Gettin' hungry?"

"No, I'm not hungry. I was, kind of, but I'm not now. Sometimes when I'm interested in a thing I get so as I'm not hungry—just from thinking about the thing. Is it ever that way with you, kind of?"

Luke was a little puzzled. "No, I can't say as 'tis," he confessed.

"The river is what you'd call tame water, isn't it?" said Bobby. "And the wild water is what comes down in other places—through the cracks, like?"

"Some on it comes all the way from the Rocky Mountains—tricklin' and droppin'."

"And now it will be used?" said Bobby.

"That's what it will."

There was a pause.

"What's that big thing down there in the lake?" Bobby asked.

"That's a suction-dredge, son; sucks the mud right up—what the engineers call silt—and chucks it off yonder somewheres."

Another pause.

"I guess maybe it comes from erosion, that mud. I suppose the river brings it down, especially if there aren't any trees where the water comes from. That's what the captain said—that the roots hold the earth together. I should think there ought to be lots of trees above a place like this, to keep the silt from coming down. Maybe that's what makes sand-bars and things in rivers—maybe."

"Well, you got *me*" said Luke. "It'd have to come a big ways. That's a poser for the cap'n. You better ask *him*."

Bobby was silent.

"Well," said Luke, "leastways there's plenty of trees up yonder. Uncle Sam's got a big forest up there, and guards, young fellers like you, ridin' their circuits and watchin' out fer fires and spyin' timber-thieves and insects and—"

"But the water ought not to bring the land with it, because it's no good down here. Maybe that's why they have to dredge out rivers. They had to dredge out our river at

home—the Government did. Captain Craig says it's better to prevent a thing; he says it's sheer nonsense to wait till after it happens before you do anything."

Luke looked curiously at the boy who was leaning against the coping of the mammoth dam and gazing up through the great valley. He did not quite understand him. Again there was a pause.

"This dam seems kind of like a company of soldiers," said Bobby; "and all those big hills and rocks and cliffs and things like a mob, kind of. A company of soldiers can lick a big mob 'cause they know how. I was just thinking the dam is like that. When I saw it 'way off I thought, at first, maybe it wasn't strong enough; but when you get near it it's different; it's made from ideas, and that's what counts." He was an engineer "in the chrysalis stage," all right.

They went up to Roosevelt and stopped at the commissary building, where a man at a desk gave Bobby a book of mess coupons and assigned him to "Survey Bungalow."

"You'll find mostly geologic boys there," explained Luke, as they threaded their way among quaint little one-story shacks with here and there some larger structure. "Topographic fellers, surveyors 'n' rodmen 'n' levelmen and such; it's kept for the geologic boys, mostly, though there's others there, too."

They paused at the door of Bobby's new home for a few parting words.

"Well, bub, here ye are," drawled Luke, "'n' now it's up to you, as the feller says. You've got the cards in yer hand. Yer knuckle down and make good. Maybe you don't realize what a short cut you've taken. Ye might have been two years gettin' here if the cap'n hadn't took a fancy to yer. You jest keep yer eyes 'n' ears open; don't be feared o' gettin' yer hands dirty, 'n' remember who's yer boss. I'll tell you what the cap'n told me last night down to Mesa. He said he's goin' to get you broke in to the ditch work, so's later—after a year or so, mebbe—you can come down as canal-rider in the valley. Now there's yer fortune read for ye. You mayn't see me much, 'cause I got my ostriches down Tempe 'n' my overseein', but when I do drive up I'll look in on yer. And by the time I have to knuckle down to water-masterin' in earnest I'll count on yer for a rider. Meanwhile, you stick t' the cap'n, if ye know what's good for yer; don't ever tell him a lie; don't ever talk to him when he's busy, and if ye have an idee tell him it."

Bobby grasped the brown hand which Luke held out to him. "There's one thing I want to ask you," he said. "It's about those prehistoric people. Did they really have ditches and—and things—tunnels—for irrigating? I can't always tell if you're jollying me, because you're so kind of—funny. I don't mind being jollied," he added, frankly; "but for a special reason I'd like to know."

Luke Merrick looked down into Bobby's frank, inquiring eyes. "Used to bein' jollied, are ye?"

"Yes, but I don't mind it; because people can jolly you and still be friends with you. Lots of fellows jolly me."

"Well, son," said Luke, smiling, "you take my advice and don't bother much 'bout them prehistorics. They was there, sure enough, and I'll show you Cassy Grandy when you're down t' the valley. But the cap'n's got no use for all these tales ye hear of sub-

irrigation and the like. He's thinkin' 'bout Uncle Sam's big job, an' you'll only queer yerself with him if you let yer mind run on fossile-huntin'. That was the trouble with the lad was doin' the work you'll probably do, and he was a likely youngster, too, otherwise. So you jest think 'bout what you got to do."

Bobby said he would, for, indeed, he realized himself that it would not augur well for him with the practical captain if he showed himself a dreamer. In plain fact, Captain Craig took no stock in most of the astonishing tales of former civilization in the historic valley. He admitted that there had been such a civilization and that was about all. He thought the people who came from the Smithsonian Institution were a nuisance.

And he used a piece of the ancient porous tiling for a rough plum-bob.

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[1] Casa Grande

[2] Smithsonian Institution

CHAPTER X
BOBBY HEARS OF RED THORNTON

Bobby's room was small, but immaculately clean, containing a single iron bed, a plain table, a straight-backed chair, a rocking-chair, and a dresser. The floor was covered with a grass carpet. On the wall the sole embellishment was a framed notice which read:

> *Loyalty to the Government is the keynote of success in the several branches of the Reclamation and Conservation Service. The workers are urged to give no information to representatives of the press, but to refer all such inquiries to the engineers in charge. Complaints in regard to meals and accommodations should be made to the Commissary.*
>
> *Breakfast at 7 A.M. Lunch at 1 P.M. Supper at 7 to 9 P.M.*

Bobby had no complaints to make. As for giving out information, he would not think of doing such a thing—he made the resolve then and there. He was now an official of the Government, and he hoped he realized the responsibility. As far as he was concerned newspaper reporters, however persistent, should appeal in vain. He would be absolutely impartial; he would treat all the newspapers alike. All the deep secrets of the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture might be his, but he would not divulge them. He would send all such people to the captain. As for complaints about meals and accommodations, why that must be just the Government's way of poking fun at him. What complaints could there be with this tidy little room on the edge of that vast, wild valley, and the mess-tent hard by with Uncle Sam's flag flying above it? The Black Ranger and Dan Dreadnaught had never known anything like this. What complaint could there be with that mighty dam down there guarding the outlet of this remote valley; with this goodly company of grimy, competent workers; this great, happy family; and with Apache Indians lolling in the background? What complaint could there possibly be?

"Any fellow that complained would be crazy," said Bobby.

He felt as if he had suddenly been introduced into the delightful mystery of boarding-school life. He had read boarding-school stories of enviable youths who lived in rooms decorated with pennants, played football and baseball, suffered hazing and in turn hazed others, whose sanctums were mysterious retreats where mischievous plots were fomented and who apparently never had any lessons to do. The voices which he now heard down-stairs seemed to make these delightful pictures a reality.

"Have you got my red necktie?" some one called.

The person addressed called back that he had not, and that he wouldn't take it for a gift.

"Well, it's blamed funny; it's gone."

"Maybe Dynamite Charlie's using it for a blast flag," some one suggested.

“Did you see the new souvenir the captain brought?” some one else called.

“That kid that was talking to Luke Merrick?”

“Yup. Every time the captain goes East he brings back a new toy.”

“Well, he can pick a winner, all right. I’ll say that for him.”

“You don’t suppose that kid’s going to take Red’s place, do you?”

“Looks that way.”

“The cap can tell by the way a kid makes mud pies whether he’ll make an engineer.”

“Going over to the concert at Contractors’ Camp?”

“If I get that west quadrangle map lettered up, I am.”

“Well, come on over to eats.”

The last sentence reminded Bobby to stop listening and finish drying his face. Over in the mess-tent were half a dozen long boards, lined with the manual workers. Somewhat apart from these were two smaller boards around which were seated mostly young fellows, some in khaki, others in white duck. Bobby was given a seat among these, and they sized him up very promptly.

“Hear about Corby on the Long Canal?” some one asked. “He’s raising square green peas—can’t roll off your fork. Shows what irrigation will do.”

“That’s nothing,” said another. “Walley, down in Glendale, is growing stuffed olives.”

Bobby felt that they were trying him out, and he smiled his frank, half-bashful smile.

“C. S.?” some one asked him.

“I—I don’t know what it means,” said Bobby.

“Civil service.”

“No, I’m not,” he said.

“You going to take Red Thornton’s place?”

“I don’t know yet what I’m going to do.”

“Seen anything of Red lately, Michigan?” some one asked.

“Yes, he was knockin’ around the other day.”

Bobby noticed that few of these fellows were called by their own names, but usually by the name of the State or town from which they came. He gathered that they were surveyors, draftsmen, and young engineers lately from college, engaged in detail work of more or less responsibility. His exclusion from their familiar shop-talk made him feel very green and rather ill at ease, but they addressed him pleasantly now and then, and manifested a disposition to jolly him, which he took in good part. Then and there he laid the foundation of his general popularity. He was rather curious about Red Thornton, who seemed to be the subject of rather sneering comment.

In the morning he went to the office-building and was taken through a drafting-room, where blue-prints of the whole project decorated the rough board partition, and into a second room, where the captain and several other men sat at desks. Bobby

supposed them to be engineers. A spectacled young fellow in khaki was talking with the captain.

"How'd you sleep, Bob?"

"I was too excited, kind of, to sleep very good," said Bobby, frankly.

"Well, to-night you'll be good and tired and you'll sleep better," the captain laughed. "This is Mack—Mr. MacConnell. He's going to start you in. I'm going to send you out on the freshet diversion work, where you'll pick up some knowledge and get acquainted with the country. Two of our best men started up there, and one—the one whose place you're going to fill—would have made another; but he fell down. You're down as L. H.,[1] Bob—twenty-six dollars a month, and, of course, your living is furnished you. There's just one thing I want to say. Washington doesn't like the idea of carting a young fellow across the continent and putting him in the L. H. list—and they're waiting for the chance to jump on me. Don't give them the chance. That's all."

He swung around and plunged into the work before him.

Mack and Bobby started up through the valley, skirting the lake. Already the big dredge was uttering its diabolical clamor. Running from it a heavy pipe-line resting on pontoons was carried to shore and disappeared over one of the lower ledges of rock. They passed some men who were drilling a large rock for blasting.

"That's Dynamite Charlie," said Mack, as they passed. "Hello, Charlie!"

All about men were busy. Some, with transits over their shoulders and accompanied by others with rods and stakes, were starting out and greeted the pair as they passed, sometimes giving a curious glance at Bobby. One group of three or four carried a tent and duffel-bags, evidently bent on some work which would detain them overnight or longer. One stout little gentleman hurried along with a black box.

"Morning, Mr. Thomas," said Mack; then to Bobby: "He comes from the Bureau of Standards—tests bridges and things all over the country."

In the distance pigmy figures could be seen perched on cliffs and climbing the slopes.

"That's Williams of the Forestry Bureau," said Mack; "and that's Barney, who planned the emergency gates at Panama."

"What's that white streak winding down around those cliffs?" Bobby asked.

"That's a concrete diversion—Thornton planned that."

A beaten path led them out of the bed of the valley, and as they climbed the slope Mack continued to point out things of interest. Soon they stopped at a little shack, from which Bobby had a fine view of the valley below, though they were by no means outside of it. Here there were tools, lanterns, and such things, and from these Mack selected an implement with a handle about as long as an ax and with a narrow metal end not unlike a hoe. It had U. S. stamped on it, as indeed had almost everything which Bobby saw.

"Now we'll have to climb a bit," said Mack. "When you start learning engineering you have to begin at the top and work down, as the captain says."

"Who—who is Thornton?" Bobby asked, as they clambered up a pretty rough ascent.

"Red Thornton? Oh, he's the fellow who was here before you. He worked up and got so's they let him plan trunk-lines and outlets. Red did some good diversion work up here—cut out a lot of sandy ground, and that's what counts. Rock channel is what you're after; remember that. I'll show you."

"Was he—discharged?"

"Well, he was reduced, and then they let him out. He got to hanging round the mines and panning for gold and loafing down at Frazer's. He was always knocking the Government. The captain says he was smart enough, but he got the notion of making a fortune in a hurry. That was his bug. A good many fall for that notion out here."

"I kind of don't like the idea of taking the place of a fellow that's discharged. It—it seems to me I'll be thinking about it all the time."

"Don't let that worry you," said Mack. "He got what was coming to him. You won't hear any one in camp wasting any sympathy on him. We've no use for that sort. If a fellow gets into Sediment Camp it's his own fault."

"What camp?" said Bobby.

"Sediment Camp. It's just a name for those who drop the service or are dropped and hang around. Usually they haven't got money enough to get home. They're a kind of sediment."

Bobby thought it was a pretty sad name.

"I wouldn't exactly say that Red was crooked," Mack continued; "but he had a vein of it, as the miners say. He took photographs of Casa Grande and sold them, and he made a survey for the miners on the q. t. Uncle Sam doesn't let you do outside work. Red had every chance in the world; he served in topographic work with the Survey, and made the contours on all the north quadrangles in Montana, and he was booked for revetment work down the Missouri. Leighton said his main leads up here where scientific, and so they are."

"Who's Leighton?" Bobby asked.

"Oh, he's one of the big engineers; he designed the spillway."

"It makes it seem worse because he was smart, don't you think so?" said Bobby. "Gee! I'll never be able to do that work!" he added, with a twinge of apprehension.

"Oh, you're not starting in on that, never fear; you're just getting the A B C of it. It'll be a year before you're on construction. This is just coaxing, you're on. You begin by coaxing water and you end by browbeating it—like the captain does."

Bobby felt reassured. "The captain told me about loyalty to the service," he said. "Maybe he was thinking of Thornton, then—hey?"

"Like enough. The captain's got no use for Red at all. If you want to get the captain's goat talk about the ruins and the ancient civilization. Red sold some old pieces of junk to tourists down at the project—said they were relics. When the captain heard that—*good night*! That was the end of Red. C. S. or no C. S., out he went. And don't you waste your sympathy on him."

"I wonder if I'll see him," said Bobby. It was characteristic of his modesty that he should rather dread a meeting with this fellow whom he was to supplant.

"Oh, sure you'll see him. He'll blow in with the next tornado. He was down in Mesa last I heard."

It was all very well to tell Bobby not to waste sympathy on this young man whose star had declined; but he did waste sympathy on him, for that was Bobby. His enthusiasm was shadowed a little by this other side of the noble picture of Uncle Sam, wonder-worker. He had never supposed that there was another side—where people left and were discharged and knocked the Government and became ne'er-do-wells and derelicts on the project. Sediment Camp! What a name. Well, it would only make him the more loyal, the more faithful.

After a tramp of ten or fifteen minutes they came upon a little trickle of water falling among rocks.

"Here we are," said Mack. "Now just remember that if all there was to be done was dig a ditch for this water they'd send a Swede or a Dago up here to do it. If you follow this trickle down for a mile or so you'll find it flows into that concrete trench. Now, what you're going to do is to make its path easy for it. This isn't radical diversion, like they're doing over on the west slopes. It's what we call up-stairs work—making beds."

"I get you," said Bobby.

"Now, let's follow this down. You see for the first few yards there's nothing to do, and you don't want to be rooting into the stream-bed with your lifter just because you happen to have it handy, and you don't want to try any out-and-out diversion unless there's some good reason for it. Just remember the captain will always ask you for your *reason*—every single time."

Bobby followed him along, watching and listening intently.

"Now, here's a bend and a rock. See how she goes to the left of the rock and plows her way through the soil? Now let's move the rock a little." He edged the hoe-like implement under the rock and pulled it three or four feet. "Now, you see, the stream runs off to the right there, and tumbles down that rocky crevice. And that's so much less—"

"Less silt for the dredge to pump out," Bobby interrupted, with a sudden inspiration.

"That's the idea," said Mack. "Now let me tell you something. Get a short cut whenever you can. One thing that will make you feel cheap is when the captain comes up here and shows you where you might have saved twenty yards. 'Use your brain, not your lifter.' That's what he'll tell you. Oh, I've got the captain's number. He's a fiend at it."

Bobby laughed.

"But remember this, too. A mile of rock is better than ten yards of soil, so go after the rock channel every trip."

They followed the little stream down for some distance, Bobby removing obstacles and essaying improvements in its course.

"Here's where it makes a sharp bend," said he. "Won't it jump its traces there some day, maybe? I heard the captain use that expression," he added, apologetically.

“Good for you,” said Mack; “so we’ll do it for him; we’ll make a cut-off. Just drag your lifter through here and cut off the bend. Now she’ll flow easier—see? Sometimes when the Old Lady does that of her own accord the people in a village wake up and find that instead of the river passing their door it’s a mile away.”

“Who’s the Old Lady?”

“The Mississippi. You’ll never hear the service boys call her anything but the Old Lady.”

Thus they followed the stream in all its windings, defining its bed more clearly for it, showing it the path of least resistance (for little streams have to be taught this, just as a kitten must have its face dipped in the milk), and leading it among rocks whenever possible. Sometimes they would stop and consider what to do. Bobby liked Mack, and was not afraid to make a suggestion now and then—usually a good one. At last they reached the concrete trench at a point not far up the slope from the prospective high-water mark of the reservoir.

“Now,” said Mack, “you follow the trench up to where the next trickle comes into it and then follow the trickle till it’s as small as this one was where we started, and then come down. Don’t be afraid. If you should make a mistake the dam won’t break; but use your judgment—first your brain, then your lifter, as the captain says. You can get down to mess for lunch to-day, but when you take the freshet-beds farther up you’ll have to take your grub—you might even have to bivouac now and then. Ain’t afraid to sleep outdoors, are you? And don’t forget to get a pocket compass in the commissary.”

Mack left him, and Bobby started up the trench for his little game of solitaire with the stream above. He found the work fascinating. He was but an infinitesimal part of the great project, and the territory in which he worked but an infinitesimal section of the vast country which the engineers had to consider; but already his small responsibility acted like a tonic on him; his imagination took flight, and he fancied himself a little lord of creation up there on his lonely slope, with the great storage site beneath him.

At dinner-time, when the distant bugle sounded, he went down to mess and laughed good-naturedly when Michigan called over to Dynamite Charlie at one of the long tables, and asked him if he had heard anything about the farmers down below raising tearless onions. Dynamite Charlie said he hadn’t, but that he understood when distribution began in earnest the farmers east of Tempe were going to raise macaroni extensively.

Bobby knew well enough that this was intended for him, and he laughed when the fellows winked at one another, and stood for no end of jollying.

A fellow who has charge of the “diversion work” up on the Forest Slope Section can afford to be amiable.

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[1] Meaning Local Help, as distinguished from Civil Service men; one who is hired on the spot and receives small wages. Such help is usually temporary.

CHAPTER XI
AN ACCIDENT

They called it Forest Slope because if you followed it far enough away from the storage site you would come into an arm of national forest, the somber border of which was visible in the distance even from where Bobby worked.

He often paused and looked up that way, wondering what the wilderness was like and what the lives must be of those who lived amid its dim recesses. Occasionally it sent him some token of itself, a leaf or broken twig, carried down along the devious way of one or other of these tiny tributaries. Bobby had learned to distinguish "forest water" by its coolness and by the scantiness and character of the silt which it bore.

He had never supposed that there were more than two kinds of water—salt water and fresh water—but he learned from Mack a half-dozen different kinds distinguishable by Uncle Sam's geologists and engineers. He knew the "stranger water," as they called it, which had been diverted through a defile in the Rockies, lured from the source of some easterly flowing stream away from its natural watershed and brought through mountain fastness and deep ravine for use in the Salt River Valley. He could tell the Rocky Mountain water when he tasted it or felt of it. He knew the "tableland water" and the brakish subsoil water. He came to distinguish by instinct.

Occasionally Captain Craig made him a flying visit, and usually showed him where the wild water had stolen a march on him. He was always cordial and apparently satisfied, though usually in a great hurry. Of Luke Merrick Bobby saw nothing, and he often wondered about him and whether he drove up often from his valley. Sometimes the talk which he had overheard that first night in the wagon at Mesa recurred to him, and it troubled him a little to feel that some one was plotting to swindle the Government. At first he had thought that he ought to tell the captain about it, or, at least, Luke Merrick, but in the prosaic light of day the talk of the two men seemed to lose much of its significance. After all, he had been half asleep at the time, and the hints he had overheard justified only the very vaguest inferences. There was really nothing definite to tell, and the captain would probably take no stock in it, anyway.

One thing did stick in his memory, and that was the tunnel mentioned by the strangers. He could not disassociate it with Luke Merrick's mention of ancient underground ruins, though not for worlds would he have mentioned those ancient irrigators to the captain. He would leave them to the Smithsonian people, to whom they belonged. But he wondered about the tunnel, just the same.

One evening he drove a topographic stake in the ground far up beyond the second ledge of Forest Slope and trudged, weary and dirty, down to Roosevelt after the hardest day's work he had ever known. He would not go farther without bivouac equipment, and he intended to ask Mack whether he should go so equipped the next day and trace an elusive creek farther.

"It's forest water, all right," he said, as he sank into the comfortable chair in Mack's room in the draftsmen's bungalow. "It's something new. I never saw it before, but I bet

it's a shoot."[1]

"Go as far as you like," said Mack, "only don't get over the eastern shed. You'd come out at New Orleans."

Bobby laughed. "It isn't stranger water," said he.

"You're getting to be some fiend," commented Mack; "the water can't put anything over on you."

And, indeed, Bobby did know a good deal about it for a boy who had denounced water so.

The next day he started out with provisions for one night. As he went along he marked with chalk the rocks which the laborers who came later must move. At last he came to a point where the stream was so small and the physical work so light that he could do it by himself, and he pressed on with his lifter, making easier the narrowing stream's flow and putting it in the way of plowing a better and more permanent channel for itself. A little before dusk he lost it in a rocky crevice not a quarter of a mile from the edge of the forest.

Looking down, he could see the reservoir site and the little lights of Roosevelt in the distance, and the mighty dam was a mere dash of white among those dark, rugged hills. It was always so in a distant view; the familiar, homelike details of the valley, the buildings, the mill, were unseen, and nothing apparent to the eye but the dam and the wilderness.

Bobby made his way up through the sparse tree growth into the forest, resolved to camp in its solitude and work back along another stream in the morning. Scarcely had he opened his duffel-bag and prepared to kindle his fire when a sound made him look up, and he saw a pony winding its way toward him among the trees. Its rider—a young fellow in a red shirt and cowboy hat—was not even holding the reins.

"Hello!" said Bobby, surprised. "It's all right to camp here, isn't it?"

"All right enough to camp," the stranger drawled in a mild, easy tone, "but I can't let you start a fire. Who are you?"

His manner was so gentle and his voice so soft, that he seemed to be a natural part of the wilderness, and to have acquired some of the calmness and quiet of the forest.

"I'm working down at the reservoir," Bobby said. "Doing some work on the small streams on the slope. I was going to camp all night and then work down. It's— Is it all right to stay here?"

"B'longs to you much as it b'longs to me."

"Are you a guard?" asked Bobby.

"That's what they call me. I hear them blasting down yonder," he added; "they must be getting along."

"The lake is rising," said Bobby. "We're distributing a little already. I—didn't know it was against the rule to start a fire or I wouldn't have tried it. Gee; I wouldn't break a rule—especially because now I can see it's a good one."

"If you burn the trees it just means clogging the canals," said the guard.

"Sure it does," said Bobby, glad to touch a familiar topic. "Cracky! I'd only be making extra work for myself, wouldn't I?"

"You'll have to eat, though," said the guard.

"I don't mind not eating," said Bobby; "I got some bacon; maybe I could eat it raw. Gee! I wouldn't break the rule."

