The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Road Builders, by Samuel Merwin

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Road Builders

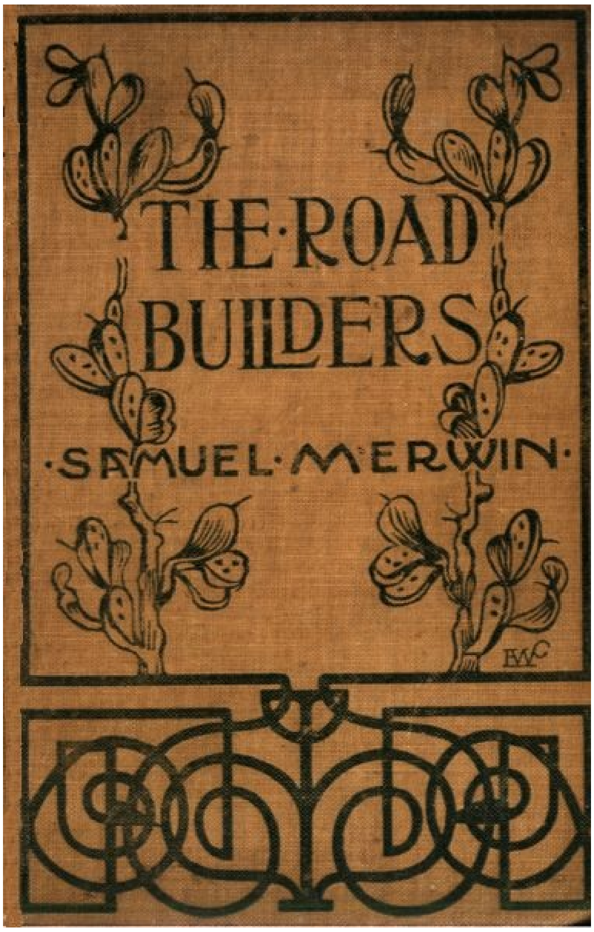
Author: Samuel Merwin
Illustrator: F. B. Masters

Release date: January 12, 2013 [EBook #41825]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Bruce Albrecht, Matthew Wheaton and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net

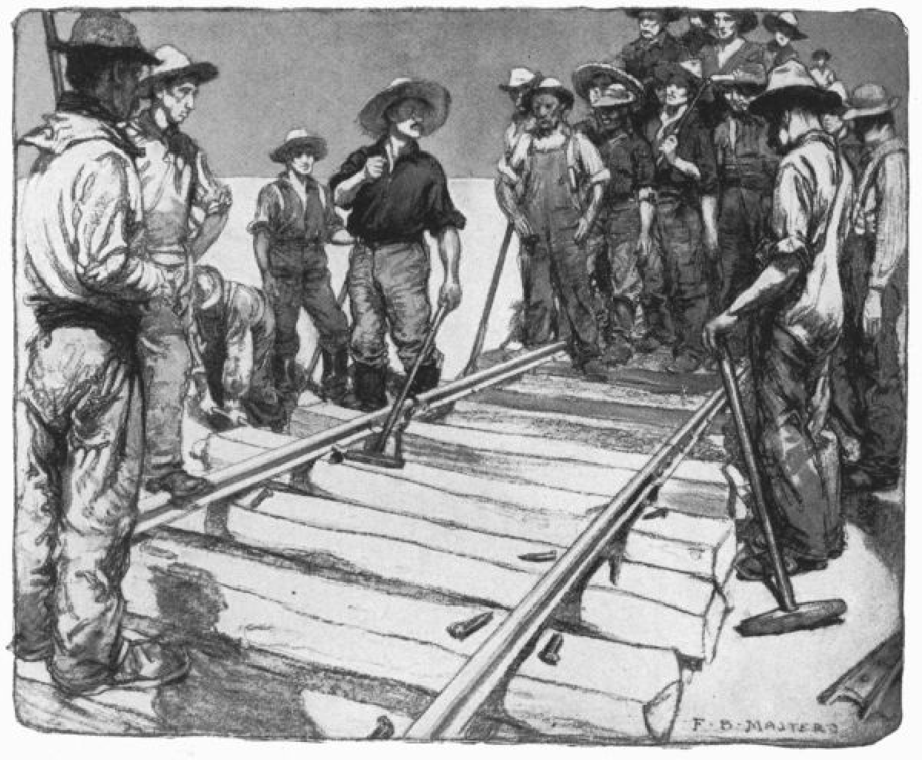
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROAD BUILDERS ***



THE ROAD BUILDERS
SAMUEL MERWIN

THE ROAD-BUILDERS

The M M Co



“‘There,’ he cried, … ‘there, boys! That means Red Hills or bust.’”

The Road-Builders

BY

SAMUEL MERWIN

AUTHOR OF “THE MERRY ANNE,”
JOINT AUTHOR OF “CALUMET ‘K,’” “THE SHORT LINE WAR,” ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
F. B. MASTERS

TORONTO
THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, Ltd.
1910

Copyright, 1905,
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Set up and electrotyped. Published October, 1905.
Reprinted April, 1906.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co.—Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

TO MY LITTLE SON

NOTE

A part of this story was printed serially in *The Saturday Evening Post* under the title, “A Link in the Girdle.”

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Young Van engages a Cook	1
II.	Where the Money came From	22
III.	At Mr. Carhart’s Camp	37
IV.	Jack Flagg sees Stars	66
V.	What They found at the Water-hole	97
VI.	The Road to Total Wreck	138
VII.	The Spirit of the Job	185
VIII.	Shots—and a Scouting Party	219
IX.	A Show-down	246
X.	What took Place at Red Hills	293

ILLUSTRATIONS

‘There,’ he cried, … ‘there, boys! That means Red Hills or bust’	*Frontispiece*
	FACING PAGE
‘It’s all I have a right to give anybody’	74
‘Eighty cents,’ he muttered, ‘and for how much work?’	80
‘Well,’ began the boss, looking him over, ‘what kind of a cook are you?’	98
Wonderfully they held the pace	114
They went on in this way for nearly an hour	120
‘Look here, Tiffany,’ Carhart began, ‘something’s going to happen to this man Peet’	142
‘You go back to your quarters’	208
… this trestle structure which was slowly crawling, like some monster centipede, across the sands of the La Paz	240
The cigarette dropped from Antonio’s unnerved fingers	244
Charlie had not raised his revolver,—the muzzle still rested easily on the sill,—but it was pointing straight at Jack Flagg’s heart	310

THE ROAD-BUILDERS

CHAPTER I

YOUNG VAN ENGAGES A COOK

The S. & W. was hoping some day to build a large station with a steel and glass trainshed at Sherman. Indeed, a side elevation of the structure, drawn to scale and framed in black walnut, had hung for a number of years in the private office, away down east, of President Daniel De Reamer. But that was to come in the day when Sherman should be a metropolis; at present the steel of which it was to be constructed still lay deep in the earth, unblasted, unsmelted, and unconverted; and the long, very dirty train which, at the time this narrative opens, was waiting to begin its westward journey, lay exposed to the rays of what promised to be, by noon, the hottest sun the spring had so far known. The cars were of an old, ill-ventilated sort, and the laborers, who were packed within them like cattle in a box-car, had shed coats and even shirts, and now sat back, and gasped and grumbled and fanned themselves with their caps, and steadily lost interest in life.

Apparently there was some uncertainty back in the office of the superintendent. A red-faced man, with a handkerchief around his neck, ran out with an order; whereupon an engine backed in, coupled up to the first car, and whistled impatiently. But they did not go. Half an hour passed, and the red-faced man ran out again, and the engine uncoupled, snorted, rang its bell, and disappeared whence it had come.

At length two men—Peet, the superintendent, and Tiffany, chief engineer of the railroad—walked down the platform together, and addressed a stocky man with a close-cut gray mustache and a fixed frown, who stood beside the rear car.

“Peet says he can’t wait any longer, Mr. Vandervelt,” said Tiffany.

“Can’t help that,” replied Vandervelt.

“But you’ve got to help it!” cried Peet. “What are you waiting for, anyway?”

“If you think we’re starting without Paul Carhart, you’re mistaken.”

“Carhart! Who is Carhart?”

“That’s all right,” Tiffany put in. “He’s in charge of the construction.”

“I don’t care what he is! This train—”

He was interrupted by a sudden uproar in the car just ahead. A number of Italians had chosen to enliven the occasion by attacking the Mexicans, some of whom had unavoidably been assigned to this car.

Vandervelt left the railroad men without a word, bounded up the car steps, and plunged through the door. The confusion continued for a moment, then died down. Another moment, and Vandervelt reappeared on the platform.

Meanwhile Tiffany was talking to the superintendent.

“You’ve simply got to wait, Peet,” said he. “The old man says that Carhart must have a free hand. If he’s late, there’s a reason for it.”

“The old man didn’t say that to me,” growled Peet; but he waited.

It would perhaps be difficult to find, in the history of American enterprise, an undertaking which demanded greater promptness in execution than the present one; yet, absurdly enough, the cause of the delay was a person so insignificant that, even for the purposes of this narrative, his name hardly matters. The name happened to be, however, Purple Finn, and he had been engaged for chief cook to the first division.

There was but one real hotel in the “city,” which is to be known here as Sherman, the half-dozen other places that bore the title of hotel being rather in the nature of a side line to the saloon and gambling industry. At this one, which was indicated by a projecting sign and the words “Eagle, House,” Carhart and his engineers were stopping. “The Comma House,” as the instrument men and stake men had promptly dubbed it, was not very large and not very clean, and the “razor back” hogs and their progeny had a way of sleeping in rows on and about the low piazza. But it was, nevertheless, the best hotel in that particular part of the Southwest.

Finn, on the other hand, made his headquarters at one of the half dozen, that one which was known to the submerged seven-eighths as “Murphy’s.” That Finn should be an enthusiastic patron of the poor man’s club was not surprising, considering that he was an Irish plainsman of a culinary turn, and considering, too, that he was now winding up one of those periods between jobs, which begin in spacious hilarity and conclude with a taste of ashes in the mouth.

It was late afternoon. The chief was sitting in his room, before a table which was piled high with maps, blue-prints, invoices, and letters. All day long he had been sitting at this table, going over the details of the work in hand. Old Vandervelt had reported that the rails and bolts and ties and other necessaries were on the cars; Flint and Scribner had reported for their divisions; the statements of the various railroad officials had been examined, to make sure that no details were overlooked, for these would, sooner or later, bob up in the form of misunderstandings; the thousand and one things which must be considered before the expedition should take the plunge into the desert had apparently been disposed of. And finally, when the large clock down in the office was announcing, with a preliminary rattle and click, that it intended very shortly to strike the half-hour between five and six, the chief pushed back his chair and looked up at his engineers, who were seated about him—Old Van before him on a trunk; Scribner and Young Van beside him on the bed; John Flint, a thin, sallow man, astride the other chair, and Haddon on the floor with his back against the wall.

“All accounted for, Paul, I guess,” said Flint.

Carhart replied with a question, “How about those iron rods, John?”

“All checked off and packed on the train.”

“Did you accept Doble and Dean’s estimate for your oats?”

“Not much. Cut it down a third. It was altogether too much to carry. You see, I shall be only thirty-odd miles from Red Hills, once I get out there, and I don’t look for any trouble keeping in touch.”

“It’s just as well,” said Carhart. “The less you carry, the more room for us.”

“Did those pots and kettles come, Gus?” Carhart asked, turning to the younger Vandervelt, who was to act as his secretary and general assistant.

“Yes; just before noon. They had been carried on to Paradise by mistake. I got them right aboard.”

“And you were going to keep an eye on that cook. Where is he?”

Young Van hesitated, and an expression of chagrin came into his face.

“I’ll look him up. He promised me last night that he wouldn’t touch another drop.”

“Well—get your hands on him, and don’t let go again.”

Young Van left the room, and as he drew the door to after him he could hear the chief saying: “Haddon, I wish you would find Tiffany and remind him that I’m counting on his getting around early to-night. I’m not altogether satisfied with their scheme for supplying us.” And hearing this, he was more than ever conscious of his own small part in this undertaking, and more than ever chagrined that he should prove unequal to the very small matter of keeping an eye on the cook. At least, it seemed a small matter, in view of the hundreds of problems concerning men and things which Paul Carhart was solving on this day.

The barkeeper at Murphy’s, who served also in the capacity of night clerk, proved secretive on the subject of Purple Finn—hadn’t seen him all day—didn’t know when he would be in. The young engineer thought he had better sit down to digest the situation. This suggested supper, and he ordered the best of Murphy’s fare, and ate slowly and pondered. Seven o’clock came, but brought no hint of the cook’s whereabouts. Young Van gathered from the barroom talk that a big outfit had come into town from Paradise within the past hour or so, and incidentally that one of the outfit, Jack Flagg, was on the warpath—whoever Jack Flagg might be. As he sat in a rear corner, watching, with an assumption of carelessness, the loafers and plainsmen and gamblers who were passing in and out, or were, like himself, sitting at the round tables, it occurred to him to go up to Finn’s room. He knew, from former calls, where it was. But he learned nothing more than that the cook’s door was ajar, and that a half-packed valise lay open on the bed.

At half-past ten, after a tour of the most likely haunts, Young Van returned to Murphy’s and resumed his seat in the rear corner. He had no notion of returning to the Eagle House without the cook. It was now close on the hour when Sherman was used to rouse itself for the revelry of the night, and that Finn would take some part in this revelry, and that he would, sooner or later, reappear at his favorite hostelry, seemed probable.

The lamps in this room were suspended from the ceiling at such a height that their light entered the eye at the hypnotic angle; and so it was not long before Young Van, weary from the strain of the week, began to nod. The bar with its line of booted figures, and the quartets of card-players, and the one waiter moving about in his spotted white apron, were beginning to blur and run together. The clink of glasses and the laughter came to his ears as if from a great distance. Once he nearly recovered his faculties. A group of new arrivals were looking toward his corner. “Waiting for Purple Finn, eh?” said one. “Well, I guess he’s got a nice long wait in front of him, poor fool!” Then they all laughed. And Young Van himself, with half-open eyes, had to smile over the poor fool in the corner who was waiting for Purple Finn.

“I hear Jack Flagg’s in town,” said the barkeeper. “I wonder if he is!” replied the first speaker. “I wonder if Jack Flagg is in town!” Again they laughed. And again Young Van smiled. How odd that Jack Flagg should be in town!

He was awakened by a sound of hammering. There was little change in the room: the card games were going steadily on; the bar still had its line of thirsty plainsmen; two men were wrangling in a corner. Then he made out a group of newcomers who were tacking a placard to the wall, and chuckling as they did so.

And now, for the first time, Young Van became conscious that he was no longer alone at his table. Opposite him, smiling genially, and returning his gaze with benevolent watery eyes, sat a big Texan. This individual wore his cowboy hat on the back of his head, and made no effort to conceal the two revolvers and the knife at his belt.

“D’ye know,” said the Texan, “I like you. What’s your name?”

“Vandervelt. What is yours?”

“Charlie—that’s my name.” Then his smile faded, and he shook his head. “But you won’t find Purple Finn here.”

“Why not?”

“Ain’t that funny! You don’t know ’bout Purple Finn. It’s b’cause Jack Flagg’s in town. They ain’t friendly—I know Jack Flagg. I’ve been workin’ with ’im—down Paradise way.”

Young Van was nearly awake. “You don’t happen to be a cook, do you?” said he.

“Yes,” Charlie replied dreamily. “I’m a cook. But I’m nothin’ to Jack Flagg. He’s won’erful—won’erful!”

The engineer got up to stretch his legs, and incidentally took occasion to read the placard. It ran as follows:—

> Purple Finn: I heard you was looking for me. Well, I’ll be around to Murphy’s to-morrow because I want to tell you you’re talking too much.
>
> Jack Flagg.

He returned to his table, and amused himself listening to Charlie’s talk. Then he looked at his watch and found that it was nearly two hours after midnight. Within six or seven hours the train would be starting. He wondered what his friends would say if they could see him. He was afraid that if he should drop off again, he might sleep too late, and so he determined to keep awake. He communicated this plan to Charlie, who nodded approval. But he was not equal to it. Within a very short time his chin was reposing on his breast, and Charlie was looking at him and chuckling. “Awful good joke,” murmured Charlie.

Young Van fell to dreaming. He thought that the doors suddenly swung in, and that Purple Finn himself entered the room. The noise seemed, at the instant, to die down; the barkeeper paused and gazed; the card-players turned and sat motionless in their chairs. Finn, thought Young Van, nodded in a general way, and laughed, and his laugh had no humor in it. He walked toward the bar, but halfway his roving eye rested on the placard, and he stood motionless. The blue tobacco haze curled around him and dimmed the outlines of his figure. In the dream he seemed to grow a little smaller while he stood there. Then he walked across and read the placard, taking a long time about it, as if he found it difficult to grasp the meaning. When he finally turned and faced the crowd, his expression was weak and uncertain. He seemed about to say something but whatever it was he wished to say, the words did not come. Instead, he walked to the bar, ordered a drink, put it down with a shaking hand, and left the room as he had entered it, silently. The door swung shut, and somebody laughed; then all returned to their cards.

When Young Van awoke, the room was flooded with sunlight from the side windows. He straightened up in his chair and looked around. Charlie was still at the table. Here and there along the side bench men were sleeping. The card-players, with seamed faces and cold eyes, were still at their business. A new set of players had come in, one of them a giant of a man, dressed like a cowboy, with a hard eye, a heavy mustache, and a tuft of hair below his under lip.

The engineer was almost afraid to look at his watch. It was half-past eight. He turned to the still smiling Charlie. “See here,” he said, “did Finn come in here last night?”

Charlie nodded. “You didn’t wake up.”

Young Van almost groaned aloud. “Where is he? Where did he go?”

“Listen to ’im!” Charlie was indicating a lank stranger who was leaning on the bar, and talking to a dozen men who had gathered about him.

“… And when I got off the train,” the lank man was saying, “there was Purple Finn a-standin’ on the platform. I thought he looked sort o’ caved in. ‘Hello, Purple,’ says I, ‘what you doin’ up so early in the mornin’?’ But he never answers a word; just climbs on the train and sits down in the smoker and looks out the window as if he thought somebody was after ’im.”

A laugh went up at this, and all the group turned and looked at the big man with the mustache. But this individual went on fingering his cards without the twitch of an eyelid.

“So Finn has left town,” said Young Van, addressing his vis-a-vis.

“Yes,” Charlie replied humorously. “He had to see a man down to Paradise.”

“Who is that big man over there?”

“Him?” Charlie’s voice dropped. “Why, that’s him—Jack Flagg.”

“Did you tell me last night that he was a cook?”

Charlie nodded. “He’s won’erful—won’erful! I know ’im. I’ve been workin’—”

Young Van pushed back his chair and got up. For a moment he stood looking at the forbidding face and mighty frame of the man who was now the central figure in the room; then he crossed over and touched him on the shoulder. “How are you?” said he, painfully conscious, as every waking eye in the room was turned on him, that he did not know how to talk to these men.

Flagg looked up.

“They tell me you can cook,” said the engineer.

“What’s that to you?” said Flagg.

“Do you want a job?”

“This is Mr. Van’ervelt,” put in Charlie, who had followed; “Mr. Van’ervelt, of the railroad.”

“What’ll you pay?” asked Flagg.

Young Van named the amount.

“When do you want to start?”

“Now.”

“Charlie,”—Flagg was sweeping in a heap of chips,—“go down to Jim’s and get my things and fetch ’em here.” And with this he turned back to the game.

Young Van looked uncertainly at Charlie, whose condition was hardly such that he could be trusted to make the trip without a series of stops in the numerous havens of refuge along the way. The thing to do was perhaps to go with him; at any rate, that is what Young Van did.

“Won’erful man!” murmured Charlie, when they reached the sidewalk. Then, “Say, Mr. Van’ervelt, come over here a minute—jus’ over to Bill White’s. Wanna see a man,—jus’ minute.”

But Young Van was not in a tolerant mood. “Stiffen up, Charlie,” he said sharply. “No more of this sort of thing—not if you’re going with us.”

Charlie was meekly obedient, and even tried to hurry; but at the best it took considerable time to get together the clothing of the cook and his assistant, pay their bill, and return to Murphy’s. This much accomplished, it became necessary to use some tact with Flagg, who was bent on winning a little more before stopping. And as Flagg could easily have tossed the engineer out of the window, and had, besides, the strategical advantage, Young Van was unable to see much choice for himself in the matter. And standing there, waiting on the pleasure of his cook, he passed the time in wondering where he had made his mistake. Paul Carhart, or John Flint, he thought, would never have found it necessary to take the undignified measures to which he had been reduced. But what was the difference? What would they have done? In trying to answer these questions he hit on every reason but the right one. He forgot that he was a young man.

Carhart and Flint, after waiting a long time at the “Eagle, House,” went down to the station, arriving there some time after the outburst of Peet, which was noted at the beginning of the chapter. Tiffany saw them coming, and communicated the news to the superintendent. The engine reappeared, and again coupled up to the forward car.

“Everything all right?” called Tiffany.

“No,” replied Carhart; “don’t start yet.”

The three walked on and joined Old Van by the steps of the rear car.

“Well,” growled the veteran, “how much longer are we going to wait, Paul?”

“Until Gus comes.”

“Gus? I thought he was aboard here.”

“No,” said John Flint, with a wink; “he went out last night to see the wheels go round. Here he comes now. But what in—”

They all gazed without a word. Three men were walking abreast down the platform, Gus Vandervelt, with a white face and ringed eyes, in the middle. The youngest engineer of the outfit was not a small man, but between the two cooks he looked like a child.

“Would you look at that!” said Flint, at length. “Neither of those two Jesse Jameses will ever see six-foot-three again. Makes Gus look like a nick in a wall.”

Young Van met Carhart’s questioning gaze almost defiantly. “The cook,” he said, indicating Flagg.

“All right. Get aboard.”

“Rear car,” cried Old Van, who had charge of the arrangements on the train.

This time the bell did not ring in vain. The train moved slowly out toward the unpeopled West, and the engineers threw off coats and collars, and made themselves as nearly comfortable as they could under the circumstances.

A few minutes after the start Paul Carhart, who was writing a letter in pencil, looked up and saw Young Van beside him, and tried not to smile at his sorry appearance.

“I think I owe you an explanation, Mr. Carhart,” began the young man, in embarrassment which took the form of stiffness.

But the chief shook his head. “I’m not asking any questions, Gus,” he replied. Then the smile escaped him, and he turned it off by adding, “I’m writing to Mrs. Carhart.” He held up the letter and glanced over the first few lines with a twinkle in his eyes. “I was just telling her,” he went on, “that the cook problem in Chicago is in its infancy.”

CHAPTER II

WHERE THE MONEY CAME FROM

Doubtless there were official persons to be found at the time of this narrative—which is a matter of some thirty years back—who would have insisted that the letters “S. & W.” meant “Sherman and Western.” But every one who lived within two days’ ride of the track knew that the real name of the road was the “Shaky and Windy.”

Shaky the “S. & W.” certainly was—physically, and, if newspaper gossip and apparent facts were to be trusted, financially. The rails weighed thirty-five pounds to the yard, and had been laid in scallops, with high centres and low joints,—“sight along the rails and it looks like a washboard,” said John Flint, describing it. For ballast the clay and sand of the region were used. And, as for the financial part, everybody knew that old De Reamer had been forced to abandon the construction work on the Red Hills extension, after building fully five-sixths of the distance. The hard times had, of course, something to do with that,—roads were going under all through the West; receiverships were quite the common thing,—but De Reamer and the S. & W. did not seem to revive so quickly as certain other lines. This was the more singular in that the S. & W., extending as it did from the Sabine country to the Staked Plains, really justified the popular remark that “the Shaky and Windy began in a swamp and ended in a desert.” On the face of things, without the Red Hills connection with the bigger C. & S. C., and without an eastern connection with one of the New Orleans or St. Louis lines, the road was an absurdity.

Then, only a few months before the time of our narrative, the railroad world began to wake up. Commodore Durfee, one of “the big fellows,” surprised the Southwest by buying in the H. D. & W. (which meant, and will always mean, the High, Dry, and Wobbly). The surprise was greater when the Commodore began building southwestward, in the general direction of Red Hills. As usual when the big men are playing for position, the public and the wise-acres, even Wall Street, were mystified. For the S. & W. was so obviously the best and shortest eastern connection for the C. & S. C.,—the H. D. & W. would so plainly be a differential line,—that it was hard to see what the Commodore was about. He had nothing to say to the reporters. Old General Carrington, of the C. & S. C., the biggest and shrewdest of them all, was also silent. And Daniel De Reamer couldn’t be seen at all.

And finally, by way of a wind-up to the first skirmish of the picturesque war in which our engineers were soon to find themselves taking part, there was a western breeze and a flurry of dust in Wall Street. Somebody was fighting. S. & W. shares ran up in a day from twenty-two to forty-six, and, which was more astonishing, sold at that figure for another day before dropping. Other mysterious things were going on. Suddenly De Reamer reappeared in the Southwest, and that most welcome sign of vitality, money,—red gold corpuscles,—began to flow through the arteries of the S. & W. “system.” The construction work started up, on rush orders. Paul Carhart was specially engaged to take out a force and complete the track—any sort of a track—to Red Hills. And as he preferred not to take this rush work through very difficult country on any other terms, De Reamer gave him something near a free hand,—ordered Chief Engineer Tiffany to let him alone, beyond giving every assistance in getting material to the front, and accepting the track for the company as fast as it was laid.

And as Tiffany was not at all a bad fellow, and had admired Carhart’s part in the Rio Grande fight (though he would have managed some things differently, not to say better, himself), the two engineers seemed likely to get on very well.

Carhart's three trains would hardly get over the five hundred miles which lay between Sherman and the end of the track in less than twenty-seven or twenty-eight hours. "The private car," as the boys called it, was of an old type even for those days, and was very uncomfortable. Everybody, from the chief down, had shed coat and waistcoat before the ragged skyline of Sherman slipped out of view behind the yellow pine trees. The car swayed and lurched so violently that it was impossible to stand in the aisle without support. As the hours dragged by, several of the party curled up on the hard seats and tried to sleep. The instrument and rod and stake men and the pile inspectors, mostly young fellows recently out of college or technical institute, got together at one end of the car and sang college songs.

Carhart was sitting back, his feet up on the opposite seat, watching for the pines to thin out, and thinking of the endless gray chaparral and sage-brush which they would find about them in the morning,—if the train didn't break down,—when he saw Tiffany's big person balancing down the aisle toward him. Tiffany had been quiet a long time; now he had a story in his eye.

"Well," he said, as he slid down beside Carhart, "I knew the old gentleman would pull it off in time, but I never supposed he could make the Commodore pay the bills."

Carhart glanced up inquiringly.

"Didn't you hear about it? Well, say! I happen to know that a month ago Mr. De Reamer actually didn't have the money to carry this work through. Even when Commodore Durfee started building for Red Hills, he didn't know which way to turn. The Commodore, you know, hadn't any notion of stopping with the H.D.& W."

"No," said Carhart, "I didn't suppose he had."

"He was after us, too—wanted to do the same as he did with the High and Dry, corner the stock." Tiffany chuckled. "But he knew he'd have to corner Daniel De Reamer first. If he didn't, the old gentleman would manufacture shares by the hundred thousand and pump 'em right into him. There's the Paradise Southern,—that's been a regular fountain of stock. You knew about that."

Carhart shook his head.

"We passed through Paradise this noon."

"Yes, I know the line. It runs down from Paradise to Total Wreck. But I didn't know it had anything to do with S. & W. capital stock."

"Didn't, eh?" chuckled Tiffany. "Mr. De Reamer and Mr. Chambers own it, you know, and they're directors in both lines. The old game was for them, as P. S. directors, to lease the short line to themselves as S. & W. directors. Then the S.& W. directors pay the P. S. directors—only they're it both ways—in S. & W. stock. Don't you see? And it's only one of a dozen schemes. The old gentleman's always ready for S. & W. buyers."

Carhart smiled. The car lurched and shivered. Such air as came in through the open door and windows was tainted with the gases of the locomotive, and with the mingled odors of the densely packed laborers in the cars ahead.

"That's really the only reason they've kept up the Paradise Southern—for there isn't any business on the line. Well, as I was saying, the Commodore knew that the first thing he had to do was corner Mr. De Reamer, and keep him from creating stock. So he came down on him all at once, with a heap of injunctions and court orders. He did it thorough: restrained the S. & W. board from issuing any more stock, or from completing any of the transactions on hand, and temporarily suspended the old gentleman and Mr. Chambers, pending an investigation of their accounts, and ordered 'em to return to the treasury of the company the seventy thousand shares they created last year. There was a lot more, but that's the gist of it. He did it through Waring and his other minority directors on the board. And right at the start, you see, when he began to buy, he made S. & W. stock so scarce that the price shot up."

"Seems as if he had sewed up the S. & W. pretty tight," observed Carhart.

"Didn't it, though? But the Commodore didn't know the old gentleman as well as he thought. Mr. De Reamer and Mr. Chambers got another judge to issue orders for them to do everything the Commodore's judge forbid—tangled it all up so that everything they did or didn't do, they'd be disobeying somebody, and leaving it for the judges to settle among themselves. Then they issued ten million dollars in convertible bonds to a dummy, representing themselves, turned 'em right into stock,—and tangled that transaction up so nobody in earth or heaven will ever know just exactly *what* was done,—and sold 'most seventy thousand shares of it to Commodore Durfee before he had a glimmer of where it was coming from. And then it was too late for him to stop buying, so he had to take in the whole hundred thousand shares. I heard Mr. Chambers say that when the Commodore found 'em out, he was so mad he couldn't talk,—stormed stormed around his office trying to curse Daniel De Reamer, but he couldn't even swear intelligent."

"So Mr. De Reamer beat him," said Carhart.

"Beat him?—I wonder—"

"But that's not all, surely. Commodore Durfee isn't the man to swallow that."

"He *had* to swallow it.—Oh, he did kick up some fuss, but it didn't do him any good. His judge tried to jerk up our people for contempt, but they were warned and got out of Mr. De Reamer's Broad Street office, and over into New Jersey with all the documents and money." Tiffany's good-humored eyes lighted up as his mind dwelt on the fight. Never was there a more loyal railroad man than this one. Daniel De Reamer was his king, and his king could do no wrong. "Not that they didn't have some excitement getting away," he continued.

"They say,—mind, I don't know this, but *they* say that Mr. De Reamer's secretary, young Crittenden, crossed the ferry in a cab with four million five hundred thousand dollars *in bills*—just tied up rough in bundles so they could be thrown around. And there you are,—Commodore Durfee is paying for this extension that's going to cut him out of the C. & S. C. through business. The money and papers are out of his reach. The judges are fighting among themselves, and will be doing well if they ever come to a settlement. And now if that ain't pretty slick business, I'd like to know what the word 'slick' means."

Carhart almost laughed aloud. He turned and looked out the window for a few moments. Finally he said, "If you have that straight, Tiffany, it's undoubtedly the worst defeat Commodore Durfee ever had. But don't make the mistake of thinking that the S. & W. is through with him."

"Maybe not," Tiffany replied, "but I'll bet proper on the old gentleman."

Carhart's position as the engineer in charge of a thousand and more men would be not unlike that of a military commander who finds himself dependent for subsistence on five hundred miles of what Scribner called "very sketchy" single track. It would be more serious; for not only must food, and in the desert, water, be brought out over the line, but also the vast quantity of material needed in the work. It would be the business of Peet, as the working head of the operating department, to deliver the material from day to day, and week to week, at the end of the last completed section, where the working train would be made up each night for the construction work of the following day.

If the existing track was sketchy, the new track would be worse. Everything was to be sacrificed to speed. The few bridges were to be thrown up hastily in the form of primitive wooden trestles. There would be no masonry, excepting the abutments of the La Paz bridge,—which masonry, or rather the stone for it, was about the only material they would find at hand. All the timber, even to the cross ties, would have to be shipped forward from the long-leaf-pine forests of eastern Texas and western Louisiana.

Ordinarily, Carhart would not have relished undertaking such a hasty job; but in this case there were compensations. When he had first looked over the location maps, in Daniel De Reamer's New York office, his quiet eyes had danced behind their spectacles; for it promised to be pretty work, in which a man could use his imagination. There was the bridge over the La Paz River, for instance. He should have to send a man out there with a long wagon train of materials, and with orders to have the bridge ready when the track should reach the river. He knew just the man—John B. Flint, who built the Desplaines bridge for the three I's. He had not heard from John since the doctors had condemned his lungs, and ordered him to a sanatorium in the Adirondacks, and John had compromised by going West, and hanging that very difficult bridge between the walls of Brilliant Gorge in the Sierras. Carhart was not sure that he was still among the living; but a few searching telegrams brought out a characteristic message from John himself, to the effect that he was very much alive, and was ready to bridge the Grand Cañon of the Colorado at a word from Paul Carhart.