"Better come along to my cabin," said the guard, quietly. "Me and Grace is always glad to see folks. Ain't we, Gracie?" he added, stroking the pony.

"It—it wouldn't be against the rule?" asked Bobby.

"No, indeed; we got one visitor already."

Bobby was glad enough to go with him, and he followed as the pony, unguided, threaded its way through the forest till they came upon a clearing where stood a small cabin and a corral. Outside was a flag-pole with the Stars and Stripes flying, and this the guard hauled down.

Within the cabin it was very cozy. A young man was seated in one of the bunks with his knees drawn up, playing a harmonica. He was rather shabbily dressed in a pair of patched trousers and a faded gray flannel shirt. His seediness seemed to concern him little, however, and he greeted Bobby cordially before the latter had so much as crossed the threshold with "Hello, kiddo!" and proceeded with his music without further notice of the new arrival. His face was thickly freckled and he had curly, glossy hair as red as a brick. These were the things which Bobby saw upon entering, but later as they talked his attention was riveted by the stranger's eyes, which were gray and very vivacious, with a kind of dancing recklessness in them.

"When you going to eat, Bentley?" the young man asked of the guard.

"Soon as I can get it ready. This fellow comes from down Roosevelt; he's workin' on the slope. That was your specialty, wasn't it? I don't know what your name is," he said, turning to Bobby, "but this is Mr. Thornton."

"You working up the streams?" Thornton asked.

Bobby felt very ill at ease. He did not like to admit that he was even attempting the work which Red Thornton had skilfully carried so far.

"It's just the—the A B C of it," he said. "Of course, I couldn't plan a trench; 'tisn't even regular diversion *I'm* doing."

"What were you going to do, start a fire?" the stranger asked, glancing at the duffel-bag.

"Yes, but—"

"Didn't get away with it, hey? You should have waited another hour; then Bentley'd have been in bed—wouldn't you, Bent?"

"I'd rather be here, anyway," said Bobby.

"You on auto leave?"

"I don't know what that is," said Bobby.

"Guess Bent can tell you," the stranger laughed. "It's leave you give yourself. When I used to work up this far I'd always spend a day with Bent 'fore I worked down. Nobody knows the dif." He began to play his harmonica.

"Not with me," said the guard. "Anybody can rest here. Don't drag me into it."

"Bent's all right," said Thornton, "only he's got patriotitis."

Bobby was not at all at home with this sophisticated stranger. But Thornton was so offhand and pleasant that he could not dislike him.

After they had eaten the simple meal which Bentley prepared, he and Thornton fell to playing checkers, while Bobby watched them. He was amused at the wry faces which Thornton made and greatly flattered when the latter winked at him, as he did whenever he got Bentley into a tight place. “Hey, kiddo?” he would say, and screw his face up with an exasperating look of triumph.

He insisted on sleeping in a hammock under the trees, so that Bobby could have the extra bunk, and he blithely announced, winking at Bobby, that if he was cold in the night he would kindle a fire.

In the morning Bentley went off on his circuit, and Thornton volunteered to accompany Bobby down toward the lake and “put him next to a few tricks.”

“Bent’s a pretty good sketch,” said he; “he’s everybody’s friend.”

“I guess you kind of get so you feel friendly toward everybody when you live in the forest. Don’t you think so?” said Bobby.

“You get to feel blamed lonely—it’s a good, long ways from Broadway. Bent’s dead and he don’t know it.”

“I never saw Broadway,” said Bobby; “but I like this better. Except I might like to look in the store windows. I like to look in store windows. Don’t you?”

Thornton looked at him and laughed.

“I heard about you,” said Bobby; “but, anyway, I like you. And I couldn’t help being put on this work.”

“Well, it ain’t for the Government I’m going to put you wise,” said Thornton. “I’m through with that bunch. I’m just hanging ’round now till I turn over a little deal. I know where there’s a negative well down Mesa way, and I’ll turn that into more money than you’ll make here in a year. It’ll irrigate three or four farm units with something left over. There’s more money in knowledge than there is in shoveling dirt. I know whose farm it’s on. You’re young and innocent yet, kiddo.”

Bobby felt very much so now. “What is a negative well?” he asked.

“You know what an artesian well is, don’t you? Well, a negative well is an artesian well that doesn’t shoot up. You’ve got to bring it up with a hydrant, or a mill.”

“And do you mean you’ll tell the farmer about it and get him to pay you money?” Bobby asked, a light beginning to dawn upon him.

“Soon as he gets here and I get a squint at him. The farm’s vacant now, but they’ll be flocking out by the hundreds soon—soon as distribution begins in earnest. That’s all I’m waiting for.”

“There isn’t much skill in having a secret and selling it,” said Bobby. “You don’t feel as if you had done anything, kind of. If I knew as much as you do about engineering, gee! I’d stick to it—I would.”

Thornton laughed.

“If an artesian well is on a public land homestead,” Bobby asked, “wouldn’t it be the Government’s water, just the same as the storage water?”

"Maybe, and maybe not; but this farm is private land and the water's private water and can be used—used and sold. It'll wash six farms."

"Then they wouldn't have to pay the Government, would they?" Bobby asked.

"That's what they wouldn't. You hear talk about the Government charging rates for water just till the construction work is paid for, and then giving it free. And you hear about selling electric power to Phoenix so's to cut down the water rates to the farmer. Oh, Uncle Sam is keen for the farmers—nit, not. Look at the bunch of them that's been here two years, waiting for water; there's dozens of them filed three years ago and the lake's nothing but a big mud-puddle yet. You don't suppose the Government's ever going to stop the rates, do you? These immigrants are easy. The Government wouldn't let a man come out here and put up a claim shanty and file for water. No, he must come out and live and sit and wait. That's the way the Government does things. He must start a *home*, as they call it, even if he dies of dry rot. Take a man that's got a hundred and sixty acres of land—or rather sand; sand and sage. Uncle Sam 'll only sell him water for forty acres—maybe not that. He's got to sell the rest 'cause he can't get water for it. That's what they call 'homesteading'—intensive farming—a lot of rot! That's to make room for a lot of Swedes. There won't be any people left in the New York tenements if this keeps up."

"I should think that would be good," said Bobby.

"Good for nothing. Why, take this land I'm telling you about, south of Mesa. There's two full units there—three hundred and twenty acres. Suppose the owners cut it up into forties, as they'll have to do, because the Government won't give any man more water than he needs to support his family. *Home, Sweet Home* idea. There'll be eight farms, each paying four dollars an acre for water. Over a thousand dollars a year. And it'll never be less—take it from me! That little old negative well of mine is in one of those units, and my cue is to see the new owner before he cuts it up into forties. He can irrigate his whole hundred and sixty acres and keep it, and he can sell water to the other unit for one or two dollars—anyway, he can beat the Government's price. Now just suppose I unload my little secret for five hundred bucks?"

Bobby said nothing. Thornton was evidently well posted, and he was very convincing. Bobby could not answer these arguments. His reply was strong or weak, as you choose to view it, but it was very characteristic of him.

"Sometime," he said, "Roosevelt is coming out here to dedicate the dam—'cause it's named after him. It's the biggest dam that ever was. When you look at it far off it seems kind of lonely like. Once I knew a dam that couldn't be trusted; it killed my uncle and my aunt. But this one looks as if it isn't scared. Some men came all the way from Europe to see it. I asked Captain Craig what would happen if it broke, and he said, '*It won't break.*' So whenever I look at it I think, cracky! it can be trusted. When they get the coping all finished and the spillway working they're going to have the dedication. Jiminy! it must be great to have a dam like that named after you. I'm going to be there when they dedicate it, that's one sure thing. And I can say I helped. I—I think maybe I'd like to have my hands dirty, so as I can feel I helped. Maybe you don't understand what I mean."

"You'll have to wash your hands when Teddy comes," Thornton laughed.

“You can’t always explain what you mean,” said Bobby; “but if a big dam like that, way off in the mountains, can make it so that people far away don’t have to live in tenements any more, than I think it’s good.”

They clambered down the upper ledges and for a few minutes neither spoke.

“Well,” said Thornton, “you’ve got some imagination. You’re a queer kid. You’ll never be an engineer, though, if you let your imagination run away with you.”

“I know I’ll never make as good a one as you,” said Bobby. “I can see you know a lot.”

“Well, don’t worry, kiddo. If I can pass you any tips you’re welcome to them.”

“There’s one thing I want to ask you,” said Bobby. “I guess you got a right to sell that—that secret. And just because I’d rather work and get money that way isn’t saying a fellow hasn’t got a right. I think it’s fun working—for Uncle Sam. Only there’s one thing I was thinking about. Would that water be as good as the storage water?”

“Better—it would have soil richness.”

“’Cause it would be different, and I wondered if it would be as good.”

“What makes you think it would be different?” Thornton asked, eying him closely.

“’Cause it would; I could tell the difference. I couldn’t tell if it would be better ’cause I don’t know anything about farming—yet. I haven’t been in the valley except to Mesa. But I could tell the difference.”

Thornton stopped short and stared at him, and his eyes were so brilliant and penetrating, with a momentary suspense, that Bobby felt quite uncomfortable.

“No, you couldn’t,” said Thornton.

“Yes, I could,” Bobby answered.

He walked along at Thornton’s side, and followed him as he clambered down the steep, rocky ways until they rooted out a little trickle of water. Much of the time Thornton seemed preoccupied, and at other times he made cynical remarks about the Government and sneering observations about its workers. These remarks annoyed Bobby, particularly as his companion seemed so well posted and it was impossible to answer him. He was nothing if not clever, and he showed Bobby how to pond a brook to prevent its flooding; carrying out in miniature the principle of the whole gigantic project. Whatever his grudge against the Government, he certainly cherished no resentment against Bobby, and the boy more than liked him—he was captivated by him.

It was almost dark when they reached the border of the lake, one of those stretches of temporary shore inclosing an arm of the great body of water, formed as it spread and grew. The lights of Roosevelt shone on the slope beyond. The cheerful illumination of the big mess-tent reminded Bobby that he had been away from it for two whole days, and he believed the merry company assembled there would jolly him the more because of his absence. He wondered where Red Thornton was going to eat and spend the night.

The big dredge was moored on the opposite side of this bay, and its long train of huge piping, resting on pontoons, extended across the water, disappearing beyond a minor hill. The dredge was running and sending its unearthly din up into the quiet

night. The roar of a lion is a whispering zephyr compared with the screech of a suction-dredge. The floating pipe-line vibrated in unison with the machinery, the pontoons rocking like boats.

"Well," said Thornton, "here you are, and just in time for eats. Think you can waltz along that line? That's the way we used to do. Shorter than going round."

"Where are you going?" asked Bobby.

"Me? Oh, nowhere in particular; down to Frazer's, maybe."

"You couldn't get there till midnight."

"Not by the road, but I can cut off ten or a dozen miles."

"Another secret?" Bobby asked.

"I know the hills," said Thornton.

Bobby hesitated a moment. "Maybe you could come to my room with me, and I could bring you some supper," he said. "If—of course, it's none of my business—but if you won't get any money till you can sell that secret—maybe—anyway, I've got fifty dollars. It's two twenty-dollar bills and a ten, and there's no way to use it here. You can't even buy a soda. Maybe you'd like to have the ten, and when you sell your secret —"

Red clapped him on the shoulder and laughed. "You're a little prince, kiddo, but don't worry about me. Go over and fill up on your uncle. I can't go over there, but you're a brick. Don't say you know me; it won't help you any with that crew. And don't mention the secret, either; don't say anything about it to anybody. I told you because—oh, just because you happen to strike me right."

Bobby picked up his duffel-bag. "Well, good-by—Red," said he.

"Good-by, sport, and don't get to dreaming about dams and tenement-houses while you're doing the tight-rope act. And don't worry about me. You're aces up, kiddo."

He watched Bobby as he stepped gingerly along the quivering pipe-line, his duffel-bag strapped on his back. Once he turned his head a little to look at Thornton.

"Don't turn; keep your eyes ahead," the latter called.

Bobby had gone but a few feet farther when he lost his balance, righted himself, lost it again, and went head over heels into the water.

He was never fully conscious of what happened immediately afterward. For a few seconds he was floundering in the water, sputtering, and trying vainly to clutch one of the pontoons. Then he went down, and there was a sensation of being drawn with terrible rapidity. His hands, grasping spasmodically, clutched stones and mud; then he was dragged, as it seemed, by some tremendous power against something hard and hollow, which he fought off with all the desperation of blind instinct. He was sideways against this awful thing, and its edges pressed and cut into his sides, and it bent him like a twig. There was a tremendous roaring, intermingled with a muffled rattling and clanging; things struck him in the face, and the merciless submarine monster kept bending him—bending him—

Then, suddenly, he was drawn sideways across these edges that were pressing him. As his feet passed by one there was a terrific wrenching and pulling at his legs; then sudden spasmodic jerks the other way. If his mind had been capable of thought he

might have supposed himself contended for by two rival monsters, and being wrenched apart in the conflict. Then the awful pulling lessened—ceased—and he was breathing the free air.

RED THORNTON RESCUES BOBBY

He lay on one of the pontoons all but unconscious, his head and clothing covered with mud, his face bruised and bleeding, his side throbbing. He opened his eyes languidly, half consciously. Some one, covered with mud like himself, was seated astride him, and he felt the sharp pressure and release of the person's hands below his ribs.

"Take a long breath when I push—that's right."

“Is—is it—Red?”

“Yes, it’s me—Red. You were up against the suction-pipe, kiddo. Keep breathing. That’s right. Draw your breath when I let go my hands; that’ll help.”

He pressed cruelly, then released the pressure—steadily, regularly, Scout fashion.

“I told you not to be thinking about Uncle Sam and dams and tenement-houses, didn’t I?”

“I—I wasn’t. I was thinking about you,” said Bobby, weakly.

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[1] Meaning a stream which has branched off suddenly from some larger stream.

CHAPTER XII
WORK AND AN ADVENTURE

They brought an army stretcher out on a rowboat and took him ashore to Uncle Sam's little hospital. News of the accident spread like fire, and many, hurrying out from the mess-tent, followed the stretcher, asking what had happened to the kid. Women, standing in the doorways of the married men's quarters, gazed fearfully at the little procession, and some, elbowing their way through the throng, looked at the white, bespattered face and turned away shuddering.

In five minutes it was noised about Roosevelt that the kid had been killed or was dying. Burly men who had jollied him waited silently in the trellised portico of the hospital to hear the verdict of the army surgeons. The mess-tent was deserted, with suppers left unfinished. The "kid" did not know of all this, and he would not have understood if he had known. Once, while they were carrying him along, he opened his eyes and said to Mack, who was close beside him, "You can't say he isn't a hero, anyway."

Later, when the nurse asked him if he were suffering any pain, he answered that he was, but that he could "think about the dam and the dedication and forget it, kind of."

The contour squad of the topographic branch didn't go over to beat the Contractors' Camp boys at basket-ball as they had intended to do, but lingered about with the others, waiting and talking about the kid, and asking what Roosevelt would seem like without him.

"He was so gol-blamed honest, you could see it stickin' out all over him," said one of the men from the dredge. "I'd laugh to hear him talk, and then hanged if I wouldn't be kind of ashamed for laughin'."

If Bobby could have seen the crowd outside—surveyors, levelmen, draftsmen, under-engineers, laborers—he might have thought that the great dedication was indeed at hand.

No one expressed any surprise that Red Thornton had dived into the very jaws of the great suction-pipe, for that was Red Thornton all over, and none were disposed to question his recklessness or his bravery. He was as hard of comprehension in many ways as Bobby himself, and the horrible death which he had challenged was hardly realized in its full significance until the excitement following the affair was over. Some said he was crazy.

What people did express surprise at was that Bobby had been in his company, and since the boy had been absent from camp for two days they wondered how long he had been with Thornton.

Bobby's injuries were serious, but not grave. Besides his cuts and bruises and the terrific shock he had sustained, one of his ribs had been broken and his convalescence was slow and painful. He bore his suffering with the same stoical patience that he had shown whenever his uncle had whipped him, and his long periods of silence interspersed with odd questions sometimes puzzled and sometimes amused his

attendants. Once, after a long silence, he said: “I think Uncle Sam is right not to let anybody have too much water, so as to make them not have too much land, because then more people will come and have farms.”

“That’s what Uncle Sam wants,” the nurse told him.

He was silent for a while, and then said, “I think Red is wrong, but that isn’t saying he isn’t a hero.”

Once he asked when the dedication would take place, and when he was told it would be in the spring, he said, “Maybe the Government will be kind of mad, maybe, because I got hurt, and I’ll have to go home and I’ll miss the dedication.” He seemed greatly relieved when they told him that was not likely to happen.

Often the captain dropped in to see him; Mack stopped each night on his way home, and sometimes Michigan, who usually had some atrocious tale of the valley, of ostriches which sat on pumpkins, supposing them to be their own eggs, and hatched out pumpkin pies, or of the enterprising ostrich farmers of Glendale who were planting ostrich feathers and raising spring hats.

But the visit he enjoyed most of all was that of Luke Merrick, who came up from Mesa with a load of commissary stores. He sat down, causing the cot to creak with his huge bulk, and it was a tonic to Bobby just to look at him.

“Well,” he drawled, “when yer comin’ down valley? Things is sprucin’ up down there now. You boys sent us water enough fer three cuttin’s o’ alfalfa this season, ’n’ it’ll be five next season—if the dam don’t bust. Yer mustn’t bust no more ribs.”

Bobby said he wouldn’t.

“Yer wouldn’t know things round Mesa; all that land south o’ the station’s been reclaimed. Outside Phoenix we got more ’n fifty-three miles o’ new laterals. Both the main canals is runnin’ ’bout a third full. Ain’t so bad, hey?”

“Are there many new people coming?” Bobby asked.

“Standin’ on line at the office. I don’t know what’s goin’ t’ become o’ Noo York ’n’ Chicago if ’t keeps up. Why, Phoenix is got growin’-pains, it’s spreadin’ so fast. Well, she’s got a big plain to spread in—nothin’ ter stop her. Fust thing you know, she’ll bunk her nose against Tempe.”

Bobby thought that was fine.

“Next spring,” said Luke, “I’m goin’ ter hire me a man to look after my little forty[1] ’n’ watch out for the ostriches, ’n’ I’ll take the reins in earnest. The Water Users’ Association has elected me, ’n’ Uncle Sam’s O. K.’d me, so I reckon it’s all right. I’m goin’ ter put you on the south ditch, and you’ll have ter sleep with one eye on the sluice-gates. They’re growin’ lemons down that way, and they’ll want lots o’ water—for lemonade, I reckon. They’re startin’ beet-sugar along there, too, to be handy. You remember them farm tracts south o’ Tempe you seen on the way up? Uncle Sam’s got an experiment farm started there—growin’ dates. Ellerton and that crowd is goin’ in fer grape-fruits—grape-fruits and navy oranges.”

Bobby was delighted with the picture painted by Luke. He imagined the land below, which had once been desert, flowing with milk and honey, and he longed to go down

there and take a hand with the burly water-master. Luke's visit did him a great deal of good.

On those days of convalescence he often thought of Red, and wondered where he was. At first he had thought that Thornton would come and see him, but he came to realize that this would have been embarrassing for the latter, if not impossible. Sometimes he mentioned him to others, but it troubled him and hurt him when they spoke unfavorably of Red, and advised him to shun his company, and he came at last to say nothing about him.

In his new interests he almost forgot the strange talk which he had heard on the night of his arrival at Mesa, and if he did think of it now and then he almost believed that he must have dreamed it.

After a while he was allowed to go back to his own little room in the Survey Bungalow. This being on a Thursday, the doctors thought it best for him to wait until Monday before beginning work. During the period of idleness he wandered about in the great valley, watching parts of the work which he had not seen. The arm of water where he had met with his mishap had entirely disappeared, its shores being submerged. The half-dozen or so bungalows which constituted a sort of suburb of Roosevelt—and which they called Teddyville—had been moved higher up the slope to make room for the spreading lake.

Down at the dam the spillway was almost completed, one of the gigantic sluice-gates was open so that a little of the flood water might pass, and the vast growing lake lapped higher against the mighty dam.

Bobby stood in the open doorway of one of the immaculate power-houses, fascinated by the steady movement of the great turbines, which made the heedless water yield its power as it passed to generate the current which should be sent miles and miles over the wild waste of country to light distant cities. That was Uncle Sam's scheme for saving money for the farmers.

"I don't see what makes Red think the Government won't stop the water rates some day," Bobby mused. "Cracky! I bet if he saw those engines he'd think so." His greatest hope seemed to be to set Red right about the Government. Bobby loved machinery, from the lathe in Bradley's garage to these steel giants—he loved it all. He loved the oily smell and the sight of the moist, polished steel moving back and forth, and he envied the grimy men who rubbed it with cotton waste. The love of machinery, like love of flowers, cannot be acquired—it is born in people.

Here and there about the valley sloping areas of soft land had been faced with concrete, and every creek which poured its water and the water of its tiny tributaries into the great lake had its concrete delta, so that the whole valley was besprinkled with little dots of spotless white, contrasting oddly with the dull gray of the land.

Soon, thought Bobby, there would be nothing there but the big storage lake and the dam and the power-houses, and one or two bungalows to accommodate the small permanent force. It would seem like a frontier post, with just those things and Uncle Sam's banner waving. "I don't know what ever made me think that engineers don't fight," he mused. "I sure don't."

Roosevelt, to be sure, would disappear, but Phoenix and Mesa and Tempe and Glendale would drink their fill of water and become great in the world.

On Sunday night Bobby went over to Contractors' Camp to the gospel service, and scarcely had he entered his room on his return when Tom Bonny, alias Michigan, blew in and laid down in the corner a curious apparatus which looked to Bobby like a toy aeroplane with an attachment similar to the electric vibrators and massage instruments that he had seen in the East.

"Hurry to go to bed? How you think you feel?"

"Fine," said Bobby, "only I get a kink in my side once in a while."

"Good," said Michigan. "What you want is a course of treatment from old reliable Doctor Bonny. The captain and Leighton told me to take your case, so here I am. How's your appetite?"

"My appetite is all right," said Bobby, a little annoyed, "and I'm going back to work to-morrow morning, and I don't want to be rubbed and vibrated with that thing. I'm all right."

"Sleep all night?"

"Sure."

"Ever fall asleep without knowing it?"

"Sure."

"That's a bad sign. It's a question whether you'll live for the dedication."

"I'm all right if they'd let me alone," said Bobby. "What is that thing?"

"It's a machine for measuring patriotism. If you can use that steady every day for a month and not go daffy, Uncle Sam's got you."

"What is it, Michigan?"

"It's a current-wheel, which is Latin for water-meter."

"Oh."

"Tonto Creek is going to make her affidavit, and we want you to take it down. How about you? The captain and Leighton and Doc Morris think you better not strain yourself yet awhile, so they suggested I put you in the crow's-nest and let you measure stream velocity. I told them you were just the cheese, because you're small and don't weigh much. What d'ye say—willing to die for your country?"

"As long as I can go back to work—"

"This is high-brow work, take it from me; it's the real thing. Are you with us?"

"Sure."

"All right, then. Meet me at North footbridge at eight and bring that thing with you."

He disappeared as informally as he had come in, and Bobby felt as if a cool breeze had passed over him.

When he examined the instrument more closely he saw that it consisted of a tiny metal paddle-wheel, whose paddles were in the shape of cups, with a four-winged rudder to hold it steady in the water and a weight to keep it in the right position. A long coil of twisted wire was attached to it. Connected with the axis of the little paddle was a

simple make-and-break device which opened and closed the electric current furnished by a couple of dry cells attached to the other end of the wire. Fastened to the battery-box was a little buzzer, and it needed only a few moments' study for Bobby to discover that every revolution of the little paddle-wheel was accompanied by a quick, short buzz at the other end of the wire. By keeping count of them and using a watch, the operator could readily determine the number of revolutions per minute, though how this would enlighten him as to the stream's velocity Bobby did not know.

The chief contributor to the reservoir, next to Salt River, was Tonto Creek, and it was to ascertain the speed of Tonto Creek in the minor autumn floods that Tom Bonny and a couple of the hydrographic boys were now going to follow it in its winding course above the valley.

Bobby did not see why it should take very much time to measure the velocity of a stream—any more time, indeed, than it took to lower the meter into the creek and note the result. But he was soon to learn that this new work was slow and tedious, though interesting and with an element of adventure.

Michigan and two other fellows were waiting for him in the morning with a wheelbarrow containing a coil of rope, some hemp, pulleys, turnbuckles, and something which looked to Bobby like a packing-case taken apart.

"I know something about that already," said he, "because I know about the make-and-break system; but how do you tell?"

"Well," said Michigan, "four revolutions a second is equal to a speed of seven feet per second. How's that strike you?"

"Do you have to drop it in more than once?" asked Bobby, as they made their way up the creek.

"You have to drop it in about 'steen million times."

"I don't see why," said Bobby.

"Because the water's got all kinds of different speeds in it. Ever hear of fluctuating quantities?"

Bobby had not.

"Well, then you've missed half your life; I could just live on fluctuating quantities. You see, it's this way, kid, a river doesn't move like a train of cars, all at the same speed. Some of it goes fast and some of it goes slow and some of it tangoes around. In toward shore it goes slow; out in the middle it goes fast. It flows faster on the top than it does at the bottom. Now what are you going to do about it?"

Bobby said he didn't know that there was anything he could do about it.

"So we take her measure every few feet, near the bottom, near the top, near shore, at the bend; then do some arithmetic and there you are. All we're after now is an average. If she'll give us a general idea we'll be satisfied till spring—hey?"

Bobby thought that would be all right.

They stopped at a part of the creek where there was a boat moored and a stake driven into the shore. There also were some rough beams. Two of these they raised in tripod form from the ground, adjusting them by a brace and a rope, which they tied to a stake in the ground. Two of the boys rowed across the creek, taking an end of wire

cable with them, and raised a similar support on the opposite bank. From one to the other of these the cable was brought taut, and the whole thing looked to Bobby exceedingly like the apparatus erected for a tight-rope walker. Next they fitted and clamped together the several parts of the box and Bobby saw that it was a little car with pulleys above it, which rolled back and forth across the stream, moved by a rope to either shore.

In this Bobby stood, lowering the meter into the water at points about a yard apart, once just below the surface, then just above the bottom, and so on as they moved the little car across the stream. The work was very interesting and the sensation of being suspended on the yielding cable above the rapid-flowing creek was delightful. He kept his watch in one hand, timing the buzzer and calling the results to Michigan, who wrote them down.

Whenever he had crossed the stream he got out of the car, and without disturbing the apparatus they moved it to a point where the stream was narrower or wider or made a bend, or where its geography gave reason for suspecting a different velocity of current.

Sometimes, having started Bobby on a fresh trip across and adjusted the rope so that he could move the car himself, the crew would go forward, exploring the creek, making soundings, and selecting places where the apparatus should next be placed. At such times Bobby would note down his own findings.

It was at one of these times that he met with a wholly novel adventure which gave him quite a scare and might have sent him back to the hospital. He was on one of his trips across the creek, and was holding the meter in the water. When he pulled it up it was unusually heavy, and he saw that something muddy was attached to it. It was on the very edge of the car when the muddy object made a sluggish movement which showed it to be alive, and, losing all presence of mind, Bobby dropped the whole business into the bottom of the car.

Instantly the creature opened its mouth and raised itself on its front legs in a ridiculous attitude of defiance at nobody in particular. It was a sort of lizard, nine or ten inches long, with a horrible, rough skin which looked as if it were covered with black beads, little beady eyes, and a great mouth with a kind of yellowish liquid around its edges. As soon as Bobby stirred it started around the bottom of the car in an aimless, lumbering fashion, and, stopping, seemed about to spring.

Bobby had not been in Arizona more than half a year without hearing of the awful Gila monster, and he was in a state of panic fright. Grasping the cable above the car, he lifted himself, resting his feet on its edges, and looked down at his unwelcome guest. The creature was as still as a statue, its fore legs stiffened up, its dreadful mouth gaping, its tail wriggling significantly. Bobby had heard that if one of these reptiles had something to brace its powerful tail against it could make a most phenomenal spring, and this one seemed now to be making a sort of blind exploration backward for this purpose.

Bobby was no coward, but an encounter with one of these unspeakable reptiles—which were the subject of many extravagant tales—had never been anticipated in his most adventurous dreams, and, resolving that discretion was the better part of valor, he

vacated the car completely and hung by his two hands from the cable. Scarcely was he free of the car than he heard a rap and felt sure that the creature had either made its threatened spring or administered a rebuke to the car with its muscular tail.

At all events, it still remained within and Bobby remained without, the cable cutting his hands cruelly. He realized now that he had by no means regained his full measure of strength. His head began to swim; his arms seemed pulling out of their sockets. He took out his handkerchief to make a pad for one hand, and nearly let go the other one while doing so. Then he tried to go hand over hand to shore, but could not. It required less exertion to hang just where he was, so he did so, calling lustily for help.

Below him the creek flowed rapidly in moderate flood and he knew that it was deep. Ever since his accident he had dreaded the water, and it gave him a sensation of faintness to see it flowing beneath him and to know that even a fairly good swimmer could hardly buck the current. Soon his unprotected hand began to bleed. Moreover, the insects which had pestered him all day, seeing him deprived of his two best weapons, instituted an assault and drove him distracted. He would have given all he possessed to swat his face with one fatal and resounding swat; but he dared not let go the cable.

He looked at the car, some few yards distant, and felt a sense of the preposterous unreason of the thing; that this abhorrent creature should reign in silent possession of the car while he was hanging between life and death outside it.

At last his friends came. It seemed hours that he had hung there, and the most welcome sound he had ever heard was their voices as they came into view a couple of hundred feet distant.

“There’s a thing in that car,” he said. “Hurry! I’m going to fall.”

They were none too soon, for he fainted as soon as he dropped into the boat which one of the boys rowed out to him.

“That makes one adventure under water and one above water,” said Michigan, as Bobby came to. “What’s the matter, couldn’t you and the lizard get along together?”

As for the reptile, he had a ride as far as the shore, and there his career of glory ended. Michigan said he was a Gila, all right; the others were not so sure. At all events, he got a bullet. What had possessed him to undertake such an ambitious enterprise as swallowing a current-wheel is a mystery. Possibly he thought he would like to taste the make-and-break spark device. There is no accounting for tastes, and a Gila hasn’t overmuch sense.

Bobby went home after that first day’s experience greatly wrought up and with a cruel cut on his hand. Still that was much better than to be bitten by a Gila monster. Of course, it was no such adventure as the Black Ranger had with grizzlies, or Frank Nelson with pirates and bandits, and yet, you know, it was some adventure at that.

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[1] A forty-acre farm.

CHAPTER XIII
RED'S PLANS

One day, when they had finished work, Mack and the others left Bobby to loosen the taut cable and put the meter in its box while they went over to Contractors' Camp for band rehearsal.

After arranging things for the night Bobby started for Roosevelt along the beaten path which they called Precipice Lane. He had not gone far when he came face to face with Red Thornton.

"Hello!" said he, surprised. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Waiting to see you," said Red. "How are you, kiddo?"

Bobby had not seen Thornton since his rescue from the dredge, and the change which had come over him was pitiful. He wore no coat, and his shirt, which had once been gray, was now of no color at all, and torn into the bargain. Worse than this, his cheeks were hollow and his face had the unmistakable look of worry and deprivation. But his eyes were still vivacious, and Bobby noticed that the trusty harmonica, his only companion, stuck out of his pocket.

"Wandering minstrel, hey?" he laughed, noticing where Bobby's glance fell.

"I'm glad to see you, Red," said Bobby. "I've often thought about you—especially when I was sick. I got to feel thankful to you more than to anybody else, that's one sure thing. And I wanted to see you so as to tell you so. They've got to admit you were a hero, and they do—even Mack does."

"That's very sweet and kind of him," said Red; "and some day I'll have to show him how to line a contour right, just to pay him back."

"Nobody says you can't line contours, Red—nobody ever said that. Gee! they couldn't say that, anyway. And everybody knows where I'd be if it wasn't for you—I don't care what they say."

"Gettin' sun-dried a mile away at the end of the pipe-line, hey?" laughed Red.

Bobby shuddered at the very thought; and he shuddered, too, at Red's flippant way of speaking of it.

"Well, anyway, I know you're a hero even if you don't. You can talk kind of joking about it, like—but I know. If you'd waited they'd have told you."

"Told me I was a crook, yes. I suppose you heard all those lies about me. Must have come hard to admit I could swing a stunt."

"They knew it was brave. Gee! they had to admit it."

"Gang of yaps," sneered Red, "clapping at a little dive. They ought to go to the circus, the whole bunch of them. They make me sick." His cynical view of his own daring act troubled Bobby.

"Well, anyway, I know, and I'm grateful to you."

"You know why I did it, don't you, kiddo?"

"Because you're a hero."

"Because you're a little prince; and you feel friendly toward me after all you've heard? Or maybe you don't believe the things."

Bobby hesitated. "I don't know anything about those things; but I know you're wrong about some things, Red. But, anyway, it hasn't got anything to do with it. One night when I was sick—when you're sick you can think of things better—that night I was thinking about the ways people treat each other, kind of. Home, where I lived, my uncle wouldn't let me join the Scouts 'cause he didn't like the Scoutmaster; and there was a man named Mr. Bronson that he didn't like either. But I found out some things about Mr. Bronson that he didn't know, and I got a right to like him."

"Kiddo, you're one little brick."

"You know that fifty dollars I told you about?" said Bobby. "Mr. Bronson gave me that. He's president of a bank. He said he'd give me money enough to go to college and be an engineer if I liked it. So you see maybe my uncle didn't know all about him—maybe. And that's the way it is when I think about you."

Red looked straight into Bobby's open face and refrained from any flippant remark.

"I've got that fifty dollars yet," said Bobby, after a moment's silence, "and I've got some at the Postal Bank. If you want some of it until— Did you sell your secret yet?"

"Don't you worry about me, kiddo, and you keep that little old fifty. The bank president knows a trump when he sees one. You can tell him that if you happen to be writing. I'm worrying along all right. You're wasting your time working for the Government, kiddo; they'll never appreciate anybody like you. I got wise to them all right, Craig and that outfit."

"That's one thing I don't like about you, Red."

Red reached out and tousled Bobby's hair. "Well, that's one thing I do like about you," he mocked. "Come on, walk along; I want to talk to you."

"I wish you'd tell me where you live, Red."

"Frazer's, Settlement House in Phoenix, Maricopa Indian Village, freight-cars—"

"I wish you'd tell me really."

"Well, I'll tell you where I'll be living three or four months from now, if that'll do. I'll be living in the swellest part of Phoenix; I'll have my own little bungalow—"

"I'm going to work in the valley next spring," said Bobby, "and I'll come and see you if you want me to."

"Want you to! I'll grab you by the collar and drag you there. I'll kidnap you, that's what *I'll* do. I'll be on easy street then."

"Did you sell your secret?"

"Well, practically—yes. I haven't got the cush yet, but it'll be a nice little bag of coin when it comes—somewhere round three hundred."

Bobby noticed that the amount had gone down since their last meeting. "Couldn't you get five hundred like you said?"

"Doubt it. This hayseed is a stingy old crab, but he'll come across for three all right. He's busted and needs money for his house. But I've got other balls in the air, kiddo. I'm in with a movie concern; we're going to do a flood and a lot of other junk—goin' to show irrigation. 'The Death of the Desert'—how do you like that for a name?"

Bobby thought it was a fine name, and he was on the point of asking if Uncle Sam wasn't responsible for the death of the desert, but he refrained.

"I'll have another four or five hundred out of that," said Red, "so you can see for yourself where I'm going to get off."

They paused at the edge of the big camp, for Red would not go farther.

"I'm coming to the valley after the dedication," said Bobby. "Next week I'm going to help on revetment and facing, and I don't know what I'll do after that; maybe I'll mark stones for grouting."

"They ought to face up that cove near Pine Hill," said Red. "She's breaking down and throwing silt all the time. They ought to put a forty-five-degree concrete facing on there and revet the stream above. There's going to be trouble there."

"Red, I—I wish you could come back and work for Uncle Sam—because I can see you know such a lot."

"I can show that bunch a trick or two. But not for mine. I'm through with your uncle. And I'm going to have you out of it yet, too. I'm not going to forget you, kid, and if the office turns a trick on you, hunt me up."

It seemed pathetic to Bobby to hear these proffers of assistance from one who had been brought so low.

"Take care of yourself, kiddo; you'll hear from me."

"I hope I surely will, Red," said Bobby, "and I got to be thankful to you, though besides that I like you, anyway."

"Well, get together, kiddo. So long."

Bobby watched him as he went back along Precipice Lane and into the wildness and darkness. Then he went up to his neat little room in the Survey Bungalow, washed, and hurried over to mess-tent.

Michigan wasn't there to jolly him that night, for he was blowing his lungs out with a dreadful trombone over at Contractors' Camp.

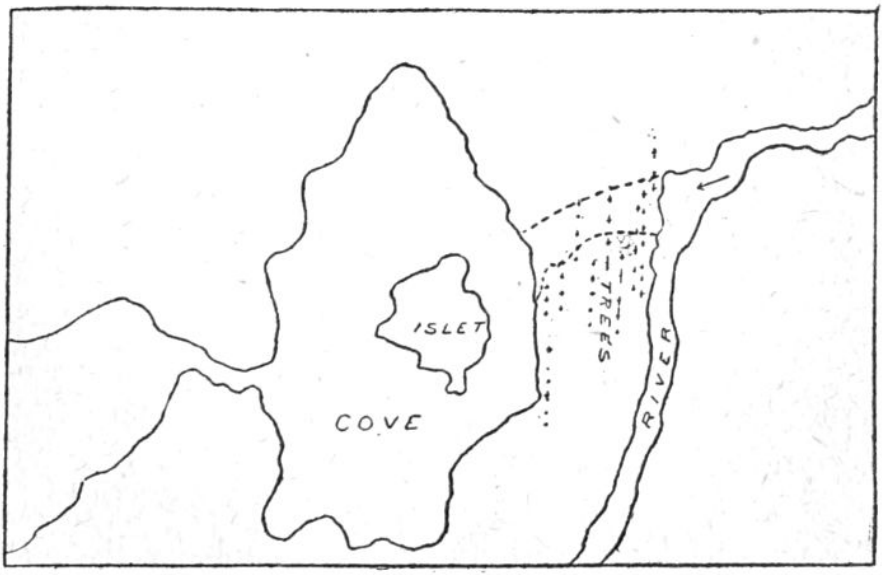
Red was right about the cove up near Pine Hill; it was one of the little things which Uncle Sam had neglected for bigger things. And very shortly something did happen there which involved Bobby in a rather novel adventure.

Pine Hill Cove, or Cliff-Dweller's Cove, or Bandit's Cove, was one of the show places of the great storage site. It vied with the dam in popular interest. It was the kind of place which was pretty sure to get itself on a postcard some time or other. It was said to have been the exclusive section of a once thriving prehistoric town of cliff-dwellers, and there were signs of ancient habitation in and about it. It was also reputed to have been the hiding-place of a band of train-robbers, and it is a fact that when the storage survey was made a skeleton was found on the mound which was now a tiny island.

It was a pity that a spot with such a dark and mysterious history, and so secluded and romantic, should end by being faced with concrete, but that was the very design which Uncle Sam had formed against it. Bobby had heard the most exciting and gruesome tales of the cove, chiefly from Michigan, and he took them with a grain of salt. But the topographic boys had worked on the storage survey, and camped there

while they were taking contours on the hill above, and their accounts of the place had filled Bobby with a desire to see it.

The best way to get to the cove was by water. You took the launch—if the powers that were would let you have it, otherwise a rowboat—and went up the north shore of the Tonto Creek end of the lake. Scarce a Sunday but a party did this. After about an hour's row you came to a place where there were precipitous cliffs with an opening or cleft between them hardly more than wide enough for a boat to pass through. You had to ship your oars to pass in, and when you had done so you found yourself in a place where the stillness was awful. One could hardly recognize his own voice there, so strange and hollow did it sound.



PINE HILL COVE AND THE ISLAND ABOVE. DOTTED LINE SHOWS THE DIRECTION OF THE "CUT-OFF"

The place was two or three hundred feet in diameter, with precipitous walls all around it so that you could no more get out of it than you could get out of a well, except by the way you had come in. Before the dam was built the cove had, of course, been dry land, and, indeed, you could not then have approached it by boat; but now the only dry part of it was a little hubble of land which stuck out of the water a few yards from the cliffs, and this, too, was destined to disappear with the next spring's freshets. The cliffs nearest this little islet were of jagged earth, and the roots of the trees which grew above stuck out like wriggling snakes. Once upon a time the bank here had evidently fallen away and it was said that the mound constituting the islet was formed in this way. A tributary of the river passed just above, making a sharp bend, and the few trees which intervened between the river and the cliff had been carefully conserved in order to bind the land and keep the river from washing through at its abrupt turn.

During the captain's present stay at Roosevelt he and Mr. Leighton had decided that it would be necessary to face this cliff with a sloping concrete wall, and to let the river through above so that it would enter the reservoir as a fall.

The job had been all planned and Bobby and the Ghost were now delegated to go up in the boat on Saturday to leave the tools and materials which the men would require on Monday. The Ghost worked in the office and was nephew to somebody or other. They called him the Ghost because he took the pay-envelopes about. He was about seventeen years old and very round and chubby, with an exceptionally good color for a specter. His right name was Worrie Wordell, or Chunk Wordell, and he was always complaining that he had no adventures. The nearest approach to actual reclamation work which he did was to letter maps at odd times, and you have to have a pretty good imagination to fancy yourself engaged in "project work" when you are lettering maps. He used to bewail his fate to Michigan, who sympathized with him and said, "Alas! poor Ghost!"

But now the Ghost was to have the time of his life, for he and Bobby had been granted permission to camp in the cove over Sunday.

They made a trip first with the launch, taking the wire netting, a lot of thin rope, graduated rods, some bags of cement, and the necessary implements, which they left on the islet. On their second trip with the skiff they brought some more material and their own bivouac outfit. Bobby was to assist in the work of the following week; but no such luck for the poor Ghost.

It was getting on toward dusk when they hauled the bow of the skiff up on the islet, and if they had been on an oasis in the Desert of Sahara they could not have seemed more isolated, and remote from civilization. The high gray cliffs surrounding them were duller in the twilight and the trees on the precipice above cast their shadows like specters down into the black waters.

"This is where they found the skeleton, I guess," said Worrie. "Oh, but it must have been a lonely place to die in."

"Or get killed in, more like," said Bobby. "Gee! that's one thing I always wanted to find—a skeleton."

"Michigan says there's treasure buried here," said Worrie.

"You can't believe half he says," Bobby commented.

"Look at the sky," said Worrie; "it's the same color as the cliffs."

"It looks kind of steel color," said Bobby, and as he spoke a little short gust of air rustled the trees above and rippled the water. Then it was gone.

"I used to think you couldn't have any adventures working for Uncle Sam," said Bobby; "but, oh, cracky! I had another think coming—sure. Open that duffel-bag and I'll show you how to start a fire; sling the saucepan over, too. You like bacon? Well, here goes for some bacon. Hand me the rice and the raisins."

In a few minutes he had a fire going; the surrounding cliffs reflected its cheerful glow, and the water showed the blaze inverted. Bobby had bivouacked a good deal in his work up on the Forest Slope; he had come to be quite an expert as a lone camper, and it was not without a certain vanity that he now exhibited his skill to the poor Ghost, whose humdrum life made him envious.

“Having kindled their fire,” said Bobby, “the two lads proceeded to skin the grizzly — Hand me the pepper, will you?”

“Why does a story-writer always call a boy a lad?” inquired the Ghost.

“Search me,” said Bobby, “when suddenly a crackling sound told them—that there should be more water in the rice. Pass that can over here. Do you like raisins with bacon, Ghost?”

The Ghost was a willing martyr. He ate bacon and raisins and said they were made for each other, and he agreed that Bobby’s rice-flops would put the Government commissary to shame.

After supper they settled down to campfire yarns which turned on the various phases of Uncle Sam’s great work out of doors.

“Next spring,” said the Ghost, “I’m going down the Missouri on revetment work, and they’re not going to keep me in the wannigan, either.”

“What’s a wannigan?” Bobby asked.

“It’s a big boat you camp on while you’re going down the river. It’s a regular floating camp. They have dandy fun. Are you going on revetment work?”

“Later, the captain says, I may do some work on the Old Lady.”

“That’s where they have the fun—down below on levee work.”

“Well, the gulch has been a pretty good home to me,” said Bobby. “Gee! it’ll seem awful funny when Roosevelt’s all gone, won’t it?”

“Yes, but there’s one thing— What’s the matter?”

Bobby had jumped and just caught his hat. “That’s an awful funny kind of wind, isn’t it? It comes so sudden and then stops.”

“And that is,” Worrie continued, “that if you’re in the service you’re sure to meet your friends again. It’s like one great big family. Take Mack, he was on the mattress work down the Ohio, and I was in the wannigan on the L. H. time-sheets. Then I come out here and here he is. And no matter where you go you’re sure to run up against Dynamite Charlie. Jiminy! it seems as if he’s gradually blowing the whole country to pieces! When he came here the first fellow he met was Michigan; they were both on dry excavation at Panama. That’s the way it runs. A big project like this is a regular family reunion.”

The Ghost’s talk opened up a delightful outlook to Bobby.

“It kind of gets you, working for Uncle Sam,” he said.

“Sure it gets you. Look how it’s got the captain. Leighton says it’s like the sea—you’re sure to go back to it. Uncle Sam’s like the goblins that get you— There goes your hat again!”

This time Bobby’s hat went careering through the air, spun around above his head, and landed on the cliff. At the same time the water was churned up so that it wet the cliffs a foot or so above the water-line.

“What do you know about that?” said Bobby. “No sooner had our young hero—”

“Our young hero had better look out for the boat,” said Worrie, jumping up suddenly. “Look!”

The boat was rocking violently, and Bobby jumped to haul its bow farther up on the shore, but he was too late. It went dancing and rocking away from the islet and began rubbing itself like a cow against the cliffs.

"Maybe it'll come back," said Bobby.

"Suppose it doesn't?" said Worrie.

"If it isn't back by morning I'll chuck a stone into it with a rope attached and haul it back willy-nilly."

"Willie what?"

"That means whether it wants to come or not. You're not getting cold feet, are you?"

"No; but I'm going to get *wet* feet pretty soon, and so are you. If you expect to get that boat you'd better do it now." He held his hat on as he spoke, for the wind was still blowing. "Suppose it should drift out?"

"It can't drift out, you gump; a boat always drifts sideways. Hurry up! Stamp on that fire!"

The fire had scattered into little particles all over the islet. The wind was blowing furiously, and the trees on the precipice turning this way and that as if they knew not what they were supposed to do. A wooden plate which the boys had been using went straight up into the air and came down again.

"Can you beat that?" said Bobby.

The air was of a blue color, and all the surrounding scenery was the same. There was something very uncanny and portentous in the whole appearance of things.

"Maybe it's going to be a cyclone," said Worrie.

"Well, it can't blow us away, anyway," said Bobby. "We've got the cliffs all around us."

"Yes, and the cliffs have got water all around them, too."

The wind was now raising havoc. Out through the narrow opening into the reservoir the water looked like the ocean, and in their little prison it beat against the cliffs and blew back in spray across the islet, where it also rolled up, wetting them and the material they had brought.