Then there was always to be considered the broad outline of the situation as it was generally understood in the railway world. Details apart, it was known that Commodore Durfee and Daniel De Reamer were fighting for that through connection, and that old General Carrington,—czar of the C. & S. C., holder of one and owner of several other seats in the Senate of these United States, chairman of the National Committee of his party,—that General Carrington was sitting on the piazza of his country house in California, smoking good cigars and talking horse and waiting to see whether he should gobble Durfee or De Reamer, or both of them. For the general, too, was represented on the directorate of the Sherman and Western; and it was an open question whether his minority directors would continue to support the De Reamer interests or would be ordered to ally themselves with the Durfee men. Either way, there would be no sentiment wasted. But it seemed to Carhart that so long as De Reamer should be able to hold up his head in the fight General Carrington would probably stand behind him. Commodore Durfee was too big in the East to be encouraged in the West. And yet—there was no telling.

It was very pretty indeed. Carhart was a quiet man, given more to study than to speech; but he liked pretty things.

CHAPTER III

AT MR. CARHART'S CAMP

"It takes an Irishman, a nigger, and a mule to build a railroad," said Tiffany.

With Young Van, he was standing in front of the headquarters tent, which, together with the office tent for the first division, where Old Van would hold forth, and the living and mess tents for the engineers, was pitched on a knoll at a little distance from the track.

"The mule," he continued, "will do the work, the nigger will drive the mule, and the Irishman'll boss 'em both."

Young Van, keyed up by this sudden plunge into frontier work, was only half listening to the flow of good-natured comment and reminiscence from the chief engineer at his elbow. He was looking at the steam-shrouded locomotive, and at the long line of cars stringing off in perspective behind it. Wagons were backed in against this and the few other trains which had come in during the day; other wagons were crawling about the track almost as far as he could see through the steam and the dust. Men on horseback—picturesque figures in wide-brimmed hats and blue shirts and snug-fitting boots laced to the knee—were riding in and out among the teams. The old track ended in the immediate foreground, and here old Van was at work with his young surveyors, looking up the old stakes and driving new ones to a line set by a solemn youngster with skinny hands and a long nose. Everywhere was noise—a babel of it—and toil and a hearty sort of chaos. One line of wagons—laden with scrapers, “slips” and “wheelers,” tents and camp equipage, the timbers and machinery of a pile-driver, and a thousand and one other things—was little by little extricating itself from the tangle, winding slowly past head-quarters, and on toward the low-lying, blood-red sun. This was the outfit of the second division, and Harry Scribner, riding a wiry black pony, was leading it into corral on “mile two,” preparatory to a start in the early morning.

From the headquarters cook tent, behind the “office,” came savory odors. Farther down the knoll, near the big “boarding house” tents, the giant Flagg and the equally sturdy Charlie could be seen moving about a row of iron kettles which were swinging over an open fire. The chaos about the trains was straightening out, and the men were corralling the wagons, and unharnessing the mules and horses. The sun slipped down behind the low western hills, leaving a luminous memory in the far sky. In groups, and singly, the laborers—Mexicans, Italians, Louisiana French, broken plainsmen from everywhere, and negroes—came straggling by, their faces streaked with dust and sweat, the negroes laughing and singing as they lounged and shuffled along.

Carhart, who had been dividing his attention between the unloading of the trains and the preparations of his division engineers, came riding up the knoll on “Texas,” his compact little roan, a horse he had ridden and boasted about in a quiet way for nearly four years. John Flint, thin and stooping of body, with a scrawny red mustache and high-pitched voice, soon rode in over the grade from the farther side of the right of way, where he was packing up his outfit for the long haul to the La Paz River. The instrument men and their assistants followed, one by one, and fell in line at the tin wash-basin, all exuberant with banter and laughter and high-spirited play. And at last the headquarters cook, a stout negro, came out in front of the mess tent and beat his gong with mighty strokes; and Harry Scribner, who was jogging back to camp from his corral, heard it, dug in his spurs, and came up the long knoll on the gallop.

There was no escaping the joviality of this first evening meal in camp. In the morning the party would break up. Scribner would ride ahead a dozen miles to make a division camp of his own; John Flint would be pushing out there into the sunset for the better part of a week, across the desert, through the gray hills, and down to the yellow La Paz. The youngsters were shy at first; but after Tiffany had winked and said, “It’ll never do to start this dry, boys,” and had produced a bottle from some mysterious corner, they felt easier. Even Carhart, for the time, laid aside the burden which, like Christian, he must carry for many days. A good many stories were told, most of them by Tiffany, who had run the gamut of railroading, north, south, east, and west.

“That was a great time we had up at Pittsburgh,” said he, “when I stole the gondola cars,”—he placed the accent on the *do,*—“best thing I ever did. That was when I was on the Almighty and Great Windy that used to run from Pittsburg up to the New York State line. I was acting as a sort of traffic superintendent, among other things,—we had to do all sorts of work then; no picking and choosing and no watching the clock for us.” He turned on the long-nosed instrument man. “That was when you were just about a promising candidate for long pants, my friend.”

“We had a new general manager—named MacBayne. He didn’t know anything about railroading,—had been a telegraph operator and Durfee’s nephew,—yes, the same old Commodore, it was,—and, getting boosted up quick, that way, he got into that frame of mind where he wouldn’t ever have contradicted you if you’d said he *was* the Almighty and Great Windy. First thing he did was to put in a system of bells to call us to his office,—but I didn’t care such a heap. He enjoyed it so. He’d lean back and pull a little handle, and then be too busy to talk when one of us came running in—loved to make us stand around a spell. Hadn’t but one eye, MacBayne hadn’t, and you never could tell for downright certain who he was swearing at.

“The company had bought a little railroad, the P. G.—Pittsburg and Gulf,—for four hundred and fifty thousand. Just about such a line as our Paradise spur, only instead of the directors buying it personal, they’d bought it for the company.

“One day my little bell tinkled, and I got up and went into the old man’s office. He was smoking a cigar and trying to look through a two-foot wall into Herb Williams’s pickle factory. Pretty soon he swung his one good eye around on me and looked at me sharp. ‘Hen,’ he said, ‘we’re in a fix. We haven’t paid but two hundred thousand on the P.G.—and what’s more, that’s all we can pay.’

“‘Well, sir,’ said I, ‘what’s the trouble?’ It’s funny—he’s always called me Hen, and I’ve always called him sir and Mister MacBayne. He ain’t anybody to-day, but if I went back to Pittsburg to-morrow and met him in Morrison’s place, he’d say, ‘Well, Hen, how’re you making it?’ and I’d say, ‘Pretty well, Mister MacBayne.’—Ain’t it funny? Can’t break away from it.

“I’ve just had a wire from Black,’ said he,—Black was our attorney up at Buffalo,—‘saying that the sheriff of Erie County,’ over the line in New York State, ‘has attached all our gon*do*la cars up there, and won’t release ’em until we pay up. What’ll we do?’

“‘Hum!’ said I. ‘We’ve got just a hundred and twenty gon*do*las in Buffalo to-day.’ A hundred and twenty cars was a lot to us, you understand—just like it would be to the S. & W. Imagine what would happen to you fellows out here if Peet had that many cars taken away from him. So I thought a minute, and then I said, ‘Has the sheriff chained ’em to the track, Mister MacBayne?’

“‘I don’t know about that,’ said he.

"'Well,' said I, 'don't you think it would be a good plan to find that out first thing?'

"He looked at me sharp, then he sort o' grinned. 'What're you thinking about, Hen?' he asked.

"I didn't answer direct. 'You find that out,' I told him, 'and let me know what he says.'

"About an hour later the bell tinkle-winkled again. 'No,' he said, when I went in his office, 'they ain't chained down—not yet, anyway. Now, what'll we do?'

"'Why don't you go up there?' said I. 'Hook your car on to No. 5'—that was our night express for Buffalo, a long string of oil and coal cars with a baggage car, coach, and sleeper on the end of it. It ran over our line and into Buffalo over the Southeastern.

"'All right, Hen,' said he. 'Will you go along?'

"'Sure,' I told him.

"On our way out we picked up Charlie Greenman too. He was superintendent of the State Line Division—tall, thin man, very nervous, Charlie was.

"Next morning, when we were sitting over our breakfast in the Swift House, the old man turned his good eye on me and said, 'Well, Hen, what next?' I'd brought him up there, you see, and now he was looking for results.

"'Well,' said I, speaking slow and sort of thinking it over, 'look here, Mister MacBayne, why don't you get a horse and buggy and look around the city? They say it's a pretty place. Or you could pick up a boat, you and Charlie, and go sailing on Lake Erie. Or you might run over and see the falls—Ever been there?'

"The old man was looking on both sides of me with those two eyes of his. 'What are you up to, Hen?' he said.

"'Nothing,' I answered, 'not a thing. But say, Mister MacBayne, I forgot to bring any money. Let me have a little, will you,—about a hundred and fifty?'

"When I said that, the old man gulped, and looked almost scared. I saw then, just what I'd suspected, that he wouldn't be the least use to me. I'd 'a' done better to have left him behind. 'Why, yes, Hen,' said he, 'I can let you have that!' He went out, and pretty soon he came back with the money in a big roll of small bills.

"'Well, good morning, gentlemen,' said I. 'I'll see you at five o'clock this afternoon.'

"I went right out to the Erie yards, where they were unloading twenty-two of our coal cars. Jim Harvey was standing near by, and he gave me a queer look, and asked me what I was doing in Buffalo.

"'Doing?' said I, 'I'm looking after my cars. What did you suppose? And see here, Jim, while you were about it, don't you think you might have put 'em together. Here you've got twenty-two of 'em, and there's forty over at the Lake Shore, and a lot more in Chaplin's yards? There ain't but one of me—however do you suppose I'm going to watch 'em all, even see that the boys keep oil in the boxes?' 'I don't know anything about that,' said he.

"'Well now, look here, Jim,' said I, 'how many more of these cars have you got to unload?' 'Twelve,' said he. 'How soon can you get it done—that's my question?' 'Oh, I'll finish it up to-morrow morning.' 'Well, now, Jim,' said I, 'I want you to put on a couple of extra wagons and get these cars emptied by five o'clock this afternoon. Then I want you to get all our cars together over there in Chaplin's yards, where I can keep an eye on 'em!' 'Oh, see here,' said he, 'I can't do that, Hen. The sheriff—'

"'Damn the sheriff,' said I. 'I ain't going to hurt the sheriff. What I want is to get my cars together where I can know what's being done to 'em.'

"Well, he didn't want to do it, but some of the long green passed and then he thought maybe he could fix me up. There was a lot of other things I had to do that day—and a lot of other men to see. The despatcher for the Buffalo and Southwestern was one of 'em. Then at five o'clock, or a little before, I floated into the Swift House office and there were MacBayne and Charlie Greenman sitting around waiting for me. The old man had his watch in his hand. Charlie was walking up and down, very nervous. I came up sort of offhand and said:—

"'Charlie, I want two of your biggest and strongest engines, and I want 'em up in Chaplin's yard as soon as you can get 'em there.'

"'What,' said he, 'on a foreign road?' 'Yes,' said I, offhand like. Then I turned to the old man. 'Now, Mister MacBayne,' said I, 'I want you to tell Charlie here that when those engines pass out of his division, they come absolutely under my control.'

"'Oh, that's all right, Hen,' said Charlie, speaking up breathless.

"'Yes, I know it is,' said I, 'but I want you to hear Mister MacBayne say it. Remember, when those engines leave your division, they belong to me until I see fit to bring 'em back.'

"The old man was looking queerer than ever. 'See here, Hen,' said he, 'what devilment are you up to, anyway?'

"'Nothing at all,' said I. 'I just want two engines. You can't run a railroad without engines, Mister MacBayne.'

"'Well,' said he, then, 'how about me—what do you want of me?'

"'Why, I'll tell you,' said I. 'Why don't you hook your car on to No. 6 and go back to Pittsburg to-night?' You should have seen his good eye light up at that. Getting out of the state suited him about as well as anything just then, and he didn't lose any time about it. When he had gone, Charlie said:—

"'Now, Hen, for heaven's sake, tell me what you're up to?'

"'Not a bit of it,' said I. 'I don't see what business it is of yours. You belong back on your division.'

"'Well, I ain't going,' said he. 'I'm going wherever you go to-night.'

"'All right,' said I; 'I'm going to Shelby's vaudeville.'

"That surprised him. But he didn't say anything more. You remember old Shelby's show there. I always used to go when I was in Buffalo of an evening.

"But about 11:30, when the show was over, Charlie began to get nervous again. 'Well, Hen,' he said, 'where next?'

"'I don't know about you,' said I, 'but I'm going to stroll out to Chaplin's yard before I turn in, and take a look at our cars. You'd better go to bed.'

"'Not a bit of it,' he broke out. 'I'm going with you.'

"'All right,' said I, 'come along. It's a fine night.'

"Well, gentlemen, when we got out to the yards, there were our cars in two long lines on parallel tracks, seventy on one track and fifty on another—one thing bothered me, they were broken in four places at street crossings—and on the two next tracks beside them were Charlie's two engines, steam up and headlights lighted. And, say, you never saw anything quite like it! The boys they'd sent with the engines weren't anybody's fools, and they had on about three hundred pounds of steam apiece—blowing off there with a noise you could hear for a mile, but the boys themselves weren't saying a word; they were sitting around smoking their pipes, quiet as seven Sabbaths.

"When Charlie saw this laid out right before his eyes, he took frightened all of a sudden—his knees were going like that. He grabbed my arm and pulled me back into the shadow.

"'Hen, for heaven's sake, let's get out of here quick. This means the penitentiary.'

"'You can go,' said I. 'I didn't invite you to the party.'

"Right beside the tracks there was a watch-box, shut up as if there wasn't anybody in it, but I could see the light coming out at the top. It was going to be ticklish business, I knew that. We had to haul out over a drawbridge, for one thing, to get out of the yards, and then whistle for the switch over to the southwestern tracks. Had to use the signals of the other roads, too. But I was in for it.

"'Well, Hen,' said Charlie, 'if you're going to do it, what in —— are you standing around for now?'

"'Got to wait for the Lake Shore Express to go through,' said I.

"Charlie sort of groaned at this and for an hour we sat there and waited. I tried to talk about the oil explosion down by Titusville, but Charlie, somehow, wasn't interested. All the while those engines were blowing off tremendous, and the crews were sitting around just smoking steady.

"Finally, at one o'clock, I went over to the engineer of the first engine. 'How many men have you got?' said I.

"'Four brakemen,' he said, 'each of us.'

"'All right,' said I. 'I guess I don't need to tell you what to do.'

"They all heard me, and say, you ought to have seen them jump up. The engineer was up and on his engine before I got through talking; and he just went a-flying down the yard, whistling for the switch. The four brakemen ran back along the fifty-car string. You see they had to couple up at those four crossings and that was the part I didn't like a bit. But I couldn't help it. The engineer came a-backing down very rapid, and bumped that front car as if he wanted to telescope it.

"Well, sir, they did it—coupled up, link and pin. The engineer was leaning 'way out the window, and he didn't wait very long after getting the signal, before he was a-hiking it down the yard, tooting his whistle for the draw. Heaven only knows what might have happened, but nothing did. He got over the draw all right with his fifty cars going clickety—clickety—clickety behind him, and then I could see his rear lights and hear him whistling for the switch over to the southwestern tracks. Then I gave the signal for the other engine. Charlie, all this time, was getting worse and worse. He was leaning up against me now, just naturally hanging on to me, looking like a somnambulist. You could hear his knees batting each other. And the engineer of that second engine turned out to be in the same fix. He was so excited he never waited for the signal that the cars were all coupled up, and he started up with a terrific toot of his whistle and a yank on the couplings, leaving thirty cars and one brakeman behind. But I knew it would never do to call him back.

"Well, now, here is where it happened. That whistle was enough to wake the sleeping saints. And just as the train got fairly going for the draw, tooting all the way, the door of that watch-box burst open and three policemen men came running out, hard as they could run. Of course there was only one thing to do, and that's just the thing that Charlie Greenman didn't do. He turned and ran in the general direction of the Swift House as fast as those long legs of his could carry him. Two of the officers ran after him and the other came for me. I yelled to Charlie to stop, but he'd got to a point where he couldn't hear anything. The other officer came running with his night-stick in the air, but my Scotch-Irish was rising, and I threw up my guard.

"'Don't you touch me,' I yelled; 'don't you touch me!'

"'Well, come along, then,' said he.

"'Not a bit of it,' said I. 'I've nothing to do with you.'

"'Well, you ran,' he yelled; 'you ran!'

"I just looked at him. 'Do you call this running?' said I.

"'Well,' said he, 'the other fellow ran.'

"'All right,' said I, 'we'll run after him.' So we did. Pretty soon they caught Charlie. And I was a bit nervous, for I didn't know what he might say. But he was too scared to say anything. So I turned to the officer.

"'Now,' said I, 'suppose you tell us what it is you want?'

"'We want you,' said one of them.

"'No, you don't,' said I.

"'Yes, we do,' said he.

"It seemed to be getting time for some bluffing, so I hit right out. 'Where's your headquarters?' said I.

"'Right over here,' said he.

"'All right,' said I, 'that's where we're going, right now. We'll see if two railroad men can't walk through Chaplin's yards whenever they feel like it.'

"And all the while we were talking I could hear that second train a-whooping it up for the state line—clickety—clickety—whoo-oo-oo! —clickety—clickety—getting fainter and fainter.

"There was a big captain dozing on a bench in the station house. When he saw us come in, he climbed up behind his desk so he could look down on us—they like to look down at you, you know.

"'Well, Captain,' said the officer, 'we've got 'em.'

"'Yes,' the captain answered, looking down with a grin, 'I think you have.'

"'Well now,' said I, to the captain, 'who have you got?'

"'That'll be all right,' said he, with another grin.

"It was pretty plain that he wasn't going to say anything. There was something about the way he looked at us and especially about that grin that started me thinking. I decided on bluff number two. I took out my pass case, opened it, and spread out annual passes on the Great Windy, the Erie, the South-eastern, and the Lake Shore. My name was written on all of them, H. L. Tiffany, Pittsburg. The minute the captain saw them he looked queer, and I turned to Charlie and told him to get out his passes, which he did. For a minute the captain couldn't say anything; then he turned on those three officers, and you ought to have heard what he said to them—gave 'em the whole forty-two degrees right there, concentrated.

"'Well, gentlemen,' he said to us, when he'd told the officer all that was on his mind, 'this is pretty stupid business. I'm very sorry we've put you to this trouble, and I can tell you that if there is anything I can do to make it right, I'll be more than glad to do it.'

"Well, there wasn't anything in particular that I wanted just then except to get out of Buffalo quick. But I did stop to gratify my curiosity.

"'Would you mind telling me, Captain,' said I, 'who you took us for?'

"The captain looked queer again, then he said, solemn, 'We took you for body snatchers.'

"'Body snatchers!' I looked at Charlie, and Charlie, who was beginning to recover, looked at me.

"'You see,' the captain went on, 'there's an old building out there by the yard, and some young surgeons and medical students have been using it nights to cut up people in, and when the boys saw two well-dressed young fellows hanging around there in the middle of the night, they didn't stop to think twice. I'm very sorry, indeed. I'll send two of these men over to escort you to your hotel, with your permission.'

"That didn't please me very much, but I couldn't decline. So we started out, Charlie and I and the two coppers. But instead of going to the Swift House I steered them into the Mansion House, and dampened things up a bit. Then I got three boxes of cigars, Havana imported. I gave one to each of the officers, and on the bottom of the third I wrote, in pencil, 'To the Captain, with the compliments of H. L. Tiffany, of the A. & G. W., Pittsburg, Pa.' I thought he might have reason to be interested when he got his next morning's paper in knowing just who we were. The coppers went back, tickled to death, and Charlie and I got out into the street.

"'Well, Hen,' said he, very quiet, 'what are you going to do next?'

"'You can do what you like, Charlie,' I said, 'but I'm going to take the morning three o'clock on the Michigan Central for Toronto.' And Charlie, he thought maybe he'd go with me."

Tiffany leaned back in a glow of reminiscence, and chuckled softly. Of the others, some had pushed back their chairs, some were leaning forward on the table. All had been, for half an hour, in the remote state of New York with this genial railroading pirate of the old school. Now, outside, a horse whinnied. Through the desert stillness came the clanking and coughing of a distant train. They were back in the gray Southwest, perhaps facing adventures of their own.

Carhart rose, for he had work to do at the headquarters tent. Young Van took the hint, and followed his example. But the long-nosed instrument man, the fire of a pirate soul shining out through his countenance, leaned eagerly forward. “What happened then?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing much,” Tiffany responded. “What could happen? Charlie and I came back from Toronto a few days later by way of Detroit.” Then his eye lighted up again. “But I like to think,” he added, “that next morning when that captain read about the theft of ninety gon*do*la cars right out from under the sheriff’s nose by H. L. Tiffany, of Pittsburg, Pa., he was smoking one of said H. L. Tiffany’s cigars.”

The sun was up, hot and bright. The laborers and the men of the tie squad and the iron squad were straggling back to work. The wagons were backing in alongside the cars. And halfway down the knoll stood Carhart and Flint, both in easy western costume, Flint booted and spurred, stroking the neck of his well-kept pony.

“Well, so long, Paul,” said the bridge-builder.

“Good-by,” said Carhart.

It rested with these two lean men whether an S. & W. train should enter Red Hills before October. They both felt it, standing there at the track-end, their backs to civilization, their faces to the desert.

“All right, sir.” Flint got into his saddle. “*All* right, sir.” He turned toward the waiting wagon train. “Start along, boys!” he shouted in his thin voice.

Haddon galloped ahead with the order. The drivers took up their reins, and settled themselves for the long journey. Like Carhart’s men, they were a mixed lot—Mexicans, half-breeds, native Americans of a curiously military stamp, and nondescripts—but good-natured enough; and Flint, believing with Carhart in the value of good cooks, meant to keep them good-natured. One by one the whips cracked; a confusion of English, Spanish, and French cries went up; the mules plunged; the heavy wagons, laden with derricks, timber, tools, camp supplies, and the inevitable pile-driver, groaned forward; and the La Paz Bridge outfit was off.

There was about the scene a sense of enterprise, of buoyant freedom, of deeds to be done. Flint felt it, as he rode at the head of his motley cavalcade; for he was an imaginative man. Young Van, standing by the headquarters tent, felt it, for he was young. Tiffany, still at breakfast, felt it so strongly that he swore most unreasonably at the cook. Down on the job, the humblest stake man stood motionless until Old Van, who showed no signs of feeling anything, asked him if he hadn’t had about enough of a sy-esta. As for Carhart, he was stirred, but his fancy did not roam far afield. From now on those things which would have it in their power to give him the deepest pleasure were the sight of gang after gang lifting cross-ties, carrying them to the grade, and dropping them into place; the sight of that growing line of stubby yellow timbers, and the sound of the rails clanking down upon them and of the rapid-fire sledges driving home the spikes.

Young Van poked his head in through the flaps.

“Well?” said the chief, looking up.

“Won’t you come down, Mr. Carhart? The boys want you to drive the first spike.”

Carhart smiled, then pushed back his chair, and strode out and down the slope to the grade.

“Stand back there, boys!” cried somebody.

Carhart caught up a sledge, swung it easily over his shoulder, and brought it down with a swing.

“There,” he cried, entering into the spirit of the thing, “there, boys! That means Red Hills or bust.”

The cheer that followed was led by the instrument man. Then Carhart, still smiling, walked back to his office. Now the work was begun.

But Old Van, the division engineer, was scowling. He wished the chief would quit stirring up these skylarking notions—on *his* division, anyway. It took just that much longer to take it out of the men—break them so you could drive them better.

CHAPTER IV

JACK FLAGG SEES STARS

It was a month later, on a Tuesday night, and the engineers were sitting about the table in the office tent. Scribner, the last to arrive, had ridden in after dusk from mile fourteen.

For two weeks the work had dragged. Peet, back at Sherman, had been more liberal of excuses than of materials. It was always the mills back in Pennsylvania, or slow business on connecting lines, or the car famine. And it was not unnatural that the name of the superintendent should have come to stand at the front for certain very unpopular qualities. Carhart had faith in Tiffany, but the railroad's chief engineer was one man in a discordant organization. Railroad systems are not made in a day, and the S. & W. was new, showing square corners where all should be polished round; developing friction between departments, and bad blood between overworked men. Thus it had been finally brought home to Paul Carhart that in order to carry his work through he must fight, not only time and the elements, but also the company in whose interest he was working.

Lately the office had received a few unmistakably vigorous messages from Carhart. Tiffany, too, had taken a hand, and had opened his mind to the Vice-president. The Vice-president had in turn talked with Peet, who explained that the materials were always sent forward as rapidly as possible, and added that certain delays had arisen from the extremely dangerous condition of Carhart's road-bed. Meantime, not only rails and ties, but also food and water, were running short out there at the end of the track.

"What does he say now, Paul?" asked Old Van, after a long silence, during which these bronzed, dusty men sat looking at the flickering lamp or at the heaps of papers, books, and maps which covered the table.

Carhart drew a crumpled slip of paper from his pocket and tossed it across the table. Old Van spread it out, and read as follows:—

> MR. PAUL CARHART: Small delay due to shortage of equipment. Supply train started this morning, however. Regret inconvenience, as by order of Vice-president every effort is being made to supply you regularly.
>
> L. W. PEET,
>
> *Division Superintendent*.

"Interesting, isn't it!" said Carhart. "You notice he doesn't say how long the train has been on the way. It may not get here for thirty-six hours yet."

"Suppose it doesn't," put in Scribner, "what are we going to do with the men?"

"Keep them all grading," said Carhart.

"But—"

"Well, what is it? This is a council of war—speak out."

"Just this. Scraping and digging is thirsty work in this sun, and we haven't water enough for another half day."

"Young Van is due with water."

"Yes, he is due, Mr. Carhart, but you told him not to come back without it, and he won't."

"Listen!" Outside, in the night, voices sounded, and the creaking of wagons.

"Here he is now," said Carhart.

Into the dim light before the open tent stepped a gray figure. His face was thin and drawn; his hair, of the same dust color as his clothing, straggled down over his forehead below his broad hat. He nodded at the waiting group, threw off his hat, unslung his army canteen, and sank down exhausted on the first cot.

Old Van, himself seasoned timber and unable to recognize the limitations of the human frame, spoke impatiently, "Well, Gus, how much did you get?"

"Fourteen barrels."

"Fourteen barrels!" The other men exchanged glances.

"Why—why—" sputtered the elder brother, "that's not enough for the engines!"

"It's all we can get."

"Why didn't you look farther?"

"You'd better look at the mules," Young Van replied simply enough. "I had to drive them"—he fumbled at his watch—"an even eighteen hours to get back to-night." And he added in a whimsical manner that was strange to him, "I paid two dollars a barrel, too."

Carhart was watching him closely. "Did you have any trouble with your men, Gus?" he asked.

Young Van nodded. "A little."

After a moment, during which his eyes were closed and his muscles relaxed, he gathered his faculties, lighted a cigarette, and rose.

"Hold on, Gus," said Carhart. "What are you going to do?"

"Bring the barrels up by our tent here. It isn't safe to leave them on the wagons. The men—some of them—aren't standing it well. Some are 'most crazy." He interrupted himself with a short laugh. "Hanged if I blame them!"

"You'd better go to bed, Gus," said the chief. "I'll look after the water."

But Young Van broke away from the restraining hand and went out.

Half a hundred laborers were grouped around the water wagons in oppressive silence. Vandervelt hardly gave them a glance.

"Dimond," he called, "where are you?"

A man came sullenly out of the shadows.

"Take a hand here—roll these barrels in by Mr. Carhart's tent." A murmur spread through the group. More men were crowding up behind. But the engineer gave his orders incisively, in a voice that offered no encouragement to insubordination. "You two, there, go over to the train and fetch some skids. I want a dozen men to help Dimond—you—you—" Rapidly he told them off. "The rest of you get away from here—quick."

"What you goin' to do with that water?" The voice rose from the thick of the crowd. It drew neither explanation nor reproof from Young Van; but his manner, as he turned his back and, pausing only to light another cigarette, went rapidly to work, discouraged the laborers, and in groups of two and three they drifted off to their quarters.

The men worked rapidly, for Mr. Carhart's assistant had a way of taking hold himself, lending a hand here or a shoulder there, and giving low, sharp orders which the stupidest men understood. As they rolled the barrels along the sides of the tent and stood them on end between the guy ropes Paul Carhart stood by, a rolled-up map in his hand, and watched his assistant. He took it all in—the cowed, angry silence of the men, the unfailing authority of the young engineer. No one felt the situation more keenly than Carhart, but he had set his worries aside for the moment to observe the methods of the younger man. Once he caught himself nodding with approval. And then, when he was about to turn away and resume his study at the table beneath the lantern, an odd scene took place. The work was done. Vandervelt stood wiping his forehead with a handkerchief which had darkened from white to rich gray. The laborers had gone; but Dimond remained.

"That's all, Dimond," said Vandervelt.

But the man lingered.

"Well, what do you want?"

"It's about this water. The boys want to know if they ain't to have a drink."

"No; no more to-night," replied Young Van.

"But—but—" Dimond hesitated.

"Wait a minute," said Van abruptly. He entered the tent, found his canteen where he had dropped it, brought it out, and handed it to Dimond.

"This is my canteen. It's all I have a right to give anybody. Now, shut up and get out."

Dimond hesitated, then swung the canteen over his shoulder and disappeared without a word.

"Gus," said Paul Carhart, quietly.

"Oh! I didn't see you there."

"Wasn't that something of a gallery play?"

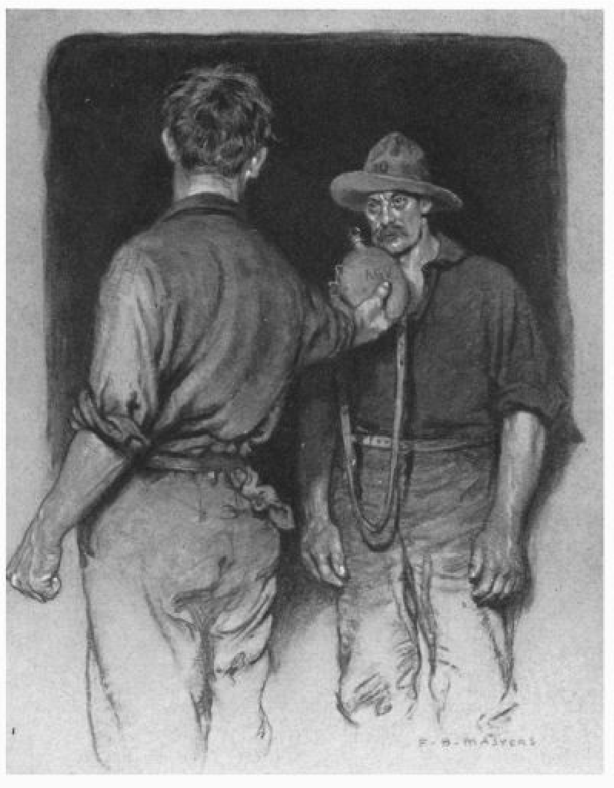
"No, I don't think it was. It will show them that we are dealing squarely with them. I had a deuce of a time on the ride, and Dimond really tried, I think, to keep the men within bounds. They are children, you know,—children with whiskey throats added,—and they can't stand it as we can."

"Gus," said the chief, taking the boy's arm and drawing him toward the tent, "it's time you got to sleep. I shall need you to-morrow."

The other engineers were still sitting about the table, talking in low tones. Carhart rejoined them. Young Van dropped on a cot in the rear and fell asleep with his boots on.

"Old Van is telling how the pay-slips came in to-day," said Scribner.

Carhart nodded. "Go ahead." He had found the laborers, headed by the Mexicans, so impossibly deliberate in their work that he had planned out a system of paying by the piece. When the locomotive whistle blew at night, each man was handed a slip stating the amount due him. At the end of the week the slips were to be cashed, and to-day the first payment had been made. "Go ahead," he repeated. "How much did it cost us?"



"'It's all I have a right to give anybody.'"

"About seventy-five dollars more than last week," replied Old Van. "So that, on the whole, we got a little more work out of them. But here's what happened. When the whistle blew and I got out my satchel, nobody came. I called to a couple of them to hurry up if they wanted their pay, but they shook their heads. Finally, just two men came up and handed in all the slips."

"Two men!" exclaimed Carhart.

"Yes. One was the cook, Jack Flagg. He had fully two-thirds of the slips. The other was his assistant, the one they call Charlie. He had the rest. I called some of the laborers up and asked what it meant, but they said it was all right that way."

"So you gave them the whole pay-roll?"

"Every cent."

Carhart frowned. "That won't do," he said. "A man who can clean out the camp in less than a week will breed more trouble than a water famine."

There was little more to be said, and soon the council came to a close. Scribner went promptly to sleep. Young Van awoke, and with a mumbled "good night" staggered across after Scribner, to his sleeping tent. And then, for an hour, Paul Carhart sat alone, his elbows on the table, a profile of the line spread out before him. Outside, in the night, something stirred. He extinguished his lamp and listened. Cautious steps were approaching behind the cluster of tents. A moment more and he heard a man stumble over a peg and swear aloud.

Carhart stepped out at the rear of the tent and stood waiting. Four or five shadowy figures slipped into view, caught sight of him, and paused. While they stood huddled together he made out a pair of broad shoulders towering above the group. There was only one such pair in the camp, and they belonged to the cook, Jack Flagg.

The silence lasted only a moment. Then, without speaking, the men broke and ran back into the darkness.

Carhart waited until the camp was silent, then he too, went in and to sleep.

But Young Van, dozing lightly and restlessly, was awakened by the noise behind the tents. For a few moments he lay still, then he got up and looked out. Down the knoll he could see a dim light, and after a little he made it out as coming from the mess tent of the laborers. Now and then a low murmur of voices floated up through the desert stillness.

Young Van folded up the legs of his cot, carried it out, laid it across two of the water barrels, and went to sleep there in the open air.

An hour later the mess tent was still lighted. Within, seated on blocks of timber around a cracker-box, four men were playing poker; and pressing about them was a score of laborers—all, in fact, who could crowd into the tent. The air was foul with cheap tobacco and with the hundred odors that cling to working clothes. The eyes of the twenty or more men were fixed feverishly on the greasy cards, and on the heaps of the day's pay-slips. By a simple process of elimination the ownership of these slips had been narrowed down to the present players—Jack Flagg, his assistant Charlie, Dimond, and a Mexican. The silence carried a sense of strain. The occasional coarse jokes and boisterous laughter died down with strange suddenness.

“It’s no use,” said Flagg, finally, tossing the cards on the box; “they’re against us.”

The Mexican rose at this, and sullenly left the tent. Dimond, with a conscious laugh, gathered in two-thirds of the slips and pocketed them. It was an achievement to clean out Jack Flagg. The remaining third went to Charlie.

Flagg leaned back, clasped his great knotted hands about one knee, and looked across at Dimond. Six feet and a third tall in his socks, hard as steel rails, he could have lifted any two of the laborers about him clear of the ground, one in each hand. The lower part of his face was half covered with his long, ill-kept mustache and the tuft of hair beneath his under lip. The blue shirt he wore had unmistakably come from a military source, but not a man there, not even Charlie—himself nearly a match for his chief in height and breadth—would have dared ask when he had been in the army, nor why or how he had come to leave it.

“Dimond,” said Flagg, “let me have one of those slips a minute.”

The nervous light left Dimond’s eyes. He threw a suspicious glance across the box; then, after a moment, he complied.

Flagg held the slip near the lantern and examined it.

“Eighty cents,” he muttered, “eighty cents—and for how much work?”

“Half a day,” a laborer replied.

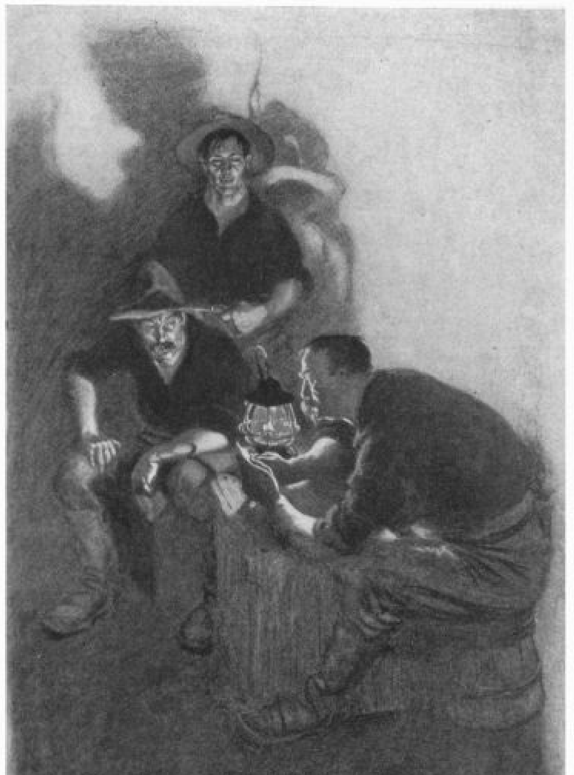
“Half a day’s work, and the poor devil gets eighty cents for it!”

“He gets eighty cents! He gets nothing, you’d better say. Dimond, there, is the man that gets it.”

“That’s no matter. He lost it in fair play. But look at it—look at it!” The giant cook contemptuously turned the slip over in his hand. “That devil hounds you like niggers for five hours in the hot sun—he drives you near crazy with thirst—and then he hands you out this pretty piece of paper with ‘eighty cents’ wrote on it.”

“That’s a dollar-sixty a day. We was only getting one-fifty the old way—on time.”

“You was only getting one-fifty, was you?” There was infinite scorn in Flagg’s voice; his masterly eye swept the group. “You was getting one-fifty, and now you’re thankful to get ten cents more. Do you know what you are? You’re a pack of fools—that’s what you are!”



“‘Eighty cents,’ he muttered, ‘and for how much work?’”

“But look here, Jack, what can we do?”

“What can you do?” Flagg paused, glanced at his vis-à-vis. From the expression of dawning intelligence on

Dimond's face it was plain that he was waking to the suggestion. The slips that he had won to-night were worth four hundred dollars to Dimond. Why should not these same bits of paper fetch five hundred or six hundred?

"What can you do?" Flagg repeated. "Oh, but you boys make me weary. It ain't any of my business. I ain't a laborer, and what I do gets well paid for. But when I look around at you poor fools, I can't sit still here and let you go on like this. You ask me what you can do? Well, now, suppose we think it over a little. Here you are, four hundred of you. This man Carhart offers you one-fifty a day to come out here into the desert and dig your own graves. Why did he set that price on your lives? Because he knew you for the fools you are. Do you think for a minute he could get laborers up there in Chicago, where he comes from, for one-fifty? Not a bit of it! Do you think he could get men in Pennsylvania, in New York State, for one-fifty? Not a bit of it! If he was building this line in New York State, he'd be paying you two dollars, two-fifty, maybe three. And he'd be glad to get you at the price. And he'd meet your representative like a gentleman, and step around lively and walk Spanish for you, if you so much as winked."

Dimond's eyes were flashing with excitement, though he kept them lowered to the cards. His face was flushed. Flagg saw that the seed he had planted was growing, and he swept on, working up the situation with considerable art.

"Think it over, boys, think it over. This man Carhart finds he can't drive you fast enough at one-fifty, so what does he do? He gets up his pay-slip scheme so's you will kill yourselves for the chance of making ten cents more. And you stand around and let him do it—never a peep from you! Now, what's the situation? Here's this man, five hundred miles from nowhere; he's got to rush the job. We know that, don't we?"

"Yes," muttered Dimond, with a quick breath, "we know that, all right."

"Well, now, what about it?" Flagg looked deliberately about the eager group. "What about it? There's the situation. Here he is, and here you are. He's in a hurry. If he was to find out, all of a sudden, that he couldn't drive you poor devils any farther; if he was to find out that you had just laid down and said you wouldn't do another stroke of work on these terms, what about it? What could he do?" Flagg paused again, to let the suggestion find its mark.

"But he ain't worrying any. He knows you for the low-spirited lot you are. So what does he do? He sends out a bunch of you and makes you ride three days to get water, and then he stacks the barrels around his tent, where he and his gang can get all they want, and tells you to go off and suck your thumbs. Much he cares about you."

Dimond raised his eyes. "Talk plain, Jack," he said in a low voice. "What is it? What's the game?"

Flagg gave him a pitying glance. "You're still asking what's the game," he replied, and went on half absently, "Let's see. How much is he paying the iron squad—how much was that, now?"

"Two dollars," cried a voice.

"Two dollars—yes, that was it; that was it. He is paying them two dollars a day, and he has set them to digging and grading along with you boys that only gets one-sixty. I happened to notice that to-day, when I was a-walking up that way. Those iron-squad boys was out with picks and shovels, a-doing the same work as the rest of you, only they was doing it for forty cents more. They ain't common laborers, you see. There's a difference. You couldn't expect them to swing a pick for one-sixty a day. It would be beneath 'em. They're sort o' swells, you see—"

He paused. There was a long silence.

"Boys,"—it was Dimond speaking,—"boys, Jack Flagg is right. If it costs Carhart two per for the iron squad, it's got to cost him the same for us!"

Carhart was turning the delay to some account by shutting himself up with his maps and plans and reports and figures. At ten o'clock on the following morning he heard a step without the tent, and, looking up, saw Young Vandervelt before him.

"There's trouble up ahead, Mr. Carhart."

"What is it?"

"The laborers have quit. They demand an increase of ten per cent in their pay."

"All right, let them have it."

"I'll tell my brother. He said no, we shouldn't give in an inch."

"You tell him I say to let them have what they ask."

Young Van hurried back with the order. Carhart quietly resumed the problems before him.

Old Van, when he received the chief's message, swore roundly.

"What's Paul thinking of!" he growled. "He ought to know that this is only the tip of the wedge. They'll come up another ten per cent before the week's out."

But Old Van failed to do justice to the promptness of Jack Flagg. At three in the afternoon the demand came;

and for the second time that day the scrapers lay idle, and the mules wagged their ears in lazy comfort.

“Well!” cried Old Van, sharply. “Well! It’s what I told you, isn’t it! Now, I suppose you still believe in running to Paul with the story.”

“Yes,” replied the younger brother, firmly, “of course. He’s the boss.”

“All right, sir! All right, sir!” The veteran engineer turned away in disgust as his brother started rapidly back to the camp. The laborers, meanwhile, covered with sweat and dust, tantalized by the infrequent sips of water doled out to them, lay panting in a long, irregular line on the newly turned earth.

“Well, Gus,” said Carhart, with a wry smile, at sight of the dusty figure before the tent, “are they at it again?”

“They certainly are.”

“They don’t mean to lose any time, do they? How much is it now?”

“Ten per cent more. What shall we do?”

“Give it to them.”

“All right.”

“Wait a minute, Gus. Who’s their spokesman?

“Dimond.”

“Dimond?” Carhart frowned. “Nobody else?”

“No; but the cook has been hanging around a good deal and talking with him.”

“Oh—I see. Well, that’s all. Go ahead; give them what they ask.”

Again the mules were driven at the work. Again—and throughout the day—the sullen men toiled on under the keen eye of Old Vandervelt. If he had been a driver before, he was a czar now. If he could not control the rate of pay, he could at least control the rate of work. To himself, to the younger engineers, to the men, to the mules, he was merciless. And foot by foot, rod by rod, the embankment that was to bear the track crept on into the desert. The sun beat down; the wind, when there was a wind, was scorching hot; but Old Van gave no heed. Now and again he glanced back to where the material train lay silent and useless, hoping against hope that far in the distance he might see the smoke of that other train from Sherman. Peet had said, yesterday, that it was on the way; and Old Van muttered, over and over, “D—n Peet!”

Night came finally, but not the train. Aching in body, ugly in spirit, the laborers crept under their blankets. Morning came, but no train. Carhart spent an hour on the grade, and saw with some satisfaction that the time was not wholly lost; then he went back to the operator’s tent and opened communications with Sherman. Sherman expressed surprise that the train had not arrived; it had been long on the way, said the despatcher.

At this message, repeated to him by the operator, word for word, Carhart stood thoughtful. Then, “Shut off the despatcher. Wait—tell him Mr. Carhart is much obliged. Shut him off. Now call Paradise. Say to him—can’t you get him?”

“Yes—all right now.”

“Say—‘When did the supply train pass you on Tuesday?’—got that?”

“Yes—one minute. ‘When—did supply—train pass—you—Tuesday?’”

“Now what does he say?”

“‘Supply—train’—he says—‘passed—here Wednesday—two—P.M.—west-bound.’ There, you see, it didn’t leave on Tuesday at all. It’s only a few hours to Paradise from Sherman.”

Carhart had Peet’s message still crumpled in his pocket. He straightened it out and read it again. “All right,” he said to the operator, “that will do.” And as he walked slowly and thoughtfully out into the blazing sunlight he added to himself: “So, Mr. Peet, that’s the sort you are, is it? I think we begin to understand each other.”

“Paul!” It was the gruff voice of Old Vandervelt, low and charged with anger.

“Yes—what?”

“What is it you mean to do with these laborers?”

“Build the line.”

“Well, I’ve done what I could. They’ve walked out again.”

“Another ten per cent?”

“Another ten per cent.”

“Let’s see—we’ve raised them twenty per cent since yesterday morning, haven’t we?”

“You have—yes.”

“And that ought to be about enough, don’t you think?”

“If you want my opinion,—yes.”

"Now look here, Van. You go back and bring them all up here by the train. Tell them Mr. Carhart wants to talk to them."

Vandervelt stared at his chief in downright bewilderment. Then he turned to obey the order; and as he walked away Carhart caught the muttered words, "Organize a debating society, eh? Well, that's the one fool thing left to do!"

But the men did not take it in just this way; in fact, they did not know how to take it. They hesitated, and looked about for counsel. Even Dimond was disturbed. The boss had a quiet, highly effective way of saying and doing precisely what he meant to say and do. Dimond was not certain of his own ability to stand directly between the men and Paul Carhart. There was something about the cool way in which they were ordered before him that was—well, businesslike. He turned and glanced at Flagg. The cook scowled and motioned him forward, and so the dirty, thirsty regiment moved uncertainly back toward the train, and formed a wide semicircle before the boss.

Carhart had taken his position by a pile of odds and ends of lumber that lay beside the track. He awaited them quietly, the only man among the hundreds there who appeared unconscious of the excitement in the air. The elder Vandervelt stood apart, scowling at the performance. The younger scented danger, and, climbing up on the train, walked back over the empty flat-cars to a position directly behind his chief. There he sat down, his legs swinging over the side of the car.

Carhart reached up for his spectacles, deliberately breathed on them, wiped them, and replaced them. Then he gave the regiment a slow, inquiring look.

"Have you men authorized somebody to speak for you?" he said in a voice which, though it was not loud, was heard distinctly by every man there.

There was a moment's hesitation; then the laborers, or those who were not studying the ground, looked at Dimond.

The telegraph operator stepped out of his little tent, and stood looking at the scene with startled eyes. Up ahead, the iron squad, uncertain whether to continue their work, had paused, and now they were gazing back. As the seconds slipped away their exclamations of astonishment died out. All eyes were fixed on the group in the centre of the semicircle.

For at this critical moment, there was, it seemed, a hitch. Dimond's broad hat was pulled down until it half concealed his eyes. He stood motionless. At his elbow was Jack Flagg, muttering orders that the nominal leader did not seem to hear.

"Flagg, step out here!"

It was Carhart speaking, in the same quiet, distinct manner. The sound of his voice broke the tension. The men all looked up, even the nerveless Dimond. To Young Van they were oddly like a room full of schoolboys as they stood silently waiting for Flagg to obey. The giant cook himself was very like a schoolboy, as he glanced uneasily around, caught no sign of fight in the obedient eyes about him, sought counsel in the ground, the sky, the engines standing on the track, then finally slouched forward.

Young Van caught himself on the verge of laughing out. He saw Flagg advance a way and pause. Carhart waited. Flagg took a few more steps, then paused again, with the look of a man who feels that he has been bullied into a false position, yet cannot hit upon the way out.

"Well," he said, glowering down on the figure of the engineer in charge—and very thin and short Carhart looked before him—"well, what do you want of me?"

For reply Carhart coolly looked him over. Then he snatched up a piece of scantling, whirled it once around his head, and caught Jack Flagg squarely on his deep, well-muscled chest. The cook staggered back, swung his arms wildly to recover his balance, failed, and fell flat, striking on the back of his head.

But he was up in an instant, and he started forward, swearing copiously and reaching for his hip pocket.

Young Van saw the motion. He knew that Paul Carhart seldom carried a weapon, and he felt that the safety of them all lay with himself. Accordingly he leaped to the ground, ran to the side of his chief, whipped out a revolver, and levelled it at Jack Flagg.

"Hands up!" he cried. "Hands up!"

"Gus," cried Carhart, in a disgusted voice, "put that thing up!"

Young Van, crestfallen, hesitated; then dropped his arm.

"Now, Flagg," said the chief, tossing the scantling to one side, "you clear out. You'd better do it fast, or the men'll finish where I left off."

The cook glanced behind him, and his eyes flitted about the semicircle from face to face. He was keen enough to take in the situation, and in a moment he had ducked under the couplers between two cars and disappeared.

"Well," exclaimed Young Van, pocketing his revolver, "it didn't take you long to wind that up, Mr. Carhart."

"To wind it up?" Carhart repeated, turning with a queer expression toward his young assistant. "To begin it, you'd better say." Then he composed his features and faced the laborers. "Get back to your work," he said.

CHAPTER V

WHAT THEY FOUND AT THE WATER-HOLE

Half an hour later Scribner, who was frequently back on the first division during these dragging days, was informed that Mr. Carhart wished to see him at once. Walking back to the engineers' tent he found the chief at his table.

"You wanted me, Mr. Carhart?"

"Oh,"—the chief looked up—"Yes, Harry, we've got to get away from this absolute dependence on that man Peet. I want you to ride up ahead and bore for water. You can probably start inside of an hour. I'm putting it in your hands. Take what men, tools, and wagons you need—but find water."

With a brief "All right, Mr. Carhart," Scribner left the tent and set about the necessary arrangements. Carhart, this matter disposed of, called a passing laborer, and asked him to tell Charlie that he was wanted at headquarters.

The assistant cook—huge, raw-boned, with a good-natured and not unintelligent face—lounged before the tent for some moments before he was observed. Then, in the crisp way he had with the men, Carhart told him to step in.

"Well," began the boss, looking him over, "what kind of a cook are you?"

A slow blush spread over the broad features.

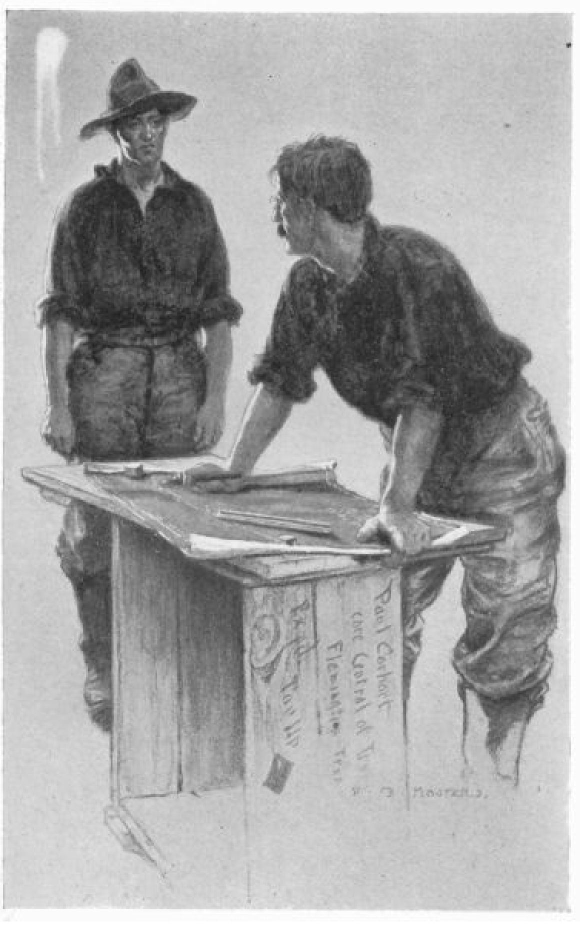
"Speak up. What were you doing when I sent for you?"

"I—I—you see, sir, Jack Flagg was gone, and there wasn't anything being done about dinner, and I—"

"And you took charge of things, eh?"

"Well—sort of, sir. You see—"

"That's the way to do business. Go back and stick at it. Wait a minute, though. Has Flagg been hanging around any?"



"'Well,' began the boss, looking him over, 'what kind of a cook are you?'"

"I guess he has. All his things was took off, and some of mine."

"Take any money?"

"All I had."

"I'm not surprised. Money was what he was here for. He would have cleaned you out, anyway, before long."

"I'm not so sure of that, sir. We cleaned him out last time."

"And you weren't smart enough to see into that?"

"Well—no, I—"

"Take my advice and quit gambling. It isn't what you were built for. What did you say your name was?"

"Charlie."

"Well, Charlie, you go back and get up your dinner. See that it is a good one."

Charlie backed out of the tent and returned to his kettles and pans and his boy assistants. He was won, completely.

Late on Thursday evening that mythical train really rolled in, and half the night was spent in preparations for the next day. Friday morning tracklaying began again. In the afternoon a second train arrived, and the air of movement and accomplishment became as keen as on the first day of the work. Paul Carhart, in a flannel shirt, which, whatever color it may once have been, was now as near green as anything, a wide straw hat, airy yellow linen trousers, and laced boots, appeared and reappeared on both divisions—alert, good-natured, radiating health and energy. The sun blazed endlessly down, but what laborer could complain with the example of the boss before him! The mules toiled and plunged, and balked and sulked, and toiled again, as mules will. The drivers—boys, for the most part—carried pails of water on their wagons, and from time to time wet the sponges which many of the men wore in their hats. And over the grunts and heaves of the tie squad, over the rattling and groaning of the wagon, over the exhausts of the locomotives, sounded the ringing clang of steel, as the rails were shifted from flat-car to truck, from truck to ties. It was music to Carhart,—deep, significant, nineteenth-century music. The line was creeping on again—on, on through the desert.

"What do you think of this!" had been Young Van's exclamation when the second train appeared.

"It's too good to be true," was the reply of his grizzled brother.

Old Vandervelt was right: it was too good to be true. Soon the days were getting away from them again; provisions and water were running short, and Peet was sending on the most skilful lot of excuses he had yet offered. For the second time the tracklaying had to stop; and Carhart, slipping a revolver into his holster, rode forward alone to find Scribner.

He found him in a patch of sage-brush not far from a hill. The heat was blistering, the ground baked to a powder. There had been no rain for five months. Scribner, stripped to undershirt and trousers, was standing over his men.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Carhart!" he cried. "You are just in time. I think I've struck it."

"That's good news," the chief replied, dismounting.

They stepped aside while Scribner gave an account of himself. "I first drove a small bore down about three hundred feet, and got this." He produced a tin pail from his tent, which contained a dark, odorous liquid. Carhart sniffed, and said:—

"Sulphur water, eh!"

"Yes, and very bad. It wouldn't do at all. But before moving on, I thought I'd better look around a little. That hill over there is sandstone, and a superficial examination led me to think that the sandstone dips under this spot."

"That might mean a very fair quality of water."

"That's what I think. So I inserted a larger casing, to shut out this sulphur water, and went on down."

"How far?"

"A thousand feet. I'm expecting to strike it any moment now."

"Your men seem to think they have struck something. They're calling you."

The engineers returned to the well in time to see the water gushing to the surface.

"There's enough of it," muttered Scribner.

The chief bent over it and shook his head. "Smell it, Harry," he said.

Scribner threw himself on the ground and drank up a mouthful from the stream. But he promptly spit it out.

"It's worse than the other!" he cried.

They were silent a moment. Then Carhart said, "Well—keep at it, Harry. I may look you up again after a little."

He walked over to his horse, mounted, nodded a good-by, and cantered back toward the camp. Scribner watched him ride off, then soberly turned and prepared to pack up and move on westward. He was thinking, as he gave the necessary orders, how much this little visit meant. The chief would have come only with matters at a bad pass.

* * *

Over a range of low waste hills, through a village of prairie-dogs,—and he fired humorously at them with his revolver as they sat on their mounds, and chuckled when they popped down out of sight,—across a plain studded from horizon to horizon with the bleached bones and skulls of thousands of buffaloes, past the camp and the grade where the men of the first division were at work, Paul Carhart rode, until, finally, the main camp and the trains and wagons came into view.

It was supper-time. The red, spent sun hung low in the west; the parched earth was awaiting the night breeze. Cantering easily on, Carhart soon reached the grade, and turned in toward the tents. The endless quiet of the desert gave place to an odd, tense quiet in the camp. The groups of laborers, standing or lying motionless, ceasing their low, excited talk as he passed; the lowered eyes, the circle of Mexicans standing about the mules, the want of the relaxation and animal good-nature that should follow the night whistle: these signs were plain as print to his eyes and his senses.

He dismounted, walked rapidly to the headquarters tent, and found the two Vandervelts in anxious conversation. He had never observed so sharply the contrast between the brothers. The younger was smooth shaven, slender, with brown hair, and frank blue eyes that were dreamy at times; he would have looked the poet were it not for a square forehead, a straight, incisive mouth, and a chin as uncompromising as the forehead. There was in his face the promise of great capacity for work, dominated by a sympathetic imagination. The face of his brother was another story; some of the stronger qualities were there, but they were not tempered with the gentler. His stocky frame, his strong neck, the deep lines about his mouth, even the set of his cropped gray mustache, spoke of dogged, unimaginative persistence.

Evidently they were not in agreement. Both started at the sight of their chief—the younger brother with a frank expression of relief.

Carhart threw off his hat and gauntlet gloves, took his seat at the table, and looked from one to the other.

The elder brother nodded curtly. “Go ahead, Gus,” he said. “Give Paul your view of it.”

Thus granted the floor, Young Van briefly laid out the situation. “We put your orders into effect this morning, Mr. Carhart, and shortened the allowance of drinking water. In an hour the men began to get surly—just as they did the other time. But we kept them under until an hour or so ago. Then the sheriff of Clark County—a man named Lane, Bow-legged Bill Lane,”—Young Van smiled slightly as he pronounced the name,—“rode in with a large posse. It seems he is on the trail of a gang of thieves, greasers, army deserters, and renegades generally. He had one brush with them some miles below here,—I think I had better tell you about this before I go on,—but they broke up into small parties and got away from him. He had some reason to think that they would work up this way, and try to stampede our horses and mules some night. He advises arming our men, and keeping up more of a guard at night. Another thing; he says that a good many Apaches are hanging around us,—he has seen signs of them over there in the hills,—and while they would never bother such a large party as this of ours, Bow-legged Bill”—he smiled again—“thinks it would be best to arm any small parties we may send out. If the Indians thought Harry Scribner, for instance, had anything worth stealing they might give him some trouble.”

“Send half-a-dozen wagons forward to him to-morrow, under Dimond,” said Carhart, briefly. “See that they carry rifles and cartridges enough for Scribner’s whole party. And wire Tiffany to send on three hundred more rifles.”

“All right; I will attend to it. I told the sheriff we came down here as peaceful railroad builders, not as border fighters; but he said what we came for hasn’t much to do with it,—I couldn’t repeat his language if I tried,—it’s how we’re going back that counts; whether it’s to be on a ‘red plush seat, or up in the baggage car on ice.’ But so much for that. It seems that his men, mixing in with ours, found out that we are short of water. They promptly said that there is a first-rate pool, with all the water we could use, only about thirty-five miles southwest of here.” He was coming now, having purposely brought up the minor matters first, to the real business. Carhart heard him out. “It didn’t take long to see that something was the matter with the men. Before the posse rode off the sheriff spoke to me about it, and offered to let us have a man to guide us to the pool if we wanted him. I am in favor of accepting. The men are trembling on the edge of an outbreak. If there was a Jack Flagg here to organize them, they would have taken the mules and started before you got back; and if they once got started, I’m not sure that even shooting would stop them. They are beyond all reason. It’s nothing but luck that has kept them quiet up to now,—nobody has happened to say the word that would set them off. I think we ought to reassure them,—tell the sheriff we’ll take the guide, and let the men know that a wagon train will start the first thing in the morning.”

“That’s it! That’s it!” Old Van broke out angrily. “Always give in to those d—n rascals! There’s just one thing to do, I tell you. Order them to their quarters and stand a guard over them from the iron squad.”

“But you forget,” Young Van replied hotly, “that they are not to blame.”

“Not to blame! What the—!”

“Wait a minute!—They are actually suffering now. We are not dealing with malicious men—they are not even on strike for more pay. We’re on the edge of a panic, that’s what’s the matter. And the question is, What is the best way to control that panic?”

“Wait, boys,” said Carhart. “Gus is right. This trouble has its roots away down in human nature. If water is to be had, those men have a right to it. If we should put them under guard, and they should go crazy and make a break for it, what then? What if they call our bluff? We must either let them go—or shoot."

"Then I say shoot," cried Old Vandervelt.

"No, Van," Carhart replied, "you're wrong. As Gus says, we are uncomfortably close to a panic. Well, let them have their panic. Put them on the wagons and let them run off their heat. Organize this panic with ourselves at the head of it." His voice took on a crisper quality. "Van, you stay here in charge of the camp. Pick out a dozen of the iron squad, give them rifles, and keep three at a time on extra watch all night."

"Hold on," said the veteran, bewildered, "when are you going to start on this—?"

"Now."

"Now? To-night?"

"To-night. Gus, you find your sheriff. He can't be far off."

"No; half a mile down the line."

"You find him, explain the situation, and tell him we want that man in half an hour."

The conference broke up sharply. Gus Vandervelt hurried out, saddled his horse, and rode off into the thickening dusk. Old Van went to select his guards. Carhart saw them go; then, pausing to note with satisfaction the prospect of only moderate darkness, he set about organizing his force. All the empty casks and barrels were loaded on wagons. Mules were hitched four and six in hand. Water, beyond a canteen for each man, could not be spared; but Charlie packed provisions enough—so he thought—for twenty-four hours.

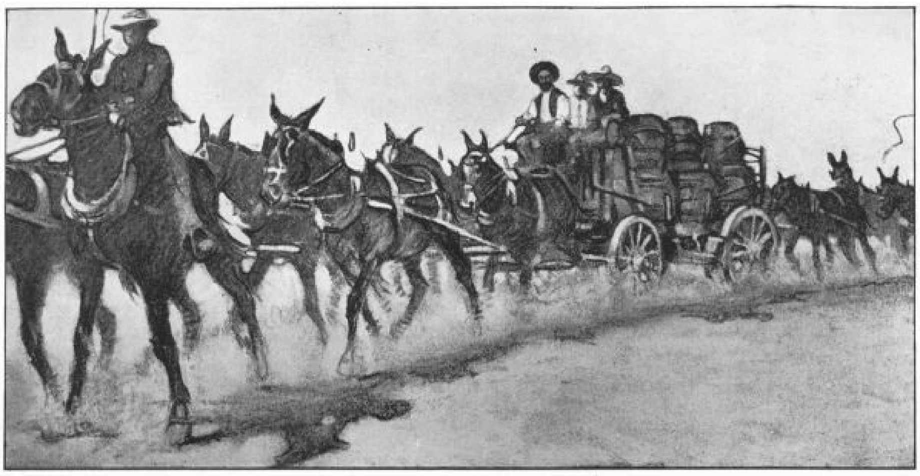
The tremulous, brilliant afterglow faded away. The stars peeped out, one by one, and twinkled faintly. The dead plain—alive only with scorpions, horned frogs, tarantulas, striped lizards, centipedes, and the stunted sage-brush—stretched silently away to the dim mountains on the horizon. The bleaching bones—ghostly white out there in the sand—began to slip off into the distance and the dark. All about was rest, patience, eternity. Here in camp were feverish laborers with shattered nerves; men who started at the swish of a mule's tail—and swore, no matter what their native tongue, in English, that famous vehicle for profane thoughts. The mules, full of life after their enforced rest, took advantage of the dark and confusion to tangle their harness wofully. Leaders swung around and mingled fraternally with wheelers, whereupon boy drivers swore horrible oaths in voices that wavered between treble and bass. Lanterns waved and bobbed about. Men shouted aimlessly.

Suddenly the babel quieted—the laborers were bolting a belated supper. Then, after a moment of confusion, three men rode out of the circle of lanterns, put their horses at the grade, stood out for a vivid moment in the path of light thrown by the nearest engine,—Paul Carhart, Young Vandervelt, and the easy-riding guide,—plunged down the farther side of the grade, and blended into the night. One after another the long line of wagons followed after, whips cracking, mules balking and breaking, men tugging at the spokes of the wheels. Then, at last, they were all over; the shouts had softened into silence. And Old Van stood alone on the grade and looked after them with eyes that were dogged and gloomy.

Paul Carhart had organized the panic; now he was resolved to "work it out of them," as he explained aside to Young Van. He estimated that they should reach the pool before eight o'clock in the morning. That would mean continuous driving, but the endurance of mules is a wonderfully elastic thing; and as for the men, the sooner they were tired, the less danger would there be of a panic. Accordingly, the three leaders set off at a canter. The drivers caught the pace, lashing out with their whips and shouting in a frenzied waste of strength. The mules galloped angrily; the wagons rattled and bumped and leaped the mounds, for there was not the semblance of road or trail. Now and again a barrel was jolted off, and it lay there unheeded by the madmen who came swaying and cursing by. Here and there one calmer than his fellows climbed back from a seat by his driver and kept the kegs and barrels in place.

Wonderfully they held the pace, over mile after mile of rough plain. Then, after a time, came the hills,—low at first, but rising steadily higher.

In the faint light the sage-brush slipped by like the ghosts of dead vegetation. The rocks and the heaps of bones gave the wheels many a wrench. The steady climb was telling on the mules. They hung back, slowed to a walk all along the line, and under the whip merely plunged or kicked. Up and up they climbed, winding through the low range by a pass known only to the guide. One mule, a leader in a team of six, stumbled among the rocks, fell to his knees, and was dragged and pushed along in a tangle of harness before his fellows came to a stop. In a moment a score of men were crowding around. Up ahead the wagons were winding on out of sight; behind, the line was blocked.



“Wonderfully they held the pace.”