Above them was a sound of crashing and rending; a tree near the edge of the cliff seemed to stagger, then came tumbling pell-mell into the cove, the black earth dripping from its bare roots like water.

It was growing darker and the water seemed as black as ink. Suddenly there came a tremendous gust which caused the boys to reel and brace themselves as they stood. The trees above were lashing violently, great branches breaking from them, and some of them falling into the cove.

"We're a pretty good target," said Bobby; "if one of those should hit us—"

"Look!" said Worrie. "There, against the cliff!"

As Bobby looked he saw the naked tentacles of root wriggling like snakes, and disappearing one by one as a serpent disappears into a hole; and every minute came a

fresh rending and falling of some tree above as the triumphant wind tore those tortuous, resisting arms out of their earthy home.

Suddenly, amid the uproar, another tree staggered over the precipice into the water.

"We'd better get the boat if we can," said Worrie, "and get away from here; we'll get our heads crushed in."

"Where could we get?" said Bobby.

They had to raise their voices to make themselves heard.

"I'd rather be drowned than have one of those fall on me. Just keep your eyes on the top of the cliff and dodge, that's all we can do. It usually doesn't last long."

Bobby turned, and as he did so he saw that the boat was broadside against the entrance to the cove, and half inverted so that it formed a sort of dam. Wedged into the opening above it was one of the fallen trees, its great, earthy root squeezed between the cliffs; the other tree was bobbing near by. Above this the cliffs almost met, roofing the opening, so that now it was all but closed.

Scarcely had Bobby noticed this when Worrie's voice sounded in his ear above the hubbub.

"Look—the cliff! It's the river. She's jumped!"

They stood speechless with dismay and terror as a mighty volume of water, bearing treelimbs and huge boulders, came tumbling in white foam over the precipice.

"We're done for," Bobby whispered.

Red Thornton was right. The river had taken matters into its own hands, and the water, as Bobby realized with a shudder, was pouring into the little cove ten times faster than it could possibly get out.

CHAPTER XIV
THE CUT-OFF

"We have only one chance," said Bobby, "and we've got to act quick."

His companion said nothing; he was struck dumb with fright. The edges of the islet were already submerged, and when they moved a yard or two the water lapped their shoes. The pandemonium of wind and breaking limbs and rushing water continued; darkness was falling, which made their predicament the more terrible. The imminent peril would have been enough to unnerve older minds than theirs and strike panic to the most courageous heart. They must die like rats in a well—they felt sure of it.

Bobby tried hard to keep his courage, and sought to cheer his friend. The whole body of the river seemed to be pouring in upon them, its riotous spray dashing in their faces and wetting them through and through. He looked anxiously at the cove entrance to see if the obstruction was gone or moving, but could distinguish nothing. Doubtless much water was getting out, but not enough to count, and Bobby was conscious of the irony of this fiendish act of nature. To tear an opening for a river and to use the very material wrenched out of that opening to make a dam to wall it up again—here was the blind, heartless ingenuity of nature shown with a vengeance. In this crazy, contradictory act she would blot out two human lives. Surely the science which aims to circumvent and throttle her is the science of warfare, and engineers are strategists and heroes, after all.

If this thought came to Bobby it was only in a crude, chaotic way, for he knew that their one faint hope lay in immediate action.

"Feel for the rope," he shouted. "It isn't washed away, is it?"

"Here it is," Worrie answered in a strange voice.

"If you hear a crash," said Bobby, "edge out into the water; if you're under a falling tree it's better to be in the water than on land. Try not to get beyond your depth, and if anything falls on you or near you, hang on to it. It'll be fifteen or twenty minutes before the water's high enough to cover us, and we can work till it's up to our waists, I guess. The principal danger is from the trees. All the land up there is eroded, I suppose."

"I'm glad I'm with somebody that's been in field-work," said Worrie, weakly.

"I wish Red was here. Hand me one of those picks, quick."

In a couple of seconds the rope was fast to the pick-ax handle.

"Is the rope good and fast?" Worrie asked.

"Scout bow-line."

Outside of a bulldog there is nothing in the wide world like a scout bow-line knot.

Bracing himself as well as he could in the mushy, submerged ground, Bobby gathered all his strength and hurled the pick-ax up through the darkness. He heard it splash in the water and hauled it in.

"Throw it to the left of where the water's falling," said Worrie; "the bank will be more solid there and there are some trees standing."

“I can’t see what I’m doing,” said Bobby; “that’s the trouble.”

Again he cast the pick up into the darkness, and again it came down without touching anything solid.

“It’s too heavy,” he said. “Hand me one of those survey rods.”

He tied the rope midway of the survey rod and cast it up, spear fashion. It came down, and he cast it up again. He was sure it had landed on the cliff, for he pulled it over slight obstructions, but nothing held to it. He had hoped that by jerking it he might bring it sideways to the rope and that it would lodge itself between the trees or rocks above.

Their predicament was becoming desperate. Worrie, almost unnerved with fear and suspense, held the rest of the rods lest they be carried away. He stood on the bags of cement to keep out of the water, which was almost up to Bobby’s knees.

“Don’t get rattled,” Bobby said to his companion. “We’ve got fifteen or twenty minutes—maybe more. Guess the trees that are standing now will stick it out.”

The roar of the wind above was deafening, although they did not feel its force so much where they were. Now and then they could distinguish black objects in the water, but these floated clear of the islet, carried over against the cove entrance by the force of the incoming water.

“Why don’t you throw a pick over into that stuff?” Worrie asked.

“I thought of that,” Bobby shouted, “but the water would carry us against it too fast; we’d get our brains crushed out. Don’t get scared. Here goes again. I wish Red was here.” It was curious how he kept thinking of Red.

This time the rod went well over the cliff, and when he pulled it dragged a little and then held fast; but when he tried his weight against the rope the rod broke.

“Give me three or four of those rods,” he shouted. “We’ll get out of this yet.”

He bound several of them together and hurled them, spear fashion, though not so easily as he had hurled the one. Again and again he threw, only to pull the rods back. He could not always tell whether they reached the summit of the cliff, for sometimes they came away without resistance, borne down in the furious volume of water.

The water was now almost to their waists, and Bobby worked with difficulty. All that was left of the islet was a little pile of cement bags sticking out of the floor. On this Worrie stood, striving to keep his balance with a survey rod and listening in suspense for a crash from above which might lay them both low. Amid the frenzied shrieking of the wind and the cracking of limbs strange sounds could be heard, weird echoes, and uncanny, half-natural voices, and through all this uproar was the steady sound of rushing water. Bobby had no time for reflection, but he did wonder what the scene above was like, where a river had, all in a minute as it were, deserted its wonted channel and plowed a passage for itself along a path of less resistance. He imagined himself and his companion floating logily in this turbulent caldron or hurled against rocks and tree trunks, their crushed bodies hidden and unrecognizable. What he did not realize was that what was happening here on a tiny scale sometimes happened elsewhere on a colossal scale, and it was to this mighty, heedless tyrant, water, that Uncle Sam’s engineers had thrown down the gantlet.

"Take this book," he said, handing Worrie the little pocket memorandum-book which he carried, "and write on the blank pages just what happened. Can you see? Maybe things will be different to-morrow and they won't be able to see just how it happened. Put it in the coffee-pot and chuck it up on the cliff. I'm going to make one more try. The water's too deep; it gets in my way; I can't sling. Let me get on those bags. My side begins to sting now—it's that blamed rib. Is the heavy plumb-bob there?"

Worrie felt around among the material under water. "Here it is."

"The cord on it?"

"Yes."

"Good." Bobby tied the plumb-bob to one end of the bound rods. "She'll sail better," he said.

It was his last try, and he realized it. The water was up to their waists, his side hurt cruelly, and he believed that if this was not successful their only hope of safety lay in giving themselves to the turbulent water and trusting that it might carry them against some trunk to which they could cling.

"Here goes."

The clumsy spear, carrying the last hope of those two despairing victims, sailed up through the storm and darkness, hurled with all the strength which desperation can muster, dragging after it its slack of rope.

In all the adventures which Bobby Cullen had later—and he had a good many, as you may know if you wish—he never suffered such suspense as in those few seconds when, standing in the water, he pulled gently on the rope, feeling the rods as they held and yielded and seemed to stumble over insufficient obstacles above. Once the rope held fast, but slackened again when he jerked it hard, and he feared it was now near the edge. Again the rods caught, and again he jerked slightly, then placed his weight against the rope. There was a little yielding above, then the rods seemed to settle themselves more firmly against the obstructions which held them.

"There's a little spring in the rope," said Bobby, "and I'm afraid the rods are only holding by something against the two ends. It may snap. I can't test it standing here; but I'm going to take a chance."

Standing there with the water lapping his chest, the precious end of the rope in his hand, and shouting amid the roar and tumult into his companion's ear, Bobby Cullen's inherent honesty, dominating all other qualities, now shone out like a light in all that tempestuous darkness.

"Ghost," said he, "if I go first I can test the strength of the thing, and if I get up there all right I can fix it secure. But while I'm trying the water may take you off your feet. If you go first it may bust and that'll be the end of you. It's just a question of which way you'd rather die, kind of. Maybe it might be best for me to go first because I'm lighter. But you can decide. I wouldn't want you to think I put myself ahead of you, and I don't want to get saved unless you are, too. I can't tell which would be safer. What do you say?"

The Ghost, whose chief desire was to put off the fatal moment, said that he would wait, and Bobby, after giving the rope two or three final jerks, tied the end of it around

one of the cement-bags, lifted himself on it and swung into the volume of water which poured over the cliff. Hand over hand he raised himself, struggling against the falling water, but in a few seconds he was under the descending sheet, between it and the cliff, and here the sound was steady and uniform—like an engine letting off steam.

Presently he felt the dash of the water again and knew that he was near the summit of the cliff. He had thought that surmounting the precipice would be his great difficulty and might prove his Waterloo; but the water had already washed away so much of the earth and the chasms left by the uprooted trees had so broken the surface that, instead of the difficult feat which he had dreaded, he found himself plowing waist-deep in mud which would certainly have engulfed him except for the rope to which he clung for dear life. Even as he plowed and dragged himself through this a terrific crash rent the air, the rope was jerked suddenly through his hands from behind, its knotted end with the splintered rods attached struck him, and it was gone. He stood knee-deep in oozing mud and utter darkness. There was no sound now but the steady swish of water.

HAND OVER HAND HE RAISED HIMSELF,
STRUGGLING AGAINST THE FALLING WATER

"Worrie!" he called. "Are you down there? Are you all right—Worrie?"

There was no answer, and he stood stark still, listening.

"Hey, Worrie!" he called again. "Why don't you answer? Worrie! What happened?"

There was no sound but the steady roar of the falling water and the occasional noise of a falling limb as it crashed into the chaos about him.

He knew not what to do, whether to turn back or go forward, and, indeed, he could not see where he was going. His blood ran cold and he had a strange feeling in his throat. He called again, not expecting an answer, but just to relieve his tense nerves.

"Worrie, what's the matter?"

He pressed on through mud and darkness into shallow water, from which he backed out, stumbling over fallen trees. His hand was cut from the quick passage of the rope through it, and his side had a cruel pain—the one lasting souvenir of his encounter with the dredge. Everything was confusion—mud, fallen trees, boulders, and here and there he encountered the vagrant stream, as if it, too, were lost and knew not where to go.

At last he came upon comparatively dry land, and, stumbling over a tree-trunk, he sat down upon it to rest and collect his senses. The wind had subsided, but the darkness was intense. He did not know what new act of treachery nature might play upon him if he moved; his frightened imagination saw cliffs and pitfalls and quagmires on every hand, and he laid his throbbing head against a limb which kindly counterfeited a reclining back, to wait and see what the grateful daylight should reveal.

He did not care much what happened now. He told himself that he had sacrificed Worrie's life for his own safety, and he could not go back to camp alone. Red Thornton, he reflected, had saved *his* life and gone away, scorning praise. Red had sneered at his own reckless bravery and at those who were childish enough to praise it. Now he, Bobby, having saved himself, would go back to Roosevelt. He told himself that such a life as his was not worth the saving. "Red is a success," he said, "and I am a failure."

He was too weary and sick and frightened to reason it out.

CHAPTER XV
SHADES OF THE ANCIENTS

That was the night in Bobby Cullen's life when he was a murderer. If you feel like a murderer then you are one, so far as your own peace of mind is concerned. And the next worst thing to being a murderer is to be a bungler and a failure. Bobby was all of these things.

He had made a fine show of kindling a campfire, and of cooking, and he had allowed himself to take pleasure in thinking how the poor Ghost envied and admired him. He had constituted himself the brains of this whole affair, and he had lost the poor Ghost's life for him.

"I guess my uncle was right," he mused, miserably. "Probably he could see I didn't amount to anything."

All night long the poor, unresourceful Ghost haunted him more truly than ever less substantial ghost haunted a terrified human. Bobby scarcely slept at all, and with the dawn he was wide awake. He found that he was on the brink of the deserted channel just where the stream had turned, and he saw how the water had indeed "jumped its traces," to use the captain's phrase, plowing a new and straighter path for itself and rushing headlong for the edge of the cliff. The turn had been so sharp that the trees had not been sufficient to withstand the water's natural inclination to flow in a straight line. If revetment mattresses had been lodged against the banks in that abrupt turn the river would have gone its wonted way, but these had not been placed there, just because Uncle Sam had intended to direct the river into the cove, although not so soon. Bobby was later to have a hand in this wonderful revetment work on the mighty rivers of Uncle Sam's vast territory, and the glimpse he now had of the dangers which revetment seeks to overcome remained for long a vivid picture in his memory. It showed him and taught him as no book could have done.

He crept carefully to the point where the water fell into the cove, though now it rather flowed than fell, since the loosened earth of the precipice had been all but washed away, and besides, the water almost filled the cove. He would not have been afraid to make the descent in a boat. The rocky cliffs, of course, stood firm, but the section of earthen wall had given way as soon as its allies, the trees, had surrendered. It was the wind which had made the first assault, the river merely following up its advantage. Bobby could see that the waterfall had moved forward across the cove, as one might say, and was now tumbling over the cliffs above the entrance into the lake beyond.

What surprised him was the rapidity with which water can change the whole face of things and make a familiar scene unrecognizable. The cove was gone—there wasn't any cove. The islet had vanished like the magic carpet in the *Arabian Nights*. He had seen something of the same effect at home in Bridgeboro; but here the change was still more startling. He could not show anybody what he had done, for he was the only part of the affair that was left. It could never happen again, that was sure. As he looked about him, and at the river settling contentedly into its new channel, the whole thing

seemed like a nightmare. Somewhere in that neighborhood he had stood on an island and thrown a rope. That was about all he knew.

He pushed around a little in the bruised ground adjacent to the new river-bed. Great roots, lying sideways, dripped black earth when he touched them. Sticking out from under one of these was something which startled him, and when he went closer he saw it to be a bloody hand. In the ragged chasm left by the uptorn root lay a form, half covered with earth, which Bobby saw to be that of the poor Ghost.

For a moment the discovery quite unnerved him, not only because of the unnatural position of the body and the ghastly look in the face, but because he could not in any way account for his companion's presence there. However, he had not taken the good Scout oath for nothing, and his brief experience of first-aid work helped him now.

Circling Worrie's wrist with his hand, he found that life was not extinct. Then he examined the other hand and discovered that a jagged wound near the wrist was bleeding freely. The boy was quite unconscious, his hands cold and his lips blue. Whatever else was the matter with him, he had almost bled to death, Bobby was sure of that.

He broke a stout twig from the tree, knotted two corners of his handkerchief together, slipped it over the wrist and up on to the forearm, and, running the twig into it, began to turn. Pretty soon the bleeding lessened and ceased. He opened Worrie's shirt, straightened his legs carefully, lest they be dislocated, then pulled him gently out of the damp chasm on to drier land. He knew of nothing that he could bring water in except his shoe, so he removed one and started for the river. On his way luck favored him by his discovery of the coffee-pot containing the brief message which Worrie had scribbled in the darkness. This he brought back full of water and doused it over the unconscious boy's face. Then he sat down by him and waited.

After a little while he fancied that he heard a faint sound in the distance. He ran along the cliff for some little way and looked anxiously across the vast lake. The sun was rising over the water and flickering the surface with its first brightness. Out on the quiet bosom of the great reservoir a solitary tree was floating, its dark, earth-laden roots bobbing logily. Far down on the other side Bobby could just distinguish the Forest Hill Slope with little streaks of white here and there, which he knew to be the freshet-trenches, and beyond the slope the dark forest. What if a few trees, like a little company of ambushed soldiers, did surrender here and there? The forest was still above the reservoir.

The sound was a little clearer now, and unmistakable.

Tk, tk—tk, tk—tk, tk, tk, tk—tk—

It was the little one-cylinder kicker, glorying in its unmuffled freedom and skipping according to its wont; and never did the dreadful skipping of an unmuffled engine sound so welcome to Bobby's ears as then. In a few minutes she came around Indian Point, taking the turn short, and headed across Tonto Valley, skipping brazenly.

The sight of the lonely boy on the edge of the cliff was a welcome one to the occupants of the Government launch. And now, more than at any other time, did the whole affair seem to Bobby like a fantastic dream.

“Are you both all right?” Whiskers, the grouting foreman, called through the megaphone.

Bobby made a funnel of his hands and called back: “I’m all right, but the Ghost’s hurt. The cove’s gone— Give her a little more air and put your timer back, for goodness’ sake.”

It was well known in Roosevelt that Bobby was the only one who could make the launch engine behave.

It was a pretty ticklish job getting Worrie into the boat, and they had to run up-shore to a place where the banks were lower in order to do it at all. The boy himself was oblivious to everything. The rescuers had not expected any such condition as they found. They had come partly to bring some material and partly to assure themselves that the campers were all right after the rough night.

Later, when the Ghost was able to talk, he told of his own miraculous escape out of the doomed cove. He believed that it was just after Bobby had gotten on to the cliff that a tremendous crash came. Instinctively he had raised his arms when something struck him on the wrist, and, though dazed, he became aware of a tree directly at his side, extending up diagonally to the summit of the cliff. He had no knowledge of the breaking rope, which the tree had doubtless encountered in its fall, tearing it away from its anchorage above. Mustering all his strength, for he felt weak and giddy, he had succeeded in scrambling up the trunk to comparative safety. Reaching the summit, he had believed he heard Bobby’s voice, but he was too weak to answer, and fainted, he thought, immediately. He remembered regaining consciousness and staggering forward till he fell into a hollow, and that was all he knew. The strange part of the whole thing was that as he lay there with his life ebbing away Bobby was scarce a dozen yards distant.

Thus the two had passed that dreadful night which terminated their tragic camping expedition in the historic cove.

It is an ill wind that blows no one any good, and now the Government geologists and fossil-hunters found a field of never-ending interest and surprise in the deserted channel which came to be called the Dead River. It was fascinating to look into this half-mile of winding cut and to wander through it to the point where its unruly water had once emptied into the reservoir. It was not the Salt River, the channel of which thereabouts was entirely submerged by the vast body of storage water, but one of the many tributary streams.

At one place it had flowed deep and strong through a wild cañon, and here, below the former water-line, were found curious excavations in the precipitous walls which doubtless had been carved by human hands at a time when the cañon was as dry as it had now become. Here were found fragments of strange pottery, hideous images, and great numbers of bleached and crumbling bones.

Michigan said these places were the remains of ancient apartment-houses, and he soberly placed on the captain’s desk a thin rectangular stone panel with hieroglyphics on it which he said was an automobile registry number, proving conclusively that there had been an ancient garage in that neighborhood.

Notwithstanding all the fun-making of the Roosevelt workers, who were Philistines at heart—and the captain was the worst of the lot—some pretty interesting discoveries were made which turned Bobby's thoughts back to those mysterious people who had inhabited ancient Arizona and irrigated parts of the Salt River Valley.

One discovery in particular interested him greatly, and this was a stone-lined excavation under the old river-bed connecting with caverns on either side. This ancient subway was in a fair state of preservation, and when pumped and cleared out one could pass through it. It had evidently been made before the river existed and now it was discovered after the river had ceased to be; and the little furore which its discovery caused in the community rekindled Bobby's curiosity about the strange people who had once inhabited these parts, and who he realized were a people of no mean attainments.

These fascinating revelations were, of course, the direct result of what had happened above the cove, and the whole business was a good object-lesson to Bobby, first, of the marvelous power of water, and second, of the wonderful civilization which had once flourished there. He saw that water, while a docile servant, is a cruel master, and up in the forest he was later to learn the same fact in regard to fire.

The only other aftermath of the affair was the martyrdom of the poor Ghost, whose sole excursion away from his maps and time-sheets had proved so disastrous. Michigan was continually asking him when he was going to go after grizzlies in the Rockies or form an expedition against the Apaches, until Worrie shunned him like a pestilence. Still, it was all in the family.

It was, indeed, the Ghost's only adventure, unless you consider the harrowing circumstance of the spiral crevasse down the Missouri an adventure. But, anyway, that came later and is really part of another story.

CHAPTER XVI
THE CRUISE OF THE "SLOW-POKE"

"Bob," said the captain, sitting meditatively back at his desk and moving a little pair of steel dividers idly across the blotting-sheet, "they tell me you've pulled a big stunt; exerted your scientific influence where everybody else had failed."

He looked sideways at Bobby in that quizzical way which the boy knew so well.

"I don't mind being jollied," said Bobby. "Everybody jollies me—especially Michigan."

The captain laughed. Every now and then he took it into his head to send for Bobby—for he felt a sort of responsibility about him—and to question him about his work and find out how things were going with him. Possibly he found Bobby something of a relief from strains, and pressures, and convergent arch action, and all such things. Bobby always talked to him frankly and enjoyed his little visits immensely, especially as he saw very little of the captain at other times. He smiled now, and looked around at the blue-print-covered board wall and waited.

"They tell me you've succeeded where even Mr. Leighton here failed."

The resident engineer, never looking up from his desk, chuckled.

"That you've put one over on the whole mechanical and scientific staff. Succeeded where I fell down. How about it?"

"Now I *know* you're jollying me," said Bobby.

"Bob, I've always known you were popular in camp. They tell me you're the mascot over there in mess-tent, but when I heard you'd made friends with the *Slow-poke's* engine I threw up my hands. Anybody that can do that is inspired. If the *Slow-poke* wasn't on C. S. it would have been fired long ago."

"You have to put an elastic band on the trip-hammer; that's the only trouble with it," said Bobby, flattered.

"The trouble with it is total depravity," said the captain. "Well, anyway, we've elected you skipper of the *Slow-poke*, and I just thought I'd break it gently to you. The lake's so big now that there's a good deal of running around; you'll have to take the topographic boys down to West End every morning, and chug the Congressmen about, I suppose, and be like the fellow on the sight-seeing 'bus. How's it strike you?"

It struck Bobby so hard he could hardly answer.

"I'm—I'm glad I used to hang out in Bradley's garage, anyway—"

"All right, Bob," smiled the captain, "go to it. Roosevelt's coming out here in the spring, and I dare say he'll want a ride."

Think of that! He, Bobby Cullen, to give Roosevelt a ride! Whew!

He did not know whether he walked to the door or flew there on wings. All he knew was that he got there somehow, and then he heard the captain say, "Just a minute, Bob."

Bobby paused, his hand on the door.

"Think you've got a pretty good general idea of diversion work? Because that's what's going to come in handy down below.[1] That's why I put you up there on the Slope, and that's why I want you to have a year or so on the canals. Then we'll get after the Old Lady. As soon as spring begins and we get the freshets I want you to get another taste of it. But this'll do for a flier. Only don't forget what you've learned."

"You wouldn't exactly call the *Slow-poke* a flier," said Mr. Leighton, smiling at Bobby.

The boy left with a laugh, feeling very happy, as he usually did after visiting the office bungalow, and before so very long, as it happened, he had an opportunity to prove the practical value of much that he had learned.

In those months preceding the formal opening of the project he had a varied experience in his errands about the vast lake. That was a time when the work upon the slopes was being hurried to completion; here and there upon the borders of the reservoir, and above, squads were busy among the clefts and gorges of minor tributaries, while much of the detail which had been familiar a year before was now submerged.

It was also a time when many visitors, official and otherwise, came to see the mammoth dam holding back this inland sea of stored waters. They came up in the stages from Mesa, and some of them down from the branch terminal at Globe, along the old freight path. Those who had previously visited the valley were enthusiastic about its new possibilities, and glowing accounts began to circulate in camp of the farming enterprises "below." Bobby himself began to share Luke Merrick's fear for New York and other proud cities in view of the magical growth of Phoenix and Tempe and other communities in the former desert.

This influx of outsiders during the mild winter months greatly enlivened Roosevelt, shut out from the world as it had been, and their talk about the valley, of the miles of ditches ready for the refreshing water, made Bobby proud of the great work he had helped bring to completion.

Early one morning before the spring opened the Ghost appeared at the landing near the dam, escorting a lady and gentleman and a young girl, who were to be taken for a spin around the storage site. Bobby was cleaning the engine and putting a new elastic band on the trip-hammer.

"Mr. Leighton told me you would take us about," said the gentleman; "but I'm a little afraid to go unless you are sure you can get us back in two hours. We're going down by the ten-o'clock stage to Mesa."

"I can't take you all the way round in two hours," said Bobby, pulling off his cap; "but I can take you up as far as Indian Point. There was a man scalped there once, so that's a good place to go to."

"How perfectly *dreadful*," said the girl. "Yes, do let's go and see it!"

"That's nothing," said Bobby. "I could take you to Miner's Gulch, where there was a massacre—the freshets come through there now."

"We should like to see all that we can see and get back before ten," said the gentleman, "and we'll depend on you to bring us back in time.

“All right, sir,” said Bobby, “the only thing that could happen would be if the elastic band on the trip-hammer broke; but I always carry a lot of them in my pocket, anyway.”

“They tell me you’re an engineer,” said the gentleman, as they chugged up the lake.

“I’m going to college some day, and then I’ll be one. Mr. Bronson’s going to send me—he’s president of a bank.”

“Isn’t that perfectly lovely?” said the gentleman’s daughter.

“But Captain Craig says the best place to start is in the field,” said Bobby; “he says you got to learn Government methods. Co-operative spirit—you know what that is?”

The gentleman thought he understood what that meant.

“It just means being loyal to Uncle Sam,” said Bobby; “sometimes engineers use big words to tell you what they mean.”

“Yes, I guess you’re right,” said the man.

“Convergent pressure—that’s a stiff one, isn’t it?” said Bobby.

“Perfectly *dreadful*,” said the girl.

“But all it means,” said Bobby, “is that a thing that’s curved is stronger than a thing that’s straight—like an arch, kind of.”

“Isn’t that perfectly wonderful?” said the girl.

“And that’s the way it is,” said Bobby, encouraged, “with fraternal effort and co-operative spirit and things like that. It just means being loyal to the Government. It’s easy to understand.”

“But not always so easy to do it?” the gentleman suggested.

“It is if you get the bug,” Bobby answered. “You know what private enterprise is?” he asked, turning suddenly upon the girl, who looked as if she thought this something of a poser.

“Private enterprise couldn’t do this job—do you know why? It wouldn’t be because they’re not smart enough. But because you don’t love your boss in a private enterprise. See? You couldn’t love a railroad, could you?”

“Hardly,” said the gentleman.

“But you can love Uncle Sam?”

“And that’s the secret of your noble dam and your great storage lake and all these ditches and canals down yonder, is it?”

“Sure it is. Ask Mack or Michigan or Dynamite Charlie, or any of the topographic fellows, or even the L. H. concrete men. They’ll tell you the dam is yours as much as it’s theirs. Sometimes you might hear Mr. Leighton say there’s an atmosphere here. I used to think he meant weather, but now I know what he means.”

He stooped to turn the grease-cups and oil the pump eccentric.

“I see you’ve learned a little out here, my boy.”

He was very soon to see that Bobby had learned a great deal.

They chugged along past places where freshet-beds had been opened in the solid rock and where concrete diversions had been built to take the place of earth channels.

They could see these thin, white streaks winding away and disappearing among the hills.

"The Gov—Uncle Sam just reaches out in every direction and gets the water and then takes it down there to the desert and sends it out in every direction again, doesn't he?" the gentleman said.

"That's what they call diversion," said Bobby. "Gee! *you'd* make a pretty good engineer, I guess."

There was a general laugh as they chugged on up the west shore, past Indian Point, where the cliffs were steep.

"In there," said Bobby, pointing to a narrow cleft, "is what we call Little Grand Cañon. Six months ago the water didn't flow in there at all. Want to go in?"

He throttled the motor down and they chugged into a narrow sort of hallway with precipitous walls.

"Now let's all talk at once," said Bobby. As they did so a clamor of voices arose; it seemed as if a hundred people were calling. They all laughed at this strange phenomenon, and as they did so a perfect carnival of merriment was all about them.

"That's Apache Indians," said Bobby, trying to frighten the girl.

His passengers were so genial and so interested in all he showed them that Bobby felt quite elated at his success as a tourist guide. He even allowed himself a little of that fun which the seasoned habitué of a locality is pretty sure to enjoy at the tourist's expense, and his mischievous essays at startling the girl caused general amusement. In a word, his guests were so thoroughly in the spirit of the trip, and so eager to know all he could tell them, that Bobby experienced shudders of dismay and chagrin when suddenly there was an ominous feel of dragging beneath, then a scraping sound, and the boat stopped. The engine, availing itself of the smallest excuse, stopped also after several ineffectual revolutions.

"Oh, are we going to sink?" cried the girl in genuine alarm.

"We couldn't sink very far," said Bobby, sheepishly; "we're aground."

The man pursed his lips and shook his head ruefully. "Pretty shallow in here, hey?"

Bobby felt very much ashamed. He saw his prestige vanishing as he realized that all his talk and his assurance of a prompt return had ended in a bungle.

"There isn't any danger," he said, weakly; "I—gee! I thought there was plenty of water in here."

The man said nothing. He did not seem to be angry, but rather anxious. "How long will we have to wait here?" he asked.

"Oh, just a minute, I guess," said Bobby, hurriedly removing his shoes and rolling up his trousers. "I can back her off all right."

But he was not so sanguine as he allowed them to think, and his attempts to back her off were quite futile.

The man looked at his watch. The pleasant air of sociability was quite gone, although the lady looked rather sympathetic as she watched Bobby's efforts to rock the boat back from the shallow place. His passengers carried out the usual program of

people in this ridiculous predicament, of swaying themselves this way and that, sitting on one side and then on the other, and imagining that they were moving the keel.

It was of no use. On a tidal river you simply wait till the tide comes up—which may be an hour or two; on a storage reservoir you may wait till the freshet raises you—which may be a month or two; or you may do the other thing—which is nothing. It makes very little difference which. People who are in this predicament when they have to catch trains are curiously unappreciative of the fact that they are not in the slightest danger.

Bobby sat on the deck, clasping his bare knees and feeling utterly condemned.

"Perhaps if we all waded in," said the gentleman, "we could push her off."

The picture of the young girl, whom he had tried to frighten with his talk of Apache Indians, getting out and pushing was not pleasant to Bobby.

"Wait a minute," said he, with a sudden inspiration. "We've got half an hour or so to spare. Suppose I try to raise her on a lock. I haven't any canvas dam, but I might be able to use the awning—if it's long enough."

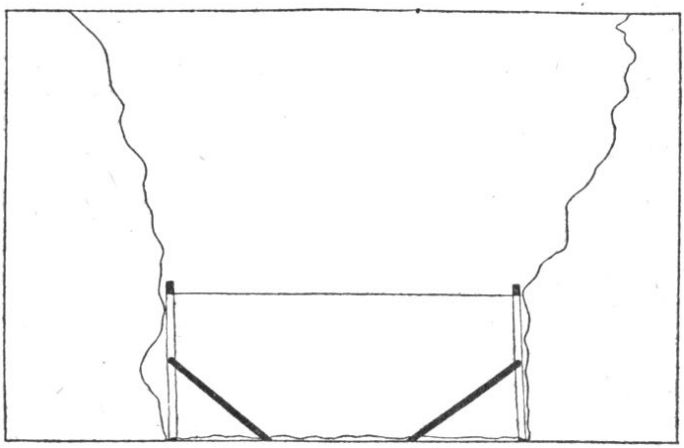
He felt that his whole reputation now depended on this. He would either carry them triumphantly out into the lake again by an engineering feat or they would stay here until some one came in the rowboat and rescued them.

The awning was about four feet wide and sixteen feet long, and through a pocket at either end was a metal rod, like a stick in a window-shade. There were two upright stanchions, one forward and one aft, to which these cross-bars were fastened. Bobby removed the whole business and waded back with it to a point about six feet beyond the boat.

"The water's coming in up a ways. You can hear it," said he.

Somewhere up through the gorge, which narrowed to a mere crevice a little farther on, they could hear the splash of falling water.

Anxiously Bobby pulled one of the awning-rods a little way out of its pocket and stuck it into the ground close to the cliff. Then he crossed the chasm-bed and lodged the other one in the same way on the other side. Here he rolled the awning around the rod a little way to bring it to the proper length. Then he braced the stanchions in the ground diagonally. As the edge of canvas which lay along the ground became wet it adapted itself to the bottom, following all the irregularities. As this was not possible on the end where the rods were, Bobby stuffed the interstices with cotton waste and oily rags, which held the water splendidly. It was only necessary to do this near the bottom, since a very few inches of water would float the boat.



SHOWING HOW BOBBY MADE THE CANVAS DAM
OUT OF THE BOAT'S AWNING

"Now I'll squeeze up there a ways and see how much is coming in; then we'll know how long we'll have to wait." He pushed his way up through the narrowing cleft and presently called, joyously: "Oh, it's coming in great—about thirty-two velocity, I guess. That means spring has come. We'll be off in fifteen or twenty minutes."

This would be time enough, and they all sat waiting. Pretty soon the water began to lap higher on the awning. They watched eagerly as the first strip of design on the canvas little by little disappeared.

"I think it's just wonderful," said the girl.

"It's better for the awning to get wet than for you to get your feet wet and to have to climb over the deck. Cracky! that's one sure thing," said Bobby, gallantly.

"It isn't that," said the girl; "but I think it's wonderful to see how it— Oh, just look, the red stripe is gone! You can make the water do just as you please, can't you?" she said, enthusiastically.

"Sure," said Bobby.

He was recovering some measure of his lost pride now as his scheme proved itself, and he began to tell the girl how the gorge was full of Gila monsters and tarantulas, till she held her elbows tight against her sides and shuddered, and said that nothing would tempt her into that creepy place outside the boat.

They did not wait till the *Slow-poke* floated. When the water had risen three or four inches Bobby started his engine on reverse and got out and shoved. The boat scraped a little, then off she went, plunk into the canvas dam. Bobby gathered the awning up, jumped into the boat, grabbed the steering-gear, and presently the *Slow-poke*, after adding another to her many ignoble adventures, backed gaily out into the lake and headed at the terrific speed of six miles an hour for the dam landing.

If Bobby's glory had been under a cloud, it had now come out again as clear as the sun down in Salt River Valley. The gentleman complimented him cordially on his ingenuity; the lady said she didn't see how he ever thought of such a thing; while her

daughter said it was *simply amazing*. None of them had ever heard of that convenient device of irrigation—a canvas dam. But perhaps it was the happy thought of using the awning which impressed them most.

No doubt the whole business was scarce worth the telling, except that it was Bobby's first meeting with these people whom later and far away he was to meet under the most extraordinary circumstances.

His passengers caught the stage and afterward Bobby learned that they lived close to the Mississippi River, somewhere in Missouri.

"Maybe that's why I had to show them," said he.

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[1] Meaning Salt River Valley.

CHAPTER XVII
TWO LETTERS

At last there came a day in the early spring when the godfather of Roosevelt Dam came out to help dedicate it, and there was great rejoicing and yards of bunting in Uncle Sam's community. It was the death-knell of the camp city, but the camp city did not care—it would go out in a blaze of glory.

The great reservoir, rising and spreading from a myriad freshets, had by now usurped much of the land which had been familiar to Bobby. The isolated tents and cabins on the lower reaches were no more. Roosevelt itself was now on the very brink of the water. The coping on the dam was at no such dizzy height from the lapping water as when he had first looked down from it on that memorable evening of his arrival nearly a year before. The little islands and points of rock which had stuck out of the water then were gone, and as he looked up toward the Tonto end he could see that the land which he used to cross going to Forest Slope was no longer there. It was wonderful how the whole geography of the place had changed.

Bobby put on the new khaki suit which he had gotten from the commissary in honor of the gala occasion, and he wore his reclamation button. He was not going to be mistaken for a mere civilian visitor—not if he could help it. He was one of the family.

Early in the morning Luke Merrick arrived with his lumbering old wagon chockful of people from the valley, blowing horns and singing "The Great Song of Phoenix." They all wore "project flowers," and one fellow distributed among the workers pinks raised in the hothouse of the Government's experimental farm. Pretty soon people who had been down at Frazer's overnight began to arrive in gaily trimmed wagons.

All sorts of novel demonstrations were made by the valley people of what they had been able to accomplish even with scant and makeshift distribution. One wagon displayed an enormous effigy of an Indian—representing Arizona—drinking his fill from a huge tankard while Uncle Sam waited close by. One farmer brought an ostrich up with a great label on his neck, reading:

"He can't bury his head in the sand because there ain't no more sand."

Roosevelt was thrown open to the visitors, who wandered about in the mess-tent, the hospital, the bungalows, the commissary; but of all the people who peered curiously about those scenes which had grown so dear and familiar to Bobby, the one who must poke into every nook and cranny was the godfather of the dam himself, who wore a gorgeous "project flower."

Bobby had the *Slow-poke* decorated with bunting; he carried an extra supply of elastic bands for the trip-hammer, and flew the little survey flag at the bow and the colors astern. And he did take the godfather of Roosevelt Dam for a spin around the reservoir. Leighton and the captain were along, and the Mayor of Phoenix, and they can prove it.

He was pretty busy all the morning chugging back and forth. Every time he passed the Forest Hill Slope he would point out with pride the work which he had done

himself. But whenever he looked at the concrete channel it dampened his pleasure more than a little to realize that Red, who had planned it, was not here as one of the workers to enjoy his share of the triumph which was being celebrated. He wondered if Red were with any of the arriving parties, and he resolved to keep a lookout for him, although he feared that Thornton would stay away and have nothing but a sneer for all these festivities.

When the momentous hour was come he ran up to the float, where Mack and Michigan and two or three of his particular friends from Survey Bungalow were waiting, and they all crowded into the *Slow-poke*. Then he ran her out and anchored just below the dam and far enough away from it to see everything. Luke had asked him up on the dam itself, where the burly water-master had a place among the officials and noted guests, but he preferred to stay in the *Slow-poke* with his friends. Dynamite Charlie came out in a rowboat and joined them.

It was then, as they lay there waiting, that Bobby realized what the long-anticipated dedication meant to him. It meant the breaking up of this home where he had spent so many happy days and the parting with these good friends. Michigan and Mack were going up to the Shoshone project in Wyoming; Dynamite Charlie was off for rock-weir work on the Ohio; some of the topographic boys were going to the Philippines.

"You'll be down the Mississippi next year," said Mack to Bobby. "I heard the captain say so."

"Mississippi work always means a meeting of the clans," said Michigan; "that's why I like it. You're pretty sure to meet the whole bunch. We'll have you for mascot on the R. S. wannigan yet, Bob," he added, clapping the boy on the shoulder.

"I never thought I'd hate to go. I mean I never thought I'd hate it so much," said Bobby; "I never had a home I liked as much," he added, wistfully.

"Lived with your uncle, didn't you, Bob?" said Mack.

"Gee!" said Bobby, "I've made a lot of friends out here—that's one sure thing."

"You're right there, Bob, old boy," said Michigan. "Well, you know it's all one big family. You're in it now. I'll be joshing you at mess up in Alaska yet!"

Bobby was silent for a few moments. "That's one thing I like about Uncle Sam—he makes it seem like a kind of a home to you. Cracky! I could never work indoors now. Maybe you think it kind of made me sore when you fellows jollied me, but it didn't; it just made it seem more of a home, like. Gee! I used to miss you nights when you went to band concert."

Michigan smiled and he didn't jolly him now.

"I did—honest I did, Michigan."

Michigan clapped him on the shoulder again. "Well, you'll hear the same old band playing for the piccaninnies to dance by down on the levees, Bob; don't you worry."

"The Ghost will be there," said Bobby.

"Sure he will. We couldn't do without the Ghost."

"It's going to be a good thing for you, Bob, to be down on the ditches for a while," said Mack.

"It won't be the same, though," said Bobby.

"Sure it will—off with the old love, on with the new."

"It'll seem strange down there first, kind of."

He looked up to the summit of the dam, where people were leaning over the coping, dropping pebbles into the water. It was thronged with visitors. The flag flew gaily above the little tower-house. To Bobby the great, clean structure had never seemed so tremendous and magnificent as now. He remembered how he had come chugging up here in the launch on the morning of their rescue when the wind-storm had wiped out Pine Hill Cove, and how the great dam had stood there, calm and majestic, scorning all that furore of the elements. It was a very symbol of strength. Because it stood there bracing its mighty flanks against the everlasting cliffs and because nothing could budge it, miles and miles of desert country down below would be changed into thriving communities and fertile farms. Little pigmy people could climb all over it, the wind could blow and the waters rise, trees could be uprooted, rivers could career madly out of their courses, but the dam would stand right there and attend to its business. How many hundreds of people, cities, towns, markets, would come to depend on this colossal dam!

"It seems, kind of, as if it makes you be more loyal to Uncle Sam when you look at the dam," said Bobby, "because if you trust the dam it's just the same as trusting Uncle Sam."

"You're a great old Bob," said Mack.

Bobby could not hear the speeches very well, but he caught the sense of what was said. He heard that the Government did this thing for the sake of its citizens, so that they might come away from the crowded cities and till the land and build homes. He heard that private enterprise could not have done this, not only because of the cost, but because private enterprise is selfish and such a thing as this must be done unselfishly. He heard that the water rates were not really charges for water, because the water belongs to everybody, but were just Uncle Sam's way of letting the farmers pay back for building the dam and making the lake, and that when these were paid for the rates would cease.

He heard much that interested him. He heard the ex-President say that the forests shade the streams and bind the earth and that they must be carefully preserved. He heard him say that the farmers in the valley must show the same spirit toward the Government that these workers above had shown. He heard him say that success awaited men who were industrious and patriotic and who loved their country better than they loved their farms, and that no man should come to this new land who had not the spirit of patriotic loyalty in his heart.

Bobby had to hurry the *Slow-poke* to the landing so that Michigan could take his place among the band. When the ceremonies were nearly over he went up to camp to go to his own little room in Survey Bungalow. The place was all but deserted. Down at the dam he could hear the last strains of the band playing the "Star-spangled Banner," and see the tiny people moving along the coping and down the steps. Now that the dedication was over and there was nothing ahead but breaking up and departure, he felt depressed. He did not want to go away from here. As he walked he was thinking of the things he had heard said, particularly of what the ex-President had said of loyalty and

patriotism. He was thinking, too, of how this remote little town and that bungalow, with its bantering company and his own neat little room, had been the nearest approach to home that he had known since he was a very little boy. It had not been necessary to defend his uncle's memory here, for no one had known his uncle, but still he defended him in his own thoughts; he believed that Mr. Clausen had had many perplexities and he was loyal, though he never found it easy to talk about his uncle. How far away all that old life seemed now!

He was musing in this fashion when "Kinks," the commissary clerk, hailed him. He went into the commissary and to the little post-office window.

"Letter here for you," said Kinks.

It was postmarked Phoenix, and Bobby thought he knew whom it was from, but he did not open it until he got to his room. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and read it.

> DEAR KIDDO,—Don't say a word—I turned my trump card. Pulled old What's-his-name across for three hundred bucks, but I thought I'd have to give him chloroform to get it. Says he's clean busted. I told him he'd have to shovel out a thousand or two on storage water before Uncle Sam got through with him. Then he fell for it. He's going to have a hydrant or a windmill. I've got another pie in the oven, too, and it's coming out brown, believe *me*. Movies! That'll mean five hundred more. So the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior can rot, for all I care.
>
> Well, kiddo, I haven't forgotten about you, you little son of trouble, and we're going to get together. So bring your baggage and your conscience (if it isn't too big to carry) just as soon as Teddy gets through his spiel. There's an old ranch-house near Tempe that I've hired and we're doping out some pretty good stuff for the films. If you don't come straight here when you hit the valley, I'll kill you.
>
> Well now, kiddo, there isn't anything else to tell you except that you've got to come right here and stay with your old college chum, so don't try to argue about it. I want to get another squint at that sober phiz of yours, and I'll show you whether your old wandering minstrel friend knows a brick when he sees one and can pay up a debt of gratitude.
>
> So drop me a line to the post-office in Tempe, so I'll know when to kill a couple of ostriches.
>
> Yours for a good time,
>
> RED.
>
> P.S.—I chucked the harmonica and got a mandolin. How did you like Teddy?

The letter struck Bobby like a cool breeze. It was just like Red! He liked Red better than he had allowed any one to know. There was something so gay and worldly and reckless about him; and he was brave and smart. Yes, he was smart. Bobby was glad that Red was brave, for that in itself gave him an excuse for liking him. He read the letter several times, then he wrote an answer.

DEAR RED,—I got your letter and I am glad; especially because I was feeling kind of homesick like. It makes me feel good the way you say things. I am glad you are not going away like the rest of them.

I am glad you sold your secret, Red. I had to laugh at what you said about giving him chloroform. I think it must be fine to be in the movies. The fellows where I used to live used to go, and sometimes one of them would take me.

I don't like what you said about the Department of Agriculture and the other department, though. That's one thing I don't like about you, Red.

I would like to come and stay with you in your ranch-house. I don't see why you say that about a debt of gratitude that you owe me, because I owe you one—that's one sure thing.

The dedication was to-day, and it's all over. I heard Roosevelt make a speech. I couldn't hear him very good because he was so high up. He hit the railing good and hard with his fist. He said the farmers have to be loyal and patriotic to Uncle Sam. That was when he hit the railing.

Well, I'll surely come and visit you on your ranch, and I'll let you know when.

Your friend,
BOBBY CULLEN.

P.S.—I like to hear a mandolin. A fellow I knew used to have one.

When he went over to mess he took the letter with him to mail, but, seeing a little group of fellows lolling in and about the commissary, he kept it in his pocket and paused only to speak with one or two who hailed him. He did not like to have them know that he was writing to Red. Late at night, when the place was closed up, he went over and dropped the letter in the door slot.

There was surely nothing underhand in that, yet it was not exactly like Bobby Cullen.

CHAPTER XVIII
THE LAND WHERE THE SAGE USED TO GROW

Bobby's departure from Roosevelt was not as regretful as he had thought it would be. For by the time he went most of the others had already gone, the pleasant little homes were being torn down, and there remained little to remind him of the life he had led there. The merry company which had assembled at the long mess-boards had thinned out so that a single table in the commissary sufficed for the workers who still remained, and among these were few of the old familiar faces.