“Vat you waiting for?” cried a New Orleans man, feverishly. He had been drinking, and had lost his way among the languages. “*Laissez passer! Laissez passer!*”

The boys were cooler than the men—not knowing so well what it all meant. “Hi there, *Oui-Oui*, gimme a knife!” cried the youthful driver, shrilly.

He slashed at the harness, cut the mule loose, and drove on. And one by one the wagons circled by the struggling beast and pushed ahead to close up the gap in the line.

Eight hours were got through. It was four in the morning. The hills lay behind, an alkaline waste before. The mules were tugging heavily and dejectedly through the sand. Certain of the drivers sat upright with lined faces and ringed eyes, others lay sleeping on the seats with the reins tied. All were subdued. The penetrating dust aggravated their thirst.

Carhart pricked forward beside the guide.

“How much farther?” he asked.

“Well, it ain’t easy to say. We might be halfway there.”

“Halfway! Do you mean to say we’ve done only fifteen or eighteen miles in eight hours?”

“No, I didn’t say that.”

“Look here. How far is it to this pool!”

“Well, it’s hard to say.”

Carhart frowned and gave it up. The “thirty or thirty-five miles” had apparently been the roughest sort of an estimate.

Then the sun came up and beat upon them, and the sand began to radiate heat by way of an earnest of the day to follow; and then the wheels sank so deeply that the chief and Young Van tossed their reins to the guide and walked by the wagons to lend a hand now and then at the spokes. All the crazy energy of the evening was gone; men and mules were alike sullen and dispirited. Of the latter, many gave out and fell, and these were cut out and left there to die. So it went all through that blazing forenoon. They halted at twelve for lunch; but the dry bread and salt pork were hardly stimulating.

Carhart again sought the guide. “Do you know yourself where the pool is?”

The guide shaded his eyes and searched the horizon. “It was in a spot that looked something like this here,” he said in a weak, confidential sort of way.

Carhart answered sharply, “Why don’t you say you are lost, and be done with it!”

“Well, I ain’t lost exactly. I wouldn’t like to say that.”

“But you haven’t the least idea where the pool is.”

“Well, now, you see—”

“Is there any other water on ahead?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Where?”

“The Palos River can’t be more than a dozen miles beyond the place where we found the pool.”

He had unconsciously raised his voice. A laborer overheard the remark, whipped out his knife, hacked at the harness of the nearest mule,—it would have been simpler to loosen the braces, but he was past all thinking,—threw himself on the animal’s back, and rode off, lashing behind him with the end of the reins. The panic broke loose again. Man after man, the guide among them, followed after, until only the wagons and about half the animals remained.

“Come, Gus,” called the chief, “let them go.”

Young Van turned wearily, mounted his panting horse, and the two followed the men. But Carhart turned in his saddle to look back at the property abandoned there in the sand.

Half an hour later, Young Van’s horse stumbled and fell, barely giving his rider time to spring clear.

“Is he done for?” asked Carhart, reining up.

“It looks like it.”

“What’s the matter—done up yourself?”

“A little. I’ll sit here a minute. You go ahead. I’ll follow on foot.”

“Not a bit of it. Here—can you swing up behind me?”

“That won’t do. Texas can’t carry double. Go ahead; I’m all right.”

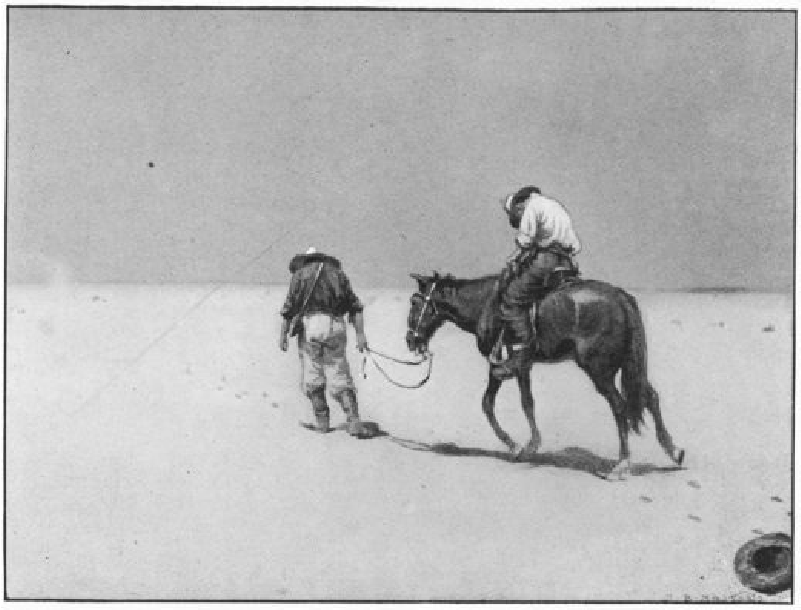
But Carhart dismounted, lifted his assistant, protesting, into the saddle, and pushed on, himself on foot, leading the horse.

They went on in this way for nearly an hour. Young Van found it all he could do to hold himself in the saddle. Then the horse took to staggering, and finally came to his knees.

Carhart helped his assistant to the ground, pulled his hat brim down to shade his eyes, and looked ahead. A cloud of dust on the horizon, a beaten trail through the sand, here and there a gray-brown heap where a mule had fallen,—these marked the flight of his drivers and laborers.

His eyes came back to the fainting man at his feet. Young Van had lost all sense of the world about him. Carhart saw that his lips were moving, and knelt beside him. Then he smiled, a curious, unhumorous smile; for the young engineer was muttering those words which had of late been his brother’s favorites among all the words in our rich language: “D—n Peet!”

The chief stood up again to think. And as he gazed off eastward in the general direction of Sherman, toward the place where the arch enemy of the Sherman and Western sat in his office, perhaps devising new excuses to send to the front, those same two expressive words might have been used to sum up his own thoughts. What could the man be thinking of, who had brought the work practically to a stop, who was now in the coolest imaginable fashion leaving a thousand men to mingle their bones with the bones of the buffalo—that grim, broadcast expression of the spirit of the desert.



“They went on in this way for nearly an hour.”

But these were unsafe thoughts. His own head was none too clear. It was reeling with heat and thirst and with the monotony of this desolate land. He drew a flask from his pocket,—an almost empty flask,—and placed it against Young Van’s hand. With their two hats propped together he shaded his face. Then, a canteen slung over each shoulder, he pushed ahead, on foot.

“The Palos River can’t be more than a dozen miles—” had said the guide, pointing southward. That was all. Somewhere off there in the desert it lay, flowing yellow and aimless. Perhaps it was a lie. Perhaps the guide was mistaken, as he had been in the search for the pool. But the last feeble tie that bound these outcasts to reason had snapped at the sight of that unsteady, pointing finger, and only the original sin in them was left. The words of the guide had been heard by one man, and he was off at the instant, his only remark a curse as he knocked a boy out of his way. But others had seen the pointing finger. And still others were moved by the impulse which spurs men, in frantic moments, to any sort of action.

In the rush for mounts two men, a half-breed from the Territory and a Mexican, plunged at the same animal. The half-breed was hacking at the nigh trace and the Mexican at the off rein when their eyes met. The mule both had chosen was the nigh leader in a double team. But instead of turning to one of the other three, the men, each with a knife in his hand, fell to fighting; and while they struggled and fell and rolled over and over in the sand, a third man mounted their prize and galloped away.

But it was the boys who suffered most. None but hardy youngsters had been chosen for the drive, but their young endurance could not help them in personal combat with these grown men; and personal combat was what it came to wherever a boy stood or sat near a desirable mule. The odd thing was that every man and boy succeeded in getting away. Hats were lost. Shirts were torn to shreds, exposing skins, white and brown, to the merciless sun. Even the half-breed and the Mexican, dropping their quarrel as unreasonably as they had begun it, each bleeding from half-a-dozen small wounds, finally galloped off after the others. And when these last were gone, and the dust was billowing up behind them, something less than two minutes had passed since the guide had pointed southward.

The Palos River is probably the most uninviting stream in the Southwest. It was at this time sluggish and shallow. The water was so rich with silt that a pailful of it, after standing an hour, would deposit three inches of mud. The banks were low and of the same gray sand as the desert, excepting that a narrow fringe of green announced the river to the eye. It was into and through this fringe that the first rider plunged. It had been a long two-hour ride, and the line straggled out for more than a mile behind him. But he was not interested in his companions. His eyes were fixed on the broad yellow river-bed with the narrow yellow current winding through it. Drinking could not satisfy him. He wanted to get into the water, and feel his wet clothes clinging about him, and duck his face and head under, and splash it about with his hands. His mount needed no lash to slip and scramble down the bank and spurt over the sand. The animal was so crazily eager that he stumbled in the soft footing and went to his knees. But the rider sailed on over his head, and with a great shout, arms and legs spread wide, he fell with a splash and a gurgle into the water. The mule regained his feet and staggered after him, and then the two of them, man and beast, rolled and wallowed and splashed, and drank copiously.

The second man reached the bank on foot, for his mule had fallen within sight of the promised land. He paused there, apparently bewildered, watching his fortunate comrade in the water. Then, with dazed deliberation, he removed his clothes, piled them neatly under a bush, and walked out naked, stepping gingerly on the heated sand. But halfway to the channel a glimmer of intelligence sparkled in his eyes, and he suddenly dashed forward and threw himself into the water.

One by one the others came crashing through the bushes, and rode or ran down the bank, swearing, laughing, shouting, sobbing. And not one of them could have told afterward whether he drank on the upstream or the downstream side of the mules.

When Paul Carhart, a long while later, parted the bushes and stood out in relief on the bank, leaning on a shrub for support, he saw a strange spectacle. For a quarter of a mile, up and down the channel, were mules, some drinking, some rolling and kicking some lying out flat and motionless. Near at hand, hanging from every bush, were shirts and trousers and stockings; at the edge of the bank was a long, irregular line of boots and shoes. And below, on the broad reach of sand, laughing, and bantering, and screaming like schoolboys, half a hundred naked men stood in a row, stooping with hands on knees, while a dozen others went dancing and high-stepping and vaulting over them.

They were playing leap-frog.

Carhart walked across to the upstream side of the mules and drank. Then, after filling two canteens, he returned to the bank and sat down in such small shade as he could find. It was at this moment that the men caught sight of him. The game stopped abruptly, and for a moment the players stood awkwardly about, as schoolboys would at the appearance of the teacher. Then, first one, and another, and a group of two or three more, and finally, all of them, resumed their simple clothing, and sat down along the bank to await orders. The panic was over.

Now the chief roused himself. “Here, you two!” he cried. “Take these canteens and the freshest mules you can find, and go back to Mr. Vandervelt. Ride hard.”

And almost at the word, eager, responsive, the men he had addressed were off.

As soon as the worst of the shakiness passed out of his legs, Carhart rose. His next task was to get the mules back to the wagons, and bring them on to the river in order to fill the barrels, and this promised a greater expenditure of time and strength than he liked to face. But there was no alternative, it seemed, so he caught a mule, mounted it, and rode back. And the men trailed after him, riding and walking, in a line half a mile long.

Carhart found Young Van sitting up, too weak to talk, supported by the two men whom he had sent back.

“How is he?” asked the chief.

“It’s hard to say, Mr. Carhart,” replied one of the men. “He don’t seem quite himself.”

Carhart dismounted, felt the pulse of the young man, and then bathed his temples with the warmish water. “Carry him over into the shade of that wagon, boys,” he said. “Here, I’ll give you a hand.”

The earth, even beneath the wagon, was warm, and Carhart and the two laborers spread out their coats before they laid him down. The chief poured a little water on his handkerchief, and laid it on Young Van’s forehead.

And then, when Carhart had got to his feet and was looking about, holding down his hat-brim to shade his eyes, an expression of inquiry, which had come into his face some little time before, slowly deepened.

“Boys,” he said, “what’s become of the mules that were left here?”

The men looked up. “Don’t know, Mr. Carhart,” replied the more talkative one. “I ain’t seen ’em.”

Carhart turned away, and again his eyes roved about over the beaten ground. Very slowly and thoughtfully he began walking around the deserted wagons in widening circles. Those of the men who were back from the river watched him curiously. After a time he stopped and looked at some tracks in the sand, and then, still walking slowly, followed them off to the right. A few of the men, the more observant ones, fell in behind him, but he did not glance around.

The foremost laborer stopped a moment and waited for the man next behind.

“The boss is done up,” he said in a low voice.

The other man nodded. “Unsteady in the legs,” he replied. “And he’s gone white. I see it when we was at the river.”

The tracks were distinct enough, but Carhart did not quicken his pace. He was talking to himself, half aloud: “It’ll go on until it’s settled,—those things have to, out here. He’s a coward, but he’ll drink it down every day until the idea gets to running loose in his head.”—He staggered a little, then pulled himself up short.

“What’s the matter with me, anyway!” he muttered. “This is a pretty spectacle!” And he walked deliberately on.

The trail led him, and the quiet little file of men behind him, over and around a low ridge and a chain of knolls. “This heat keeps a dead rein on you,” he said, again speaking half aloud. “Let’s see, what was I thinking,—oh, the boys at the camp, they needed water too; I was going to load up and hurry back to help them out.”

And then, as he walked on with a solemn precision not unlike that of a drunken man, the scene shifted, and another scene—one which had long ago slipped out of his waking thoughts,—took its place. He was fishing a trout stream in the Adirondacks. He had found a series of pools in a narrow gorge where the brook came leaping merrily down from one low ledge to another. The underbrush on the steep banks was dark and impenetrable. The pine and hemlock and beech and maple and chestnut trees grew thick on either hand, and so matted their branches overhead that only a little checkered light could sift through. The rocks were dark with moss; the stream was choked at certain points with the debris of the last flood. He was tired after the day’s fishing. A storm came up. It grew very black and ugly in that little ravine. And then, for no reason, a thing happened which had not happened in his steady mind before or since. He fell into a curious horror, in which the tangled wilderness and the gloom and the rushing rain and the creaking trees and the noise of the falling water and that of the thunder all played some part. He recalled that he had found a hollow in the bank, where a large tree had been uprooted, and had taken shivering refuge there.

The wilderness had always before seemed man’s playground. It suddenly became a savage living and breathing thing to which a man was nothing.

And now the desert was showing its teeth, and Carhart knew that he was trembling again on the brink of the horrors. He understood the sort of thing very well. He had seen men grow crafty and cowardly or ugly and murderous out there on the frontier. He had been in Death Valley. And as he had seen the symptoms in other men’s faces, so he now felt them coming into his own. He knew how a man’s sense of proportion can go awry,—how a mere railroad, with its very important banker-officials in top hats and its very elaborate and impressive organization, could seem a child’s toy here in the desert where the wonderful spaces and the unearthly atmosphere and the morning and evening colors lie very close to the borders of another realm, and where the eye of God blazes forever down on the just and the unjust.

None of the little devices of a sophisticated world pass current in the desert. Carhart knew all this, as I have said, very well. He knew that a man’s mind is searched to the bottom out here, that the morbid tone and the yellow streak are inevitably dragged to the surface and displayed to the gaze of all men. But he also knew that where the mind is sound, the trouble may arise from physical exhaustion, and this knowledge saved him. He deliberately recalled the fact that for thirty-six hours he had not slept and that the work he had done and the strain he had been under would have sent many men to the nearest hospital, or, in the desert, to the nearest shallow excavation in the ground. And he walked slowly and steadily on, in that same shaky, determined manner.

On the summit of a knoll he stopped short, and looked down at something on the farther side. The men came up, one by one, and joined him; and they, too, stopped short and looked. And then Carhart raised his eyes and watched their faces steadily, eagerly wondering if they saw what he saw,—a water-hole, fringed with green, and a mule lying at the water’s edge and a number of other mules quietly grazing. It was his test of himself. For a full half minute he gazed into those sweaty, drink-bleared faces. And then, at what he saw there, his own tense expression gave way to one of overwhelming relief. The men ran pell-mell down the slope, shouting with delight. And Carhart sat down there on the knoll, and his head fell a little forward over his knees.

“Will you have a little of this, Mr. Carhart?”

A big renegade with the face of a criminal was holding out a flask. The chief took it, and gulped down a few swallows. “Thank you,” he said quietly.

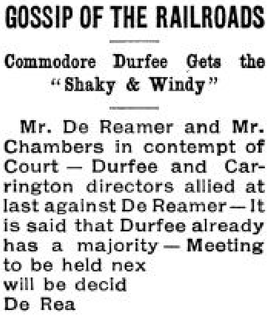
“One of the boys found this here, down among them tin cans, Mr. Carhart.”

It was the crumpled first page of the *Pierrepont Enterprise*. Carhart stiffened up, spread it out on his knees, and read the date line. The paper was only two days old.

“Where’s Pierrepont?” he asked.

“About a day’s journey down the river, sir.”

Again the chief’s eyes ran over the sheet. Suddenly they lighted up. Here is what he saw:—



GOSSIP OF THE RAILROADS

Commodore Durfee Gets the “Shaky & Windy”

Mr. De Reamer and Mr.
Chambers in contempt of
Court — Durfee and Carrington directors allied at
last against De Reamer — It
is said that Durfee already
has a majority — Meeting
to be held nex
will be decid
De Rea

GOSSIP OF THE RAILROADS

Commodore Durfee Gets the “Shaky & Windy”

**Mr. De Reamer and Mr.
Chambers in contempt of
Court—Durfee and Carrington
directors allied at
last against De Reamer—It
is said that Durfee already
has a majority—Meeting
to be held nex
will be decid
De Rea**

The rest of it was torn off, but he read these headings three times. Then he lowered his knees, with the paper still lying across them, and looked over it at the little group of men and mules about the water-hole. “Can that be true, or can’t it?” he asked himself. “And what am I going to do about it? I don’t believe it; it’s another war of injunctions, that’s what it is, and it isn’t likely to be settled short of the Supreme Court. We can start back in an hour or so, and as soon as we reach camp I’ll take the five-spot”—Carhart’s two engines happened to bear the numbers five and six—“the five-spot and the private car and see if Bill Cunningham can’t make a record run toward Sherman. It’s a little puzzling, but I’m inclined to think it’s a mighty good thing that I found this paper.”

He tossed it away, and then, catching sight for the first time of the other side, he took it up again. The second page was nearly covered with crude designs, made with a blue pencil. There were long rows of scallops, and others of those aimless markings a man will make when pencil and paper are before him. And in the middle, surrounded by a sort of decorative border, was printed out “MR. CARHART,” then a blank space and the name “JACK FLAGG.”

Carhart rose to his feet, folded the paper, put it in his hip pocket, and looked cheerfully around. “So, Mr. Flagg, it’s you I’m indebted to for this information. I’m sure I’m greatly obliged.” Then he waved to the men. “Come on, boys,” he shouted. “Bring those animals back to the wagons. We’ll fill the barrels here.”

Slowly and not without difficulty he walked back. But the unsteadiness in his legs no longer disturbed him. The panic was over,—and something else was over too.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROAD TO TOTAL WRECK

“How’s my pony?” said Young Van. “You haven’t told me.”

“I shot him.”

“Not yours too? Didn’t I see you riding Texas this morning? I—I’m a little hazy about what I have and haven’t seen these days.”

“Yes; Texas pulled through. He’s hitched on just behind us.”

The wagon train, with every barrel full, was drawing slowly toward Mr. Carhart’s camp. Young Van and Carhart were riding on the leading wagon, and the former was gazing off dejectedly to the horizon, where he could see a few moving black specks and the gray-yellow line of the grade. “I don’t know what you’ll think of me, Mr. Carhart,” he said, after a time. “I don’t seem to be good for much when it comes to real work.”

“Better forget about it, Gus,” the chief replied. “I’m going to. This isn’t railroad building.”

The long line of wagons wound into camp, and Carhart made it his first business to get his assistant undressed and comfortably settled on his cot. It would be a day or so before the young man would be able to resume his work. Then Carhart stepped out, walked part way down the knoll, and looked about him, and became conscious of an unusual stir about the job. Peering out through dusty spectacles, he saw that a party of strangers were coming up the slope toward him.

At the head walked Old Van, in boiled shirt and city clothes, with a tall man in frock coat and top hat whom Carhart recognized as Vice-president Chambers. After them came a party of ladies and one or two young men to whom Tiffany was explaining the methods of construction. It seemed that Mr. Chambers had thought it worth while to adopt Tiffany’s suggestion that the vast quantities of dry bones in the desert be gathered up and shipped eastward to be ground up into fertilizer.

Carhart was presented to Mrs. Chambers and to the two Misses Chambers and the other young women. He took them in with a glance, then looked down over his own outrageously attired person and restrained a smile. Tiffany was the one he wished to see, and he told him so with a barely perceptible motion of the head.

Tiffany caught the signal, made his excuses, and walked off with this dusty, inconspicuous man on whose shoulders rested the welfare of the whole Sherman and Western system. He had observed that the young women drew instinctively away from the dingy figure, and his smile was not restrained. He was thinking of his first meeting with Paul Carhart, in Chicago,—it was at the farewell dinner to the Dutch engineers,—and of his distinguished appearance as he rose to speak, and of his delightfully humorous enumeration of the qualities required in an American engineer. Thinking of these things he almost spoke aloud: “And they never knew the difference,—not a blessed one of ’em! Even Mrs. Chambers don’t know a gentleman without he’s tagged. Ain’t it funny!” And the chief engineer of the S. & W., being a blunt, and not at all a subtle man, wisely gave up the eternal question.

“Look here, Tiffany,” Carhart began, “something’s going to happen to this man Peet.”

Tiffany plucked a straw from a convenient bale, and began meditatively to chew it. “I haven’t got a word to say, Carhart. You’ve got a clear case against us, and I guess I can’t object if you take it out of me.”

“No; I understand the thing pretty well, Tiffany. You’re doing what you can, but Peet isn’t.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Perfectly.”

“He’s having the devil’s own time himself, Carhart. The mills are going back on us steady with the rails. They just naturally don’t ship ’em. I’m beginning to think they don’t want to ship ’em.”

Carhart stopped short, plunged in thought. “Maybe you’re right,” he said after a moment. “I hadn’t thought of that before.”

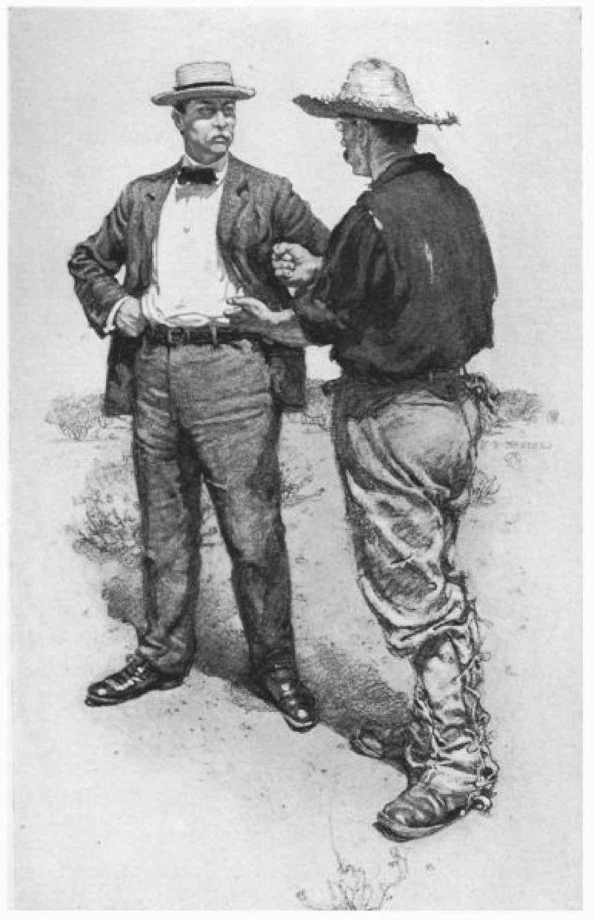
“No, you oughtn’t to have to think of it. That’s our business, but it’s been worrying us considerable. Then there’s the connections, too. The rails have to come into Sherman by way of the Queen and Cumberland,—a long way ‘round—”

“And the Queen and Cumberland has ‘Commodore Durfee’ written all over it.”

“Yes, I guess it has.”

“And knowing that, you fellows have been sitting around waiting for the Commodore to deliver your material. No, Tiffany, don’t tell me that; I hate to think it of you.”

“I know we’re a pack of fools, Carhart, but—” the sentence died out. “But what can we do, man? We can’t draw a new map of the United States, can we? We’ve got our orders from the old man—!”



“‘Look here, Tiffany,’ Carhart began, ‘something’s going to happen to this man Peet.’”

“Could you have the stuff sent around by the Coast and Crescent, and transferred over to Sherman by wagon?”

“Wait a minute; who owns the Coast and Crescent? Who’s got it all buttoned up in his pants pocket?”

“Oh,” said Carhart. They stood for a little while, then sat down on a pile of culls which had been brought up by the tie squad for supporting tent floors. “It begins to occur to me,” Carhart went on, “that we are working under the nerviest president that ever—But perhaps he can’t help it. He’s fixed pretty much as Washington was in the New Jersey campaign; he’s surrounded by the enemy and he’s got to fight out.”

“That’s it, exactly,” cried Tiffany. “He’s got to cut his way out. He ain’t a practical railroad man, and he’s just ordered us to do it for him. Don’t you see our fix?”

“Yes,” Carhart mused, “I see well enough. Look here, Tiffany; how far can I go in this business,—extra expenses, and that sort of things?”

Tiffany’s face became very expressive. “Well,” he said, “I guess if you can beat the H. D. & W. to Red Hills there won’t be any questions asked. If you can’t beat ’em, we’ll all catch hell. Why, what are you thinking of doing?”

“Not a thing. My mind’s a blank.”

From Tiffany’s expression it was plain that he was uncertain whether to believe this or not.

“It comes to about this,” Carhart went on. “It all rests on me, and if I’m willing to run chances, I might as well run ’em.”

Tiffany’s eyes were searching the lean, spectacled face. “I guess it’s for you to decide,” he replied. “I don’t know what else Mr. Chambers was thinking of when he the same as told me to leave you be.”

“By the way, Tiffany,”—Carhart was going through his pockets,—“how long is it since you people left Sherman?”

“More than a week. Mr. Chambers wanted some shooting on the way out.”

“Do you suppose he knows about this?” And Carhart produced the torn sheet of the *Pierrepont Enterprise*.

Tiffany read the headlines, and slowly shook his head. “I’m sure he don’t. There was no such story around Sherman when we left. But we found a message waiting here to-day, asking Mr. Chambers to hurry back; very likely it’s about this.”

“If it were true, if Commodore Durfee does own the line, what effect would it have on my work here?”

“Not a bit! Not a d—n bit!” Tiffany’s big hand came down on his knee with a bang. “This line belongs to

Daniel De Reamer, and Old Durfee's thievery and low tricks and kept judges don't go at Sherman, or here neither. It's jugglery, the whole business; there ain't anything honest about it." Carhart looked away, and again restrained a smile; he was thinking of where the money came from. "And I'll tell you this," Tiffany concluded, "if anybody comes into my office and tries to take possession for Old Durfee, I'll say, 'Hold on, my friend, who signed that paper you've got there?' And if I find it ain't signed by five judges—*five*, mind!—of the Supreme Court of the United States sittin' in Washington, I'll say, 'Get out of here!' And if they won't get out, I'll kick 'em out. And there's five hundred men in Sherman, a thousand men, who'll help me to do it. If it's court business, I guess our judges are as good as theirs. And if it comes to shooting, by God we'll shoot!"

"I agree with you, on the whole," said Carhart. "Mr. De Reamer and Mr. Chambers have put me here to beat the H. D. & W. to Red Hills, and I'm going to do it. But—"

"That's the talk, man!"

"But let's get back to Peet. He could help us a little if he felt like it. You told me last month, Tiffany, that Peet had given you a list of the numbers of all my supply cars, with an understanding that they wouldn't be used for anything else. Have you got that list with you?"

"No; it's in my desk, at Sherman."

"All right. I'll call for it day after to-morrow."

"At Sherman?"

"Yes. Peet isn't sending those cars out here, and I'm going to find out where he is sending them."

"There's one thing, Carhart," said Tiffany, as they rose, "I'm sure Peet don't know how bad off you were for water. He was holding up the trains for material."

"He ought to understand, Tiffany. I wired him to send the water anyway."

"I know. But that would be wholesale murder. He didn't realize—"

"I'm going to undertake the job of making him realize, Tiffany."

The whistle of the vice-president's special engine was tooting as they started back. On the one hand, as far as human beings could be distinguished with the naked eye, the groups and the long lines of laborers were shuffling to and from their work on the grade; the picked men of the iron squad, muscular, deep chested, were working side by side with the Mexicans and the negroes, as also were the spikers and strappers and the men of the tie squad. On the other hand, the ladies of the vice-president's party were picking their way daintily back toward Mr. Chambers's private car, where savory odors and a white-clad chef awaited them.

Carhart had time only to wash his face and hands before rejoining the party at the car steps. His clothing was downright disreputable, and he wanted the physique, the height and breadth and muscle display, which alone can give distinction to rough garments. Even his clean-cut face and reserved, studious expression were not positive features, and could hardly triumph over the obvious facts of his dress. Mrs. Chambers and the young women again glanced toward him, and again they had nothing to say to him. To the truth that this ugly, noisy scene was a resolving dissonance in the harmony of things, that this rough person in spectacles was heroically forging a link in the world's girdle, these women were blind. They had been curious to come; and now that they were here and were conscious of the dirtiness and meanness of the hundreds of men about them, now that the gray hopelessness of the desert was getting on their nerves, they were eager to go back. And so the bell rang, the driving-wheels spun around, slipping under the coughing engine, the car began to rumble forward, the ladies bowed, the vice-president, taking a last look at things from the rear platform, nodded a good-by, and the incident was closed.

There were a number of things for Carhart to attend to after he had eaten supper and dressed, and before he could get away,—some of which will have to find a place in a later chapter,—and it was eleven o'clock at night when he finally put aside his maps and reports. He then wrote a note to Scribner, telling the engineer of the second division that the last report of his pile inspector was not satisfactory,—the third bent in the trestle over Tiffany Hollow on "mile fifty-two" showed insufficient resistance. He left for Young Van's attention a pile of letters with memoranda for the replies. He sent for Old Van, and went over with him the condition of the work on the first division. And finally he wrote the following letter to John Flint:—

> DEAR JOHN: I'm sending forward to-morrow the extra cable and the wheelers you asked for. I have to run back to Sherman to-night, possibly for a week or so, but there'll be time enough to look over your plans for cutting and filling on the west bank when I get back. I haven't figured it out yet, but I'm inclined to agree with you that we can make more of a fill there. But I'll write you again about it.
>
> Thanks to our friend Peet I nearly killed Texas on a ride for water. Got to have another riding horse sent out here. My assistant's pony had to be shot—that little brown beauty I pointed out to you the morning you started, with the white star.
>
> Yours,
>
> P. C.
>
> P. S. By the way, that Wall-street fight was only the opening skirmish. The Commodore is raiding S. & W. for business. I guess you know how he does these things. The *Pierrepont Enterprise* says he

> has already got control of the board, so it will probably be our turn next. If you haven't plenty of weapons, you'd better order what you need at Red Hills right away. And don't forget that you're working for Daniel De Reamer.
>
> P. C.

He folded the letter, slipped it into an envelope, addressed it, and then tipped back and ran his long fingers through his hair. He was surprised to find that his forehead was beaded with sweat. "Lovely climate, this," he said to himself; adding after a moment, "Now what have I forgotten?" For several minutes he balanced there, supporting himself by resting the fingers of one hand against a tall case labelled, "A B C Spool Cotton," in the flat, glass-fronted drawers of which he kept his maps and papers. Finally he muttered, "Well, if I have forgotten anything, I've forgotten it for good," and the front legs of his chair came down, and he reached across the table for his hat.

But instead of rising, he lingered, fingering the wide hat-brim. The yellow lamplight fell gently on his face, now leaner than ever. "I wonder what they think a man is made of," thought he. "Nothing very valuable, I guess, from what an engineer gets paid. I'm in the wrong business. It's my sort of man who does the work, and it's the speculators and that sort who get the money,—God help 'em!" Again he made as if to rise, and again he paused. "Oh!" he said, "of course, that was it." He clapped his hat on the back of his head, reached out for a letter which he had that evening written to Mrs. Carhart, opened the envelope, and added these words:—

> "Have Thomas Nelson plant the nasturtiums along the back fence. There isn't enough sunshine out in front for anything but the honeysuckle and the Dutchman's pipe. And he'd better screen the fence with golden glow, set out pretty thick the whole way, between the nasturtiums and the fence. The crab-apple tree will be in the way, but it's so near dead that he'd better cut it down. I like your other arrangements first rate."

This, and a few other east-bound letters, he put in his handbag. Then he looked at his watch. "Hello!" said he, "it's to-morrow morning." He pulled his hat forward, took up the lamp, and stepped out through the tent opening, holding the lamp high and looking down, through the night, toward the track.

The silence, in spite of a throbbing locomotive, or perhaps because of it, was almost overwhelming. There was not a cloud in the sky; the stars were twinkling down.

"How horribly patient it is," he thought. "We're slap bang up against the Almighty."