The men from the Bureau of Ethnology who had been delving in the old river course lingered on, but they were not of the old circle. The captain had gone to the new camp at Engle Dam site in New Mexico to grapple with the storage problem of the Rio Grande Valley, and from there he was going, goodness knows where. He had told Bobby that he would send for him, and Bobby knew he would. Mack and Michigan and Dynamite Charlie and the topographic men had gone their several ways, talking about quadrangles in Dakota and contour work in the Rockies and camping and roughing it, so that it made Bobby heartsick to listen to them. The engineers down at the power-house remained, for they were permanent, and Bobby divided his time during these days of waiting between helping the wrecking force in their ruthless work of devastation and hanging around the great turbines, which never ceased to fascinate him. These were now working in full force.

Sometimes he would go up in the *Slow-poke* to bring back the ethnology people, and then he seemed to be transported back thousands of years as he looked upon the ruins they had unearthed and the gruesome images they had rescued. The geologists said some of them were two to three thousand years old. Long walls of skilfully laid square stone, apparently carved by hand, were revealed by the blasting, as if some mighty convulsion of nature had once buried them under the huge rock ledges. Many were the hideous graven figures that were brought home in the launch.

From these men Bobby learned that Uncle Sam was a great fossil-hunter, digging for prehistoric relics with as much gusto as some men dig for gold. He had learned at school in his study of civil government about the several branches of the Government, legislative, executive, and so forth, but he had never dreamed that Uncle Sam had a weakness for going out West and rooting around for souvenirs of lost empires.

In those days he learned about the wonderful cliff-dwellers, and, since he was now in a measure free of restrictions, he allowed himself some freedom of thought in those fascinating matters. He learned that the cliff-dwellers were a civilized people, with churches, palaces, and schools, and he was shocked and amazed when told that it was a question whether the mighty dam itself would be in a better state of preservation two thousand years hence than were these wonderful ruins now. He learned that those extraordinary people had understood "arch action" quite as well as Captain Craig understood it, as their subterranean passages proved, and that they must have had their engineers, even as Uncle Sam had his engineers now.

At last one day Luke Merrick came up with provisions, and Bobby returned with him to the valley, saying good-by to the great dam, the vast lake, and the little disheveled town upon its brink, which had for so long been his home.

"Sorry ter leave, son?" Luke asked, as they drove along the mountain road over which Bobby had come with such high expectations a year before.

"Not so much now," said Bobby, frankly. "I'm anxious to see the valley now, I've heard so much about it."

He had been a little afraid that Luke would suggest his making his home with him, or would have arranged some other accommodations for him. He was greatly relieved when the water-master accepted as a matter of course his announcement that he was going to stay for a while with a friend. This was one difficulty over, although he was not altogether comfortable at the concealment which Luke had made so easy.

As they passed Frazer's road-house, the loiterers there, who had been much at Roosevelt, waved good-by to him, and that was the last reminder of the old life which Bobby had.

It was late in the afternoon when they pulled into Mesa, the nearest to the mountains of any of the project towns. Here they stabled the horses and stayed overnight at the same hotel where Bobby had stayed a year before. Early in the morning they took the train for Phoenix—a ride of about half an hour.

The country, dotted with bright new houses here and there, was as flat as a pancake, and it was thereabouts covered mostly with a fluffy kind of growth which Luke told Bobby was alfalfa. At one place the train crossed a concrete ditch five or six feet wide which ran out across the country; at intervals narrower ditches ran out at right angles from it, while others, not concrete, ran out at right angles to these, as Bobby could see in the distance. As the train crossed the main ditch half a dozen ostriches which were standing, poking their necks about in the most uncanny manner, scampered off at a queer, outlandish gait.

"Is that one of the canals?" Bobby asked.

"No, that's a trunk lateral—comes down from Highland Canal and waters all them farms off east there. Canals are wider. Now you can take a good squint at that lateral, son, 'cause it's yours. You'll cover that from Tempe right up to where it strikes the main—'bout seven miles. Later ye'll get a main canal, mebbe."

They stopped at Tempe, where several farmers boarded the train, and between Tempe and Phoenix there was much talk about the new era which the present season had brought. Bobby heard a good deal about "second feet" and "miners' inches" and "alkali" and "stop-gates" and "tapoons," and other things which he did not understand. Luke was the storm center of a clamoring throng. There was a warm argument as to the advantages of "rotary supply," and one farmer wanted to know if the rider would have authority over the head-gates and regulators, and whether the Government would allow canvas dams to be used without permit.

"None on ye can touch a regilator above subs," said Luke; "the rider hes the keys."

Bobby began to feel quite important.

Between Tempe and Phoenix they passed through a country showing on every hand the promise of early and plentiful harvests. Fields of the low, fuzzy alfalfa extended

away to the horizon. The farmers talked about three, four, and five cuttings. Cattle grazed in spacious square inclosures; long double rows of beehives were here and there to be seen; Luke pointed out a vast area given over, as he said, to beet-sugar. At one place there was a large orchard with furrows running crossways through it, so that the place looked like a chess-board with the young trees as chessmen. The whole flat country—houses, fences, barns, sheds—was as neat and orderly as a Kate Greenaway landscape.

Bobby found Phoenix a pleasant town with palm-bordered streets and pleasant garden-surrounded homes. Many of the establishments apparently derived their names from the Government enterprise, such as the "Reclamation Shoe-store," the "New Project Market," and so on. Everybody knew Luke and greeted him cordially, including Bobby in their friendly nods. At every corner Luke had to stop and talk about ponding, or free wash, or drowning, or drainage, or whether lemons were better with furrow flow, or what the Government was going to do about rotary supply.

They finally managed to reach the Federal Building, where the land office was and where Luke presented Bobby as Captain Craig's chief assistant, which caused much laughter. Then he took Bobby into his own office adjoining, which had "Water Users' Association" on the door. Inside were a couple of clerks.

"Well, here we are," said Luke. "Now to get yer entered up and outfitted."

Before he had been in the town two minutes a dozen raw-boned, tanned individuals were lolling around, waiting to talk with him.

"Now, son, you can see I'm pretty busy and so it'll be 'most all summer, more'n like. So I'll tell yer brief what yer got to do. Yer workin' fer the 'Sociation, but the 'Sociation's so mixed up with the Government that yer can say yer workin' for Uncle Sam if yer like. Yer'll get forty dollars a month fer a while, an' then more, and ye're responsible fer that Tempe lateral. Yer s'posed to cover that twice a day. Fer the present yer to lock yer head-gate every night at sundown—and don't let nobody tell yer when sundown is. Close yer head-gate immejit if yer lateral overflows. If any complaints are made to yer jot 'em down on one o' them blanks and send it here. Come here yerself on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Don't let anybody use a canvas dam along the lateral on the main subs. Course, goes without sayin' yer have to cover the subs, too. But yer don't need ter ride up all the subs every day. See that all the head-gates and regilators is workin'. Don't close a subhead-gate unless a farmer asks yer, 'n' then only if the others along that sub is willin'. Look out for spite work, 'n' never take sides. Remember yer not for Tom, nor Dick, nor Harry, but for Uncle Sam."

"I'll sure remember that," said Bobby.

"See that yer do. Yer can 'phone here from Tempe any time if there's any trouble, or anything yer ain't sure of. Remember ye've got no business beyond the subs—that b'longs t' the farmers. If a farmer wants to raise alkali instead of crops, let him, only don't give him any extra water to do it with. Yer just a kind of a policeman workin' fer the water-master 'n' lookin' out fer that lateral 'n' its subs. Yer duty takes yer to the end of the concrete an' no farther. As fer as yer see concrete yer got authority. Now most of what yer got to do yer'll learn as yer go, and the main danger with a likely youngster like you is ter make friends too easy and do little favors—raise yer head-gate

up a little fer a quiet midnight wash—or something like that. It's been done before, and it'll be done again. Look out! Yet yer want to be good friends to everybody, too. But take my advice 'n' don't take too many apples nor oranges nor nothin' from the farmers. Now I'll see yer after a day or two, when I got more time, 'n' tell yer more. If there's ever any sign o' floodin' call up the reservoir right away, then me; but the reservoir first."

"I have to walk back and forth twice a day, do I?" Bobby asked.

"Yer don't hev ter walk at all. Here, Harry, this is Robert Cullen, from up Roosevelt; he's goin' on Tempe lateral; you see he gets a badge and a pony."

He swung around and began to talk with the besiegers about getting seeds from Uncle Sam's experimental farm.

Bobby believed there was not the slightest doubt that Phoenix would presently be greater than New York, and he knew that Luke Merrick was born to be a water-master.

In fifteen minutes he was riding through the main street, wearing proudly his badge of authority and riding a shaggy little pony. It was not yet noontime. It is doubtful if he had ever in his life felt so happy. The little pony trotted amiably along over the road to Tempe, between the vast flat fields, intersected by the white streaks of the Government ditches and the branching furrows of the farmers. The bright sun shone overhead, the sky was cloudless, cattle glanced up and away again as he passed, children hailed him, and men waved to him from the fields, knowing him to be the new "rider."

He caused quite a little furore in the smaller town of Tempe as he rode through, feeling very proud and happy. The natural cordiality of the Western people was increased through a politic desire to ingratiate themselves with the new ditch-rider. Reigning his pony at the Government experimental farm, he showed his badge and asked for the head-gate keys, which were given to him. Then he asked if they could tell him where Mr. Thornton lived.

"Red-headed feller?" one of the men asked.

Bobby nodded.

"Lives out about a mile along the Mesa road. Ye'll see an old stone ranch-house with a wooden roof on that don't fit it. That's whar he lives. Roof blew off another house in a sand-storm and they laid it on top o' that."

Bobby thought it must be quite an ambitious storm which could blow the roof clean off a house.

"Yer kin make yer headquarters here," they told him as he rode away.

After fifteen or twenty minutes' ride he came in sight of the place he sought. There was no mistaking it; it stood alone on an unirrigated section—where a lateral was later to be carried—and was, from the agricultural standpoint, a most undesirable abode. The little stone house was hardly better than a ruin, and upon it rested askew a pointed shingle roof, the whole structure reminding Bobby of a man wearing a hat entirely too big for him, and rakishly tilted into the bargain. Within a small, fenced inclosure a couple of ostriches poked their gaunt necks in the direction of the approaching rider. Several Indians were lolling about, smoking. In the doorway presently appeared Red himself, in typical cowboy garb, and greeted Bobby like a long-lost brother.

"Kiddo, you old reclamation water baby, put it there," he said, extending his hand. "How's the Lord High Engineer? I was just going to send a posse of Apaches after you!"

"I'm a ditch-rider now, Red," said Bobby, dismounting.

"You're a little old mascot, that's what you are. Here, let me introduce you to part of my family, Chief Rain-in-the-face, Chief Mud-in-the-neck, and Chief Cinder-in-the-eye—all famous movie heroes; we were just rehearsing 'The Cliff Dwellers' Daring'—three reels. Takes you back three thousand years."

"I didn't write to you because I didn't know just when I was coming," said Bobby. "I'm glad you sold your secret, Red."

"Got another three-fifty coming in a couple of weeks from Chicago," said Red. "I'm taking care of the realistic end for the Back to Nature film people and arranging scenes on the spot. We're paying union wages to real Indians, kiddo. Come on in."

Inside it was very frontier-like and cozy, and Bobby sat down and told Red all the news. Thornton listened, telling Bobby at frequent intervals that he was a little brick and a fool to work himself to death for the Government, which was selfish and unappreciative and heartless.

"That's one thing I don't like about you, Red," said Bobby, "and especially it makes me sorry, kind of, because I like you so much in other ways. I'd rather see you an engineer, Red, and, cracky! you *could* be one—that's one sure thing. But I think this must be a lot of fun, though," he conceded, frankly, "and I'm glad I came."

"Well, kiddo, I don't forget how you offered me some of your money when I was on my uppers, and we won't let an old skinflint like Uncle Sam come between us."

"He isn't a skinflint, Red."

"Well, whatever he is he's not going to come between us. You're going to bunk here and trot around on your little old pony, and you're a chump if you make two trips a day—take a tip from me!"

"That's the rule, Red."

"We don't have any rules here, kiddo—just happy go lucky."

"And I'm going to pay you board—"

"You're going to— If you ever dare to mention that subject here I'll throw an ostrich egg at you, and then have my band of trained Apaches scalp you. Hear that? You'll pay me nothing. You'll stay here for good luck—as mascot—you little—"

"I'll stay for a while, Red, but—"

"No 'but' about it. Here you are and— Oh, wait till I strum you a tune on the mandolin."

He sat up on the couch just as he had sat in Bentley's cabin and began to play.

"I'm on the Tempe lateral, Red," said Bobby. "You know where that is, don't you?"

"Know? Didn't I make the survey for it? I did more work on it than you'll ever do. And what did I get for it? Yes, kiddo, I laid that lateral—if any one should happen to ask you; and who was it they sent down here from Roosevelt to watch out for the concrete lining and plan the turnouts?" he added, strumming the mandolin all the while. "Was it your friend Mack, or that joker from Michigan, or Barnard? Nay, nay, it was

Red Thornton they sent down to do that. You can see my name on the blue-prints yet up there in Leighton's office—or could before the place was torn down. So when you're trotting up and down that lateral hunting for trouble and spying on farmers, you can think of me, kiddo."

"I always said you were smart, Red; and brave, too; I always said that."

Red strummed the mandolin awhile in silent disgust. "And what did I get for it? A big juicy lemon, that's what. Just because I found some old prehistoric junk in the excavation and sold it to a couple of men, Craig gave me a black eye in Washington. Now they're rooting out tons of it up at the reservoir, and nobody says it isn't on the square."

"I know it," said Bobby.

"Everybody knows it's a historic neighborhood," Red went on, angrily. "That lateral excavation turned up lots of funny stuff; there's a piece of it now," he added, indicating a yellow chunk on a shelf. "They used to line passages with that stuff, and it was tight as a garden hose."

"I know it, Red, and maybe the captain was mistaken about that. I've seen images and things they got."

"Oh, well," said Red, with a sneer, "I should worry. I'm out of it now, and I've got money coming, and the whole blamed tribe of them can rot."

"Tell me about your movie play, Red."

Red's mood changed like tropical climate, and he laughed merrily. "Oh, we're doing some of that ancient dope, and now we're going to fix up a big five-reeler on irrigation."

It amused Bobby that Red should be so ready to avail himself of Uncle Sam's handiwork in this way, but he only smiled.

"Well, I'm glad you're here, kiddo. What d'you say we get supper? Do you want to trot out and get some water in this pail?"

Bobby went out and got the water from a dilapidated, caved-in well.

"If any one can get water in this way," he said, "I don't see why they can't irrigate with it. I don't see how there can be any secret."

"A well is one thing, kiddo, and an artesian is another. There's artesians in Colorado will irrigate a thousand acres."

"But I shouldn't think a negative artesian would give enough water for several farms, as you said."

"Oh, wouldn't you? Well, you've got another think coming, my fraptious boy. When you get down to the end of your lateral, look off east a little ways on that dry section. You'll see the corn-stalks bobbing good morning to you before the summer's out."

CHAPTER XIX
AT THE END OF THE LATERAL

As the weeks passed Bobby liked his work and he liked his strange home hardly less so. Red came and went, spending much time in Phoenix, and whatever his habit in the mountains may have been, he was now certainly nothing if not industrious. The big movie play about irrigation developed, involving many ingenious and novel scenes, and occasionally Bobby found himself drawn into the maelstrom of rehearsals. Red's knowledge of Government work was invaluable. Sometimes in the evenings Bobby would help him phrase the explanatory paragraphs which were to be displayed between pictures and he enjoyed it greatly. Once Red took his little company—which he always made to seem much larger than it was—up to the storage site to do "some construction stuff." Bobby envied them when they started off.

This trip, as it happened, marked a turning point in the pleasant camp life in the old ranch-house, for when Red returned he was worried and preoccupied.

"They say a lot of silt's washing down and getting through into the canals," he said. "Did you ever hear such nonsense? Now they're talking about closing all the head-gates and running the canals and laterals dry for inspection."

"Who told you that?" Bobby asked.

"Oh, the reservoir guards and the power-house men," sneered Red; "they say a lot of water is escaping from the canals through cracks in the concrete. Can you beat that?"

"Well," said Bobby, "I know how it was with the freshet-ditches on Forest Slope; the concrete was always cracking."

"That's different," said Red.

Bobby did not see how it was different. "I never had much to do with concrete work," said he.

"Then what's the use in talking about it?" snapped Red.

Bobby looked at him, surprised. "But I know there are cracks along my lateral, Red," he said, "and as for silt, I know there *is* a lot coming down, because there's a pile of it at the end of the lateral."

"Well, then, what more do you want?" Red snapped again; "if it washes through to the end, what more do they want?"

"The farmers down there wanted it," said Bobby; "it's pretty rich."

"Did you give it to them?"

"I'm going to ask Mr. Merrick, Saturday."

Red threw down the piece of rock which he had been tossing from one hand to another and jumped off the cot with an air of utter disgust.

"You make me sick," said he. "What's the use of running to Merrick with everything like a little tattle-tale? The farmers are all guying you now. If they want the silt let them have it. What good is it?"

"I don't see what difference it makes to you, Red."

"Well, because I hate to see you make a fool of yourself, for one thing. You claim to be interested in the project. Now you're standing in with a lot of Government busybodies that want to furnish jobs for the C. S. bunch. Why can't you let the farmers alone? As soon as they begin paying their rates Merrick and that bunch up at the dam begin to talk about draining the canals for cracks and silt, and all such nonsense. The farmers won't get any water for a month."

"Yes, they would, Red."

"No, they wouldn't; it's a swindle."

"It isn't a swindle, Red," said Bobby, angrily, "and if you talk like that I won't stay here. I can go over to the experiment farm any time I want to. I'm not going to stay here and listen to you call the Government a swindler. You've been talking like that for a year, and I'm sick of it."

"Look out," said Red, sarcastically, "you'll fall off if you get excited—just like you fell off the dredge-pipe."

Bobby subsided. "I know you saved my life, Red—you don't need to remind me, because I never forget it. And—and—do you suppose I'd care what you said about the Government if it wasn't—that I like you so much?"

"Well, then," said Red, somewhat less angry, "I've been hearing about that for the last year, too—how I saved your life. And I'm sick of hearing it—"

"It's only because I can't ever forget about it, Red."

"Well, actions speak louder than words," Red threw at him. "If you think so much of it as all that, see if you'll do *me* a little favor."

"I will, Red, and—I didn't mean to get mad then. I know I don't know as much as you do about concrete—or silt, either, if it comes to that. Gee! I don't know anything about concrete, that's one thing sure. I know mostly about water, kind of. That's my middle name," he added, as if to withdraw, conciliatingly, from Red's chosen field. "I'm getting to be a hayseed now," he laughed, in a pitifully obvious attempt to regain his host's good-will. "I—I ain't a brick any more, Red, like you used to say."

"Yes, you are a brick, too," said Red, slapping him on the shoulder.

"I—I like you even better than Mack or Michigan," said Bobby. "I do, Red. I wouldn't let even what Captain Craig said change me. I wouldn't, honest! That's the way it used to be when my uncle was alive. I thought I had to dislike people that he was on the outs with. But, gee! that isn't fair. I can see that now. And if a feller's brave you got to like him, anyway. Oh, cracky! I was glad when I got that letter from you—I sure was! That was what made me willing to leave the reservoir."

He was volubly happy that Red slapped his shoulder in the same old, friendly way. "A feller might get mad at another feller just because he liked him so much—couldn't he?"

"You're all right, kiddo. All I want you to do is keep your mouth shut. That isn't much, is it? I don't take much stock in this talk up at the lake; it may be a year before they'll do anything. But if you start in shouting about cracks in the concrete and about silt down at the end of the lateral, Merrick will get busy. He'll have it drained and a bunch of men shoveling it out while I'm trying to get my irrigation films ready. The

farmers are satisfied. Why should you or anybody else kick? Let well enough alone. They get the water, don't they?"

"Yes," said Bobby, doubtfully.

"And you say yourself the silt is good fertilizer. Well, tell the farmers down that way to bring their wheelbarrows and shovel it up. That's what you're for. Don't bother Merrick with it. Kiddo, the Government is always crazy to do something different. The politicians want to get people jobs. If you want to be loyal to Uncle Sam, save money for him. There's a bunch of hangers-on waiting for jobs here. Don't you let them dig their hands into Uncle Sam's pocket. See?"

"I—I think you kind of like Uncle Sam, after all—only you won't admit it, Red."

"Say nothing till I get my reels made up. Let the water flow. Then if you want to start something, go to it. I'll probably be in Europe by that time."

Bobby stood in the doorway. He was just about to start on his afternoon trip. "I'll do it," said he, "if you'll do something for me—I'll do it if you'll say you won't go to Europe."

"It's a go, kiddo," said Red, laughing. "Be in early to-night, will you? I want you to help me dope out some spiels."

Bobby rode along the beaten path beside his lateral, heavy-hearted. The fields on either hand were filled with waving wheat and corn and the great symmetrical stacks of soft alfalfa, which, like everything else on the project, showed that the first cutting had already yielded a goodly harvest. In the midst of this sea of abundance great straw hats bobbed here and there, their owners quite invisible. Some of these waved cheerily to Bobby as the shaggy little pony ambled along. On one of the little bridges spanning the sub-laterals a group of brown-faced children loitered, their hands full of alfalfa, waiting to give the pony a little refreshment as he passed. It was their daily custom. The pony had made friends from one end of the lateral to the other.

But Bobby did not meet these wayside diversions with the same pleasantries as usual, for he was troubled. He knew well enough what his plain duty was. It was to add his contribution of information about the state of the canal lining and to report to the water-master the pile of silt which had accumulated at the lateral end. He tried to soothe his conscience by telling himself that water was the most important thing just now, and that later, when the crops were in, would be time enough for repairs. But his conscience refused to be quieted. He knew that, as a plain matter of fact, some of the farms were getting too much water for their own good and were going to alkali. He knew that a temporary suspension would be a good thing. He knew that the pile of silt belonged to Uncle Sam, and that it should be used on the experimental farm. He knew that silt at the end meant silt elsewhere—that all of it did *not* wash through as Red had said. He did not know why he had not said so to Thornton.

But he knew, too, that Red Thornton had saved his life, though he did not realize the spell that he had cast upon him. He was very sure that he did not want Red to go to Europe.

Away back in Bobby's mind was something else which troubled him, now that Red's plausible talk could not be heard and he and the little pony were alone together.

Was the reason which Red gave for not wanting the canals and main laterals emptied, his real reason?

Why, of course. What other reason could there be? he asked himself. Still, there wriggled into his mind odds and ends of that strange talk, now only vaguely remembered, which he had heard a year and a half before in the wagon at Mesa. It troubled him that this should come back now, like a ghost, to haunt him. But that convincing way of talking, that ingenious setting forth of a case so there was no answer—it seemed somehow familiar.

The pony stumbled over one of the sublateral bridges and aroused Bobby from his preoccupation.

"What am I getting mixed up in?" he thought, and the thought led him off into all sorts of preposterous suppositions.

He dismounted, resolving to forget all such impossible nonsense, and by way of being very care-free he put his arm around the pony's neck, as he often did, and so they ambled on together.

"It's only for a little while, anyway," said Bobby; "just till he gets his pictures made. Cracky! you got to have water if you want the thing real. The next pile of silt there is, I'll report it. I don't believe I've got any business with the concrete, anyway. I've only got to do with the water; and I got to save money for Uncle Sam, like Red said."

Oh, Bobby, Bobby!

Down among the east-end units Farmer Thorpe came over to the lateral and asked about flower-seeds. Bobby said there were plenty at the experimental farm and that he would bring some next day. A little farther on a child was waiting at a turnout with some honeycomb on a stick for the pony to lick. "Hey, rider, my mother wants you should bring the *Record*[1] to-morrow," she said. Bobby promised not to forget. A young fellow threw him an orange. "Good shot," he called back. He knew where to draw the line in these matters, and he was popular throughout his whole lateral.

Thus he made his ambling journey to the end, the monotony varied by such pleasant encounters. The rider is like the post-boy of old—everybody's friend. Sometimes the pony had to brush his way along the very edge of a wheatfield, taking toll of it as he passed—for the pony was no stickler.

Hardly a day but Bobby recalled amusedly those dreadful words, "Arizona has a hot, dry climate—farming is unsuccessful, etc."

It was so unsuccessful now that at the end of the lateral Bobby's clothes as well as the pony's mane were liberally sprinkled with clinging particles of the bordering growth, so that the pair of them were hayseeds indeed.

The lateral ended abruptly, for Uncle Sam had designs upon the land beyond and meant to continue it some day, and off to the east were the desert lands where a few hopeful souls were dry-farming it. It was makeshift farming at best, and if there was one feature of it which more than another distinguished it from Bobby's own farms—he called them *his* according to riders' custom—it was an absence of paint.

The nearest of these farms was the one which Bobby always called Red's farm, because it was to the proprietor of this farm that Red had sold the precious secret. It

was at no great distance and its chief feature was the advertising matter which disported itself upon the barn, addressing itself to the railroad that crossed hard by. The public was here commanded, in brazen colors, to buy somebody or other's breakfast food, and somebody else's tobacco and somebody else's herb tonic, and not to allow itself to be cheated. Bobby always rested at the end of the lateral, and he was so utterly weary of the sight of the signs that he thought he could not have eaten the breakfast food if he had been starving, nor taken the tonic if he had been languishing away.

Another distinguishing feature of this farm was the predominance of grocery-boxes in the domestic architecture. Incomplete trade names of soap and canned goods appeared here and there; huge letters, S. or B., stood in lonely isolation, and sometimes Bobby would try to decide just where the S belonged, doing picture puzzles, as it were, at long range. Another feature was the lack of fencing, except for an outlandish arrangement of barrel-staves and wire near the lateral end.

Bobby knew Red well enough to know his weakness for glowing pictures, and he had come to know conditions well enough to know now that no negative well could irrigate two or three farm units, or even two or three farms. It would take a pretty active "spurter" to do that. He believed that with care and industry a negative might irrigate fifty or sixty acres amply; but something was lacking on Red's farm—whether water or care and industry he did not know. The chief crops were barrel-staves and grocery-boxes, and stray cows.

The boundary of the farm was quite near the lateral end, and more than once Bobby had driven some gaunt cow back into its own domain. This he did now, and, thinking there would be no objection to his repaying trespass with trespass, he strolled up into the second field to get a drink of water from the hydrant. Here was the usual elevated pond for miniature storage, such as one sees on an artesian-irrigated farm, and the usual signs of over-irrigation in some places and under-irrigation in others. In the vicinity of the well the land was soggy and ill-drained, showing here and there fatal specks of alkali. The rest was desert. As an irrigation enterprise it was a horrible bungle.

Bobby gave the pony a drink, then took one himself. He was not very thirsty, but something prompted him to take a second draught. Then he looked puzzled. Again he drank, sipping the water slowly, then tried it again, taking a long gulp. Then he tried a little trick which Mack had taught him, of letting it go down the wrong way, and of catching some elusive suggestion of flavor as he coughed. He closed his eyes and took another drink. Then he hung the cup methodically upon its hook and tightened his lips.

"That's Government water," said he.

When he got back to the lateral he tried some of Uncle Sam's water, and then he was certain about the water from the hydrant.

It was the same water that had lapped against Roosevelt Dam.

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[1] The *Reclamation Record*; an illustrated farming journal published by the Government.

CHAPTER XX
THE WELL

Bobby's first impulse was to go straight home and to decide, on the way, what he should do next. His mind was in a whirl. But one thing was clear to him—Red was involved in this business.

Then he reflected that he had but very doubtful evidence to support his conviction. So far as he himself was concerned, he was satisfied. He had seen the character and source of water determined in this way by the geological people, and he knew what he knew. But in a criminal matter, would it be enough? It was enough, anyway, to justify a diligent search for more evidence, and this he made up his mind to secure before he went home. He would take back with him all the facts he could possibly get.

Riding down the lateral a little way, he tied his pony to the flag-pole[1] near a turnout, and sat down on the concrete edge to wait for nightfall. Then, working his way back to the farm, he stole cautiously across the fields to the well. A dim light glimmered in the distant house, but there was no soul about.

Adjacent to the hydrant was a canted circular treadmill with removable connection, presumably for some unfortunate dog to tread his monotonous course upon and so fill the storage puddle. In this makeshift affair the predominance of barrel-staves was noticeable. The hydrant itself stood on a little board platform about three feet square, hinged at one side so that one could tilt the whole business to an angle of possibly thirty degrees—as far as the piping below would allow. A loose-hanging weight-latch locked the platform down, though this was at present thrown back and evidently never used.

Bobby tilted the hydrant slightly, then, holding the platform up, looked into the well. He could learn nothing that way, so he broke an end from the long stick he had brought and propped it under the platform to keep it up. Then he began poking around in the well with his stick, and found that its depth did not exceed four feet. It was no artesian, that was certain. Then he felt around the wall with his stick for an opening at the side; this was unsatisfactory, so he squeezed himself under the tilted platform, feet first, to let himself into the well. He had managed to wriggle in and was dangling his feet in the water about to let go his hold, when the stick which held the platform up snapped and the thing came down with a bang. Fortunately it did not fit closely on the top of the well lining or Bobby's fingers would have been crushed; as it was, they got a smart pinch. He was not sorry, however, that the platform had come down, for its former position would certainly have attracted attention if any one from the house had chanced that way, and he now proceeded with his investigation.

He was standing chest-deep in water in a circular well about three feet in diameter, with his head touching the platform above. His position was not a very pleasant one, and he resolved to have done with this stifling grave without delay. So he felt around with his hands below the surface of the water and discovered a circular opening, possibly eighteen inches in diameter. He thrust his arm into it and could not reach its end. Its edge was rough and rather crumbly, and he pulled off a piece of something hard

and put it in his pocket. Then he tried to determine in what direction this passage ran, but he had not his bearings in this watery vault, and was uncertain.

However, he had learned enough. This was no artesian well at all; it was not even an ordinary well, but just a hole by which the hydrant might be connected with this little tunnel coming from somewhere. There in the stifling darkness, and uneasy in spite of himself because of the tomb-like character of his prison vault, Bobby hardly realized the discovery he had made, or rather confirmed. He could think better when he was out of this dreadful place.

He straightened himself to raise the platform a little with his head, and get his hands on the top of the wall. The platform did not budge, and a momentary feeling of fright came over him at the thought of how it would seem if he were really locked in this awful subterranean vault with no elbow room, with water up to his chest, and with an insufficiency of even the damp air which he was forced to breathe. Bobby had a strong imagination and he allowed himself just a moment or so of torturing pictures of himself buried alive in such a place. He shuddered, then he laughed to himself and raised his hands against the platform. But it did not budge. He was not really frightened, for he knew the hydrant was heavy. He braced his head and hands both against the planking and pushed with all his might. The platform rose an eighth of an inch or so, then caught hard. He could rattle it within this limit, but that was all. He paused, dismayed, then terror-stricken, as the awful truth came to him that the latch must have been thrown over by the impact when the platform fell, and that he was shut fast in this frightful hole.

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[1] Such flag-poles are used to fly small pennants conveying messages to the rider, and letter-boxes are frequently fastened to them.

CHAPTER XXI
BOBBY CULLEN FINDS HIMSELF

Bobby was never timid in a predicament when any possible avenue of escape offered through resource or ingenuity or courage. But he was panic-stricken now.

For one thing, he had lost all sense of direction, and it gave him a hopeless feeling of isolation which could not have been greater if he had been lost in a wilderness. To strike that cold, hard, clammy wall with his hands and to feel that it held him in—the thought struck terror to him. To know that he could not stand up straight, but must knock his head against that cruel planking above, and that if he lay down he would just drown like a kitten under an inverted bucket, drove him almost to the verge where despair becomes madness.

He did not believe he could stand here until morning. But if he did and some one came and found him, what would that person do, seeing the secret discovered? The man who could take his water this way, who could go the length of bargaining for this means of stealing the Government supply, was a criminal—probably a man who would take big chances and, if need be, safeguard his practice with murder. These were the thoughts which revolved in Bobby's mind. He would die, and after a day, a week, a month, maybe, would be hauled out and buried. Or he would be dragged out half alive the next morning and made away with. He thought of his little pony grazing near the lateral and waiting for him. He lost his self-control altogether and wrung his hands at his utter helplessness and hopelessness in this terrible prison.

He beat his head wildly against the boards above, and the low, hollow echo, shocking the sepulchral stillness of the place, was dreadful to hear.

Then he got control of himself in some measure, and realized that he would be the worse handicapped for every minute that he waited. There was but one hope, and that was in a fight against time and increasing weakness and suffocation.

The boards, though thick, were soft and punky from continued dampness. They were softer than they would have been under the preservative of continual immersion. If he knew exactly where the drop-latch was he might cut a hole there with his jack-knife, reach through and lift it. It was in the middle of one of the four sides, he knew. But which side? The hinges were on the outside, so he could not tell which side was hinged. Of course, the latch would be on the opposite side from the hinges, and he rattled each side, trying to determine where the catch or the hinges were, but all four sides seemed equally loose. Then he pressed against the corners, thinking that the hinged side would hold more tightly at its end, and that the side with the latch would give somewhat at its end because the latch was in the middle. These were practical theories, but they did not work out, because the platform was too heavy. The cover did give perceptibly upon pressure, and, using this as a basis, Bobby selected the side where he thought the latch must be, and decided to bore a hole in its center.

A good deal hung upon his decision, for, assuming that he could live to bore one hole, he surely could not bore two, and, after all, it was largely a question of blind luck.

Giving the cover a few final pounds with his fist, he jabbed his knife into a place midway of one side and began boring. It was difficult to do, especially as he could not stand up straight, and before he had got very far every bone in his body ached.

He succeeded in making a hole through which he could thrust his little finger, and it was something to be able to project even that much of himself into the world above. His strained position and the fact that he was standing chest-deep in water and working above himself caused his head to swim, and the dreadful uncertainty of the result was appalling. More than once he felt as if he should drop into the water. He twisted his neck and writhed his arms to get relief. He felt that if he could only stand straight up and stretch himself once it would give him strength for another hour.

He began the slow process of enlarging the hole after the same approved formula that is used in making a peek-hole in the fence of a ball-field. Sometimes he had to pause and lean against the damp wall until his giddiness passed. Sometimes he paused to wriggle his fingers and rest them, and all the while that awful specter of uncertainty haunted him.

He had no idea what time it was, but after what seemed an interminable period his work was in such a stage that every minute or so he tried to get his hand through the hole he had made; and at last he succeeded. He was almost exhausted, his head swimming, his nerves on edge from the impossibility of holding his head upright. He would rather have gone through the Pine Hill Cove episode right over again than to suffer a repetition of these last two or three hours.

Out of sheer fear and nervousness, he refrained, for a minute or two, from reaching out for the drop-latch. Then he made a quick, sudden reach, as one may take an unpalatable medicine over which he has hesitated.

The latch was not there!

The anguish of despair seized him, and he beat the wall and cried aloud. Oh, if he could only straighten his neck just once! Then he would sink down into the water and die.

Again he pushed his hand through the hole and let it bask for a moment in the free, fresh air. Then something took hold of it—something soft and clammy. Bobby pulled his hand back in terror, and if ever mortal's hair stood on end his did then.

"Who's there?" he managed to gasp, and paused, breathing heavily and listening.

There was no answer, but he fancied he could hear a faint sound of receding footsteps, as if some one were tiptoeing away.

He was now so thoroughly upset that he could not think. Who had been there? How soon would he come back? What was going to happen?

Then, suddenly, with new spirit born of his desperate plight, he plunged his hand through the hole again, reached about and found the broken stick which had propped up the platform. With this he could poke around above, and he presently found that the catch was on the side next to the one where he had made the hole. If he could get his arm through the hole as far as the elbow, that would give him some strength to manipulate the stick, and he thought with this additional reach he might be able to force the catch. To touch the lock where it lay on top of the planks would avail him nothing. He must get his stick at such an angle that he could pry it away from the side, for it was

one of those wrought-iron right-angular affairs that hinged on the flat top of the platform, bent over the edge, and fastened by its own weight under the casing. If he could get his stick lodged against it down under the edge he might push it out and raise the planking at the same time.

This he tried to do, fearing every minute to hear the cautious footfalls again or to have the stick pulled away from him by some unseen presence.

At last, after half an hour or so of effort, during which he experimented with every variety of movement and angle, he succeeded in winning the exasperating game of pushing and prying and bending and slipping. It would be impossible to describe the way he felt as he pushed the stick carefully with the slight weight of the iron precariously on it. It slipped off the stick, but not until the platform had been raised above the reach of its pesky little jaw.

Bobby emerged from his waking nightmare, writhing and stretching with unspeakable delight. He looked up toward the house and listened. Once out of that frightful hole, his courage came back to him with a rush. He was no more afraid of a rascally water-thief than he was afraid of a worm. As he experienced this refreshing self-possession he noticed a cow grazing near by, and he realized with a laugh that this kindly animal had licked his hand.

He knew not what time it was; there were no lights in the house, but he resolved to linger thereabouts and see this thing through. He believed that if the hole in the platform and the footprints in the mud were discovered suspicion would be aroused, and that the culprit, being warned, might escape apprehension.

He did not try to analyze his feelings; he knew his duty clearly enough. This thing had clarified his mind, and he saw as straight as a survey line. He was out of the slough in which he had been wallowing. He felt of his badge to see if it was secure. Then he gathered himself together and started off toward the lateral. When he came near to it he heard the pony neighing, and he was glad of the welcome. The honest, patient little animal's pleasure at his return seemed to purge the air of all this subterfuge and sophistry and guilt, which he now saw in its true light.

"Hello, Gipsy," he said, cheerily. "Tired waiting?"

He put his arm around the pony's shaggy neck. "Well, I'll tell you all the news, Gip," he said. "I had a regular adventure. You and I have great times together, working for Uncle Sam, don't we—hey, Gip? Put your mug over here, you little grafter. Suppose I was to tell Uncle Sam how you take honey and alfalfa and stuff? How long do you suppose you'd hold *your* job?"

This was only a joke, of course, for he and Gipsy knew well enough what loyalty meant; they could afford to be a little free and easy, they were so perfectly sure of themselves.

"You're about the only real friend I've got, I guess, Gip?" he said, with a wistful note in his voice. "Well, take your nose away, you little musher. I'm going to get some rest."

He walked along one of the sub-laterals a little distance and burrowed a place for himself in a mow of alfalfa. It was warm, but he did not sleep much; for now the full significance of his discovery forced itself upon him and he saw the whole thing as plain

as day. He had been living on money stolen from Uncle Sam. Red had fooled him with his "secret" and made him a sharer in his own dishonest gains. Red, who had saved his life and made possible his creditable career and all his high hopes!

He put Red out of his thoughts, for it was easier not to think of him at all than to think of him in this way. To think of him made Bobby sick at heart. It was to this that all his striving and faithfulness had brought him.

In any event, his duty was clear and he would not shirk it. Uncle Sam should know about the silt and about the cracks in the lateral lining. The canal should be drained and the other end of the secret tunnel revealed, let come what might.

His indignation was now toward the farmer who had bought this wretched means of stealing his supply. He was the real culprit, Bobby told himself, and he should be dragged out into the light and sent to jail where he belonged.

The morning found him stiff and weary and with the symptoms of a cruel cold. His head ached and he was feverish; but he cared not a whit. Running down to the lateral, he bathed as best he could and saw to it that the pony was all right. Then he started across the fields, heading for the farm. His khaki uniform was muddy and wrinkled, and he was a sorry figure, yet the conscious air of authority was all over him and his lips were set.

When he reached the well he took out a little wallet of paster notices which he carried, and with some difficulty detached one from the other, for the glue had been wetted. This he slapped upon the hydrant. It was a form used on head-gates and regulators and read:

HANDS OFF.
BY ORDER OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Bobby next started up for the house, removing his rider's badge from his shirt and placing it conspicuously on the khaki pleat of his uniform. Suddenly he swung around and started straight back for the lateral.

"Come on, Gipsy," he said, unfastening the pony. "I want you to go with me."

He could hardly have anticipated any assistance from the little animal, but he wanted the stimulus of every vestige of authority which he possessed. He was canal-rider on the Tempe lateral, and he would appear in the full regalia of office. If ever the love of one's country and the consciousness of right gave strength and courage, they gave them to Bobby then.

Nor had he much cause for timidity, so far as personal prowess was concerned. The past year, with its vigorous, outdoor life, had done wonders for Bobby; he had grown like a cactus, and rugged strength—and more of it to come—was suggested by every movement of his still ungainly frame. Moreover, his career as canal-rider, with the trust and authority which it carried, had given him a certain poise, and he was quite at ease, now that he had found himself at last.

"Look out for the mud, Gip," said he; "this fellow ought to have a rowboat."

There were barrel-staves laid lengthwise to guide one over the oozy area, and there were boards and more barrel-staves to guide one over the yielding sand. The proprietor of this shabby place had adopted the lazy man's habit of ponding his water and using

free wash, so that the small part of his land where irrigation had been tried, had had all its vitality drowned out of it and was simply mud.

Bobby had rather a contempt for the farmer who hires out his barn and even his house-side for advertisements, and as he and Gipsy made their way now through the fields toward the dilapidated, unpainted house, he sneered as he noticed the slipshod surroundings. His own farms—as he called them—were tidy and professional-looking, conducted by intelligent men who understood irrigation and who avoided an excess of it as worse than drought. Here was a man, he thought, who had been dishonest and had gained nothing by his dishonesty—who was simply incompetent.

Perhaps the best part of Bobby's training was that he had spent his time with skilful and resourceful people, doing a great work, and that he had come to have a kind of contempt for inefficiency. To do a thing and to do it wrong; to bungle; to use a good means to an unsatisfactory end; to start half-cocked and to make a botch of things! To turn the desert into a garden, what could be grander? And he had seen it done. But to turn it into a mud-hole!

Bobby picked his disgusted way along. Perhaps he exaggerated his disgust a little, but that was natural.

Reaching the house door, he gave it a sounding rap and waited, his arm resting on the pony's neck.

REACHING THE HOUSE DOOR, BOBBY GAVE IT A SOUNDING RAP

The door was opened by a youth of about his own age clad in jumpers.

"Is the owner of this farm around?" said Bobby.

"He ain't up yet," the young fellow answered, eying him keenly.

"Well, I want to see him," said Bobby. "You'll have to tell him to get up. It's time he was up," he added, with a flippant sneer.

"He ain't got no call to get up yet," the boy protested. "He ain't got nothin' to do with Government water," he added, noticing Bobby's badge. "We've got private supply."

“Oh, you have, have you?” said Bobby. “Well, please tell him I want to see him, and if he’s asleep wake him up. You don’t suppose I plugged up here through all this mud to sit around and wait, do you?” he added, with a note of peremptoriness.

The boy shook his head incredulously. “I wouldn’t dast to call him; he’d only lay it inter me,” said he.

“Well, then,” said Bobby, “if you’d rather tell him that his water is posted, you can tell him that.”

Bobby suspected that the Government water was being used for domestic supply as well as for irrigation, for he had seen no other well, and his announcement went home.

“You can’t post our water,” said the young fellow.

“Oh, can’t I, though?” said Bobby. “I can do more than that, sonny, so you just trot up-stairs and tell your boss I’m waiting. You can put a saddle on a horse if you happen to have one, for he’s going to Tempe with me.”

For a moment the boy hesitated, then, shaking his head as if to shift this awful burden of responsibility to Bobby, he went in and up-stairs. Bobby guessed that the boy, whoever he was, was the victim of a pretty rigorous discipline, and he laughed a little at the fellow’s apprehensions.

While waiting he wandered about with the pony. Pretty soon he heard footsteps, and, turning, saw a slim man coming around the corner of the house, hoisting the single strand of suspender which he wore up on to his shoulder. He approached with a kind of sideways gait which somehow struck Bobby as familiar, and he was evidently very much nettled.

“Well, sir,” he called, sharply, “what are you doing trespassing here?”

Bobby stared at him at first, puzzled, then dismayed. Then he reached nervously for the pony’s rein, fumbled with it, and stood rooted to the ground in speechless amazement.

For it was his uncle, Rafe Clausen, who stood before him.

CHAPTER XXII
THE GOOD SCOUT LAW

"I—I didn't know it was you," Bobby stammered, weakly.

For a minute his uncle did not seem to recognize him. Then he said with equal perturbation: "It ain't *you*, Bobby, is it? I'm blessed if it ain't really you—sure enough."

"Yes, it's me," Bobby managed to ejaculate. "I—I thought you were dead. I didn't know you were here—I didn't. I came on account of—of the water."

"And you was thinking to make trouble for me, hey, Bobby, and me your own uncle; and I thinking to order you off for one of them Government busybodies; and here we are facing each other, me and you. My, how you have grown up, Bobby! And so you're one of the riders, too! Well, well! And you thought I was dead. Not me. I escaped, Bobby, but your poor aunt, she was lost, Bob."

As Bobby looked at his uncle he wondered how it had ever been possible for the latter to chastise him. Whether it was because he himself had grown so much or because his uncle had shriveled up he knew not, but Mr. Clausen was now a pitiable figure. His clothing was in the last extreme of shabbiness, not the wholesome shabbiness of the careless Westerner, but the seediness of the unsuccessful Easterner. He looked hardly better than a tramp, and his prompt and obvious attempt to establish an amicable understanding with his nephew filled Bobby with disgust. It was evident that the last vestige of decent pride had departed from his uncle and that he was a broken man.

"About the water, hey? Well, what about the water, Bobby? You see me here, Bobby, trying to make an honest living, after all I had to suffer. And this boy, Bobby," he whispered, nodding toward the house, "he ain't what you was, Bobby. He ain't got your brains. I always said you'd make a man, Bobby. I used to tell your aunt so, when she'd be impatient with you."

"She wasn't impatient," said Bobby, nettled. "Are you sure she was killed?"

"Sure as taxes, Bob. And me, I was cheated out of half of the insurance that I worked so hard to pay. Don't you ever buy insurance, Bobby. So I bought this little patch of desert, Bobby—and—here I am."

"I came out here with one of the Government engineers who was in Bridgeboro after the flood," said Bobby, after a pause. "I'm in Government service for good. I'm going on river work and forestry next year. I have charge of the Tempe lateral now."

"Well, and isn't that fine? And you never knew your poor uncle was struggling away here, trying to make two ends meet."

"If you didn't pond the water you wouldn't get so much alkali," said Bobby, coldly, "and you could raise stuff. The only stuff you can raise now is mushrooms."

"You remember the mushrooms, hey, Bobby? Many's the tiff you and me had over the mushrooms."

"I'm just telling you," said Bobby.

"Well, and now I got trouble about my water, it seems," Mr. Clausen said, eying his nephew shrewdly.

"It isn't *your* water," said Bobby, looking straight at him; "it's the Government's water. If you used it right and had furrow flow and drains you could irrigate a couple of forties, maybe. But it would be stealing just the same. A year ago I was fool enough to think three or four farm units could be irrigated with a negative well. I've learned something since then. If that down there," he added, pointing to the well, "was a negative artesian it wouldn't irrigate this land, let alone your neighbor's. You'd have got stung. But it isn't an artesian, and you know it isn't. You get enough water through that tunnel, or whatever it is, to raise stuff; but you can't raise stuff lying in bed in the morning and having signs painted on your barn—you can't."

"Who says 'tisn't my water? And what's this talk about a tunnel—or something?"

"*I* say it isn't. It's not warm enough for artesian water, and it don't taste like it. Besides, I was in the well and found the tunnel."

"Trespassing, hey?"

"Why, sure I was trespassing. Can't you see I was?"

"Well, I'm ready to forget it. Never you mind about wells that's on private land, my boy. There's all different kinds of water, Bobby, and blood's thicker than any of 'em, remember that. You wouldn't go back on your uncle, would you, and start up a lot of trouble?"