"Toot! Too-oo-oot!" came from the throbbing locomotive.

"All right, sir!" he muttered. "Be with you in a minute."

He went back into the tent, put down the lamp, picked up his handbag, took a last look around, and then blew out the lamp and set off down the slope to the track.

The engineer was hanging out of his cab. "All ready, Mr. Carhart?"

"All ready, Bill." The chief caught the hand-rail of *his* private car, tossed his bag to the platform, and swung himself up after it.

"You was in something of a hurry, Mr. Carhart?"

"In a little of a hurry, yes, Bill."

They started off, rocking and bumping over the new track, and Carhart began stripping off his clothes. "It isn't exactly like Mr. Chambers's," he said, "but I guess I'll be able to get in a little sleep; that is, if Bill doesn't smash me up, or jolt me to death."

Three days later, at five o'clock in the afternoon, Carhart was writing a letter in the office of the "Eagle House," at Sherman. Sitting in rows along three sides of the room was perhaps a score of men, and in a corner by herself sat one young woman. The men were a mixed assortment,—locomotive engineers, photographers, travelling salesmen of tobacco, jewellery, shoes, clothing, and small cutlery, not to speak of an itinerant dentist and a team of "champion banjo and vocal artists." As for the young woman, if you could have taken a peep into the sample case at her feet, you would have learned that she was prepared to disseminate a collection of literature which ranged from standard sets of Dickens and Thackeray to a fat volume devoted to the songs and scenes of Old Ireland, an illustrated life of the Pope, and a work on the character and the splendid career of Porfirio Diaz. Outside, at the window, stood or sat another score of men, each of whom bore the unmistakable dress and manner of the day laborer. And every pair of eyes, within and without the smoky room, was fixed on the back of the man who was writing a letter at the table in the corner.

But Carhart's mind was wholly occupied with the work before him. He was travel-stained,—it was not yet an hour since he had come in from Crockett, the nearest division town on the H. D. & W.,—but there were few signs of weariness on his face, and none at all in his eyes. "How much had I better tell him?" he was asking himself. "I wonder what he is up to, anyway? Possibly he has an interest in the lumber company, or maybe Durfee's men have bought him up." For several minutes his pen occupied itself with dotting out a design on the blotter; then suddenly a twinkle came into his eyes, and he wrote rapidly as follows:—

> DEAR MR. PEET: I beg to enclose herewith a list of the cars which were assigned to me at the beginning of the construction work. I am sure you will agree with me that I can spare none of these

> cars, least of all to supply a rival line. And in consideration of your future hearty cooperation with me in advancing this construction work, I will gladly take pains to see that my present knowledge of the use that has been made of these cars shall not interfere in any way with your continued enjoyment of your position with the Sherman and Western.
>
> Yours very truly,
>
> P. CARHART.

He folded the letter, then opened it and read it over. “Yes,” he told himself, “it’s better to write it. Seeing the thing before him in black and white may have a stimulating effect.” He found in his pocket the worn and thumbed list of cars, enclosed it in his letter, addressed an envelope, and looked around. At once he was beset by the agents and the applicants for work, but he shoved through to the piazza, and called a boy.

“Here, son,” he said, “do you know Mr. Peet, of the railroad?”

The boy nodded.

“Take this letter to him. If he isn’t in his office, go to his house, but don’t come back until you have found him.”

“Will there be any answer?”

“No—no answer. Don’t give the letter to anybody but Mr. Peet himself. When you have done that, come to me and get a quarter.”

The boy started off, and Carhart reëntered the building, slipped past the office door, and walked up two flights of stairs to his room.

“And now,” thought he, “I guess a bath will feel about as good as anything.”

The Eagle House did not boast a bathroom, and so he set about the business in the primitive fashion to which he had learned to adapt himself. He dragged in from the hall a tin, high-backed tub, called down the stairway to the proprietor’s wife for hot water, and, undressing, piled his clothes on the one wooden chair in the room, taking care that they touched neither floor nor wall. The hostess knocked, and left a steaming pitcher outside the door. And soon the chief engineer of the Red Hills extension of the Shaky and Windy was splashing merrily.

The water proved so refreshing that he lingered in it, leaning comfortably back and hanging his legs over the edge of the tub. And as was always the case, when he had a respite from details, his mind began roving over the broader problems of the work. “I’ve done a part of it,” he said to himself, “but not enough. It won’t do any good to have the cars if we haven’t the materials to put in ’em.” He had been absently pursuing the soap around the bottom of the tub, had caught it, and was now sloping his hands into the water, and letting the cake slide back into its element.

There was a knock at the door. Carhart looked up with half a start.

“Well, what is it?”

“It’s me, sir,” came from the hall.

“Who’s me?”

“The boy that took your letter.”

“Well, what about it? There was no answer.”

“But there *is* an answer, Mr. Carhart. Mr. Peet came back with me.”

“What’s that?”

“He’s here—he came back with me. He’s waiting downstairs.”

Carhart hesitated. “Well—tell him that I’m very sorry, but I can’t see him. I’m taking a bath.”

“All right,” said the boy; and Carhart heard him go off down the stairs.

For some little time longer he sat in the tub. His mind slipped again into the accustomed channel. “If it does come to warfare,” he was thinking, “the first thing they’ll do will be to cut me off from my base. They’d know that I shall be near enough to Red Hills to get food through from there by wagon,—that’s what I should have to do,—but there won’t be any rails coming from Red Hills. I’m afraid—very much afraid—that Durfee has got us, cold. That’s the whole trick. If he’s going to seize the S. & W., he’ll cut me off first thing. There’s five to six hundred miles of track between the job and Sherman. It would take an army to guard it. And that much done, he’d be in a position to take his time about completing the H. D. & W. to Red Hills.”

And then suddenly he got out of the tub, snatched up a towel, and, half dry, began hurriedly to draw on his clothes. A moment later a thin, spectacled, collarless man darted out of a room on the third floor of the Eagle House, looked quickly up and down the hall, ran halfway down the stairs, and leaned over the balustrade.

“Boy,” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

“You didn’t get your quarter.” But it was a half dollar that he tossed into the waiting hands. “Run after Mr. Peet and bring him back here. Mind you catch him.”

The boy started to obey, but in a moment he was back and knocking at Carhart's door. "He's down in the office now, Mr. Carhart. He didn't go at all."

"He didn't, eh?" The engineer was standing before the cracked mirror, brushing his hair. "All right, I'll be down in a minute. Hold on there!" He stepped to the door. The first coin his fingers encountered in his pocket was another half dollar. He took it out without glancing at it and handed it to the now bewildered boy. Then he returned to the mirror and brushed his hair again, and put on his collar and tie. "I'll have to thank Tiffany," ran his thoughts. "It's odd how that car-stealing story has stuck in my head. I'm glad he told it."

Peet's expression was not what might be termed complacent. He was standing on the piazza when he heard Carhart's quick step on the stairs. His teeth were closed tightly on a cigar, but he was not smoking.

"How are you, Mr. Peet?" said the engineer. Peet looked nervously about and behind him, and then faced around. "Look here, Mr. Carhart, I want to tell you that you haven't got that straight—"

"Where's Tiffany?" said Carhart.

At this interruption Peet turned, if anything, a shade redder. "He's gone home."

"Let's find him. Would you mind walking over there?"

"Certainly not," Peet replied; and for a moment they walked in silence. Then the superintendent broke out again. "You didn't understand about those cars, Mr. Carhart. I know—the boys have told me—that you've thought some hard things about me—" He paused: perhaps he had better keep his mouth shut.

As for Carhart, he was striding easily along, the hint of a smile playing about the corners of his mouth. "I think I understand the situation pretty well, Peet," he said. "I was a little stirred up when my men began to go thirsty, but that's all past, and I'm going to drop it. I guess we both understand that this construction is the most important thing Mr. De Reamer has on hand these days. And if we're going to carry him through, we'll have to pull together."

They found Tiffany, coat thrown aside, hat tipped back, weeding his garden.

"Come in—glad to see you," he said, only half concealing his curiosity over the spectacle of Carhart and Peet walking together in amity. "Didn't succeed in getting back, eh, Carhart?"

"Not yet, Tiffany. I had to run up to Crockett." He said this in an offhand manner, and he did not look at Peet; but he knew from the expression on Tiffany's face that the superintendent was turning red again.

"You ain't had supper, have you?" said Tiffany. "You're just in time to eat with us."

"Supper!" Carhart repeated the word in some surprise, then looked at his watch.

"You hadn't forgotten it, had you?" Tiffany grinned.

"To tell the truth, I had. May we really eat with you? It will save us some time."

"Can you? Well, I wonder! Come in." And taking up his coat, Tiffany led the way into the house.

More than once during that meal did Tiffany's eyes flit from Peet's half-bewildered countenance to that of the quiet, good-natured Carhart. He asked no questions, but he wondered. Once he thought that Peet threw him an inquiring glance, but he could not be certain. After supper, as he reached for the toothpicks and pushed back his chair, he was tempted to come out with the question which was on his mind, "What in the devil are you up to, Carhart?" But what he really said was, "Help yourselves to the cigars, boys. They're in that jar, there."

And then, for a moment, both Peet and Tiffany sat back and watched Carhart while he lighted his cigar, turned it over thoughtfully, shook the match, and dropped it with a little sputter into his coffee cup. Then the man who was building the Red Hills extension got, with some deliberation, to his feet, and turned toward Tiffany. "Would it spoil your smoke to take it while we walk?" he asked.

"Not at all," replied the host. "Where are we going?"

"To the yards."

Peet, for no reason whatever, went red again; and Tiffany, tipped back in his chair and slowly puffing at his cigar, looked at him. Then he too got up, and the three men left the house together. And during all the walk out to the freight depot, Carhart talked about the new saddle-horse he had bought at Crockett.

The freight yard at Sherman extended nearly a mile, beginning with the siding by the depot and expanding farther on to the width of a dozen tracks. Carhart came to a halt at the point where the tangle of switches began, and looked about him. Everywhere he saw cars, some laden, some empty. A fussy little engine was coughing down the track, whistling angrily at a sow and her litter of spotted, muddy-yellow pigs which had been sleeping in a row between the rails. From the roundhouse, off to the left, arose the smoke of five or six resting locomotives. Nearer at hand, seated in a row on the handle of the turn-table, were as many black negroes, laughing and showing their teeth and eyeballs, and discussing with much gesticulation and some amiable heat the question of the day. Carhart's sweeping glance took in the scene, then his interest centred on the cars.

Peet fidgeted. "There ain't any of your cars here, Mr. Carhart," he said uneasily.

Already Carhart knew better, but he was not here to squabble with Peet. "How many have you here all together?" he asked; and after a moment of rapid counting he answered his own question: "Something more than a hundred, eh?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, what?"

"Look here, Carhart, I don't know what you've got in mind, but I can't let you have any of these cars."

"You can't?"

"Not possibly. Half of 'em are foreign as it is. I'm so short now I don't know what I'm going to do. Honest, I don't."

Carhart turned this answer over in his mind. After a moment he looked up, first at Peet, then at Tiffany, as if he had something to say; but whatever it may have been, he turned away without saying it.

"What is it, old man?" cried Tiffany, at last. "What can we do for you, anyway?"

Still Carhart did not speak. His eyes again sought the long lines of cars. Finally, resting one foot on a projecting cross-tie, he turned to the superintendent. "Suppose you do this, Peet," he said, speaking slowly; "suppose you tell your yard-master that I am to be absolute boss here until midnight. Then you go home and leave me here. Tiffany could stay and help me out—this isn't his department."

This brought Peet close to the outer limit of bewilderment. "What in—" he began; but Carhart, observing the effect of his request, interrupted.

"I don't believe Mr. Peet understands the situation very well, Tiffany. Tell him where we stand—where Mr. De Reamer stands." And with this he walked off a little way.

Tiffany came to the point. To Peet's question, "What is he talking about, Tiffany?" the veteran replied: "He knows and I know, Lou, that the only thing that will save the old man is a track to Red Hills. I haven't the slightest idea what Carhart's up to, but I'll tell you this, I've seen him in one or two tight places, and I never saw him look like this before. He's got something he wants to do, and he's decided that it's necessary, and it ain't for you and me to stand in his way. When you come to know Paul Carhart, you'll learn that he don't do things careless. What do you suppose the Old Man meant when he told you to back him up to the limit with cars and engines, and told me to keep out of his way?"

Peet did not reply for a moment. He took off his hat and brushed back the hair from a forehead that was moist with sweat. He looked from one man to the other, and from both to the roundhouse, and the depot, and the waiting cars. Finally he walked over toward Carhart. "Go ahead," he said queerly, "I'll stay with you."

"Good enough." And with these two words Carhart wheeled around and surveyed the nearest line of cars—box, flat, and gondola. "Most of those are empty, aren't they?" he asked.

"About half of them. But here's Dougherty, the yard-master. Dougherty, this is Mr. Carhart. You can take your orders from him to-night."

Carhart extended his hand. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Dougherty. I'm afraid we'll all have to make a night of it. I want you to keep steam up in three engines. And pick up all the men you can find and start them unloading every car in the yard. Keep 'em jumping. I want to have three empty trains at Paradise by midnight."

"By mid—" Dougherty's mouth opened a very little, and his eyes, after taking in Paul Carhart's face and figure, settled on the superintendent.

But Peet, with an expressive movement of his hands, turned away; and Tiffany, after a glance about the little group, went after him.

"Brace up, Lou," said Tiffany, in a low voice; "brace up."

Peet's hands were deep in his pockets. His eyes were fixed on the rails before him. "Dump all that freight on the ground!" he moaned. "Look here, Tiffany, I suppose he knows what he's doing, but—but what'll the traffic men say!"

"Never you mind the traffic men."

"But—dump all that freight out here *on the ground*!"

Tiffany passed an unsteady hand across his eyes. If Peet had looked at him, he would not have felt reassured; but he did not look up.

Dougherty, with a gulp, obeyed Carhart. And half an hour later the chance observers and the yard loafers were rubbing their eyes. Laborers were busy from one end of the yard to the other, throwing out boxes and bales and crates, and piling them haphazard between the tracks. The tired, wheezy switch engine, enveloped in a cloud of its own steam, was laboriously making up the first train. And moving quietly about, issuing orders and giving a hand here and there, followed by the disturbed eyes of the general superintendent and the chief engineer of the Shaky and Windy, Paul Carhart was bossing the work. Once he stepped over to the two men of the disturbed eyes, a thoughtful expression on his own face. "Say, Tiffany," he asked, "how much business does the Paradise Southern do?"

Tiffany started, and looked keenly at Carhart. There was a faint glimmer in his eyes, but this was followed immediately by uncertainty. "None," he replied; "that is, none to speak of. They run a combination car each way every day—two cars when business is brisk. The Old Man would have abandoned it years ago if it hadn't been for the stock scheme I told you about."

"Yes," mused Carhart, "that's what I understood. But if it's such a mistake, why was it built in the first place?"

"Oh, they were going to run it through to Bonavita on the Emerald River, but the B. & G. got all there was of that business first, and so the P. S. never got beyond Total Wreck. Mr. De Reamer never built it. The old Shipleigh crowd did that before Mr. De Reamer bought up this property." The faint glimmer had returned to Tiffany's eyes; he was searching Carhart's face. "You want these trains sent on through to your camp, don't you?" he asked abruptly.

"No, they are to go down over the P. S."

Tiffany's expression was growing almost painful. Carhart went on. "There are sidings at Total Wreck, aren't there, Peet?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, quite a yard there; but it's badly run down."

"What other sidings are there along the line?"

"Long ones at Yellow House and Dusty Bend."

"How long?"

"Nearly two miles each."

"How long is the line?"

"Forty-five miles."

"Good Lord!" The exclamation was Tiffany's. He was staring at Carhart with an expression of such mingled astonishment, incredulity, and expansive delight, that Peet's curiosity broke its bounds. "For God's sake, Tiffany," he cried, "what is it? What's he going to do?"

But Tiffany did not hear. He was gazing at Paul Carhart, saying incoherent things to him, and bringing down a heavy hand on his shoulder. He was somewhat frightened—never before, even in his own emphatic life, had his routine notions received such a wrench—but his eyes were shining. "Lord! Lord!" he was saying, "but there'll be swearing in Sherman to-morrow."

"The time has come when I ought to know what"—this from the purple Peet.

"Don't ask him, Lou," cried Tiffany, "don't ask him. If we smash, it won't be your fault. Ain't that right, Paul?"

"Yes," replied Carhart, "it is just right. Don't ask any questions, Peet, and don't give me away. I don't want any swearing in Sherman to-morrow. I don't want a whisper of this to get out for a week—not for a month if we can keep it under."

Tiffany quieted down; grew thoughtful. "It will take a lot of men, Paul. How can you prevent a leak?"

"I'm going to take them all West with me afterward."

"I see. That's right—that's right! And the station agents and train crews and switchmen—yes, I see. You'll take 'em all."

"Every man," replied Carhart, quietly.

"If necessary, you'll take 'em under guard."

Carhart smiled a very little. "If necessary," he replied.

"You'll want some good men," mused Tiffany. "I'll tell you,—suppose you leave that part of it to me. It's now,—let's see,—seven-forty. It won't be any use starting your first train until you've got the men to do the work. I'll need a little time, but if you'll give me an hour and half to two hours, say until nine-thirty, I'll have your outfit ready. I'll send some of my assistants along with you, and a bunch of our brakemen and switchmen. There'll be the commissariat to look out for too,—you see to all that, Lou, will you?"

Peet inclined his head. "For how many men?" he asked.

"Oh, five hundred, anyway, before we get through with it." Nothing could surprise the superintendent now. He merely nodded.

"And rifles," Tiffany added. "You'll want a case of 'em."

"No," said Carhart, "I shan't need any rifles for the P. S., but I want five hundred more at the end of the track, and, say ten thousand rounds of ball cartridges. Will you see to that, Peet?"

The superintendent grunted out, "Who's paying for all this?" and then as neither of the others took the trouble to reply, he subsided.

"All right, then," said Tiffany. "I'll have your crew here—enough for the first train, anyhow. You can trust to picking up fifty or a hundred laborers in the neighborhood of Paradise. See you later." And with this, the chief engineer took his big person away at a rapid walk.

Carhart turned to Peet and extended his hand. Dusk was falling. The headlights of the locomotives threw their yellow beams up the yard. Switch lights were shining red and white, and lanterns, in the hands of shadowy figures, were bobbing here and there. There was a great racket about them of bumping cars and squeaking brakes, and of shouting and the blowing off of locomotives. "I don't blame you for thinking that everything's going to the devil, Peet," said Carhart. "But I don't believe they've let you in on the situation. If I'm running risks, it's because we've got to run risks."

Peet hesitated, then accepted the proffered hand. "I suppose it's all right," he replied. "Tiffany seems to agree with you, and he generally knows what he's about. But—" he paused. They were standing by a heap of merchandise. The heap was capped by a dozen crates of chickens which, awakened from their sleep, were fluttering about within their narrow coop and clucking angrily. He waved his hand. "Think of what this means to our business," he said.

Carhart listened for a moment, then looked back to Peet. "If I were sure it would come to nothing worse than a slight disarrangement of your business, I'd sleep easy to-night."

"It's as bad as that, is it?"

"Yes," Carhart replied, "it's as bad as that. If I lose, no matter how the fight in the board turns out, you know what it will mean—no more De Reamer and Chambers men on the S. & W. Every De Reamer fireman and brakeman will go. It'll be a long vacation for the bunch of you."

Peet was silent. And then, standing there where he had so often and so heedlessly stood before, his sordid, moderately capable mind was torn unexpectedly loose from its well-worn grooves and thrown out to drift on a tossing sea of emotion and of romantic adventure. The breathlessness of the scene was borne in on his consciousness on a wave that almost took away his breath. Carhart was the sort of man whom he could not understand at all. He knew this now, or something near enough to it, clear down to the bottom of his subconscious self. And when he turned and looked at the thin man of the masterful hand, it was with a change of manner. "All right," he said, "go ahead. Just say what you want me to do."

At five minutes to ten that night a locomotive lay, the steam roaring in clouds through her safety valve, on the siding by the freight depot; and stretching off behind her was a long string of empties. Carhart, Tiffany, and Peet, walking up alongside the train, could distinguish, through the dark, men sitting on brake wheels, or swinging their legs out of box-car doors or standing in groups in the gondola cars. Once, during a brief lull in the noise of the yard, they heard a gentle snore which was issuing from the dark recesses of one of the box-cars. The three men halted beside the locomotive.

"You'd better go, Paul," said Tiffany.

Carhart looked at Peet. "I'll rely on you to keep things coming," he said.

"Go ahead," replied the superintendent. "I'll have the three trains and all the men at Paradise before morning."

"And we'll look out for the commissariat too, Paul," added Tiffany.

"All right," said Carhart. "But there's another thing, Peet. I haven't cars enough yet. As soon as enough come in to make up another train, send it out to me."

"That'll be sometime to-morrow afternoon, likely," Peet replied soberly.

Carhart nodded, shook hands with the two men, and mounted to the engine.

"Go ahead," said Peet. "You've got a clear track."

The whistle blew. Somewhere back in the night a speck of light swung up in a quarter circle. The engineer opened his throttle.

"Bong Voyage to the Paradise Unlimited!" said Tiffany.

Carhart was not surprised, when the third train rolled into Paradise on that following morning, to see Tiffany descending from the caboose. Between them they lost no time in completing the preparations for the journey down to Total Wreck. Of the two regular trains on the line, No. 3, southbound, was held at Paradise, and the lone passenger was carried down on Carhart's train; the northbound train, No. 4, was stopped at Dusty Bend.

Then for a time a series of remarkable scenes took place along the right of way of the Paradise Southern. Men by the hundred, all seemingly bent on destruction, swarmed over the line and tore it to pieces. Trains ran north and west laden with rusty old rails, switches, ancient cross-ties of questionable durability, with everything, as Carhart had ordered, excepting the sand and clay ballast.

"Some poor devils lost their little fortunes in the old P. S." said Tiffany, on the first morning, as the two engineers stood looking at the work of ruin. "I sort of hate to see it go."

Carhart himself went West on the first train, leaving Tiffany to carry the work through. He was satisfied that everything would from now on work smoothly at Paradise and Sherman, and he knew that not a man of those on the work would slip through Tiffany's fingers to bear tales back to civilization of the wild doings on the frontier. At Sherman they said that owing to insufficient business the P. S. trains would be discontinued for a time, and no one was surprised at the news. Far off in New York, in the Broad Street office of Daniel De Reamer, it was some time before they knew anything about it. The little world was rolling on. Men were clasping hands, buying and selling, knifing and shooting. Durfee's plans were marching forward, as his plans had a way of doing. De Reamer's mind was coiling and uncoiling in its subterranean depths. General Carrington was talking about a hunting trip into the mountains with pack-animals and good company and many, many bottles.

Yes, the world was rolling on about as usual; but the Paradise Southern was no more. Forty-five miles of grade, trampled, tie-marked; a few dismantled sheds which had once been known as stations; a lonely row of telegraph poles stretching from one bleak horizon to another; a rickety roundhouse or two: this was all that was left of a railroad: this, and a long memory of disaster, and an excited ranchman at Total Wreck who was telegraphing hotly to his lawyer.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPIRIT OF THE JOB

In order to make plain what was taking place at the main camp during Carhart's absence, we must go back to that evening during which so many things had come up to be disposed of before the chief could leave for Sherman and Crockett and Paradise. To begin with, Dimond came riding in at dusk with a canteen of clear water which he laid on the table about which the engineers were sitting. To Carhart, when he had unscrewed the cap and taken a deep draught, it tasted like Apollinaris. "First rate!" he exclaimed; "first rate!" Then he passed it to Old Van, who smacked his lips over it.

"Where did he find this?" Carhart asked.

"Eighteen or twenty miles ahead."

"Plenty of it?"

"He thinks so," he says, "but he's gone on to find more."

"Are the Apaches bothering him?"

"We've had a pop at 'em now and then. He says he hopes to have some beadwork for you when he sees you again. There was one fellow came too near one night, and Mr. Scribner hit him, but the others carried him off before we could get the beads. He sent me back to guide the wagons to the well if you want to send 'em."

"Well," said Carhart, when Dimond had gone, "we have water now, anyway. The next question is about these thieves. You say that five animals were stolen while I was away. When the first roads went through, they had regular troops to guard the work, and I don't know that we can improve on the plan. I'll look the matter up when I get to Sherman."

But an hour later, when he left his division engineer and stepped outside for a last look at "Texas," he found Charlie hanging about near the stable tent. The cook approached him, and made it awkwardly but firmly plain that he had heard a rumor to the effect that Mr. Carhart was going to Sherman for regular troops, and that, if the rumor were true, he, Charlie, would leave.

No questions were necessary, for Carhart had never thought Jack Flagg the only deserter in camp. He mused a moment; then he looked up thoughtfully at the tall, loose-jointed, but well-set-up figure of the cook. "Do you know anything about military drill and sentry duties?" he asked abruptly.

Charlie, taken aback, hesitated.

"Never mind answering. We'll say that you do. Now, if I were to put you in charge of the business, give you all the men and rifles you need, could you guarantee to guard this camp?"

Charlie's face wore a curious mixture of expressions.

"Well, speak up."

"I rather guess I could."

"I can depend on you, can I?"

"You won't get the regulars, then?"

"No, I won't get them."

"Then you can depend on me."

"I want you to get about it this morning. Mr. Gus Vandervelt will give you everything you need. Make the watches short and distribute them among a good many of the men, so that nobody will be worked too hard."

Carhart passed on, and let himself into the covered enclosure where his horse lay sick. It was a quarter of an hour before he returned to the headquarters tent, to find Vandervelt standing in silence at the table. Apparently he had risen to leave, and had paused at the sound of a step outside. Standing for a moment at the tent entrance, Carhart's eyes took on the curious expression which the sight of the elder of the oddly assorted brothers frequently aroused there. The lamplight threw upward shadows on Old Van's face and deepened the gloom about his eyes. A moment and Carhart, sobering, stepped inside. Certain memories of Old Van's strange career came floating through his thoughts. It was probably the last time they would be thrown together. Considering everything, he would not again feel like choosing him for an assistant. Yet he admired Old Van's strong qualities, and—he was sorry, very sorry.

"Van," he said, "I've changed my mind about the troops. I've told Charlie, the cook, to organize an effective system of guards at night, and I've told him, too, that he will take his orders from Gus."

Vandervelt stood motionless, looking at this man who had risen to be his chief, and his color slowly turned from bronze to red.

"From Gus, eh?" he said with a slight huskiness.

"Yes," replied Carhart, steadily, "from Gus. He will represent me while I am gone. It will be only a day or so before he'll be around."

Old Van might have answered roughly; instead he dropped his eyes. But Carhart's unpleasant duty was not yet done.

"One thing more, Van," he said, looking quietly at the older man, but unable to conceal a certain tension in his speech, "are you carrying a gun?"

There was a long silence. Every one of the faint evening camp sounds fell loud on their ears. A puff of wind shook the tent flaps and stirred the papers on the table. The lamp flickered. Very slowly, without looking up, Old Van reached back to his hip pocket, drew out a revolver, laid it on the table,—laid it, oddly enough, on a copy of the Book of Common Prayer which was acting as a paperweight, and left the tent and went off down the grade. And for some time after his footfalls had died away Carhart sat with elbows on table, chin on hands, looking at the weapon.

Paul Carhart was gone. It would probably be a week to ten days before he would be able to get back to the track-end. And with him had gone the spirit of the work, the vitality and dash which had worked out at moments through the assistants and the men in a stirring sense of achievement, which had given to each young engineer and engineer's assistant a touch of the glow of creating something, which had made this ugly scene almost beautiful. That steam-leaking locomotive and that rattle-trap of a "private car," bearing the chief away into the dawn, left a sense of depression behind it. By noon of the following day, Old Van was growing noticeably morose. By mid-afternoon every man of the thousand felt the difference. Before supper time the heat, the gloom, the loneliness of the desert, the sense of a dead pull on the work, the queer thought that there was no such place as Red Hills anywhere on the map, and that even if there were, the western extension of the Shaky and Windy would never reach it, these thoughts were preying on them, particularly on Young Van, who was up and at work soon after noon.

Through the second day it was worse. Young Van made stout efforts to throw more energy into his work, and then, in looking back on these efforts, recognized in them a confession of weakness. Paul Carhart never seemed to drive as he had been driving,—his work was always the same. In this frame of mind the young man, at evening, mounted a hummock to survey what had been accomplished during the day. But to his altered eyes the track was no longer a link in the world's girdle; it was only a thin line of dirt and wood and steel, on which a thousand dispirited men had been toiling.

Later he saw Charlie bringing the wagons into corral. He heard his brother ordering the cook sharply about, and he noted how doggedly the orders were obeyed. Then, finally, having laid out the details of the morrow's work and smoked an unresponsive cigarette or two, he went to sleep.

Old Van sat up later. And Charlie sat up later still, nearly all night in fact. He found a comfortable lounging place near Dimond's post, in the shadow of the empty train. The grade was here slightly elevated, and, lying on one elbow, he could survey the camp. Now and then he made the rounds, looking after the half-dozen sentries whom he had posted on knolls outside the wide circle of tents and wagons, making sure that there was no drinking and that his men were advised as to their duties and responsibilities. Between trips he lay back, surrounded by a number of wide-awake laborers, and listened while Dimond recited the prowess of their chief. It was very comfortable there, stretched out upon the newly turned earth. The camp was very quiet. Only a few lights twinkled here and there, and it was not very late when these went out, one by one.

"I heard Mr. Scribner telling, the other day," said Dimond, "how the boss run up against a farmer with a shotgun when he was running the line for the M. T. S. Mr. Scribner was a boy then, carrying stakes for him. There was quite a bunch of 'em, but nobody had a gun. They come out of a piece of woods on to the road, and there they see the farmer standing just inside his stump fence with the two barrels of his shotgun resting on the top of one of the stumps. Mr. Scribner says the old fellow was that excited he hollered so they could 'a' heard 'im half a mile off. 'Don't you dare cross the line of my property!' he yells. 'The first man that crosses the line of my property's a dead man!' They all stopped, Mr. Scribner says, for they didn't any of 'em feel particularly like taking in a barrel or so of buckshot. But Mr. Carhart wasn't ever very easy to stop. He just looked at the fellow a minute, and then he went right for him. 'Look out!' the man yells. 'You cross the line of my property and you're a dead man!' But Mr. Carhart went right on over the fence. 'That's all right,' says he, 'but you can't get away with more'n one or two of us, and there'll be enough left to hang you up to that tree over there.' And the next thing they knew, Mr. Scribner says, Mr. Carhart had took the shotgun right out of the farmer's hands."

Dimond had other stories. "I guess there ain't nobody ever found it easy to get around him. Once when he was a kid surveyor, before he went North, they sent him over into southern Texas to look up an old piece of property. There was a fellow claimed a lot of land that really run over on to this property. Mr. Carhart figured it out that the fellow was lying, but he knew it was going to be hard to prove it. The old marks of the corners were all gone—there wasn't a soul living who had ever seen 'em. It was an old Spanish grant, Mr. Scribner says, and the Spanish surveyors had just blazed trees to mark the lines. Well, sir, would you believe it, Mr. Carhart worked out the place where this corner ought 'o be, cut down an old cedar tree that stood there, sawed it up into lengths before witnesses, found the blaze mark all grown over with bark, and took the piece of log right into court and proved it. No, I guess it wouldn't be so infernal easy to get ahead o' Mr. Carhart."

"That's all right," observed one of the laborers, "if you're working for Mr. Carhart. But s'pose you ain't—s'pose you're workin' for Mr. Vandervelt?"

"Oh, well, of course," Dimond replied, "Mr. Vandervelt's different. He ain't nowhere near the man Mr. Carhart is."

Charlie took in this comment quietly, but with less than the usual good nature in his blue eyes.

"I don't care how decent the boss is," continued the laborer, "if I have to have a mean old he-devil cussin' at me from six to six, and half the night besides, sometimes."

Dimond grew reflective. "I know about Mr. Vandervelt," he said meditatively. "You see, boys, it was sort o' lonely up ahead there boring for water, and Mr. Scribner and me we got pretty well acquainted." Dimond was endeavoring to conceal the slight superiority over these men of which he could not but be conscious. "It's a queer case," he went on, "Mr. Vandervelt's case. I know about it. It's his temper, you see. That's what's kep' 'im back,—that's why he's only a division engineer to-day."

"Keep quiet, boys," broke in the laborer, with a sneer. "Dimond knows about it. He's tellin' us the news. Mr. Vandervelt's got a temper, he says."

Dimond was above a retort. "I can tell you," he said. "Mr. Scribner give me the facts." (In justice to Harry Scribner it should be mentioned that he had told Dimond nothing whatever concerning the personal attributes of his colleague.) "When Mr. Vandervelt gets mad, he shoots. He don't have to be drunk, neither, or in a fight, or frolicking careless with the boys. He shot a waiter in the Harper restaurant at Flemington, shot 'im right down. And then he went out into the mountains and worked for a year without ever coming near a town. And they say"—Dimond's voice lowered—"they say he shot a camp boss on the Northern, a man he used to knock around with, friendly. They say he shot him." Dimond paused, in order that his words might sink into the consciousness of each listener. "He never goes North any more. He'll never even stay at a place like Sherman for more than a day or two, and not that when he can help it."

The men were silent for a little while. Then Charlie got slowly to his feet and shook out his big frame preparatory to making his rounds. "I guess that's why Mr. Carhart told me to take my orders from his brother," he said slowly. "I was wondering." Then he stepped off in the direction of the corral.

It was three o'clock in the morning when Charlie finally stretched out for three winks. The laborers had long before rolled themselves up in their blankets. The men on guard, weary of peering into the darkness and the silence, had made themselves as nearly comfortable as they could. And it was half-past three, or near it, when a rope was cut by a stealthy hand and half a dozen sleepy, obedient mules were led out and away. Where so many animals were stirring; and where, too, lids were perhaps drooping over hitherto watchful eyes, the slight disturbance passed unobserved. At four the guards were changed, and the new day began to make itself known. At five the camp was astir; and a boy, searching in vain for his team, came upon the cut, trailing ends of rope at the outer edge of the corral.

They told Charlie, whom they found bending, red-eyed, over a steaming kettle. And the cook, with a straightforward sort of moral courage, went at once to announce his failure at guarding the camp. As luck would have it, he found the brothers Vandervelt together, at the wash basin behind their tent.

"May I speak to you, sir?" addressing the younger.

"Certainly, Charlie—What luck?" was the reply. And then, for a moment, they waited,—Young Van half glancing at his brother, Charlie summoning every ounce of this wonderful new sense of responsibility for the ordeal which he saw was to come, Old Van meaning unmistakably to take a hand in the discussion.

"We lost six mules last night, Mr. Vandervelt," said Charlie, at length, plainly addressing Young Van.

"We lost six mules, did we?" mimicked the veteran, breaking in before his brother could reply. "What do you mean by coming here with such a story, you—?" The tirade was on. Old Van applied to the cook such epithets as men did not employ at that time to any great extent on the plains. All the depression of the day before, which he had not succeeded in sleeping off, came out in a series of red-hot phrases, which, to Young Van's, and to his own still greater surprise, Charlie took. Young Van, looking every second for a blow or even for a shot, could not see that he so much as twitched a muscle. Finally Old Van paused, not because he was in any danger of running out of epithets, but because something in the attitude of both Charlie and his brother tended to clarify the situation in his mind. Gus was standing almost as squarely as Charlie, and there were signs of tension about his mouth. It was no time for the engineers to develop a conflict of authority.

When his brother had stopped talking, Young Van said shortly, "How did you come to let them get away, Charlie?"

"I fell asleep, Mr. Vandervelt,—it must have been after three this morning, and I didn't wake up until four."

"But what was the matter with your men?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out, sir. They must have been asleep, too."

"Who was on guard at that point?"

"A man named Foulk—one of the iron squad."

"Yes, I know him. He is trustworthy, I think."

"Oh, yes, sir, you can trust him, as far as having anything to do with those thieves is concerned."

"But that won't help us much if he can't keep awake a few hours. Where is he now?"

Charlie hesitated. "I—I tied him up."

"Bring him here."

Charlie went off to obey. And Old Van returned to his ablutions. A moment more and the unfortunate sentinel was being marched across to headquarters, under the guidance and the momentum of a huge red hand.

"Here he is, Mr. Vandervelt."

Young Van looked at the two. Foulk appeared honestly crestfallen. Then, "Let him go, Charlie," he said. And turning to Foulk, he merely added, "You'll get your night's sleep after this, my friend. We want no men on guard who can't be relied on—and it's evident that you can't. Now go and eat your breakfast, and get to work. See that this doesn't happen again, Charlie."

Foulk hurried off in one direction, Charlie walked away in another; Old Van disappeared within the tent in order to complete his very simple toilet; Young Van stood alone, looking after one and another of the retreating figures with an expression of something like dismay. He had spoken with more vigor and authority than he could suppose; but even such as it was, his momentary grip on the situation relaxed while he stood there. The work was not going to stop, he knew that, yet this complicated mechanism, the job, seemed to be running on without any mainspring. Speaking for himself, there was no one of the many tasks Carhart had left in his hands which he was not competent to perform, yet, viewing them in mass, they bewildered him. There would be bickerings, sliding on from bad to worse. The work would be undertaken each day in a dogged spirit, and it would have an ugly side which had not before shown itself. Earlier in the course of the undertaking there had been moments when he had thought, looking out from his own mountain range of details, that Carhart's work was not so trying as it seemed; that he had time to ride up and down the line, chatting with engineers and foremen; that he could relax almost as he chose,—run down to Sherman now and then, or even slip off for a day's shooting. Now he saw it differently. And his forebodings were realized. Everybody in authority felt the unfortunate drift of the work, and everybody felt helpless to check this drift. Attempts made now and then by individuals were worse—because they merely succeeded in drawing attention to it—than the general failure. That evening, when Scribner came back and they all tried to be jolly, was the gloomiest time in a gloomy week. Men took to deserting their work. On one occasion thirty-odd of them left in a body to join an outfit which halted overnight near the main camp—that was when they were living on "mile forty-five." Fights grew more frequent. Accidents seemed to be almost a part of the week's routine.

One day, Young Van, chancing to pass near the track-laying work, heard his brother swearing at the rider of the snap-mule that drew the rail-truck back and forth between the material train and the work. The rider was a boy of twelve. Young Van recalled, as he listened, a scene of a fortnight earlier (it seemed a year), when the boy, then new to it, had been found by Carhart, quietly sobbing on his horse. "What's the trouble, son?" the chief had inquired good-humoredly. "I'm afraid," was the lad's reply. Whereupon the chief had lifted him down, swung himself into the saddle, and, with a twinkle in his eye, had ridden a few trips in order to show the boy how to manage it safely.

At length a man was killed, one of pile-driver crew No. 1, on Old Van's division. Other men had been killed earlier in the work, but this death struck the workmen as bearing greater significance. In the other cases Carhart himself had done all that man could do; the last time he had driven the body twenty miles to a priest and decent burial. But Old Van sent out a few nerve-shaken laborers to dig a grave, and told them to waste no time about it, beyond seeing that it was well filled after—afterward.

For several nights after the trouble with Foulk Charlie did not sleep at all. But even a frontiersman is subject to Nature's laws, and the time came when he was overcome, shortly after midnight, while sitting on a box before his tent, and he rolled over and slept like a child.

They woke him at daybreak, and, without a word, handed him this rough placard:—

> Tell Mr. Carhart he'd better be carrying a gun after this. He'll need it.
>
> JACK FLAGG.

"It was stuck up on the telegraph pole," explained a sleepy-eyed sentinel.

"Where?"

"Here in camp."

A few moments later the cook, pale under his tan, stood before his half-dressed acting-chief. Again the two brothers were together.

"So this is how you watch things, is it?" said Old Van. "What did you lose for us last night?"

"The drivers are counting up now, sir. I only know of a mule and a horse so far."

“That’s all you know of, is it? I’ll tell you what to do. You go back to your quarters and see that you do no more meddling in this business. No, not a word. Go back and get your breakfast. That’s all I expect from you after this.”

Charlie looked inquiringly at Young Van, who merely said: “I want to know more about this, Charlie. Run it down, and then come to me.”

When the cook had gone, Young Van picked up the placard and read it over. He was struck by the bravado of the thing. And he wondered how much of a substratum of determination Jack Flagg’s bravado might have. This primitive animal sort of man was still new to him. He had neither Paul Carhart’s unerring instinct, nor his experience in handling men. To him the incident seemed grave. There would be chances in plenty before they reached Red Hills for even a coward to get in a shot, and a coward’s shot would be enough to bring the career of their chief to an abrupt end. He folded the dirty paper and put it into his pocket.

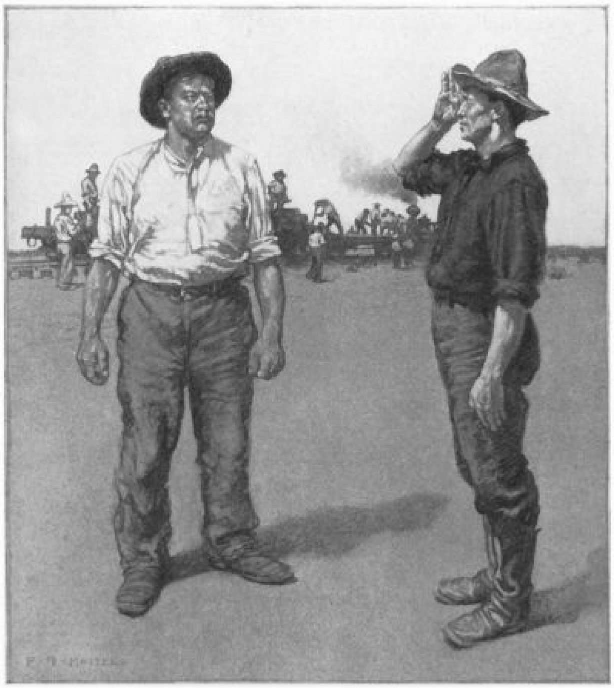
Later, with the best of intentions, he said to his brother: “You are altogether too hard on Charlie. I happen to know that he has been doing everything any man could do without a troop of regulars behind him.”

To his surprise, Old Van replied with an angry outburst: “You keep out of this, Gus! When I need your advice in running this division, I’ll ask you for it.”

Twenty minutes later, when they were rising from breakfast, Charlie appeared, leading with an iron grip a dissolute-looking plainsman, and carrying a revolver in his other hand.

“Hello!” cried Young Van. “What’s this? What are you doing with that gun?”

“I took it away from this man. He was hiding out there behind a pile of bones. I reckon he was trying to get away when his horse went lame and the daylight caught him.”



“‘You go back to your quarters.’”

“What has he to say for himself?”

“It’s a —— lie!” growled the stranger. “I was riding in to ask for a job, an’ I hadn’t more’n set down to rest—”

“You ride by night, eh?”

“Well—” the stranger hesitated—“not gen’ally. But I was so near—”

“Here, here!” cried Old Van. “What’s all this talk about? I guess you know what to do with him. Get about it.”

“What do you mean by that?” cried Young Van, flushing.

“What do I mean by it? What is generally done with horse thieves?”

The stranger blanched. “You call me a—”

But Young Van checked him. “We don’t know that he is a horse thief.”

“I do, and that’s enough. Charlie, take him off, and make a clean job of it.”

“Charlie,” cried Young Van, “stay where you are!” He turned hotly on his brother. “The worst we have any reason to believe about this man is that he put up that placard.”

“Well, doesn’t that prove him one of the gang?”

“We have no proof of anything.”

“You keep out of this, Gus! Charlie, do as I tell you.”

Charlie hesitated, and looked inquiringly at the younger engineer. This drove Old Van beyond reason. He suddenly snatched the revolver from the cook, shouting angrily: “If you won’t obey orders, I’ll see to it myself!”

But Young Van, with a quick movement, gripped the weapon, bent it back out of his brother’s grasp, snapped it open, ejected the cartridges, and silently returned it. Old Van held it in his hand and looked at it, then at the five cartridges, where they had fallen on the ground. Then, with an expression his brother had never before seen on his face, he let the weapon fall on the ground among the cartridges, and walked away to the headquarters tent.

“Charlie,” said Young Van, “keep this man safe until the sheriff comes back.”

“All right, sir,” Charlie replied.

The cook turned away with his prisoner, and Young Van’s eyes sought the ground. He had almost come to blows with his brother, and that before the men, about the worst thing that could have taken place. The incident seemed the natural culmination of these days of depression and pulling at odds.

“It looks like the sheriff coming in now, sir.”

Young Van started and looked up. Charlie, still grasping the stranger, was pointing down the track, where a troop of horsemen could be seen approaching. They drew rapidly nearer, and soon the two leaders could be distinguished. One was unmistakably Bowlegged Bill Lane. The other was a slender man, hatless, with rumpled hair, and a white handkerchief bound around his forehead. Young Van walked out to meet them, and saw, with astonishment, that the hatless rider was Paul Carhart; and never had face of man or woman been more welcome to his eyes.

The troop reined up, dismounted, and mopped their sweating faces. Their horses stood damp and trembling with exhaustion. All together, the little band bore witness of desperate riding, and to judge from certain signs, of fighting.

“Well, Gus,” said Carhart, cheerily, “how is everything?”

But Young Van was staring at the bandage. “Where have you been?” he cried.

“Chasing Jack Flagg.”

“But they hit you!”

“Only grazed. If it hadn’t been dark, we should have got him.”

“But how in—”

The chief smiled. “How did I get here?” he said, completing the question. “The train was stalled last night only a dozen or fifteen miles back. The tender of that model of 1865 locomotive they gave us went off the track, and the engine got in the same fix trying to put it on again. When I left, they were waiting for the other train behind to come up and help. They ought to be along any time this morning. Where’s your brother?”

Young Van had turned to look at a group of three or four prisoners, whom two of the posse were guarding.

“Where’s your brother?” Carhart asked again.

“My brother! Oh, back at the tent, I guess.”

The chief gave him a curious glance, for the young engineer was flushing oddly. “Tell him to wait a minute for me, will you? I want to see you both before the work starts.”

Young Van walked over to the headquarters tent and stood a moment at the entrance. His brother, seated at the table, heard him, but did not look up.

“Mr. Carhart is back,” said the young man, finally. “He asked me to tell you to wait for him.”

Old Van gave not the slightest indication that he had heard, but he waited. When the chief entered, motioning Young Van to join him, he went briskly at what he had to say. He sat erect and energetic, apparently unconscious of the red stain on his bandage, ignoring the fact that he had as yet eaten no breakfast; and at his first words the blood began to flow again through the arteries of this complicated organization that men called the Red Hills extension of the S. & W.

“Now, boys,” he began, “it was rather a slow ride back from Sherman, and I had time for a little arithmetic. Through our friend Peet—”

“D—n him!” interrupted Old Van.

The chief paused at this for another of his questioning glances, then went quietly on. “Through our friend Peet, we have lost so much time that it isn’t very cheerful business figuring it up. But we aren’t going to lose any more.”

“Oh! you saw Peet!” said Young Van.

“Yes, I saw him. We won’t bother over this lost time. What we are interested in now is carrying through our schedule. And I needn’t tell you that from this moment we must work together as prettily as a well-oiled engine.” He said this significantly, and paused. Of the two men before him, the younger flushed again and lowered his eyes, the elder looked away and muttered something which could not be understood. “I’m bringing up a hundred-odd more men on this train. When they get in, put them right at work. Is Dimond in camp now?”

“Yes.”

“We’ll send him up to take charge of the well business. He can do it, now that it is so well started. We need Scribner.”

“How much must we do a day now, to make it?” asked Young Van.

“We shall average as near as possible to two miles.”

Young Van whistled, then recovered himself. “All right, Mr. Carhart,” he said. “Two miles is good. Beginning to-day, I suppose?”

“Beginning to-day.”

The chief spent very little time on himself. He was soon out and riding along the grade, showing no nervousness, yet making it plain to every man on the job that he meant to give an exhibition of “the fanciest track-laying ever seen in these United States.” That was the way Young Van, in the exuberance of his new-found spirits, expressed it to the foreman of the iron squad.

But even Young Van’s enthusiasm was not equal to the facts. When the night whistle blew, and the dripping workmen dropped their picks and sledges, and rails, and ties, and reins, and sat down to breathe before washing up for supper,—there was water for washing now,—the conductor of the material train called to Young Van, and waved toward a stake beside the track. “See that stick,” he shouted.

“Yes, I see it.”

“Well, sir,”—the conductor was excited too,—“I’ve been setting up one of those things for every time we moved ahead a train length. My train’s a little over a thousand foot long, and—and how many of those sticks do you suppose I’ve set up since morning? Give a guess now!”

“I should say eight or ten. We’ve been getting over the ground pretty rapidly.”

“No, sir! No, sir! Fifteen there were, fifteen of ’em!”

“Fifteen thousand feet—three miles!” The young man stood a moment, then turned and walked soberly away.

It was early the next morning that Young Van recalled Jack Flagg’s communication, which he still had in his pocket. He saw that the chief was about starting off for his breakfast, and called him back and gave him the paper. Carhart read it, smiled rather contemptuously, and handed it back.

“That man,” he said, “was just about big enough to stir up a little trouble in the camp. I’m glad we’re through with him.”

“I wish I was sure we were,” replied Young Van.

“Hello! you’re right, Gus. Here he is again.”

Charlie was approaching with another dirty paper in his hand. “I didn’t think anybody could get in last night, Mr. Carhart,” he said ruefully, “but—here is what they left.”

The chief took this second paper and read it aloud:—

> My dear Mr. Carhart: My shooting’s getting bum. Better luck next time.
>
> Jack Flagg.

“Flagg ought to be on the stage,” he said when he had tossed the paper away. “He is the sort of man that can’t get along without an audience.”

CHAPTER VIII

SHOTS—AND A SCOUTING PARTY

It was early evening. Gus Vandervelt, nervous, exultant, leaving a trail of cigarette stubs behind him, was pacing up and down the track. When he faced the east, his eyes saw far beyond the cars and wagons and clustering tents. Off there, in each mile of the many they had travelled, lay a witness of some battle won. They had fought like soldiers; and the small successes had come rapidly until the men were beginning to take victory as a matter of course. The most stupid of them understood now just what sort of thing the reserved, magnetic Paul Carhart stood for, and they were finding it a very good sort of thing indeed.

As Young Van walked, his imagination leaping forward from battles fought to the battles to come, he heard a step, and saw the stocky figure of his brother approaching through the dusk. He stiffened up and paused, but Old Van marched by without the twitch of a muscle. The young man watched him until he had faded out of sight, then lighted another cigarette, and continued his beat.

A little later, smiling in a nervous way he had of late, Young Van turned toward the headquarters tent. He knew that his brother had gone to make up the material train and would not return for some time.

He found Paul Carhart sitting alone, sewing a button on the yellow linen trousers.

"Did you see any more drunks?" Carhart asked, pausing, needle in air.

Young Van, now that he thought of it, had observed signs of unusual good feeling among the laborers.

"We're a little too near this Palos settlement to suit me," said the chief. "Keeping your men in the desert rather spoils one for the advantages of civilization. I never had an easier time with laborers. But these men are a bad lot to bring within five miles of a saloon. They will be fighting before morning."

"I suppose they will. I hadn't thought of it. By the way, there's a rumor about that you had a letter from Mr. Flint to-day."

Carhart shook his head. "No," said he, "that's the thing I want most just now."

For a while they were silent. Young Van's face grew sober. The track, this double line of rusty steel, had so absorbed the energy of all of them that it seemed now, to his inexperience, the complete outward expression of their lives. He could think of little else. When not engrossed by the actual work, his thoughts were ranging beyond, far into the deeper significance of it. Crowding on the heels of the constructors would come settlers. Already mushroom towns were pushing up along the line behind them. With settlers would come well-boring, irrigation, farming, and ranching. Timber, bricks, stone would be rushed into these new lands, to be converted into hotels, shops, banks, dwellings. The marvellously intricate interrelations of civilization would suddenly be found existing and at work. There would be rude, hard struggles, much drinking and gambling, and some shooting. The license of the plains would be found strangely mingled with law and with what we call right. The church and the saloon would march on, side by side. And, finally, out of the uproar and the fighting would rise, for better or worse, a new phase of life. Thinking these things, Young Van could not forget that they five—Paul Carhart, John Flint, Old Van, Harry Scribner, and himself—were bringing it about. They were breaking the way, pioneers of the expansion of a restless, mighty people.

"No,"—Carhart was speaking,—"that letter was from Peet. You might enjoy reading it."

Young Van started from his revery, took the letter, and spread it open. "My dear Mr. Carhart," it ran, "I am very sorry, indeed, about the delay of that lot of spikes. I have arranged with Mr. Tiffany to buy up all we can find here in Sherman and hurry them on to you. Please keep me informed by wire of any delays and inconveniences. You will understand, I am sure, that we mean to stop at nothing to keep you from the slightest annoyance and delay in these matters. Very faithfully yours, L. W. Peet."

"But we have spikes enough," said the assistant, looking up. "What does he mean?"

Carhart smiled. "Just what he says; that he wouldn't delay us for worlds."

"'Very faithfully yours,' too. What is all this, Mr. Carhart? What have you done to him—hypnotized him?"

Carhart smiled. "Hardly," he replied; adding, "Reach me that spool of thread, will you?" But instead of continuing his needlework, Carhart, when he received the spool, laid it down beside him and sat, deep in thought, gazing out through the tent-opening into the night.

"Gus," he asked abruptly, "where did the operator go?"

Young Van glanced up at his chief, then answered quietly: "To bed, I think. I heard him say he was going to turn in early to-night."

"Would you mind stirring him out?"

"Certainly not."

"Wait a minute. We have enough firewood on hand to keep the engines going six or perhaps eight days. That won't do."

Young Van was slightly puzzled.

"Go ahead, Gus. Tell him to meet me at his instrument in ten minutes."

Young Van left the tent at once. When he returned, after rousing the sleepy operator, he observed that the chief was still deep in thought. "All right," said Young Van; "he's getting up."

"Much obliged, Gus." Carhart started to resume his mending, then lowered his needle. "And all for the want of a horseshoe nail," he hummed softly.

Young Van, more puzzled than before, looked up from a heap of papers which had drawn his attention. Carhart smiled a little.

"You remember?" he said,—

> "For the want of a nail the shoe was lost;
> For the want of the shoe the horse was lost;

For the want of the horse the rider was lost;
For the want of the rider the battle was lost;
And all—"

He stopped and looked out. A partly clad figure was hurrying by toward the shelter that covered the telegraph instruments.

"There he goes now. I'm a little bothered, Gus. It would be a humorous sort of a joke on me if I should be held up now for a little firewood."

"I suppose we couldn't cut up ties?" suggested Young Van.

"Can't spare 'em. I've ordered wood from Red Hills, but we shan't be able to pick up enough there. And if we don't get some pretty soon, the engines will have to stop."

Young Van took down a letter file and glanced through it. In a moment he had drawn out a recent message from Peet. "Here," he said, "Mr. Peet promised to have a big lot of wood on the way by to-day. That leaves some margin for delays."

Carhart rose, and nodded. "Yes," he replied, "but not margin enough."

"You expect something to happen right off?"

"Couldn't say to that. But my bones feel queer to-night—have felt queer all day. Tiffany writes that Bourke, who is in charge of the H. D. & W. construction, was in Sherman the other day. And Commodore Durfee was expected at Red Hills a week ago. Well,—" He shrugged his shoulders and went out and over to join the operator.

"We'll try to get the man on the next division," said Carhart. "Ask him if the line is clear all the way."

The operator extended his hand to send the message, but checked it in midair. "Why," he exclaimed, "he is calling us!" He looked up prepared to see surprise equal to his own on Carhart's face. But what he did see there mystified him. The chief was slowly nodding. He could not say that he had expected this call,—the thing was a coincidence,—and yet he was not at all surprised.

"'Trouble on Barker Hills division—'" The operator was repeating as the instrument clicked.

"That's a hundred miles or so back—"

"Hundred and thirty-eight. 'Operator on middle division,' he says, 'wires fifty men trying to seize station—has notified Sherman—assistance promised. Big armed force Barker Hills led by large man with red mustache—'"

"That's Bourke himself," muttered Carhart.

The operator's hand shook a little. His eyes were shining. "Here's some more, Mr. Carhart,—'Have tried to hold my station, but—'"

"Wait," cried the chief, sharply. "Quick—say this: 'Has supply train passed west to-day?'"

"'Has—supply—train—'" the operator repeated after a moment—"'passed—west-to-day?'"

"Now what does he answer?"

"Just a moment—Here he is!—'Not—not—' Hold on there, what's the matter?"

"Has he stopped?"

"Stopped short. That's queer."

"Do you think so?" said Carhart, looking down into the white face of the operator. The effect of the young man's excitement was hardly lessened by the shock of rumpled hair about his forehead and by the white collar of a nightgown which appeared above his hastily buttoned coat.

"You mean—?"

"Wait a little longer." For several minutes they were silent, the operator leaning his elbows on the table, Carhart bending over him. Then, "Try him again," said Carhart.

The operator obeyed. There was no response. Carhart drew up an empty cracker box and sat down. Twenty minutes passed.

"Click—clickety—click—click," said the instrument. The operator, in a husky voice, translated the message as it came in: "'P. Carhart, chief west'n ext. S. & W.: On receipt of this you will stop all construction work until further instructions, by order of Vice-Pres. Chambers—H. L. Tiffany.'"

"That's funny!" said the operator.

Carhart did not seem to hear the exclamation. He was frowning slightly, and his lips were moving. At length he said, "Take this:—

"To C. O'F. Bourke,

Barker Hills Station:—

"Have another try, old chap. You haven't quite caught Hen Tiffany's style yet.

“P. Carhart.”

The operator laughed softly and nervously as his deft fingers transmitted this personal communication.

“Got it all through?” asked the chief.

“Yes, sir; all through.”

“All right, then, go back to bed. Good night.”

“Good night, Mr. Carhart.”

For several days now no word had come through from Flint, on “mile 109.” But twenty hours after the trouble at Barker Hills—just before supper time of the following day—a party of plainsmen came galloping into camp. One of these, a wizened little man with a kindly smile and shrewd eyes, dismounted before the headquarters tent and peered in between the flaps. “Mr. Carhart here?”

“He will be in two minutes,” replied Young Van, rising from the table. “Come in, sir!”

“Your Mr. Flint asked me to hand him this.” The wizened one produced a letter, and dropped into the chair which Young Van had brought forward. “Having quite a time up there, isn’t he?”

“How so?” asked Young Van. It was well to speak guardedly.

“Oh, he’s in it, deep,” was the reply. “Commodore Durfee’s at the Frisco Hotel in Red Hills. They say he came out over the ‘Wobbly’ on a construction train and rode through. Pretty spry yet, the Old Commodore. He’s hired a bad man named Flagg—Jack Flagg—and sent him out with a hundred or so men to seize your bridge at La Paz. Sorry I couldn’t stay there to see the excitement, but I’m hurrying east. Mr. Flint thought maybe I could pick up one of your trains running back to Sherman. If I can’t do that, I’ll strike off south for Pierrepont, and get through that way.”

Young Van hesitated, and was about to reply, when he heard the chief approaching.

Carhart came in from the rear, nodded to the stranger, and picked up the envelope. “You brought this, sir?” he asked.

“Yes; Mr. Flint asked me to.”

Very deliberately Carhart read the letter, and, without the slightest change of expression, tossed it on the table. “You must have supper with us,” he said. “If you stopped with John Flint you perhaps know how little an engineer’s hospitality amounts to, but such as we have we shall be very glad to share with you.”

“Thank you,” replied the stranger.

“You are a ranchman, I presume?” Carhart went on.

“Yes—in northwest of Red Hills. I go to Sherman every year.”

Young Van spoke, “He thought of taking one of our trains through.”

Carhart smiled dryly. “I should be greatly obliged to you, sir, if you could take a train through,” he said. “That’s something we don’t seem able to do.”

The wizened one glanced up with a keen expression about his eyes. “Having trouble back along the line?” he asked.

“You might call it trouble. My old friend Bourke, of the H. D. & W., has cut in behind us with a small army.” He gave a little shrug. “I can’t get through. I can’t get either way now that they’ve got in between Flint and Red Hills.”

“Then I’d better ride down to Pierrepont, hadn’t I?”

“I’m afraid that’s the best that I can suggest, sir.”

“You people certainly seem to be playing in hard luck, Mr. Carhart.” As the wizened one ventured this observation he crossed his legs and thrust his hands into his pockets. The action caused his coat to fall back, and disclosed a small gold pendant hanging from his watch guard. Young Van observed it, and glanced at Carhart, but he could not tell whether the chief had taken it in.

“It’s worse than hard luck,” Carhart replied; “it begins to look like defeat. We have been dependent on the Sherman people for material, food, water,—everything. Now Bourke has shut us off.”

“But you seem to have plenty of material here, Mr. Carhart.”

“Rails—yes. But it takes more than rails.”

“And you surely have a large enough force.”

“Yes, but moving several hundred men back a hundred and forty miles, fighting it out with Bourke, clearing the track, and getting trains through from Sherman, will take time. Long before we can make any headway, the H. D. & W. will have beaten us into Red Hills.”

“Ah—I see,” nodded the wizened one. “You’re going back after Bourke.”

“What else can I do! I can’t even wire Sherman without sending a man two hundred miles through the desert. The most important thing to my employers is to maintain possession of the line.”

“Of course—I see. I don’t know much about these things myself.”

After supper the wizened one announced that he must ride on with his party.

“You won’t stop with us to-night?” asked Carhart.

“No, thanks. It’ll be light an hour or two yet. I’ve got to move fast. I’ll lose a good deal, you see, going around by way of Pierrepont.”

“That’s so, of course. Well, good-by, sir.”

“Good-by.”

The riders swung into their saddles and cantered off eastward. Carhart turned to Young Van and slowly winked. “Come up to headquarters, Gus,” he said. “I’ve got some work for you.”

“I rather guess you have, if we’re going after Bourke.”

“After Bourke?” Carhart smiled. “You didn’t take that in, Gus?”

“Well—of course, I suspected.”

“You saw his badge?”

“Yes.”

“Bourke always has a lot of men about him from his own college.”

“You really think it, then?”

“It would be hard to say what I think. But I’ve been going on the assumption that he is one of Bourke’s engineers.”

They were approaching the headquarters tent. Young Van looked up and saw that “Arizona,” Carhart’s new saddle-horse, was hitched before it. They entered the tent, and the first thing the chief did was to get out two long blue-nosed revolvers and slip them into his holsters. A moment later, and Dimond, fitted out for a long ride, appeared at the entrance, saying, “All ready, Mr. Carhart!”

“Now, Gus,” said the chief, “I’m off for ‘mile 109.’ I want you to get about two hundred men together and send them after me to-night or to-morrow morning. I’ll tell Scribner, as I pass him, to have fifty more for you. Every man must have a rifle and plenty of ball cartridges. Send Byers”—this was the instrument man of the long nose—“and two or three others whom you think capable of commanding forty or fifty men each.”

“And Bourke?”

“We’ll leave him to Mr. Chambers. Give Charlie instructions to strengthen his night guard. Some men will be sent back to guard the second and third wells.”

Young Van involuntarily passed his hand across his eyes.

“I’m afraid I’m not much good,” he said slowly. “I didn’t grasp this situation very well. It’s rather a new phase of engineering for me. We seem to be plunging all of a sudden into tactics and strategy.”

“That’s about the size of it, Gus,” the chief responded. He had exchanged his old straw hat for a sombrero. His spurs jingled as he moved. There was a sparkle in his eye and a new sort of military alertness about his figure. He paused at the tent entrance, and looked back. “That’s about the size of it, Gus,” he repeated with a half smile. “And I’m afraid I rather like it.”

“Well, good-by. I’ll start the men right along after you.”

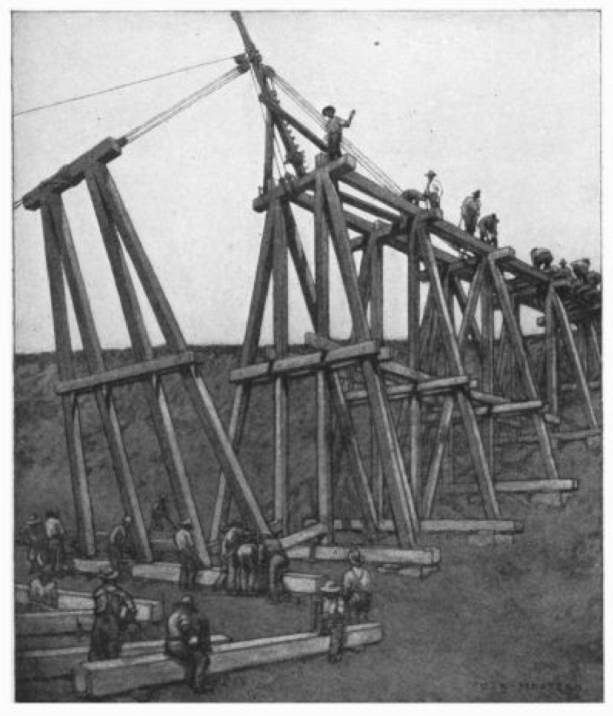
Carhart mounted his horse, Dimond followed his example, and the two rode away in the direction of the La Paz bridge. And ten hours later, at five in the morning, a line of armed horsemen—a long-nosed young man with the light of a pirate soul in his eyes riding at the head, an athletic pile-inspector and a college-bred rodman bringing up the rear—rode westward after him.

Troubles had been coming other than singly on “mile 109.” Jack Flagg, with a force which, while smaller than Flint’s, was made up of well-armed and well-paid desperadoes, had seized the ridge which shut in the La Paz Valley on the west, had pitched camp, erected rude intrenchments of loose stone, and stopped for the moment all work on the mile-long trestle. So much John Flint had set down in the note which the wizened one had delivered to Carhart. The next adventure befell on the night after the departure of the wizened one; and it brought out the ugly strain in the opera bouffe business of these wild railroading days.

Antonio, the watchman, sat on the edge of the eastern abutment and dangled his feet. He was so drowsy that he even stopped rolling cigarettes. He had chosen a comfortable seat, where a pile of timbers afforded a rest for his back. To be sure, there was the possibility of rolling off into the water and sand if he should really fall asleep; but elsewhere he would be exposed to the searching eyes of the engineer in charge, and those eyes were very searching indeed. He was thinking, in a dreamy way, of what he would do on the Sunday, with his week’s pay in his pocket and the village of La Paz but twelve miles away.

Now and again his complacent eyes roved out across the river, which slipped by with such a gentle, swishing murmur. He could look over the tops of the four unfinished piers and the western abutment and see the trestle where it was continued on the farther side. These Americanos, what driving devils they were! And when they had built their railroad, what were they going to do with it? To go fast—Antonio shrugged his shoulders and resumed the cigarettes—it is very well, but to what purpose? When they have rushed madly across the continent, what will they find there? Perhaps they will then rush back again. These Americanos!

He let his eyes rest upon the row of piers—one, two, three, four of them. What labor they had caused—how the men had sweat, and muttered, and toiled—how the foremen had cursed! Four piers of masonry rising out of the ghostly river. Very strong they must be, for the La Paz was not always gentle. In the spring and fall it was savage; and then it had an ugly way of undermining bridges, as those other foolish Americanos had learned to their cost when they built the wagon bridge at La Paz. He smiled lazily. But suddenly he sat up straight. A long thin figure of a man was moving about among the piles of timber. It was the señor Flint—and such a prowler as he was, day and night, night and day. He lived this bridge, did the señor; he thought it, he ate it, he drank it, he talked it, he slept it,—and for why? It could not be that he believed it living to think and breathe bridge and only bridge. It could not be that man was made for this—to become a slave to this trestle structure which was slowly crawling, like some monster centipede, across the sands of the La Paz. It was very good for the trestle perhaps, and the bridge, but was it so good for the señor?



"... this trestle structure which was slowly crawling, like some monster centipede, across the sands of the La Paz."

Antonio smiled again, and settled back; the señor was passing on. He was getting into a boat. He was poling across the languid, dimpling river. He was getting out on the farther bank; he was walking up the long slope, keeping out of the moonlight in the shadow of the trestle-thing; he was peering up toward the embattled ridge beyond, where lay the redoubtable Flagg.

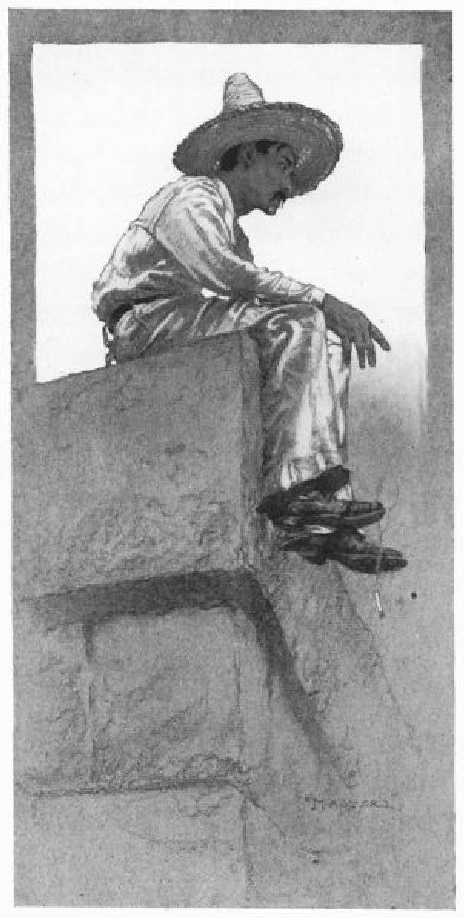
... The cigarette dropped from Antonio's unnerved fingers, and fell with a sizzling splash into the water below. He drew an involuntary quick breath, and the smoke in his nostrils went unexpectedly into his throat and made him cough. Then trembling a little, he got slowly to his feet and stood staring out there over the serene surface of the river. He rubbed his eyes and stared again. A shot,—two shots,—which was right? Two—no, one! And that insignificant little dark heap yonder in the moonlight—was that the señor? What a trouble!—and he had been so comfortable there on the abutment!

Antonio was frightened. He thought of running away from these fate-tempting Americans; but in that case he would lose his pay and those Sundays at La Paz. He waited a while. Perhaps he was dreaming and would make himself ridiculous. He walked about, and tried different points of view. And at last he went to rouse his foreman.

They got Flint in—Haddon, in night-shirt, bare legs, and shoes with flapping strings to them; the foreman of the pile-driver crew in night-shirt and hat, and two big-shouldered bridgemen. There was a ball somewhere in Flint, and there were certain complications along the line of his chronic ailment, so that his usefulness was, so to speak, impaired. And Haddon, during what was left of the night and during all of the following day, had distinctly a bad time of it.

While these things were going on, Paul Carhart was riding westward at a hot gallop with Dimond close behind. It was shortly after sunset that he reined up on the crest of the eastern ridge and looked out over the La Paz. The barren valley was flooded with light. The yellow slopes were delicately tinted rose and violet, the rock pillars stood out black and sharply defined, the western hills formed a royal purple barrier to the streams of color; and through this glowing scene extended the square-jointed trestle, unmistakably the work of man where all else was from another hand. Never in the progress of this undertaking which we have been following across the plains had the contrast been so marked between the patient beauty of the old land and the uncompromising ugliness of the structure which Paul Carhart was carrying into and through it. And yet the chief,—an intelligent, educated man, not wanting in feeling for the finer side of life,—though he took in the wonders of the sunset, looked last and longest at the trestle and the uncompleted bridge. Then he rode down, glancing, in his quizzical way, at the camp, which had been moved back behind a knoll, at the piles of stone and timber, at the corral, and at the groups of idle, gloomy workmen.

Fortunately the chief was prepared for surprises. News that the trestle had been burned to the ground would have drawn no more than a glance and a nod from him. His mind had not been idle during the ride. He knew that the strongest defence partakes of an offensive character, and he had no notion of sitting back to await developments. Of several sets of plans which he had been considering, one was so plainly the simplest and best that he was determined to try it. It involved a single daring act, a sort of raid, which it would be necessary to carry through without a vestige of legal authority. But this feature of it disturbed him very much less than a mere casual acquaintance with this quiet gentleman might have led one to suppose. Perhaps he had, like the red-blooded Tiffany, a vein of “Scotch-Irish” down in the depths of his nature which could on occasion be opened up.



“The cigarette dropped from Antonio’s unnerved fingers.”

After looking out for the comfort of John Flint, and after conferring with Haddon and going thoroughly over the ground, Carhart sent for Dimond.

“How much more are you good for?” he asked.

Dimond grinned. “For everything that’s going,” he replied.

“Good. Do you know where the H. D. & W. is building down, a dozen or fifteen miles north of here?”

“I guess I can find it,” said Dimond.

And with a fresh horse and a man or two, and with certain specific instructions, Dimond rode north shortly after nightfall of that same day. At eight in the morning he was back, hollow-eyed but happy. And Paul Carhart, when Dimond had reported, was seen to smile quietly to himself.

CHAPTER IX
A SHOW-DOWN

All was quiet at the main camp. Excepting that the division engineers were short-handed, and that Paul Carhart was away, things were going on with some regularity. Scribner rode in late on the second afternoon, and toward the end of the evening, when the office work was done, he and Young Van played a few rubbers of cribbage. The camp went to sleep as usual.

At some time between eleven o'clock and midnight the two young engineers tacitly put up the cards and settled back for a smoke.

“Do you know,” said Young Van, after a silence, “I don't believe this stuff at all.”

Scribner tipped back, put his feet on the table, puffed a moment, and slowly nodded. “Same here, Gus,” he replied. “Fairy tales, all of it.”

“You can't settle the ownership of a railroad by civil war.”

“No; but if you can get possession by a five-barrelled bluff, you can give the other fellow a devil of a time getting it back.”

“That's true, of course.” They were silent again.

... “What's that!” said Scribner. Both dropped their feet and sat up.

“Horse,” said Young Van.

“Devil of a way off.”

“Must be. Lost it now.”

“No—there it is again. Now, what do you suppose?”

“Don't know. Let's step out and look around.”

Standing on the sloping ground in front of the tent, they could at first distinguish nothing.

“Gives you a queer feeling,” said Scribner, “horse galloping—this time of night—”

”—just now,” Young Van completed, “when things are going on.”

“Coming from the east, too,—where Bourke is. Know him?”

“No—never met him. Heard of him, of course.”

“He's a good one. Wish he was on our side.”

“I guess Mr. Carhart can match him.”

Scribner nodded. “This sort of a fight's likely to settle down into the plain question of who's got the cards. There'll come a time when both sides'll have to lay down their hands, and the cards'll make the difference one way or the other. Just a show-down, after all.”

“I think myself Mr. Carhart's got the cards. He didn't look like a loser when he went off the other night.”

“If he has,” said Scribner, “you can bet he'll ‘see’ Durfee and Bourke every time.”

... “Here's that horse, Harry.”

“Big man—looks like—”

“It's Tiffany.—Good evening, Mr. Tiffany.”

“How are you, boys? Paul here?”

“Why, no, Mr. Tiffany. He's up on ‘mile 109.’”

“‘Mile 109!’” Tiffany whistled. “What the devil! You don't mean that those—” he paused.

“Commodore Durfee's at Red Hills, you know,” said Young Van.

“The —— he is!”

“And he's sent a force to hold the west bank of the La Paz.”

By this time the chief engineer of the S. & W. had got his big frame to the ground. He bore unmistakable evidences of long and hard riding. Even in that dim light they could see that his face was seamed with the marks of exhaustion.

“Haven't got a wee bit drappie, have you?” he asked.

“I certainly have,” Young Van replied. “Come right in.”

Tiffany tossed his hat on the table, reached out for the flask and tumbler, and tossed down a drink which would have done credit to the hardiest Highlander of them all. “Now show me the stable,” he said. “Want to fix my horse for the night. I've half killed him.”

A quarter of an hour later the three men were back in the headquarters tent.

“How did you get through, Mr. Tiffany?” asked Young Van.

“Came out on the first train to Barker Hills. Bourke’s holding the station there. He had a couple of our engines, and was working east, but we stopped that. Peet’s there now with Sheriff McGraw and a bundle of warrants and a hundred and fifty men—more, I guess, by this time. Just another thimbleful o’ that— Thanks! We’ve got Bourke blocked at Barker Hills, all right. Before the week’s out we’ll have the track opened proper for you. Mr. De Reamer’s taken hold himself, you know. He’s at Sherman, with some big lawyers—and maybe he ain’t mad all through!”

“Then Commodore Durfee hasn’t got the board of directors?”

“Not by a good deal! I doubt if even General Carrington’s votes would swing it for him now. But then, I don’t know such a heap about that part of it. I was telling you—I’ll take a nip o’ that. Thanks!—I was telling you. We come along the Middle Division, running slow,—we were afraid of obstructions on the track,—”

“Did you find any?”

“Did we find any?—Well I guess.” He held out a pair of big hands, palms up. “I got those splinters handling cross-ties in the dark. And about the middle of the Barker Hills division—at the foot of Crump’s Hill,—we found some rails missing.

“Well, sir, I left ’em there to fix it up—we had a repair car in the train—and got my horse off and rode around south of the station. Had some sandwiches in my pocket, but didn’t get a drop of water till I struck your first well, last night. You ain’t using that now?”

“No, we’ve moved up to two and three—this way.”

“There was a blamed fool tried to stop me, a mile south of Barker Hills Station—yelled at me; and fired when I didn’t answer.”— Tiffany paused with this, and looked grimly from one to the other of the young men. Then he drew a big revolver from his belt, opened it, and exhibited the cylinder. One chamber was empty. They were silent for a time.

“You’ll find Mr. Carhart’s cot all ready for you, Mr. Tiffany,” said Young Van, at length.

“All right. Can I get a breakfast at five? I’m going on to find Paul. That’s where the fun’ll be—where you find Paul Carhart. I wonder if you boys know what it means to have the opportunity to work with that man—eh? He had us all guessing about the old Paradise. And he was right—oh, he was right. There hasn’t a rail come through since.”

Scribner and Young Van were looking at each other. “Then those rails didn’t come from Pennsylvania?” said the former.

“He didn’t tell you, eh?” Tiffany grinned. “Well, I guess it ain’t a secret now. Mr. Chambers never even grunted when I told him, but he looked queer. And Mr. De Reamer ain’t said anything yet. Why, Paul, he see first off that we weren’t ever going to get the rest o’ those rails. He see, too, that Bourke was going to cut him off if he could. And what does he do? Why he comes down and walks off with the old Paradise Southern—rails, ties, everything. He never even tells Peet and me. It’s up to him, he thinks, and if he makes good, nobody can kick.” Tiffany was grinning again. “Yes, sir,” he continued, “Paul Carhart just naturally confiscated the Paradise Southern, and it was the prettiest job anybody ever see. And it’s funny—he says to me, while we were out there at Total Wreck pulling up the freight yard by the roots, ‘Tiffany,’ he says, ‘if you hadn’t told about how you stole those Almighty and Great Windy cars from the sheriff of Erie County, I’d never ‘a’ thought of it.’ Well, I’ll turn in, boys; good night.”

“Good night,” said Young Van.

“Good night,” said Scribner; “I’ll ride on with you as far as my division to-morrow, Mr. Tiffany. I can give you a fresh horse there.”

The chief engineer of the S. & W. disappeared between the flaps of Carhart’s tent. They could hear him throwing off his clothes and getting into bed. Another moment and they heard him snoring. They stood gazing off down the grade.

“Well, what do you think of that?” said Scribner. Young Van looked at his companion. “I think this,” he replied: “I wouldn’t miss this work and this fight under Paul Carhart for five years’ pay.”

Scribner nodded. “The loss of an engineer’s pay, Gus, wouldn’t make much difference one way or the other,” he replied, and his face lighted up with enthusiasm. “But it’s a great game!”

And so it was that something like two days after Carhart’s arrival on “mile 109,” Tiffany, a little the worse for wear, but still able to ride and eat and sleep and swear, came slowly down the slope into the camp, where Flint was hovering midway between the present and the hereafter. He found the chief of construction deep in a somewhat complicated problem, and after a bite to eat he climbed up the ridge behind the camp to the tent which Carhart was occupying.

“Well, Paul, how goes it?” said he.

“First-rate. How much do you know?”

“Precious little.”

Carhart mused a moment, then pulled out from a heap of papers one on which he had sketched a map. “Here we are,” said he. “The trestle is fifty to a hundred and fifty feet high, from ridge to ridge. Flagg has strung out his men along the west ridge, about a mile from here, and across the end of the trestle.”

“Yes, yes,” broke in Tiffany, “I see. I’ve been all over this ground.”

“Well, now, you see these two knolls on the west ridge, a little back of Flagg’s position? The one to the north is a hundred and twenty feet higher than Flagg’s men; the one to the south is eighty feet higher and only a quarter of a mile away from him. His line of retreat lies through the hollow between the two knolls, where the track is to run. Now if I put fifty or a hundred men on each knoll, I can command his position, and even shut off his retreat. His choice then would lie between moving north or south along the crest of the ridge, which is also commanded by the two knolls, or coming down the slope toward us.”

“Flagg hasn’t occupied the knolls, eh?”

“I believe he hasn’t. I’ve been watching them with the glasses.”

“I wonder why the Commodore put such a man in charge.”

“Oh, Flagg has some reputation as a bad man. He’s the sort General Carrington employed in the Colorado fights.”

They talked on for a time, then Carhart put up his map and they walked out. It was evening. Across the valley, at the point where the trestle met the rising ground, they could see lights, some of them moving about. Tiffany walked with his hands deep in his trousers pockets. Finally he said thoughtfully:—

“The more I think of it, Paul, the more I’m impressed by what Commodore Durfee has done. He has got possession of our grade over there—we can’t deny that. We’ve either got to give up, or else take the offensive and fight. And that would look rotten, now, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes,” Carhart replied, “it would. He has made a pretty play. And as a play—as a bluff—it comes pretty near being effective.”

“D—n near!” Tiffany muttered.

“But now suppose we take those knolls—quietly, in the night—and close in across Flagg’s rear, hold a line from knoll to knoll, what then? Wouldn’t he have to shoot first?”

“Well, perhaps. But it would put both sides in a mean light. Oh, why didn’t John stand him off in the first place! Then he could have shot from our property, and been right in shooting.”

They had been pacing slowly up and down. Now Carhart stopped, and sat down on a convenient stick of timber. Tiffany followed his example. The moon was rising behind them, and the valley and the trestle and the rude intrenchments of timber and rock on the opposite ridge and the knolls outlined against the sky grew more distinct.

“Yes,” Carhart said slowly, “it’s a very good bluff. Commodore Durfee knows well enough that this sort of business can never settle the real question. But the question of who gets to Red Hills first is another thing altogether. The spectacle of Jack Flagg and a well-armed regiment of desperadoes in front of them, and the knowledge that the Commodore himself had organized the regiment and sent it out, would stop some engineers.”

Tiffany leaned forward, rested his elbows on his knees, and gazed moodily out across the valley. He had been riding hard for four days, with not enough food and water and scarcely any sleep. Only one night of the four had found him on a cot—the other nights had been passed on the ground. In the resulting physical depression his mind had taken to dwelling on the empty chamber in his revolver—he wished he knew more of what that leaden ball had accomplished. And now here was John Flint shot down by a hidden enemy. It was the ugliest work he had been engaged in for years. When he finally spoke, he could not conceal his discouragement.

“How about this engineer here, Paul?” he said, still looking out there over the valley. “Will the regiment and Commodore Durfee stop you?”

“I hope not,” said Carhart.

“You’re going to fight, then—until the governor calls out the state troops, and throws us all out, and there’s hell to pay?”

“I don’t think so. I’m going to get ready to fight.”

“By putting your men on those two knolls?”

“Yes.”

“And then what?”

“Then I’m going to Red Hills.”

“To Red Hills!” Tiffany sat up. There was more life in his voice.

“Yes.” Carhart laughed a little. “Why not?”

Tiffany half turned and looked earnestly into the face of this unusual man. The spectacles threw back the moonlight and concealed the eyes behind them. The lower part of the face was perhaps a trifle leaner than formerly. The mouth was composed. Tiffany found no answer there to the question in his own eyes. So he put it in words: “What are you going to do there, Paul?”

“See Commodore Durfee.”

“See—! Look here, do you know how mad he is? Do you think he came clear down here from New York, and shoved his old railroad harder than anybody but you ever shoved one before and hired the rascals that shot John Flint,—him playing for the biggest stakes on the railroad table to-day,—do you think he’ll feel like talking to the man who’s put him to all this trouble?”

“Well,” Carhart hesitated,—“I hope he will.”

“But it’s foolhardy, Paul. You won’t gain anything. Just the sight of you walking into the Frisco House office may mean gun play. If it was Bourke, it would be different; but these Durfee men are mad. The Commodore was never treated this way in his life before. And you’re a little nervous yourself, Paul. Be careful what you do. He’ll have lawyers around him—and he’s redhot, remember that.”

“I can’t quite agree with you, Tiffany. I think he’ll talk to me. But there’s one thing I’ve got to do first, and you can help me there.”

“For God’s sake, then, let me get into the game. I can’t stand this looking on—fretting myself to death.”

“I want you to take charge here for a day while I go after my firewood. I came pretty near being held up altogether for want of it. Bourke cut me off before Peet could get it through.”

“Where can you get it?”

“There’s a lot waiting for me off north of here.”

Tiffany grunted. “North of here, eh?”

Carhart nodded.

“And you have to work so delicate getting it that you can’t trust anybody else to do it?”

Carhart smiled. “Better not ask me, Tiffany. I can’t talk to Commodore Durfee until I’ve got all the cards in my hand, and this is the last one. As to going myself, it happens to be the sort of thing I won’t ask anybody to do for me, that’s all.”

“That’s how you like it,” said Tiffany, gruffly, rising. “Want to talk about anything else to-night?”

“No—I shan’t be leaving before to-morrow noon. I’ll see you in the morning.” While he spoke, he was watching Tiffany, and he was amused to see that the veteran had recovered his equilibrium and was angry with himself.

“When will you want to begin your military monkey-shines?”

Carhart drove back a smile, and got up. “Not until I get back here with the wood,” he replied. “Good night.”

Tiffany merely grunted, and marched off to the cot which had been assigned him.

At noon of the following day Carhart was ready to lead his expedition northward. It was made up of all Flint’s wagons, with two men on the seat and two rifles under the seat of each. And scattered along on both sides of the train were men picked from Flint’s bridge-builders and from Old Van’s and Scribner’s iron and tie squads. These men were mounted on fresh ponies, and they carried big holsters on their saddles and stubby, second-hand army carbines behind them. Dimond was there, too, and the long-nosed instrument man. The two or three besides the chief who knew what was soon to be doing kept their own counsel. The others knew nothing, but there was a sort of tingling electricity in the air which had got into every man of the lot. This much they knew; Mr. Carhart was very quiet and considerate and businesslike, but he had a streak of blue in him. And it is the streak of blue in your quiet, considerate leader which makes him a leader indeed in the eyes and hearts of those who are to follow him. Not that there were any heroics in evidence, rather a certain grim quiet, from one end of the wagon train to the other, which meant business. Carhart took it all in, as he cantered out toward the head of the line, dropping a nod here and there, and waving Byers, who was leaning on his pony’s rump and looking impatiently back, to start off. He had picked his men with care—he knew that he could trust them. And so, on reaching the leading wagon and pulling to a walk, he settled himself comfortably in his saddle and began to plan the conversation with Commodore Durfee which was to come next and which was to mean everything or nothing to Paul Carhart.

Once Byers, not observing his abstraction, spoke, “That was hard luck, Mr. Carhart, getting cut off from Sherman this way.”

“Think so?” the chief replied, and fell back into his study.

Byers looked puzzled, but he offered nothing further. Carhart was for a moment diverted along the line suggested by him of the long nose. “Hard luck, eh?” he was thinking. “It’s the first time in my life I was ever let alone. I only hope they won’t clean Bourke out and repair the wires before I get through.”

The white spot on Bourke’s long blueprint of the High, Dry, and Wobbly, to which was attached the name of “Durfee,” might have seemed, to the unknowing, a town or settlement. It was not. It was a station in the form of an unpainted shed, a few huts, and a water tank. Besides these, there were heaps of rails and ties and bridge timbers and all the many materials used in building a railroad. "The end of the track," or rather "Mr. Bourke's camp," which marked the beginning of the end, lay some dozen miles farther west. Out there, men swarmed by the hundred, for work had by no means been discontinued on the H. D. & W. But here at "Durfee" there were only an operator, a train crew or so, a few section men, and a night watchman. And on that late evening when a train of wagons rolled along on well-greased wheels beside the track and stopped at the long piles of firewood which were stored there within easy reach of passing locomotives, all these worthy persons were asleep.

What few words passed among the invaders were low and guarded. Everything seemed to be understood. Of the two men on each wagon, one dropped his reins and stood up in the wagon-box, the other leaped to the ground and rapidly passed up armfuls of wood. Of the horsemen, three out of every four dismounted and ran off in a wide circle and took shelter in shadowed spots behind lumber piles, or dropped silently to the ground and lay there watching. Out on the track a deep-chested, hard-faced man, who might perhaps have answered to the name of "Dimond," took up a post of observation. On that side of the circle nearest the station and the huts, two men who had the manner of some authority moved cautiously about. Both wore spectacles and one had a long nose. Through the still air came the champing of bits and the pawing and snorting of horses. The man with the spectacles and the less striking nose seemed to dislike these noises. He drew out a watch now and then, and held it up in the moonlight. The work was going on rapidly, yet how slowly! Once somebody dropped an armful of wood, and every man started at the sound.

The watchman upon whom devolved the responsibility of seeing that no prowling strangers walked off by night with the town of "Durfee" was meanwhile dreaming troublous dreams. From pastoral serenity these night enjoyments of his had passed through various disquieting stages into positive discord. They finally awoke him, and even assumed an air of waking reality. The queer, faint sounds which were floating through the night suggested the painful thought that somebody *was* walking off with the town of "Durfee." He would investigate.

Slowly tiptoeing down an alleyway between two long heaps of material, the watchman settled his fingers around his heavy stick. Then he paused. The sounds were very queer indeed. He decided to drop his stick and draw his revolver. But this action, which he immediately undertook, was interrupted by a pair of strong arms which gripped him from behind. And a pair of hands at the end of two other strong arms abruptly stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth and held it in place by means of another which was tied at the back of his neck.

"Bring him along, boys," said a low voice.

"All right, Mr. Carhart," replied the owner of the first-mentioned arms,—and then could have bitten his tongue out, for the speaking eyes of the incapacitated watchman were fixed on the half-shadowed, spectacled face before him.

Ten minutes more and the wagon train, now heavily laden, was starting off. The horsemen lingered until it was fairly under way, then ran back to their mounts, and hovered in a crowd about the last dozen wagons until all danger of an attack was past. And later on, when they were something more than halfway back to Mr. Flint's camp, they released the night watchman, and started him back on foot for "Durfee," and hurled pleasantries after him for as long as he was within earshot.

* * *

It was necessary to drop another day before occupying the knolls, and Carhart spent most of it in sleep. He was not a man of iron, and the exertions of the week had been of an exhausting nature. But Tiffany, who had slept the sleep of the righteous throughout the night of the raiding expedition, took hold of the preparations with skill and energy. And after supper he and Carhart stood together on the high ground at the eastern end of the trestle and talked it over.

"Young Haddon seems to be a pretty good man to command one knoll," said Tiffany, "but how about the other?"

"Byers could do it, possibly, but not so well as Dimond. The men like him, and while he's a little rough-handed, he's level-headed and experienced. I'll take Byers to Red Hills with me. We can start out at nine, say. Each party will have to make a wide circuit around the hills and cross the stream a mile or two from here. It will be two or three hours before we get around to the knolls."

"Would you use boats to ferry the boys over?"

"No. They saw too much of the start of my wagons yesterday. They would make out any movement on the river. You take the down party, Tiffany, with Haddon; I'll go up with Dimond. Then you can leave Haddon in charge when you have him placed, and move about where you please."

Not a man of either party knew where he was to go, but as was the case at the beginning of the movement on "Durfee," voices were subdued and nerves were strung up. As soon as it was dark, men carrying rifles and with light rations stuffed into all available pockets—little men, middle-sized men, and big men, but all active and well-muscled—appeared here and there by ones and twos and threes, dodged out of the camp, and slipped through the hollow behind the trestle-end. There was little champing and pawing of horses to-night, for Carhart and Byers were the only ones to ride. The men lay or sat on the rocks and on the ground there behind the brow of the ridge, and talked soberly. Before long an inquisitive bridgeman counted a hundred and twenty of them, and still they were coming silently through the hollow. After a time Dimond appeared, then Haddon and Byers walking together, and, after a long wait, Tiffany and Carhart themselves. Then the five leaders grouped for a consultation. Those near by could see that Carhart was laying down the code that was to govern their conduct for a day or two. Something was said before the group broke up which drew an affirmative oath from Tiffany and started Haddon and Dimond examining their weapons, and stirred Byers to an excited question. Then Tiffany drew off a rod or so with Haddon at his heels, saying, "My boys, this way." And as the word passed along man after man, to more than a hundred, sprang up and fell in behind him. Carhart beckoned to those who were left, fully an equal number of them, and these gathered together behind their chief.

"Good night, Tiffany," said Carhart, then.

But Tiffany's gruffness suddenly gave way. With a "wait a minute, boys," he came striding over and took Carhart's hand in a rough grip. "Good luck, Paul," he said something huskily. And then he cleared his throat. "Good luck!" he said again, and went back to his men. And the two parties moved off over the broken ground and the rocks, Carhart and Byers leading their horses.

Carhart led his men nearly two miles north, then forded the stream at a point where it ran wide and shallow. He climbed the west ridge, and turned south along the farther slope. After twenty minutes of advancing cautiously he sent Dimond to follow the crest of the ridge and keep their bearings. Another twenty minutes and Dimond came down the slope and motioned them to stop.

"Is this the knoll ahead here?" asked the chief.

Dimond nodded.

"Quietly, then. Byers, you wait here with the horses."

The same individual spirit which makes our little American army what it is, was in these workingmen. Every one understood perfectly that he must get to the top of that knoll as silently as the thing could be done, and acted accordingly. Orders were not needed. There were slopes of shelving rock to be ascended, there were bits of real climbing to be managed. But the distance was not very great, and it took but a quarter of an hour or so. Then they found themselves on the summit, and made themselves comfortable among the rocks, spreading out so that they could command every approach. Carhart took Dimond to the top of the southeasterly slope and pointed out to him the knoll opposite, the hollow between, the camp a third of a mile away of Flagg and his cheerful crew, the trestle, the river, and their own dim camp on the farther slope. He repeated his instructions for the last time. "Lie quiet until noon of the day after to-morrow—not a sound, understand; not so much as the top of a hat to show. It will be a hard pull, but you've got to do it."

"Yes, sir."

"At that time, if you hear nothing further from me, take your men down there along the slope, give Flagg one chance to withdraw, and if he refuses, close in across the hollow behind the rocks. Mr. Haddon will do the same. After that if they try to rush you, shoot. The men from camp will be working out across the trestle and up the hill at the same time.—Here it is, written down. Put it in your pocket. And mind, not a shot, not so much as a stone thrown, before noon of day after to-morrow, excepting in self-defence. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now come down the slope here, on the other side—where we can't be seen from Flagg's camp. You have your lantern?"

"Here."

"Light it, and flash it once."

Dimond obeyed. Both men peered across the hollow, but no response came from the other knoll.

"Flash it again."

This time there came an answering flash. Carhart nodded, then took the lantern from Dimond, extinguished it, and handed it back. "Don't light this again for any purpose," he said. "Now see that you do exactly as I have told you. Keep your men in hand."

"All right, sir."

"Good night, then."

Carhart groped his way along the hillside, slowly descending. After a time he whistled softly.

"Here—this way!" came in Byers's voice.

They had to lead their horses nearly a mile over the plateau before they found the beaten track to Red Hills. Byers was jubilant. He was a young man who had dreamed for years of this moment. He had known not what form it would take, but that he should at some time be riding, booted and spurred, with a weight of responsibility on his shoulders, a fine atmosphere of daring about him, and the feeling within of a king's messenger, this he had always known. And now here he was! And buoyant as an April day, the blood dancing in his veins, sitting his horse with the ease of an Indian, Byers called over to his chief: "Fine night this, Mr. Carhart!"

They were riding side by side. At his remark the chief seemed unconsciously to be pulling in. He fell behind. Byers, wondering a little, slowed down and looked around. Apparently his remark had not been heard. He called again: "Fine night, Mr. Carhart!" ... And then, in the moonlight, he caught a full view of the face of his leader. It was not the face he was accustomed to see about headquarters; he found in it no suggestion of the resourceful, energetic chief on whom he had come to rely as older men rely on blind forces. This was the face of a nervous, dispirited man of the name of Carhart, a man riding a small horse, who, after accomplishing relentlessly all that man could accomplish, had reached the point where he could do nothing further, where he must lay down his hand and accept the inevitable, whether for better or for worse. Byers could not, perhaps, understand what this endless night meant to Paul Carhart, but the sight of that face sobered him. And it was a very grave young man who turned in his saddle and peered out ahead and let his eyes rove along the dreary, moonlit trail.

A moment later he started a little, and hardly conscious of what he was doing, turned his head partly around and listened.

“Oh, my God,” Carhart was saying, as if he did not hear his own voice, “what a night!”

They pulled up before the Frisco Hotel at Red Hills. The time had come to throw the cards face up on the table.

“See to the animals yourself, will you, Byers?” said Carhart. He dismounted, patted the quivering shoulder of his little horse, and then handed the reins to his companion. “I don’t want to wear out Arizona too.”

Byers nodded, and Carhart walked up to the hotel steps. His eyes swept the veranda, and finally rested on two men who were talking together earnestly, and almost, it might seem, angrily, at one end. He had never seen either before; but one, the nearer, with the florid countenance and the side whiskers, he knew at once for Commodore Durfee. He paused on the steps, and tried to make out the other—a big, fat man with the trimmed, gray chin-beard, the hard mouth, and the shaven upper lip which we associate with pioneering days. It was—no—yes, it was—it *must* be—General Carrington.

Carhart had intended to take a room and make himself presentable. He changed his mind. Hot and dusty as he was, dressed almost like a cowboy, he walked rapidly down the piazza.

“Mr. Durfee?”

The magnate turned slowly and looked up.

“Well?” he inquired.

Carhart found his card-case and drew out one slip of cardboard. Mr. Durfee took it, read it, turned it over, read it again, hesitated, then handed it to the General, saying, in a voice the intent of which could hardly be misread, “What do you think of that?”

General Carrington read the name with some interest, and looked up. He said nothing, however; merely returned the card.

“You want to talk to me?” asked Durfee.

“If you please.”

“Well—talk ahead.”

Carhart glanced at General Carrington. He knew that the opportunity to have it out with Durfee in the presence of the biggest man of them all, the man who was the *x* in this very equation with which he was struggling, was a very great opportunity. Just why, he could hardly have said; and he had no time to figure it out in detail. So he leaped without looking. He drew up another of the worn porch chairs and made himself comfortable.

“A rascal named Jack Flagg,” he said, speaking with cool deliberation, “with a hundred or two hundred armed men, has thrown up what I suppose he would call intrenchments across our right of way at the La Paz River. Another party has attacked our line back at Barker Hills. This second party is commanded by Mr. Bourke, who is in charge of the construction work on your H. D. & W. I care nothing about Bourke, because Mr. De Reamer, who is at Sherman, is amply able to dispose of him. I have come here to ask you if you will consider ordering Flagg to get out of our way at the La Paz.”

He settled back in his chair, looking steadily into the florid countenance of the redoubtable Commodore Durfee. The two railway presidents were looking, in turn, at him, but with something of a difference between their expressions. Whether the General was amused or merely interested it would have been difficult for any but one who was accustomed to his manner to say. But there could be little doubt that the worldly experience of the Commodore was barely equal to the task of keeping down his astonishment and anger.

“This has nothing to do with me,” he replied shortly. “I know nothing of this Flagg.”

Carhart leaned a little forward. His eyes never left Durfee’s face. “Then,” he said, in that same measured voice, “if you know nothing of this Flagg, you don’t care what happens to him.”

“Certainly not,” replied the Commodore,—a little too shortly, this time, for he added, “I guess two hundred armed men behind intrenchments can take care of themselves.”

Carhart settled back again, and the shadow of a smile crossed his face. Both men were watching him, but he said nothing. And then General Carrington unexpectedly took a hand. “See here,” he said with the air of a man who sweeps all obstructions out of his way, “what did you come here for? What do you want?”

Carhart’s answer was deliberate, and was uttered with studied force. “I have ridden thirty miles to talk with Mr. Durfee and he sees fit to treat me like a d—n fool. I came here to see if we couldn’t avoid bloodshed. Evidently we can’t.”

"What do you mean by that?" asked Carrington.

Instead of replying, Carhart, after a moment's thought, turned inquiringly to Durfee.

"Out with it," cried that gentleman. "What do you want?"

"I want you to call off Jack Flagg."

"Evidently you *are* a d—n fool," said Durfee.

But Carrington saw deeper. "You've got something up your sleeve, Mr. Carhart," he said. "What is it?"

Again Carhart turned to Durfee. And Durfee said, "What is it?"

"It's this." Carhart drew from a pocket his sketch-map of the region about the trestle. "Here is Flagg—along this ridge, at the foot of these two knolls. His line lies, you see, across our right of way. Of course, everybody knows that he was sent there for a huge bluff, everybody thinks that I wouldn't dare make real war of it. Flagg opened up the ball by shooting Flint, my engineer in charge at the La Paz. The shooting was done at night, when Flint was out in the valley looking things over, unarmed and alone."

"What Flint is that?" asked Carrington, sharply.

"John B."

"Hurt him much?"

"There is a chance that he will live."

Carrington pursed his lips.

"We foresaw Bourke's move," Carhart pursued, "some time ago. And as it was plain that the mills in Pennsylvania—" he smiled a little here, straight into Durfee's eyes—"and the Queen and Cumberland Railroad were planning to find it impossible to deliver our materials, we took up the rails and ties of the Paradise Southern and brought them out to the end of the track. In fact, we have our materials and supplies so well in hand that even if Bourke could hold Barker Hills, we are in a position to work right ahead. Track-laying is going on this minute. But we can't cross the La Paz if Flagg doesn't move."

"No, I suppose not," said Durfee.

"So it is necessary to make him move."

"It is, eh?"

"Yes, and—" Carhart's eyes were firing up; his right fist was resting in the palm of his left hand—"and we're going to do it, unless you should think it worth while to forestall us. Possibly you thought I would send a force back to Barker Hills. But I didn't—I brought it up this way instead. I have three times as many men as your Mr. Flagg has, and a third of them are on the knolls behind Flagg."

"And the fighting comes next, eh?" said Carrington.

"Either Mr. Durfee will call Flagg off at once, or there will be a battle of the La Paz. I think you see what I am getting at, Mr. Durfee. Whatever the courts may decide, however the real balance of control lies now, is something that doesn't concern me at all. That issue lies between you and my employer, Mr. De Reamer. But since you have chosen to attack at a point where I am in authority, I shan't hesitate to strike back. It isn't for me to say which side would profit by making it necessary for the governor and his militia to take hold, but I will say that if the governor does seize the road, he will find Mr. De Reamer in possession from Sherman to Red Hills. I am prepared to lose a hundred—two hundred—men in making that good. I have left orders for the shooting to begin at noon to-morrow. If you choose to give any orders, the news must reach Mr. Tiffany by that time. I shall start back at midnight, as my horse is tired, and I wish to allow plenty of time. You can find me here, then, at any time up to twelve o'clock to-night." He rose. "That, Mr. Durfee, is what I came here to say."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Carhart," said General Carrington. "Did I understand you to say that you have enough materials on the ground to finish the line?"

"Practically. Certainly enough for the present."

"That's interesting. Even to firewood, I suppose."

Carhart bowed slightly. "Even to firewood," he replied,—and walked away.

Byers was asleep in a chair, tipped back against the office wall. Carhart woke him, and engaged a room, where, after eating the meal which Byers had ordered, they could sleep all day.

That evening, as Carhart and Byers were walking around from the stable, they found General Carrington standing on the piazza.

"Oh, Mr. Carhart!" said he.

"Good evening, sir," said Carhart.

The General produced a letter. "Would you be willing to get this through to Flagg?"

"Certainly."

"Rather nice evening."

"Very."

"Suppose we sample their liquid here—I'm sorry I can't say much for it. What will you gentlemen have?"

* * *

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Carhart, Byers, Dimond, and Tiffany stood on the north knoll.

"I'll take it down," said Byers, his eyes glowing through his spectacles on either side of his long nose.

"Go ahead," said Carhart. "And good luck to you!"

The instrument man took the message and started down the hill. Halfway there was a puff of smoke from Flagg's camp, and he fell. It was so peaceful there on the hillside, so quiet and so bright with sunshine, the men could hardly believe their eyes. Then they roused. One lost his head and fired. But Dimond, his eyes blazing, swearing under his breath, handed his rifle to Carhart and went running and leaping down the hillside. When he reached the fallen man, he bent over him and took the letter from his hand and, standing erect, waved it. Still holding it above his head, he went on down the hill and disappeared among the rocks that surrounded the camp.

* * *

Late that afternoon Flagg's men straggled out through the hollow, bound for Red Hills. And every large rock on either hillside concealed a man and a rifle. Here and there certain rocks failed in their duty, and Flagg's men caught glimpses of blue-steel muzzles. So they did not linger.

* * *

For a number of reasons, after an attempt to communicate by wire with a little New Hampshire town, and after an unavailing search for representatives of the clergy at La Paz and at Red Hills, it was decided to bury the instrument man where he had fallen. "Near the track," Young Van suggested. "He would like it that way, I think."

At six in the morning a long procession filed out of the camp. At the head went the rude coffin on the shoulders of six surveyors and foremen. Paul Carhart and Tiffany followed, the chief with a prayer book in his hand; and after them came the men. The grave was ready. The laborers and the skilled workmen stood shoulder to shoulder in a wide circle, baring their heads to the sun. Carhart opened the book and slowly turned the pages in a quiet so intense that the rustle of the leaves could be heard by every man there. For the ungoverned emotions of these broken outcasts were now swayed to thoughts of death and of what may come after.

"I am the resurrection and the life ..." Carhart read the immortal words splendidly, in his even, finely modulated voice. "... I know that my Redeemer liveth.... Yet in my flesh shall I see God.... We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out.... For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain; he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them."

Gus Vandervelt raised his eyes involuntarily and glanced from one to another of the lustful, weak, wicked faces that made up the greater part of the circle.

"It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."

Could it be that these wretches were to be raised in incorruption? Was there something hidden behind each of these animal faces, something deeper than the motives which lead such men to work with their hands only that they may eat and drink and die?

"... for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For ... this mortal must put on immortality."

At the conclusion of the service Young Van, deeply moved, looked about for his brother. But it seemed that the same impulse had come to them both, for he heard a gruff, familiar voice behind him:—

"Look here, Gus, don't you think you've been sort of a d—n fool about this business?"

The young fellow wheeled around with a glad look in his eyes. He saw that his brother was scowling, was not even extending his hand, and yet he knew how much those rough words meant. "Yes," he replied frankly, "I think I have."

Old Van nodded, and they walked back to breakfast, side by side. Only once was the silence broken, when Gus said, with some slight hesitation: "What are you going to do next?—Coming back to Sherman with us?"

And Old Van turned his face away and looked off down the river and walked along for a few moments without replying. Then, "No," he finally got out, "guess I'll take a little vacation." He paused, still looking away, and they strode on down the slope. "Going over into Arizona with an outfit," he added huskily.

CHAPTER X

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT RED HILLS

The last spike in the western extension of the Sherman and Western was driven by no less a personage than President De Reamer himself. In the circle of well-dressed men about him stood General Carrington and a score of department heads of the two lines. The thirty miles of track between the La Paz and Red Hills was laid, without unusual incident, in twenty days—a brilliant finish to what had been a record-breaking performance.

There was to be a dinner at the Frisco Hotel. Everybody knew now that General Carrington had promised to be there and to speak a felicitous word or two welcoming the new C. & S. C. connection. After the spike-driving, Mr. De Reamer, a thin, saturnine figure, could be seen moving about through the little crowd. Once, it was observed, he and General Carrington drew aside and talked in low, earnest tones. The reporters were there, of course, and to these the president was urbane. They had gathered at first about the General, but he had waved them off with a smiling “Talk with my friend De Reamer there. He deserves whatever credit there may be in this thing.” And next these keen-eyed, beardless men of the press bore down in a little group on Carhart, Tiffany, and Young Van, who were standing apart. Tiffany was the first to see them approaching.

“Not a word, boys,” he said in a low voice.

“Why not?” asked Young Van. “I don’t know of anybody who deserves more credit than you two.”

“Not a word,” Tiffany repeated. “It would cost me my job. Mr. De Reamer’s crazy mad now because so much has been said about Paul here. I don’t care to get into it,—just excuse me.”

The reporters were upon them. “Is that Mr. Tiffany?” asked one, indicating the retreating figure.

Carhart nodded.

“Is it true, Mr. Carhart,” asked another, “that he came out and fought under you at the La Paz?”

Carhart smiled. President De Reamer was passing with Mr. Chambers and had paused only a few feet away. “There wasn’t any fighting at the La Paz,” he replied.

“There is a grave there,” the questioner persisted.

“How do you know?”

“I rode out and saw it.”

“Then you should have ridden back the length of the line and you would have found a few other graves.” The chief sobered. “You can’t keep a thousand to two thousand men at work in the desert for months without losing a few of them. I’m sorry that this is so, but it is.”

“Mr. Carhart,” came another abrupt question, this time from the keenest-appearing reporter of them all, “What did you say to General Carrington and Commodore Durfee when you saw them at the Frisco?”

Young Van looked at his chief and saw that the faintest of twinkles was in his eyes. He glanced over his shoulder and made out that De Reamer had paused in his conversation with Mr. Chambers, and was listening to catch Carhart’s reply. For himself, Young Van was blazing with anger that this man, who had in his eyes fairly dragged De Reamer through to a successful termination of the fight, should be robbed of what seemed to him the real reward. He had still something to learn of the way of the world, and everything to learn of the way of Wall Street. Then he heard Carhart replying:—

“You must ask Mr. De Reamer about that. He directs the policy of the Sherman and Western.”

And at this the president of the melancholy visage, and with him his vice-president, passed on out of earshot.

“Mr. Carhart,”—the reporters were still at it,—“one of your assistants, J. B. Flint, was carried on a cot the other day to the C. & S. C. station and put on a train. What was the matter with him?”

Carhart hesitated. Personally he cared not at all whether the facts were or were not given to the public. He felt little pleasure in lying about them. Engineers as a class do not lie very well. But he was doing the work of the Sherman and Western, and the Sherman and Western, for a mixture of reasons, wished the facts covered. And then, somewhat to his relief, the youngest reporter in the group blundered out the question which let him off with half a lie.

“Is it true, Mr. Carhart,” asked this reporter, “that Mr. Flint has been really an invalid for years?”

“Yes,” Carhart replied cheerfully, “it is true.”

The party seemed to be breaking up. Tiffany caught Young Van’s eye, and beckoned. “Come on!” he called —“the Dinner!”

“They are starting, Mr. Carhart,” said Young Van.

“Are they? All right.—That’s all, boys. You can say, with perfect truth, that the Sherman and Western has been completed to Red Hills.”

"And that the H. D. & W. hasn't," cried the youngest reporter.

Carhart laughed. "The H. D. & W. will have to do its own talking," he replied.

"But they aren't doing any."

"Can't help that," said Carhart. "No more—no more!" And with Young Van he walked off toward the Frisco.

After the dinner the party broke up. Flint and Haddon went West with the Chicago and Southern California officials. The others, who were to start eastward in the late evening, rode off for a shoot on the plains. And it fell out that Carhart and Young Van, who had, from different motives, declined the ride, were left together at the hotel.

"What are you going to do now, Gus?" asked the chief.

Young Van hesitated, then gave way to a nervous smile. Carhart glanced keenly at him, and observed that he had lost color and that the pupils of his eyes were dilated. Now that the strain was over he was himself conscious of a severe physical let-down, and he was not surprised to learn that his assistant was completely unstrung.

Neither was he surprised to hear this hesitating yet perfectly honest reply: "I've been thinking I'd start at the first saloon and drink to the other end of town. Want to come along?"

"No," Carhart replied, "I don't believe I will, thanks. I meant to ask what work you plan to take up next?"

"Nothing at all."

"Nothing!—why so?"

"That is easy to answer." Young Van laughed bitterly. "I have no offers."

"I'm surprised at that."

"You don't really mean that, Mr. Carhart?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, it's more than I can say. If a man came along and offered me a good position, I should feel that I ought to decline it."

"Why?" Carhart was genuinely interested.

"Why?" Young Van rose and stood looking gloomily down at his chief. "That's a funny question for you to ask. You've been watching my work for these months, and you've seen me developing new limitations in every possible direction. All together, I've discovered about the choicest crop any man ever opened up. When I started out, I thought I might some day become an engineer. But if this job has taught me anything, it has taught me that I'm the emptiest ass that ever tried to lay two rails, end to end, in a reasonably straight line." The tremulous quality of his voice told Carhart how deeply the boy had taken his duties to heart.

"I've been thinking to-day that the best thing I can do will be to rent a few acres somewhere out on Long Island and set up to raise chickens for the New York market: broilers, and maybe squabs—they say there is money in squabs. I'd probably find I couldn't even do that, but it would be exciting for a while."

"Let's get out and tramp around a little, Gus," was Carhart's reply. "That will do you as much good as a drunk."

Young Van flushed at this, but followed the chief out to the long street along which straggled the buildings that made up the settlement. These buildings were mostly saloons, each with its harvest of plainsmen, cowboys, laborers, and outcasts standing, sitting, or sprawling before the door. The day was hot with the dry heat of September, from which even the memory of moisture had long ago been sucked out. The dust rose at every step and settled on skin and clothing. Now and then a lounging figure rose and moved languidly in through a saloon door. Almost the only other movement to be seen was the heat vibration in the atmosphere. The only sound, beyond a drawled remark now and then, and the clink of glasses, was the tinkle of a crazy piano down the street. But the bronzed, sinewy engineers, who had for months known no other atmosphere, stepped off in a swinging stride, and soon were past the end of the street and out in the open. Carhart himself was not above a sense of elation, and he fell into reminiscence.

"There is only one thing I have regretted, Gus," he said. "If I could have got hold of a big Italian I know of, with about a hundred of his men, this dinner would have taken place some days ago."

"I didn't suppose that the work could have gone much faster," replied the younger man, moodily.

"Yes, we might have saved that much time easily in the cuts."

"Working by hand?"

"Yes. My experience with this chap was up in New Jersey. The firm I was working for at the time was developing a big ice business up in the lakes in the northern part of the state. It was necessary to lay a few short lines of track to connect the different ice-houses with the main line, and I was given charge of it. I got my laborers—several hundred of them—from an Italian padrone in New York City. Neither myself nor my assistants spoke their language, of course, and, as it turned out, we didn't think in their language either, for after two or three days they all walked out—to a man. I could do nothing with them. So I rang up the padrone and told him he would have to furnish a better lot than that. 'But,' said he, 'I can't let you have any more men.' I asked him why not. 'Because you don't know how to handle them.' That was a surprising sort of an answer, but I needed the laborers and I kept at him. Finally he said, 'I'll tell you what I will do. I will send you the men, but you must let me send a foreman with them, and you must agree to give all your instructions through that foreman.' 'All right,' I replied, 'send them along. If they do the work, I won't bother them.'

"The next day, when I was at the office in Newark, one of my assistants called me up and told me it would be worth my while to come right out on the work. When I reached there, he met me and took me down the track to a deep cut where the force was at work. The laborers were placed just as I have placed our men lately, packed close together on terraces; and after I had watched for a moment it dawned on me that I had never seen Italians work so fast as those were working. 'How did you do it?' I asked. The assistant grinned, and advised me to watch the man at the top, and then I saw that a giant of an Italian was standing on the hill above the top terrace, where he could look down at the rows of laborers. He wore a long ulster, and kept his hands in his pockets.

"Pretty soon a laborer down on the lowest terrace rested his pick against his knees and stood up to stretch. 'Watch now!' whispered my assistant. I looked up at the big man just in time to see him draw a stone out of his pocket—no pebble, mind you, but a jagged piece of road ballast—and throw it right at that laborer's head. The fellow simply dodged it, seized his pick, and went to work harder than ever; and not another man stopped, even long enough to draw a good breath during the twenty minutes I stood there. Then the whistle blew, and as I was curious to see what would happen I waited."

"What did happen?" asked Young Van.

"Nothing whatever, except that the laborers crowded around this foreman and seemed proud to get a word from him."

"But I don't understand. What gave him such a hold over them?"

"I don't understand it myself. But I know that if I strained things to the breaking point, I could never get the work out of any laborers that he got out of those Italians. With him, and them, we might have saved a good many days in this work."

"We might have tried the plan ourselves," said the young man, with a chuckle. "Only I fancy a little something would have happened if we had tried it."

Young Van's dangerous mood had passed. Carhart abruptly changed the subject. "How would you like to go up into Canada with me, Gus?" he said.

"With you? There isn't much doubt what to answer to that."

"There will be some interesting things about the work—and time enough to do them well, the way it looks now. I can't promise you any remarkable inducements, but you will get a little more than you have been paid here—I won't say more than you have earned here, for you have not been paid what you are worth."

A moment passed before these words could get into the consciousness of the young man. Then—they were just entering the village on their return—he stopped short and looked into Paul Carhart's face. "Do you mean that you really want me?" he asked.

Carhart tried not to smile as he said: "The choice of assistants is in my hands, Gus, and I should find it difficult to justify myself for taking an assistant whom I did not want—and especially for an undertaking that is likely to last several years."

Young Van was standing stock-still. "'Several years,'" he repeated. Then, "This seems to amount pretty nearly to a permanent offer?"

"Pretty nearly," said Carhart, smiling now.

At this they resumed their pace and entered the town. Both were absorbed—Young Van in his astonishment that he had found favor in the eyes of his chief, Carhart in his amusement over the utter naïveté of the boy; and neither had an eye for the groups of desperate characters that lined the street, least of all for the particular group before the "Acme Hotel, J. Peters, Prop."

It could not be supposed that the coming of fifteen hundred men to Red Hills, their pockets lined with the earnings of those last irresistible weeks, should pass without a great effort on the part of the local population to empty these pockets promptly and thoroughly. If the two engineers had looked about more sharply in the course of their walk, they would have seen more than one familiar face. It was, indeed, a day to be remembered in Red Hills; there had been no such wholesale contribution to local needs since the first ramshackle frame building rose from the dust. Bartenders were busy; and deft-fingered, impassive gentlemen from Chicago, and New Orleans, and Denver, and San Francisco were hard at work behind green tables. All was quiet so far. The laborers were so skilfully distributed that no green table was without its professional gambler; and sweltering in the heat, gulping down the ever ready fluids, they went gayly, gloomily, angrily, defiantly on, thumbing the dirty cards and relinquishing their earnings. All was still quiet, for the business of the day was carried on in back rooms and on upper floors. The uproar would not begin for a few hours yet, and would hardly reach its full strength before dark.

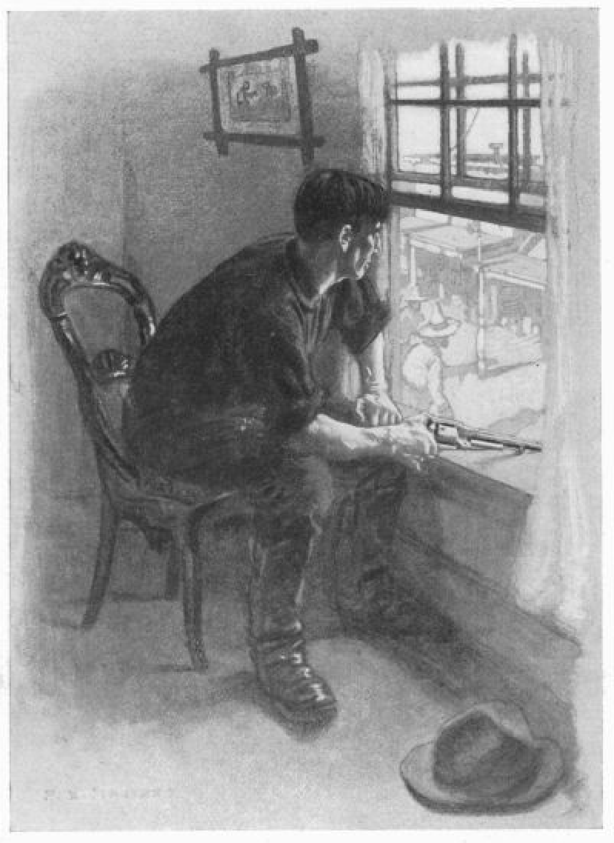
Among those to whom music and feminine charms, such as they were, outweighed the delights of the green table was Charlie the cook. He sat at an open window, upstairs, where he could look down at the sleepy street and at the front of the Acme Hotel, opposite. At first he had been content to make out what he could of the scene through the cheesecloth sash curtains, but, under the mellowing influence of a rapid succession of bottles, he had drawn the curtains, and now sat with his knees against the sill, smiling down in a ruddy, benevolent fashion on everybody and everything below. The parlor at his back was filled with workmen and their companions. He had seen the engineers walk down the street, and had smiled in genial fashion, though aware that they had not observed him. Now he saw them returning, and he was ready, undaunted, to greet them again.

Then something happened. The door leading to the bar of the Acme Hotel suddenly opened, and a hulking figure of a man appeared on the broad step. He was half drunk, and he carried a revolver in his hand. Behind him, crowding out to see the fun, came a dozen men. Charlie saw this, and, without in the slightest relaxing his genial smile, he drew out one of his own revolvers and held it carelessly before him with the muzzle resting on the window sill. Never for an instant did he take his good-natured, bloodshot eyes from the man across the street.

The engineers were drawing rapidly nearer. Young Van was the first to take in the situation, and he spoke in a low, quick voice, hardly moving his lips:—

“Don’t look up or start, Mr. Carhart—but Jack Flagg is standing in front of that hotel on the left, and he looks as if he meant to shoot. What do you think we had better do? I am not armed.”

“Neither am I,” Carhart replied. “Don’t pay any attention to him.”



“Charlie had not raised his revolver,—the muzzle still rested easily on the sill,—but it was pointing straight at Jack Flagg’s heart.”

That was all that was said. The two engineers swung along without a sign of faltering. Jack Flagg slowly raised his weapon and took deliberate aim at Paul Carhart. Still the two came on, not wholly able to conceal their sense of the situation, but, rather, regardless of it. On Carhart’s face there was an expression of stern contempt; Young Van was pale and his eyes were fixed straight before him.

At this point it seemed as if the strain must break one way or the other. The men were not ten yards apart—in another moment it would be less than two. A little gasp of admiration came from the watching groups. Flagg heard this, and his hand wavered, but he recovered and took a short step forward.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a low whistle. Flagg started, and looked around.

Again came the low whistle. This time Flagg looked up, and caught his first sight of Charlie in the window, and hesitated. Charlie had not raised his revolver,—the muzzle still rested easily on the sill,—but it was pointing straight at Jack Flagg’s heart. Flagg lowered his weapon a little way, then looked as if he wished to raise it again, but on second thoughts this seemed hardly wise, for Charlie was shaking his head in gentle disapproval. Then this incident, which had shaved close to tragedy, suddenly ran off into farce. Flagg pocketed his revolver, muttered something that nobody understood, and disappeared through the bar-room door; and after a long breath of mingled relief and disappointment, somebody laughed aloud.

As for Charlie, he turned, still playing with his revolver, and looked about the room. “Why!” he exclaimed. “Why! Where’s the ladies?”

The engineers walked steadily up the street and turned into the hotel. Then Young Van weakened, staggered to a chair, and sat limp and white. “I told you,” he said breathlessly, “I told you I was—no good.”

Carhart, before replying, looked at his watch, and his hand shook as he did so. “Brace up, Gus,” he said. “Brace up. I start East in an hour or so, and you are coming with me, you know.”

THE GAME

A TRANSCRIPT FROM REAL LIFE

By JACK LONDON

Author of “The Call of the Wild,” “The Sea-Wolf,” etc.

With Illustrations and Decorations in Colors by Henry Hutt and T. C. Lawrence.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> “The Game” resembles “The Call of the Wild” very strongly in the unity and rapidity of its action, in its singleness of purpose, and in its conveyed impression of power. “The Game” is that which takes place within the squared ring; included in the story is an intensely graphic portrayal of what the prize ring stands for and means to participants, spectators, and the general scheme of things.

THE STORM CENTRE

By CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK

Author of “The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains,” “The Story of Old Fort Loudon,” etc.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> A war story; but more of flirtation, love, and courtship, than of fighting or history. It is a simple and pleasing tale of a wounded Union officer in a household strongly in sympathy with the Confederate cause. The officer falls in love with the young lady of the house, and the son of the family, a dashing young Confederate officer, comes back to see his family. While there the rebel officer secures information that enables the Southern army to gain an important strategical advantage, and the Union officer is eventually court-martialled. The tale is light and entertaining and thoroughly readable, and the background is that associated with Miss Murfree’s well-earned fame.

THE HOUSE OF CARDS

A RECORD

By JOHN HEIGH

Sometime Major U.S.A.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> Glimpses of many fascinating figures are seen in this chronicle. The old, old social warfares of Boston and Philadelphia come out now and then amusingly. The chief character is one of the modern kings of finance—“a promoter? Not at all! He reorganizes railroads and things; one railway he has reorganized three times; and these rejuvenated concerns have been very grateful to him. He is rich beyond all decent guessing, my friend of fifty years, and I regard him as the most dangerous man in America.” So his story is told by his oldest friend, with little thrusts of grim humor; yet with a very strong and sweet undercurrent of sentiment. It has an altogether indescribable tone that is admirably in keeping with one’s mental picture of the veteran soldier and scholar who tells the tale to young “Waltham Eliot, late of Boston, who has come to settle in Philadelphia, live on law, and be honest!” But in the last analysis it is a love-story of yesterday, to-day, and forever.

MRS. DARRELL

By FOXCROFT DAVIS

Author of “Despotism and Democracy”

With Illustrations by William Sherman Potts

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> “Mrs. Darrell” is a penetrating bit of analysis in the form of an exceptionally good story of the social side of high political life in the national capital.
>
> Its very genuine people are sketched with a light touch, a delicacy of expression, that make the book enjoyable reading. Those who know the city well enough to recognize the unerring accuracy of

> even its minor details will wonder over the skill which has produced such real, interestingly varied types. It is full of highly diverting humor without a trace of satirical sting; on the contrary, its prevailing tone is refreshingly wholesome.

A DARK LANTERN

A STORY WITH A PROLOGUE

By ELIZABETH ROBINS (C. E. RAIMOND)

Author of "The Magnetic North," "Below the Salt," etc.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> This new book is one that must appeal very strongly to those who enjoy the novel of keen social analysis. Its pictures of English and continental society are as graphic, just, and authoritative as any that have appeared in fiction. One of the main characters is a young German whose rank at once excludes him from the privileges of commonplace home life and gives him the unconscious assumption of the overfêted man who has missed the tonic of hard work. Another is the young specialist in "nerves," accurate to the verge of brutality, driven to misogyny by the trivial aggravations of encountering most often the vague indecisions he hated most. And between them stands Katharine Dereham, a character of strong, unforgettable appeal to the woman who looks on modern social life with open eyes.

The Memoirs of an American Citizen

By ROBERT HERRICK

Author of "The Common Lot," "The Real World," etc., etc.

With 45 Illustrations by F. B. Masters

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> In his grasp on the popular interest Mr. Herrick's mastery grows with every new book he writes. Just because they are human, alive, and above all sincere, they hold one as no tales of silks and swords in an imaginary land could possibly do. The "American" of his new story walks into the Chicago markets from Indiana, to all appearances a tramp—in reality a country boy who has quarrelled with his home surroundings and flung himself into the city to fight for a future. The novel opens in time and scenes of Chicago in 1877. It includes among other incidents a glimpse of the strained days of the Haymarket riot and the trial that followed. It is a novel with more than a passing appeal to ones sympathies, and taken as a whole seems certain to be at once the most popular and the best thing that Mr. Herrick has written.

THE SECRET WOMAN

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of "The American Prisoner," "My Devon Year," etc.

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> "There cannot be two opinions as to the interest and the power of 'The Secret Woman.' It is not only its author's masterpiece, but it is far in advance of anything he has yet written—and that is to give it higher praise than almost any other comparison with contemporary fiction could afford."

THE LODESTAR

By SIDNEY R. KENNEDY

With Illustrations by The Kinneys

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> "The novel is full of humor, a humor of a gentle, quiet, almost wistful quality, and its effect is to make us more in love with life and with our fellow-mortals."—*News and Courier.*

THE MASTER-WORD

A STORY OF THE SOUTH TO-DAY

By L. H. HAMMOND

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> "Mrs. Hammond has conceived and portrayed what is perhaps the most difficult situation on earth.... The writer has a large heart and wide sympathies; she has told her story freely and well, treading both firmly and delicately on difficult ground.... She has done some admirable work, and

has achieved a striking story quite out of the ordinary.”—*N. Y. Times.*

THE GOLDEN HOPE

A STORY OF THE TIME OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

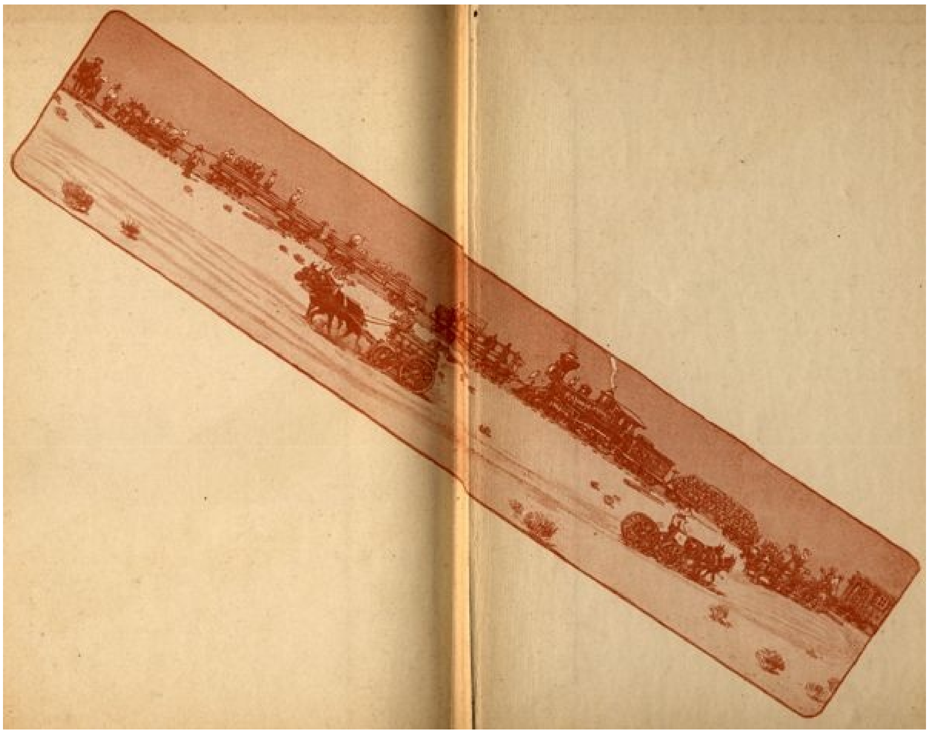
By ROBERT H. FULLER

Cloth 12mo $1.50

> “All together this is a powerful story and a vivid, correct, and intensely interesting picture of the most prosperous days of the Macedonian kingdom.”—*The Watchman.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
64-66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

Inside Front



Inside Back

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROAD BUILDERS ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg

Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.