Bobby hesitated. "No, I wouldn't," he said. "If I wanted to do that I wouldn't tell you what I'm going to tell you, that's one sure thing."

"It sounds natural to hear you talk, Bob."

"I know I got to be loyal to you. I came here to order you to come to Tempe with me, and I could do it, too," he added, proudly. "I got more strength than you have."

"I'm very poorly, Bobby."

"But that was before I knew it was you. I'll tell you now that the lateral is going to be emptied and cleaned out, and the other end of your tunnel will be discovered. I'm going to put in my report to-morrow. I know who you bought the secret from; it was Thornton, and I suppose it's an old sub-tunnel. I know you gave him three hundred dollars for it. I live in Thornton's house, and he's—he was—he's a friend of mine."

"That looks bad for you, Bobby."

"Never you mind about that. I just want you to know that I know the whole business. So there isn't any use talking about it. I had my mind all made up what I was going to do, but now I can't do it—because I got to be loyal. And even if I didn't have to be loyal I'd be sorry for you, because you don't know how to do things right. I got to be sorry for you, kind of. And—and I got to remember how you took me to a show once. And once you gave me a quarter."

"I had more money in those days, Bobby, boy."

"So now I'm going away," said Bobby, "back to Tempe, and I tell you that I won't say a word to anybody till I see you again to-morrow. You have to believe me, because I'm going to be loyal. I got to think and decide."

His voice shook a little as he turned away, for he was much affected at the turn of affairs.

"Good-by," he said, starting to mount the pony, "and you just wait. I wouldn't go back on you. Especially I wouldn't now, because I see how it is. You never worked for the Government, and it isn't so bad for you as it is for—"

"Bobby," cried his uncle, grasping the pony's rein and standing between his nephew and the animal in a childish effort to prevent his mounting, "you ain't going to go back on me—you ain't, Bobby?"

"I told you I wasn't."

"You and me can keep a secret, Bob. Don't get me into no trouble with that crowd down at Phoenix—promise me that, boy. I know they could send me to jail, Bob, but you wouldn't see your uncle go to jail, would you—your uncle that raised you?" He clung desperately to the rein as Bobby mounted and looked up at the boy imploringly. "Remember your auntie, Bob, and how I used to play the accordion for you when you was a little mite of a codger. Remember that, Bob?"

"Yes, I do," said Bobby, frankly; "it kind of makes me think of Bridgeboro, now I see you. It kind of all comes back, like."

He turned his head away while his uncle, pleased with the effect he had produced, waited.

"You went through a lot of trouble—that's one sure thing," said Bobby, speaking with difficulty.

"So you won't make any more trouble for me, Bobby?"

"I don't know," said Bobby, "just what I'll do. I—I never thought how I'd have to be loyal to different people. But I won't tell them, that's one sure thing. I got to think now what I ought to do. I can think best when I'm alone with my pony. And I don't feel good, so I want to go home. While I'm riding along I'll think. But I'll surely fix it for you some way."

"You ain't going to work a scheme on me, Bobby?" his uncle asked, suspiciously, still clinging to the rein.

"No, I ain't, I told you. But I got to think how I can be fair to everybody, haven't I? It's different now, kind of, since I found it was you."

He looked straight at his uncle with brimming eyes, and Rafe Clausen saw that he could be trusted. Yet still he dropped the rein reluctantly and stood right where he was, watching with a look of apprehension as his nephew rode away. When Bobby had nearly reached the ramshackle fence he turned and saw his uncle going toward the house with that familiar, sideways gait which the boy was now old enough to distinguish as the mark of a prideless, weak, and broken character. And down in his generous, unresentful heart he realized with unspeakable pity why his uncle was such a failure. Even as a young boy in Bridgeboro he had had a sort of vague consciousness of it. He realized this now; and he saw that even the influence of Uncle Sam could not help such a man. His own boyish idea of a drain-ditch outside the house in Bridgeboro and his uncle's reception of the suggestion struck the keynote of both their characters and read their two fortunes for them.

Here, in the midst of a barren mud-hole, was an object-lesson of the man helplessly addicted to makeshifts, who ties a string on a chair instead gluing it, who uses brown paper instead of window-glass, and carpet-tacks where he ought to use screws. Bobby's own experience with Captain Craig enabled him to see these things now in their true light, and his heart went out to his uncle as to one handicapped by disease and whose doom is sealed.

He had even made a hopeless botch of his dishonest purchase.

CHAPTER XXIII
BOBBY DECIDES

And this was the triumph of Bobby's quest. The anguish of that horrible night, his fine resolve, and all his high hopes of dragging a malefactor out into the light had brought him only to this. He did not know what he would do, more than that he would go home and change his clothing and get something to eat.

As he rode along his mind wandered back to the old life at Bridgeboro, to the little ramshackle cottage near the river, to the Bronson boys, to his uncle as he had known him then, patching up the chicken-coop with a wire bedspring, or sitting with his feet in the oven, playing the accordion. He bore no resentment toward his uncle; he merely felt sorry for him. He was even sorry for the momentary anger he had shown. It touched his pride to think that his own uncle had come out here and made such a botch where other men had wrought a miracle, fraternally joining hands with Uncle Sam, making a science of farming and throwing down the gantlet to the desert. He was almost as much ashamed of his uncle's inefficiency as he was of his dishonesty.

As for Red, he tried not to think of him at all; yet he could not entirely forget him, for he owed his life to Red.

"It's all a muddle, anyway," he said to himself. "Cracky! I told Mr. Bronson it might be you'd have to be loyal two different ways, like; and he said 'No.' But I was right, anyway."

He tried to straighten things out as he rode along, and when he had almost reached home he had about formed his plan.

Red was not in the ranch-house when he entered, but there was a note, evidently scribbled hurriedly, which read:

> KIDDO,—Waited for you last night. Where the dickens were you? Have to go away for a few days. Will write.
>
> RED.

He was rather glad of Red's absence, for he knew not how he would face him nor what he would say. Though he was perfectly sure of himself now, he dreaded Red's engaging manner and convincing way of talk. Red had often been away for two or three days.

After changing his clothes and feeding the pony, he made himself a cup of coffee and ate what was ready to hand.

Then he rode into Phoenix. At the Federal Building he had to wait his turn, as usual, to see Luke. When he did go in the water-master's big visage and friendly smile acted like a tonic on him, just the same as it had that first morning in Mesa, when his cordial greeting seemed to clear the air of the words which he now knew had been spoken by Red Thornton.

"Well, how's the water flowin', son? I hear Willis down your way is experimentin' with dates?"

"It's no experiment," said Bobby; "he's got away with it. He's using his whole south sub for them."

"Well, yer got a wide-awake lot along yer ditch, son. Yer got the north main canal beat a mile. That's what I tell the boys up there."

"Yes," laughed Bobby. "You tell each one the same thing."

Luke laughed, too. "Well, what's new, son?"

"Oh, one or two things," said Bobby, trying to speak carelessly. "There's a pile of silt at the end of my lateral—about a wagon-load, I guess. The farmers down there want it."

"What'd yer tell 'em?"

"Nothing, yet."

"Guess Uncle Sam 'll use that silt himself, Bob."

"That's what I thought. Then there's something else. I want some copies of the *Record* to take along. I want some flower-seeds, too."

"All right, sir."

"And there's some long cracks in the concrete along my lateral. I don't know how it is under water, but I suppose it's the same."

Luke rooted among his papers and handed Bobby a pad of printed notices which read:

NOTICE

On Friday, the 15th inst., the head-gates and regulators will be closed at sundown and will remain closed from fifteen to thirty days pending the cleaning and repairing of the canals and main laterals.

"Glad yer spoke of it, son. I almost forgot. Yer better post those notices on the pennant-poles and gates and hand 'em around to the farmers. Tell 'em we figger it'll take three or four days for the canals to exhaust. Out o' twenty-seven riders yer the only one that's noticed the cracks enough to report on 'em. Guess that's the trainin' yer got up to Roosevelt, hey?"

"Maybe the other ditches aren't so bad," said Bobby, modestly.

"Maybe the other riders ain't got Engineer Cullen's trainin'. I'm glad yer spoke of it before I did; it shows yer got eyes, like I always told Cap'n Craig."

Bobby was glad, too, that he had spoken of it first and voluntarily. It might have made a big difference if he had not. To have done so cleared his conscience.

When he left the water-master's office he went into the post-office down-stairs and drew out the three hundred and twenty dollars which he had saved. There had been little chance to spend money up at Roosevelt, and the habit of saving thus acquired continued naturally amid the allurements of Phoenix and Tempe. He had sent back the fifty dollars which Mr. Bronson had given him; he had sent ten dollars to the fund for "a new Bridgeboro," taking a certain benevolent pride in thus remembering his old

home in these days of opulence; he had spent a little for clothing, and that was about all. His surprise at his own prosperity and thrift was a surprise experienced by many a reclamation worker, who, as the expression went, had his freshets without any spillway. Bobby was now saving to take a college course, and he had a secret ambition, which he did not divulge, of buying Gipsy for his very own.

He stayed that night at the experimental farm in Tempe and went off to his territory early in the morning. Notices similar to the ones he carried with him had been already posted here and there in the town, and several people halted him to ask about the suspension of water supply.

Reaching his laterals, he posted the notices at every turnout as he rode along, and communicated the order verbally to every one he met. At one of the subs a farm-hand greeted him, stroked the pony and said, "Well, Gip, yer master buy yer yet?"

"Not yet," said Bobby. "Maybe I won't. I can't tell."

On the whole, he felt better as he rode along than he had felt the day before.

Reaching the lateral end, he drove a stick into the pile of silt and put one of his "Hands Off" notices on it. Then he started across the fields for his uncle's farm, the pony jogging companionably at his side.

"So you've come, Bobby," said his uncle. "I knew you would—I knew you could be trusted." For all that, he looked very anxious and suspicious, and Bobby guessed he had not slept.

"What did Red Thornton tell you?" he asked, seating himself on the edge of the dilapidated porch.

"Well, now, I'll tell you, Bob, just what he told me," Mr. Clausen answered, sitting down quite confidentially beside him. "Between you and me I don't think much of that fellow Thornton. I don't like his eye, Bob."

"What did he tell you?"

"He told me about how there was an old tunnel used by ancient people that began down here near my well and ran out almost to the Government canal. He said he'd connect it with the canal. There used to be a house down where that well is, Bob; I used the stones of it for the—the—"

"Fake artesian," said Bobby.

"That's it, Bob; he was a clever one, that Thornton."

For a few minutes Bobby sat in silence. "Well," said he, at last, "I've thought it all over. I thought about it going home, and I thought about it when I was alone last night. And I've decided there's only one thing to do. I have to decide myself, because I can't ask anybody."

"Oh, you wouldn't do that, Bobby!"

"They're going to empty the lateral. I reported that there were cracks in it and silt. I had to do that; but they were going to do it, anyway. The head-gates and regulators have to be shut for good in two days. And, of course, when they find the hole in the lateral and trace it they'll arrest you."

"You wouldn't see them do that, Bob?"

"No, I wouldn't. But I wouldn't see you keep on cheating the Government, either. I don't know how much water you've used. All I know is it hasn't done you any good. Your rates for a year would be about two hundred and fifty dollars. I can't ask them to compute it, because then they'd know. So we have to guess, kind of. I've decided to say that you owe Uncle Sam one hundred and fifty dollars."

"Uncle Sam is rich, Bobby; he can afford to lose it."

Bobby ignored the remark. "You haven't got any money yourself, have you?" he asked.

"Not a red cent, Bob; and they could close me out any time here; that's the plain truth."

"Well, then," said Bobby, "you have to do just what I say. First you have to get a piece of paper and write what I tell you."

"Now listen here, Bobby—"

"I made up my mind I'd be respectful to you and not get angry," Bobby interrupted, "because you're my uncle and I'm sorry for you, too. But if you don't do just what I say I'll get on that pony and ride away, and in a week you'll be arrested. I've worked for the Government going on two years, and it's made a man out of me. We ain't in Bridgeboro any more. You've got to do as I say now. Now go and get a piece of paper."

His uncle sat looking at him for a moment, then rose and entered the house. After a few minutes he returned and resumed his seat with a piece of paper and a pencil in his hand.

"There's something the Government has," said Bobby, simply, "that they call a conscience fund. I heard a man talking about it to Mr. Leighton, the resident engineer up at Roosevelt. It's a dandy idea—that's one sure thing," he added, with that odd reversion to his old boyish manner. "I saw it was a good idea as soon as I heard about it. People that have cheated the Government just send the money in when it troubles their consciences, like. They don't have to sign their names or tell where they are or anything. They just send the money. So that will be the best thing for us, because you won't have to sign your name or anything."

Mr. Clausen looked at the boy as if he were talking in a foreign language.

"Now you write what I say and then I'll send it in with the money, and then I'll give you a hundred and fifty dollars more to go away with. If you start talking about it I won't do it," he added.

"You wouldn't be such a fool, Bobby—"

"Take the paper and write what I say," said Bobby. "Address it to the Reclamation Service, Washington, D. C.

> "I used some water that I had no right to, and it comes to about a hundred and fifty dollars as near as I can make out. So I send you a hundred and fifty dollars. If I knew what it was exactly I would send it. I am sorry I cheated you, especially because it is such a fine thing you are doing."

Bobby read the note, then pulled out of his pocket the precious three hundred and twenty dollars which he had saved. Very methodically he counted out a hundred and

fifty, rolled the bills up with the letter and returned them to his pocket. He then detached two ten-dollar bills from the other pile and handed the hundred and fifty to his uncle.

"That'll take you back to Bridgeboro if you want to go," he said; "but, anyway, you ought to go far away from here, and you ought to go right away. Some men who go back East say that irrigation is no good, just because they failed. You ought not to say that, because it wouldn't be fair. You can always write to me, and if I get along all right I'll help you more, if I can. And when you let me know where you are I'll write to you, too. I'm sorry if I got mad yesterday." He rose, but hesitated before mounting the pony. "It was the only way I could think of to be loyal," he said, "and it makes me think of Bridgeboro when I see you. Last night I got to thinking how you played checkers with me, and it made me homesick, kind of."

It was odd how the one or two things his uncle had done for him and the little isolated instances of comradeship between them kept recurring to him now.

"I'll send you the money back, Bobby. I may go to Chicago."

"You don't need to send it back. I don't want it. Good-by."

Bobby's eyes were swimming as he held out his hand. Then he started across the farm; through the sand and sage, through the mud and alkali, and so back to his lateral, where the billowed seas of wheat and corn waved on either side.

He had divided his little fortune between his two uncles, the one who had raised him and taken him to the show, and the one who had made a man of him and given him a start in life. He wondered what Mr. Bronson would think of his decision. Perhaps he had not followed the cold requirements of the highest duty. He could not tell. He had never expected anything like this, but he had thought it out and done the best he knew.

It was not so bad.

CHAPTER XXIV
PLANS

The discovery of the ancient sub-irrigation main was a nine days' wonder on the project. When Bobby's lateral was drained a hole was found in the concrete near its end, which opened into a passage some dozen yards in length, communicating with the old distribution tunnel. This ran for fully a quarter of a mile, terminating at the spot where Rafe Clausen had dug his shallow well.[1] Here, with almost every shovelful of earth they turned, the Government geologists and ethnologists were rewarded by some new and startling discovery. If Rafe Clausen's farm had yielded nothing else it yielded at least a goodly harvest of ancient relics, and there seemed no doubt at all that on this very spot where he had made such a failure some wiser head than his had, ages back, conducted a prosperous farm.

It was true that the very stones with which he had lined his well were the scattered remnants of a prehistoric house, and it gave Bobby a shudder when the thought occurred to him that the stones which he had beaten in his blind fear on that dreadful night in the well had been carved by those mysterious prehistorics. Perhaps, for all he knew, the disembodied spirit of some cliff-dweller had kept silent vigil with him in that dank prison, lingering still among the stones which had formed his ancient home. If so, it must have shocked him to distraction to see some of his handiwork converted into a slipshod pigsty near at hand, and to behold, rising out of a pile of stones which he had cut, a pole on which a glaring placard extolled the flavor of a certain plug tobacco.

Of all that Bobby learned about the wonderful cliff-dwellers, nothing seemed to bring them so near to him nor to make them seem so vividly real as this sensational discovery.

But of all these interesting revelations Rafe Clausen knew nothing, for he had gone to pastures new. Whether he ever crossed Bobby's path again is not a part of this chronicle, but we may be sure that wherever he settled down the trusty brown paper did duty for a windowpane and barrel-staves played their customary part.

The hole in the lateral and the short stretch of connecting tunnel had been made with engineering skill, and were all the more remarkable because the work must have been done stealthily at night. Bobby suspected that the man who had talked with Red that night in the wagon at Mesa must have helped in the work, but, of course, he could not know.

As the days passed and Red did not return, Bobby began to realize—what he might have suspected already—that his absence was due to flight. He believed that Red must have seen one of the notices and had lost no time in taking himself to parts unknown. Bobby had, and strangely, perhaps, he continued to have, a feeling of affection for Red. It was not only that Red had saved his life, but that evidences of his wasted talents were continually cropping up. Even now, while those who suspected his connection with the scheme spoke ruefully of him, they praised his resource and skill, and along with the evidence of his dishonesty stood the evidence of his ability. It was always like that.

When Bobby had come down from the project, he had hoped that he would be able, somehow or other, to bring Red back into Government service, and he had cherished that hope to the very end. But along with this desire had grown the realization that Red was by nature an odd number, hopelessly cursed with the spirit of the free lance, and unable to work in harness. Of course Bobby could not look into the future and see how Red's honest fondness for him was to prove his salvation.

He bore his disappointment now as well as he could, never allowing himself to look at the old ranch-house, and staying at the Government experimental farm. The boyish frankness which had made him so popular, and which had won even Red, served him here, and he was a general favorite. Yet his eager, unsophisticated manner was beginning to wear off a little and give way to a demeanor of self-assurance as he gradually found himself and realized the possibilities of the future that was before him. It had been a big year and a half for Bobby; he had seen a tremendous job put through, a mighty miracle wrought, the byproduct of which had been a lesser miracle in his own life. He had hit the nail on the head when he told his uncle that Uncle Sam had made a man of him.

If he had been one of those redoubtable young heroes of whom he had read he might have gone to Roosevelt as chief engineer; but, being just a plain, every-day wide-awake boy, he had been satisfied with kindergarten work in the noble profession of engineering in which he hoped that he was now launched.

While the ethnologists were having their innings on Rafe Clausen's deserted and ruined farm, Bobby rode upon his duties, oblivious of the remarks which he heard about his uncle. He heard him called a swindler and a thief, but he paid no attention. He knew that the money which his uncle owed had been paid and that was enough for him. He believed that Mr. Bronson would have approved his course, and he went his round on his little pony with supreme indifference to all he heard.

He never knew that he was himself under a momentary cloud of suspicion when some farmer asked Luke Merrick if he did not think "the rider on that lateral might have known about the tunnel and received a bribe for keeping it secret." This farmer was not on Bobby's lateral, and his query brought a storm about his ears. The water-master answered with towering indignation that his rider had reported conditions in the lateral before he had so much as heard of the Government's order.

One day, after distribution had been reestablished, Bobby jogged into the farm at Tempe and found a letter waiting him. It bore no stamp, only the imprint of the Reclamation Service at Washington. For a moment he feared his connection with the conscience money had been discovered, but was reassured when he read the letter:

> Dear Bobby,—I have asked the Reclamation Office to forward you formal instructions to report to me at Fort Skelton near Helena, Montana, not later than the 15th of next month, for special work on the Butte Mountain Forest Reservation.
>
> I shall plan to take you with me down the Missouri and Mississippi, as far as Vicksburg, possibly New Orleans. I should like you to inquire of Mr. Wells in the land office at Phoenix for the booklet of topographic instructions used by the Survey and for the Civil Service pamphlet. I want you to read them

carefully—you can study them while you're traveling. I have had sent you the booklet of folding charts showing soundings in the Gulf of Mexico. Look them over carefully and read the introductory matter.

If you should reach Fort Skelton before the 15th you'll find Tom Bonny there, and he will make provision for you till I arrive.

E. B. Craig.

P.S.—If Tom should be on contour work give this card to Mr. Williams of the Inland Waterways Commission and make yourself known to him.

Bobby read the letter through a second time. He had drunk it down at the first gulp; now he lingered over the taste. The Butte Mountain Forest Reservation! The Missouri and the Mississippi! Sounding charts of the Gulf of Mexico! The Inland Waterways Commission! And Tom Bonny—Michigan.

He carried the letter around with him until the next report day, taking it three times a day and before retiring, like a tonic. "You can study them while you're traveling." Wasn't that exactly like the captain!

At the water-master's office he had to wait his turn, and he talked with the other riders whom he met there semi-weekly.

"Well, son," said Luke, sitting back and beaming upon him with that fixed, up-ended smile, so cordial yet so shrewd, "how's them prehistorics? Didn't I tell ye fust off 'bout them prehistorics?"

"Yes, you did," said Bobby.

"Weldin get his seeds?"

"Yes, he got them, and he wants to know if he can have extra flow for cucumbers?"

"Sure. Let him have it. Terry's ostriches hatch?"

"Fine. He's going to pluck pretty soon."

"What's he givin' 'em, alfalfa?"

So it went on, the little gossipy report and exchange of news which Bobby always enjoyed so much. Luke usually gave him a little more of his time than he did the other riders.

"Well, son," he said, finally, "I s'pose I got to hear other folks's troubles now, as the feller says."

"There's one thing more," said Bobby. "It's a trouble of my own."

"No more secret tunnels?" Luke laughed.

"It's a letter I want to show you. It's from the captain."

"Lord! what's he up to now?" drawled Luke, taking the letter.

Bobby waited rather anxiously as he read it.

"Well," Luke drawled, as he finished, "if anybody wanted to shoot the cap'n they'd have to ketch him on the wing, that's all. Lassooin' wouldn't do no good. Well, son?"

"I want you to give me your advice, Mr. Merrick, so I can be sure. I'm pretty sure already," Bobby added, with characteristic frankness, "but I want to be specially sure." Luke sat back and thought, rubbing his big hand through his hair. "Well," he finally

drawled, “it’s all a question of what yer want to be, son. If yer want to be a farmer then yer’d better stay right here with us old hayseeds. Bein’ a rider won’t lead to nothin’, Bob. If yer want to be an engineer yer can’t do better ’n fall in line behind the cap’n—if yer can keep up with him. Lord-a-mercy! I reckon now he’s figgerin’ on puttin’ the Mississippi out o’ business. He’ll be harnessin’ them canals up on Mars yet.” He paused. “Yer want to go, don’t yer?”

“Y-yes, I do.”

“An’ yer jest want me to say I think yer right?”

“Yes, I do,” Bobby smiled.

“Well,” drawled Luke, “I guess yer are. That fust night me and yu stood on top of the dam, and yu was talkin’ ’bout trees preventin’ erosion an’ ’bout the dam bein’ like a company o’ soldiers and bein’ made from idees and such like, I says to myself, I says, ‘This kid’s either plum crazy or else he’s going to be an engineer.’”

“And what do you think now, Mr. Merrick?”

“Well, you know, Bob, what they used to say up to camp—that the cap’n could tell by the way a kid makes mud pies if he’ll make an engineer. I dun’no,” he added, “ye ain’t crazy—that’s one sure thing, to use your own style o’ talk. I heard him tell Randel over t’ the land office that you *saw big*. I dun’no’ what he meant by it, son; the cap’n gets me. But I guess yer better go, Bob.”

THE END

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[1] Specimens of the tiling used in these sub-irrigation tunnels of the cliff-dwellers may be seen to-day at the Smithsonian Institution at Washington.

[The end of *Uncle Sam’s Outdoor Magic* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh]