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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S "CENTURY" RUN; OR, THE GOVERNOR'S COURIER ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 3
MAR. 13, 1909.

FIVE
CENTS

**MOTOR MATT'S
CENTURY RUN**

**OR THE GOVERNOR'S
COURIER**

By
STANLEY R. MATTHEWS.

MOTOR STORIES
THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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Motor Matt's "Century" Run;

OR,

THE GOVERNOR'S COURIER.

By the author of "MOTOR MATT."

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, concerning whom there has always been a mystery—a lad of splendid athletic abilities, and never-failing nerve, who has won for himself, among the boys of the Western town, the popular name of "Mile-a-minute Matt."

Chub McReady, sometimes called plain "Reddy," for short, on account of his fiery "thatch"—a chum of Matt, with a streak of genius for inventing things that often land the bold experimenter in trouble.

Welcome Perkins, a one-legged wanderer who lives with Chub and his sister while their father prospects for gold—Welcome is really a man of peace, yet he delights to imagine himself a "terror," and is forever boasting about being a "reformed road-agent."

McKibben, the sheriff who has both nerve and intelligence.

Juan Morisco, a Mexican of low degree, and a rascal as well.

Tom Clipperton, known generally as "Clip," a quarter-blood, who is very sensitive about his Indian ancestry.

The Governor, head of the State, and a friend of Matt.

Gregory, a rancher.

Dangerfield, the leader of the smugglers; who has another name.

Burke, another sheriff, who lands his man.

"**Rags**," a little girl waif whom Matt befriends, to his profit later.

CHAPTER I.

WELCOME TAKES A SUDDEN DROP.

"Ready, Perk?"

"Hold up there, Chub! Don't ye git in sich a tarnal hurry. What am I goin' to do with this here rope?"

"Why, cast it off, of course. How can you expect to fly with the rope holdin' you back?"

"Waal, now, wait; le's understand this thing. It's my idee, ain't it?"

"Sure. You drew the plans an' I put the machine together."

"If any picters is published in the papers, mine goes in bigger'n yours, don't it?"

"That's all to the good, Perk. When the reporters write this up, you'll be the king-pin. The invention is yours, and all I did was to put it together. But you're a pretty old man to try it out, Perk. You'd better let me take the first spin."

"Bein' the inventor, I reckon I got a right to show off a little. Purty nigh all my life I been a hootin', tootin' disturber o' the peace, committin' depperdations as makes me blush to think of; but right here is where I do somethin' fer civilization an' progress, which'll go a good ways to'rds makin' up fer the past. I'm plumb hungry, Chub, to hear folks say: 'That there flyin' machine is the biggest thing o' the twentieth century, an' Welcome Perkins done it. He used to be a howlin', cut-an'-slash desperado in his younger days, but now he's turned over a new leaf, an' is devotin' his shinin' abilities to forwardin' the cause o' progress as much as he used to be fer holdin' it back.' That's what I wants to hear folks say as they're p'intin' me out, an'——"

"Oh, slush! If you stand up there chinning much longer, Perk, somebody'll come. You want this to be a private flight, don't you?"

"Jest at the beginnin', till I see if everythin' works all right. If there ain't any hitch. I want to make it as public as possible. I'd be tickled to have the hull town come out an' see me cuttin' figger eight's in the clouds. 'It can't be that one-legged feller up there is Welcome Perkins, the ole ex-
pirate o' the plains as has been living right here among us, can it?' the people will say, awed-like, turnin' to each other. Then I'll fly low, so'st to let 'em make sure, an' laugh exultin'-like——"

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"Back to the woods for you, Perk; go ahead an' fly. Don't stand there talkin' about it."

"Sure Susie ain't got back yit, an' nobody else ain't lookin'?"

"Don't fret about that, Perk. We're all alone out here, but there's no tellin' how long we'll be by ourselves if you lose much more time."

There was a very peculiar situation in the McReady back yard. A stout pole, some thirty feet high, stood firmly planted in the ground. Half way up the pole a platform had been constructed, and on this platform stood an old, one-legged gentleman surrounded by a lot of canvas wings. There was a canvas tail behind to be depressed or lifted, according as the old gentleman wanted to fly up or down; and there was a propeller just in front of the tail, which was to be worked by foot-power and keep the machine going. The aeroplane had been hoisted to its elevated position by means of a stout rope passing through a pulley at the top of the pole.

The one-legged man was Welcome Perkins, and the red-headed boy on the ground was Chub McReady—who was something of an inventor himself, although this flying machine had been designed wholly by Welcome.

Slowly Welcome untied the rope from the flying machine, and Chub pulled it through the pulley and then coiled it up on the ground at the foot of the pole. Thereupon Welcome pushed into the manhole of the flying machine and began hoisting himself up and down, preparatory to springing off. He stopped suddenly, however, and pulled out of the machine to look down at Chub.

"I reckon, Chub," he observed, as by an afterthought, "I'll fly around the dome o' the capitol half a dozen times an' then light on the weather-vane so'st the governor kin have a chanst to look out o' the cupola winder an' thank me fer this boon to the human race. Mebby I'll perch on top o' the court-house, too, fer a spell, an' take a leetle fly out by the Injun school. If I don't git back airly, don't be in a takin' about me, er——"

"Oh, shucks!" roared Chub. "If you're afraid to start, Perk, come down an' let me try it."

"Afraid!" snorted Welcome. "You know blame' well I ain't afraid o' nothin' on the airth 'r over it. I wisht you'd stuck the 'Merican flag on the machine, some'rs, but I won't stop fer that now. So-long, Chub, I'm goin' to take wing. Git out yer spy-glass if ye want ter watch me."

While Chub held his breath, old Welcome made a few more up and down movements and then leaped from the platform.

But something must have been wrong. It couldn't have been the machine, of course, for Chub had O. K.'d the plans, so it must have been in the way Welcome manipulated the tail or the wings.

Twenty feet from the foot of the pole flowed the town canal. By actual measurement, Welcome flew twenty-five feet; then the canvas fabric turned itself inside out, and, with a wild yell, the old man dropped into the water. There was a tremendous splash, and a small-sized geyser shot upward.

Loud shouts came from around the corner of the house, and Matt King and Tom Clipperton rushed into sight and darted for the canal to give Welcome a helping hand. Matt grabbed up the rope at the foot of the pole as he ran past.

"Great Scott!" cried Chub, joining in the race for the canal, "where'd you fellers come from?"

"Rode up on our motor-cycles," replied Matt, "and hung around the corner to see the show. Foolish business, Chub. Welcome might have broken his neck—or that other leg."

"It was his own notion, that machine. I was sure it would fly, but I headed him for the canal, so if anything went wrong he'd have a soft place to drop."

By that time the boys were at the canal, and Matt threw the rope. Welcome, sputtering and floundering, was tangled in the wreckage. He had sense enough left to catch the rope, and Matt dragged him out of the torn canvas, and all three of the boys lifted him up on the bank.

"That's the last time," fumed Welcome, dancing around and holding his head on one side to get the water out of his ear, "the very last time, Chub McReady, I'm goin' to try any more o' your fool contraptions. I might a' been kilt! 'Tain't your fault I wasn't."

"It wasn't my contraption, Perk," answered Chub, smothering a laugh, now that he was certain Welcome hadn't suffered any particular damage. "It was yours."

"Dad-bing!" yelled Welcome, more worked up over the fun the boys were getting out of the situation than he was over the accident itself. "Ye goaded me on, ye know ye did! I ain't a-goin' to stand no more. Lawlessness is b'ilin' around inside o' me, an' I'm goin' to git right out! Instid o' helpin' progress, like I was intendin', I'm goin' to cut loose, out there in the hills, an' give it a back-set. You hear me? Wow! Laff! laff all ye want! When they git out the U. S. Army to chase me, an' run me down, I reckon ye'll laugh on t'other side yer face. An' it was you done it, Chub McReady! That's somethin' fer you to think about!"

The old man whirled and galloped for the house, growling to himself, jabbing his wooden pin viciously into the ground with every step, and leaving a watery trail as he went. Chub keeled over on the ground, kicked his feet in the air, and roared.

"It's a cinch," he guffawed, "that that's the last flyin' machine Perk'll try to invent. We thought we was havin' this experiment entirely private, an' I guess Perk thought I'd given you fellers the tip, so you could be hangin' around. That didn't help his temper any."

"We got here just before Welcome jumped off," said Matt. "I couldn't figure out what he was trying to do, at first, or I'd have rushed out and tried to stop him."

"You couldn't have stopped him!" snickered Chub. "The old boy had the bit in his teeth."

"Ducking was all right," grinned Clip. "May have been a good thing. Cooled his spirit, anyhow."

"Punk! His pesky spirit will break out somewhere else, you see. Perk is a human volcano, an' he's got to have an eruption just about so often or he can't be happy. But why are you fellers showin' up here so early in the morning?"

"Clip and I are going to Denver on our motor-cycles," answered Matt. "We just came around to say good-by."

Chub's face fell.

"On the level?" he asked. "Hang it all, Matt it can't be you're goin' to-day?"

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"We are, if nothing bobs up to keep us back. I've been trying to start for two or three weeks, but at the last moment I generally run into something that interferes with my plans. Clip has bought Penny's motor-cycle, we've laid out our route, and we want to get away early this afternoon."

"Say," exploded Chub, "if I had a motor-cycle I'm hanged if I wouldn't go with you."

"I've got a picture of you leaving Phœnix now," returned Matt, "while your father is getting to work developing his mine. You'll have to help him, Chub. Where's Susie? I want to say good-by to her before I—"

Matt broke off his words. Fate had already interfered two or three times with his start for Denver, and just then Fate was getting ready to repeat the old performance.

A far-away rattle, growing steadily in volume, broke on the ears of the boys. Whirling around, they stared across the canal and toward the road on the other side of the bridge.

What they saw sent the blood racing through their veins.

Four scrubby cayuses, hitched to a wood-hauler's wagon, were running away. The wagon was nothing more than two pairs of wheels connected by a "reach." As the vehicle leaped and swayed from one side of the road to the other, the startled eyes of the boys made out a small figure

clinging to the "reach" for dear life.

"There's a girl on that wagon!" cried Chub breathlessly.

The girl could not have been more than five or six years old, and her dangerous situation appealed to Matt and aroused a swift determination to save her if it could possibly be done.

Without a word, he picked up the rope with which he had dragged Welcome out of the canal and darted for the gate in front of the house. As he ran, his fingers were busy knotting a noose in the rope's end.

CHAPTER II.

A QUEER SITUATION.

Motor Matt was never long about making up his mind as to what he was going to do. In the present instance an expedient flashed through his brain which might, or might not, succeed.

The rope which had been used to hoist the aeroplane to the staging on the pole was a long one. As Matt ran through the gate, he flung the noose which he had tied in the rope over a hitching-post, and then leaped across the road.

By that time the four horses had crossed the bridge and were thundering on toward the front of the house. Matt, holding the rope firmly, stretched it so as to bring it across directly in front of the leaders.

Clipperton, instantly divining Matt's plan, started toward him, with the intention of helping him hang onto the end of the rope. But Matt had other plans for him and Chub.

"Keep back, Clip!" he yelled. "When I make 'em slow down, you and Chub grab the bits."

Just then the front wheels of the wagon separated from those in the rear. The "reach" went on with the forward axle, and the back wheels spun around, dashed across the road, and smashed into the fence. The end of the "reach" had struck the ground with terrific force, and the girl was dragged along with it.

Why didn't she let go? was the thought that plunged through Matt's mind. The next moment he had no time to think or to do anything else but give his attention to the work in hand.

There was a shock like an earthquake as the front horses of the team hit the rope. Matt, clinging like grim death to the stout hemp, was jerked into the air and hurled forward and inward. The pace of the leaders was checked, and the wheel-horses tried to play leap-frog with them, the result being that the whole team became entangled in the harness.

Clip and Chub, throwing themselves at the heads of the leaders, grabbed the bits. Before the rope was pulled from Matt's hands, the horses were at a standstill.

As soon as Clip and Chub had the team in hand, Matt ran to the girl. She was lying on the ground close to the end of the "reach" and an exclamation escaped Matt's lips when he saw that she was tied to the piece of timber that had connected the front wheels with those behind.

"Is she hurt?" called Clip.

"She must be," answered Matt. "I don't see how she could go through what she has without being hurt—and badly hurt at that. She's unconscious. Some one tied her to the wagon."

He went down on his knees, and, with his pocket-knife, severed the rope that secured the girl to the "reach."

He was about to pick her up in his arms when a panting voice called out to him:

"Leaf her alone! I will be taking care of her."

Matt straightened on his knees and looked at the speaker. The man was a Mexican, and had a surly, ill-omened face. He was covered with dust, and had evidently been racing after the team on foot. Behind him another Mexican was coming.

The little girl was American—Matt could tell that by her looks. That being the case, why was she with the two Mexicans? And why had she been tied to the wagon?

"Does the team belong to you?" demanded Matt.

"Yas, he b'long to me. I left him by de store, an' he git scare' an' make a run off. *Carramba!* He bust my wagon all up. I take care of de girl, señor. She hurt, huh?"

The other Mexican, scarcely giving a look at the girl, passed on to the horses and began to pound them with a stick that he was carrying. His attack was so brutal that Clip grabbed the stick out of his hand, and would have laid it over his back if Chub had not interfered.

"Cut it out, Clip," said Chub. "The greaser don't know any better. About half o' these wood-haulers ain't any more'n half-baked."

"He'll have the team running again," scowled Clipperton. "He ought to have some sense pounded into him."

Meanwhile, Matt, paying no heed to the other Mexican, had picked up the little girl and was

carrying her toward the gate. The Mexican ran after him and grabbed his arm.

"You gif her to me!" he shouted.

"This is the most ungrateful outfit of greasers I ever met up with," cried Clip, hurrying toward the second man. "That'll do for you!" he said angrily, catching the fellow by the collar and throwing him back.

The Mexican whirled, his little eyes glittering like a snake's. One hand darted toward the breast of his coat.

"Look out Clip!" warned Chub. "He's going to pull a knife on you."

Clip still had the club he had taken from the Mexican's companion, and he squared away threateningly. There was a scar in the shape of a cross on the man's swarthy cheek, and it glowed redly with the anger that filled him.

Before the clash could proceed any farther, a man came galloping up on horseback. The boys recognized him at once as Mr. McKibben, the sheriff. The Mexicans also seemed to recognize him, for the one by the horses slunk in between the animals' heads, and the other at once lost his truculent manner.

"What's going on here?" demanded McKibben, peering sharply at the Mexican, and then swerving his gaze to Matt and the unconscious form in his arms.

"The team ran away, Mr. McKibben," explained Matt, "and this girl was tied to the 'reach.' It looks as though she was badly hurt. I want to carry her into the house and this fellow was trying to take her away from me."

"H'm!" muttered the sheriff, getting down from his horse, "it's a cinch the girl don't belong to them." He stepped closer to the Mexican, his eyes on the scar. "Where'd you get the girl?" he demanded, one hand groping in his pocket.

"The *niño*?" returned the Mexican shiftily. "She b'long to a friend of mine, señor. I take her to him. I no like to leave her here."

The sheriff's hand came out of his pocket with a rush, bringing a pair of handcuffs along with it. In less time than it takes to tell it, one of the cuffs was about the Mexican's right wrist, while the other was snapped about McKibben's left.

The Mexican gave a backward jump, but the sheriff, with a pull of the arm, drew him back with a jerk that almost lifted him off his feet. Once more the Mexican's hand was plunged into the breast of his coat. It was the left hand this time, however, and he was awkward in using it. McKibben's fingers gripped the wrist of the hand as it was withdrawn and shook a knife out of it.

"None of that, Juan Morisco!" growled McKibben. "You see, I know you. I've had you watched ever since you reached town, so you'll just walk along with me and not make any trouble about it."

There was a rattle of hoofs up the road.

"The other one's making a getaway, Mr. McKibben," sang out Chub excitedly. "He took one of the horses and— Holy smoke, watch him go!"

The sheriff turned and flashed a look after the retreating horseman.

"I can follow him," said Clip. "I'll use your horse."

"Let him go," answered McKibben. "He's only the wood-hauler. This is the man I want. Take the girl into the house, King," he added. "You might ride my horse to the corral, Clipperton, and get a doctor."

"Do you know anything about this girl?" asked Matt, looking down at the head that was lying limply over his arm.

"Not a thing; but I'll bet money there's crooked work of some kind going on. The girl didn't belong with these Mexicans."

"If they hadn't tied her to the wagon," said Matt, "she would have got clear of that accident without being so badly hurt."

"We'll get Juan in the sweat-box and find out about it."

"What have you pinched the greaser for, Mr. McKibben?" asked Chub.

"Don't get so curious, McReady," parried the sheriff. "Hitch those three horses to the fence, and I'll send some one after them and the wreck of the wagon. Do what you can for the girl, King."

Clip got on the sheriff's animal and started for the bridge; Chub went to the horses which, by that time, had quieted down, and started toward the fence with them; McKibben took his prisoner toward town; and Matt pushed on through the gate and into the house.

This was a mysterious affair from start to finish, and he was wondering what would come of it.

CHAPTER III.

Susie McReady, who had been visiting with a friend over in town, came home a little while after Matt had laid the girl down on a couch. Chub entered the house with his sister, and was excitedly telling her what had happened.

Susie went at once to the girl and began doing what she could for her.

"It's too bad," murmured Susie sympathetically, as she passed a wet cloth back and forth over the girl's face. "Poor little thing! She hardly seems to have any breath left in her."

"An' she don't seem to be hurt anywhere," said Chub, standing close to the couch with Matt, "that's the queerest part of it."

"She may be hurt internally," spoke up Matt, feeling a pang of pity as he looked at the pale little face.

The girl's clothing was so ragged it was a wonder that it held together. Her shoes were broken and scuffed out, and there were holes in her stockings.

The cold water revived her, and when her big eyes flickered open, they passed in a troubled daze from Susie to Chub, and then to Matt. When they rested on Matt, a faint smile came to her lips.

"Yous is de one dat was runnin' acrost de road wid a rope," said she. "Dat was bully, w'at yous done. Put 'er dere, cull," and she lifted herself on one elbow and reached out her hand.

"You're feeling a whole lot better, eh?" asked Matt, taking the dirty little paw.

"Well, mebby," was the hesitating answer, "only I can't move me pins. What's de matter wid 'em?"

She looked down at her feet as Matt released her hand. Susie cast a frightened glance at Matt.

"Are you trying to move your feet?" Matt asked, hiding as best he could the sudden consternation that swept through him.

"Sure I'm tryin'. Funny, ain't it? Dey feel like dey wasn't mine."

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"Well, don't fret about it," said Matt softly. "When the doctor comes he'll fix you up all right. What's your name?"

"Rags," was the answer.

"You've got another name besides that, haven't you?"

"Sure; but yous don't hear me sayin' it, I guess." Her face hardened a little as she added: "Yous has done a lot fer me"—here she fixed her large eyes steadily on Matt—"an' I'd do a lot fer yous, on'y don't ask me name or anyt'ing about meself; see? Dat goes. Come around here an' grab holt o' me mitt. Dere ain't nobody treated me white fer quite a spell. De rest is all right, but yous is de one dat's made a hit wid Rags."

Susie drew back a little and Chub pushed up a chair. Matt humored the child and sat down beside her.

"W'at d'yous call yerself?" she asked, snuggling Matt's hand against her cheek.

"Matt," he answered.

"Gee, but yous is fine! Say, ain't yous de Motor Matt de push has been talkin' about?"

"They call me that sometimes."

She laughed, and her eyes danced as they looked into his.

"Ain't it great t' have a feller like yous stop a runaway team an' pull yous out o' de smash! Why, yous saved me jest like yous did Dirk Hawley's goil, only she was ridin' a horse while I was hangin' to a busted wagon."

"Who were those men with you, Rags?" queried Matt.

"Cut it out, Matt. Dat's somet'ing I can't tell yous."

"Have you lived long in Phœnix?"

"Dere yous go ag'in! Say, I hope dem pins git so's I kin use 'em before long. I ain't got no money an' I can't be spongin' on folks dat mebby don't want me around."

"You can stay right here, Rags, as long as you want to," put in Susie, "and it won't cost you a cent."

"Not a red!" added Chub heartily.

"Dat's mighty kind," answered Rags, "but I got t' fly my kite jest as soon's I kin git on me uppers."

"Is Juan Morisco a friend of yours, Rags?" asked Matt, still trying to get some information from the girl.

"What's dat?" demanded Rags, starting up and looking hard at Matt. "How'd yous know w'at his name was?"

"The sheriff arrested him——"

"Jugged! Are yous givin' it to me straight?"

"Yes."

Rags lay back and closed her eyes in a tired way.

"Well," she muttered, "dey won't git nuttin' out o' me."

The doctor came, just then, and for several minutes he gave his undivided attention to Rags. When he had got through, and had left some medicine, he beckoned Matt to follow him out on the porch. The moment they were clear of the house the doctor's face became very grave.

"Not much hope for her," said he.

"What!" exclaimed Matt, taken aback. "Do you mean she can't get well?"

"Chances don't favor it. There's an injury to her spine and she's paralyzed from the hips down. What do you know about her, King?"

"Not a thing, doctor, and she won't say a word about herself. But maybe the man the sheriff arrested can be made to tell something."

The doctor, apparently, had been told all about the runaway and the arrest of the Mexican, by Clip.

"There's something here that's mighty mysterious," said he, shaking his head. "This Juan Morisco must be a hard citizen or McKibben wouldn't have nabbed him. And what was the girl doing with Morisco, tied to the wagon like she was? Got to make her talk, King. You seem to have more influence over her than any one else. She's too young to have much strength of will, and I think she'll tell you everything if you keep trying to make her."

"That's where you're wrong, doctor," said Matt. "From what I've seen of her I'll bet she won't say a word. Rags has got a reason for keeping back what she knows, and she'd let you kill her before she'd breathe a whisper."

"Well, I hear McKibben is giving Juan Morisco the third degree. If Morisco can stand that, he's a better man than I think he is. One way or another, the truth about that girl is bound to come out."

The doctor got into his buggy and drove off. Matt stood at the gate for a few moments, looking for Clip; but, as he could see nothing of him, he went back into the house.

Rags was asleep. Susie, who sat beside the couch, looked at Matt and laid a finger on her lips. Matt tiptoed out through the kitchen to the back of the house. Chub was sitting in a chair, tilted back against the wall.

"What's old Sawbones got to say, pard?" he asked.

"Not much hope for Rags, Chub," said Matt gravely.

"Too bloomin' bad!" muttered Chub, "but mebby old pills-an'-physic has made a wrong guess."

"Of course, there's a chance that he's off his reckoning. Wish I knew why Rags won't tell us anything about herself, or about those two greasers who had her tied to the wagon."

"She's a nervy little piece! Mebby she'll tell you, though, if you give her time. You seem to make a hit with all the girls, Matt, little an' big, an' Rags has taken to you like a Piute squaw to a string of glass beads."

"Where's Welcome?" asked Matt.

A slow grin worked its way over Chub's freckled face.

"He's out in his study, soothin' his turbulent soul with hair-raisin' literature."

"Didn't know he had a study," said Matt.

Chub jerked a thumb over his shoulder at a neighboring barn.

"It's over there," said he. "Perk's got a box stall all to himself, an' his library contains everything about Dick Turpin that was ever written. Come on over an' we'll take a look at him."

Matt was glad of something that would take his mind off Rags for a time, and he followed Chub toward the barn. Approaching softly, Chub placed an empty box under a square opening that ventilated one of the stalls and motioned for Matt to get up beside him.

Some shelves had been put up along one side of the stall, and they were piled with a lot of grimy-looking books. One of the books lay open on a board placed over the manger, and Welcome stood in front of it with an old butcher-knife in his hand. The old man had twisted up the ends of his mustache to make it look bristling and fierce, and he was mumbling to himself and flashing the butcher-knife around him savagely.

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"Le'me see," the boys heard him mutter, as he bent over the book, "how does that there go? Dad-bing! I wisht I had my glasses. The print's purty fine an' the light ain't none too good."

Then he read, tracing the words with the point of the knife.

"'Gallopin' Dick pulled up his hoss clost by the coach an' drew a bead on the passengers with his trusty pistol. 'Stand!' he cried; 'stand an' deliver!'"

Welcome jerked himself away from the book, whirled around on his wooden pin and pointed his knife at the book-shelves.

"Stop where ye be!" he said fiercely. "It's Eagle-eye Perkins, Pirate o' the Plains, that's stoppin' this here stage-coach. Stand an' deliver!"

Just then Chub let off a whoop. Welcome, startled by the unexpected sound, dropped the knife, jumped for the side of the stall, and tried to climb up the book-shelves.

Crash went the collection of literature, and Welcome fell back on the floor of the stall, half-covered by a deluge of books.

Laughing to themselves, the boys dropped off the box and started back toward the house.

"What do you think of that!" chuckled Chub. "The old joke is a nice kind of reformed road-agent, ain't he? Instead of tryin' to fight down his lawlessness, he's keepin' it alive with that stuff. I'll bet if sis ever finds out about his doin's there'll be a ruction, and— Hello! here comes Clip, an' he's tearin' along as though he was goin' over the course for a record."

The boys had reached a place where they could see the road. Clipperton, on foot, was racing up from the canal bridge. Clip was the best "miler" anywhere in that part of the country, and he was certainly hitting nothing but the high places as he rushed for the McReady front gate.

"Let's hike for the road and find out what he's got on his mind," suggested Matt.

He and Chub reached the gate just as Clipperton came up with it.

"Get the *Comet*, Matt," jerked out Clipperton. "You're wanted on the jump. Hustle."

"Who wants me?" demanded Matt.

"The governor. It's a hurry-up call. McKibben said for you not to lose a minute."

"What does the governor want me for?"

As Matt put the question he was running for his motor-cycle.

"That's too many for me," answered Clip. "All I know's what I'm telling you. Something in the wind. No getaway for Denver for us to-day."

"Where'll I find Governor Gaynor?" asked Matt.

He was pushing his machine through the gate, and Clip was getting his own wheel and making ready to follow.

"In his office," answered Clip. "He's waiting for you there."

Matt got into the saddle and began pedaling. The next moment the pistons took the push and the motor began to snap. By the time he reached the bridge the cylinders were purring softly and the *Comet* was going like a limited express.

CHAPTER IV.

A DANGEROUS MISSION.

"I don't think the boy can make it, McKibben; I don't know whether it's right to ask him to try to make it."

The governor was pacing back and forth in his private office, talking with the sheriff who sat near-by. Something of importance was in the wind, as could plainly be told from the faces of the two men and from the nervous actions of the governor.

"There's nothing that lad can't do when he sets his mind to it," declared McKibben. "If Joe Dangerfield and his gang are kept from reaching Mexico, it's Motor Matt that does it. Take my word for that, governor."

"Do you think you can believe what Juan Morisco told you?" queried the governor.

"I'll take my oath it was the truth."

"If word reaches the Dangerfield gang about what we're doing, King will never be allowed to reach his destination."

"How can word reach the gang? When the boy starts he'll go like a streak of greased lightning. He'll beat the news, even if there was a leak somewhere and the information that he was acting as your courier got started toward the hills."

"I sha'n't let him start until I have told him all about the danger——"

McKibben laughed.

"That youngster don't know what fear is, governor. He won't gigg back on the job because of any trouble that may be staring him in the face. Anyhow, he's our only hope. There's not a machine in town that can cover the ground like it's got to be covered, except the *Comet*; and there's no one else to use the *Comet* except Motor Matt."

"He's slow getting here, seems to me," muttered the governor, starting for a window to look out.

Before he reached the window a rap fell on the door. In answer to his call, the governor's secretary entered.

"Here's young King, sir," announced the secretary.

"Have him come right in," said the governor, a look of relief crossing his face.

The secretary withdrew, and the next moment Matt entered and stood before the two men, cap in hand.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

This was not the first time Governor Gaynor had seen Motor Matt, but never before had he marked the sturdy bearing and resourceful air of the lad as he did then. Somehow, his feeling of relief increased, and he sat down in the big chair before his desk.

"Yes, King," said he; "I sent for you. How would you like to do a little brisk, and perhaps exciting, work for Uncle Sam and the Territory of Arizona?"

"I'll be glad to do anything I can," answered Matt, not a little curious because of the governor's words and manner.

"There may be danger in it, King," went on the governor, eyeing the lad's face keenly, "a great deal of danger."

"That ought to keep me gingered up," smiled Matt easily.

McKibben chuckled and swerved his eyes to the governor.

"There'll also be one hundred dollars in it for you."

"That's all right, too, sir," said Matt. "I could use the hundred."

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"Briefly, then," proceeded the governor briskly, "the work is this: A man named Joe Dangerfield, with several other ruffians, is camped at Tinaja Wells, near Painted Rocks. They're a lawless set, those fellows, and have been engaged in smuggling Chinamen into the United States by way of Mexico and the Arizona border. The Federal Government has offered a reward of one thousand dollars each for the capture of Dangerfield or any of his gang.

"Jasper Burke, the sheriff from Prescott, is camped with a posse at Potter's Gap, just over the divide, at the head of Castle Creek Cañon. Dangerfield and his gang are known to be making for the Mexican border, to get away from the authorities and so effect their escape. The trail south from Tinaja Wells passes through Potter's Gap, and Burke and his posse are waiting there to catch the Dangerfield outfit as it comes along.

"It appears now, however, that Dangerfield has got wind of the sheriff's move, and that he is going to leave Tinaja Wells some time to-night and start south by another route. Now, Potter's Gap is a hundred miles from Phoenix, and unless I can find a courier who will get a letter into Burke's hands by five o'clock this afternoon, the Dangerfield gang will escape into Mexico."

The governor's eyes sought a clock on the wall.

"It lacks fifteen minutes of noon," said he. "If you can get started by twelve o'clock, you will have just five hours to make a 'century' run—and a rough run it will be for a part of the way. Can you make it?"

A large map of Arizona hung near the clock. Matt stepped toward it.

"Can you show me, Mr. McKibben," he asked, "how I'll have to go to reach Potter's Gap?"

"Sure, Matt," answered the sheriff, getting out of his chair and drawing his finger over the map as he talked. "This here's the Black Cañon road out of Phoenix—you know that pretty well by this time, I reckon. The road forks this side of the Bluebell Mine, and you take the fork. That leads you to Frog Tanks and Castle Creek Cañon. You go up the cañon to a point five miles north of Hot Springs; there you'll find a trail leading up the right-hand wall of the cañon and over the divide to Potter's Gap. The hard part of your trip will come getting over the divide."

"Any place on the trail where I can get gasoline?" asked Matt. "The *Comet's* tank will only hold enough for about seventy-five miles. If I can't get any on the way, I'll have to take some with me. Won't have to bother with oil. The oil-tank holds a quart, and that will keep me going for two hundred miles."

"Better take some gasoline along and make sure," said McKibben. "You might be able to get some at Hot Springs, or at Frog Tanks; but there's a doubt, and you can't be in doubt of anything on this trip."

"Very well, sir."

"Think you can find your way all right?"

"It looks easy on the map, but I might take Clipperton along. He knows the country like a book, and he's got a motor-cycle of his own now. His machine is a one-cylinder, and not as fast as the *Comet*, but if I see Clip can't keep the pace, I can leave him behind."

"It's all right to take one of your chums with you, King," put in the governor; "in fact, it may be a mighty good thing for you to have some one else along. If Dangerfield and his men are captured, it means that they will spend a good long time in the penitentiary; and if they find out you are carrying word to Burke that will keep them from reaching Mexico, they'll do everything in their power to stop you."

"How'll they find out, sir? I'll keep ahead of the news all the way."

"That's what I'm hoping you'll do; but this Dangerfield gang is well organized, and the fact that they've discovered Burke and his posse are laying for them at Potter's Gap proves they're keeping track of things."

The governor whirled around to his desk and picked up an envelope.

"I'll not keep you any longer," said he, "for you have little enough time for your 'century' run as it

is. Here are the instructions which you are to deliver to Burke. Put the letter away safely."

Matt opened his leather jacket and tucked the letter into the inside pocket.

"Did you find out all this from Juan Morisco, Mr. McKibben?" he asked.

The sheriff nodded.

"That scar on Juan's face gave him away," said he. "How's the girl?"

The sheriff's eyes widened when he heard the report.

"She won't say a word about herself, or about Juan Morisco," went on Matt.

"Can't blame her for that," said the sheriff.

It was plain that Morisco had told the sheriff something about Rags, and Matt would have liked to hear what it was. Time was pressing just then, however, and he had no wish to talk any longer.

As he was about to leave the room, the governor caught his hand, shook it heartily, and wished him luck.

"I have confidence in your ability to take care of yourself, King," said he; "if I hadn't, I shouldn't allow you to make this venture under any consideration. Keep a sharp look-out for trouble, that's all, and put the *Comet* through for all she's worth."

"I'll get your letter into Burke's hands, Governor Gaynor," declared Matt, "by five o'clock. Good-by, sir."

As he left the office the clock was striking twelve.

"He'll do it, too," declared McKibben.

A few moments after the door closed behind Matt, the secretary presented himself. He wore a troubled air.

"What's the matter, Jenkins?" queried the governor.

"Perhaps nothing, sir," answered Jenkins; "but when young King came in to see you, there was a rough-looking man loafing around the hall. After I had sent King into your office, I saw the man through the window. He was hurrying down the walk in front, and I watched until he got into a motor-car—a high-powered roadster. There was another man in the car, and I'm sure they exceeded the speed-limit as they broke away from the curb."

The governor, with a trace of consternation, turned on the sheriff.

"What do you think of that, McKibben?" he asked.

McKibben laughed easily.

"You're letting this Dangerfield business get on your nerves, governor," said he. "What could that chap who was loafing in the hall discover just by seeing King come in here?"

"He might have been friendly toward the Dangerfield gang, and he may have made a guess as to why King had come here——"

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"Nothing to it, governor, take it from me. Motor Matt will pull down that hundred just too easy for any use. A dollar a mile for that 'century' run looks pretty good to him, I'll bet. Don't lose any sleep about *him*. He'll be back here some time to-morrow, chipper as usual and a hundred to the good. He's the bank that gets my gilt, no discount on that."

CHAPTER V.

THE RED ROADSTER.

As Matt hurried out of the capitol building he found Clip at the curb, waiting for him. Clip's motor-cycle was leaning against a hitching post, and there was an ominous look on Clip's swarthy face—a look that somehow reminded one of his grim Indian ancestors, for Clip was proud of the fact that one of his grandparents had been a full-blood native of the soil.

"What's on?" he asked, as Matt rolled the *Comet* off the walk and into the street.

"I've got to do a hard 'century' in five hours," answered Matt, "and you're to go with me as long as you can keep up."

A gleam of satisfaction darted through Clip's eyes.

"I was looking for your machine," said he. "Where'd you leave it, Matt?"

"Left it at the steps, in charge of the janitor. Didn't intend to give any one a chance to tamper with it. How's your gasoline-tank, Clip?"

"Full."

"Plenty of oil?"

Clip nodded.

"Same here," went on Matt. "We've got to carry two quarts more of gasoline with us, and we'll pick it up at Brigham's."

Brigham's was a general store in the "Five Points," and on the boys' direct course to the Black Cañon road. The machines were soon hustling through Washington Street as fast as the speed regulations would allow.

"Going up Castle Creek Cañon?" asked Clip, while he and Matt were gliding along side by side.

"How'd you know that, Clip?" returned Matt.

"Then it's true," muttered Clip darkly. "By thunder!"

The quarter-blood's manner was full of mysterious foreboding.

"What's true?" came from Matt sharply.

"A red automobile stood in front of the capitol. Was there when I came up. A rough-looking fellow was in the driver's seat. Another tough-looking man ran out of the building and jumped into the red car. 'Motor Matt's carrying a message,' I heard the second man say to the driver. 'Castle Creek Cañon, Jem, on the high speed.' Trouble ahead, Matt," Clip added.

Matt was astounded.

"Was that all you heard, Clip?" he asked.

"That was all."

"Ever see the two men before?"

"No."

"What kind of a car was it?"

"Roadster. Looked like it could go."

Matt puzzled over this disquieting information all the way to Brigham's. They were held up about five minutes at the general store, buying a couple of two-quart canteens and having them filled with gasoline. When they left the Five Points and shot along Grand Avenue, each had a receptacle securely lashed to the head of his machine.

Thirty miles an hour was about the limit of Clip's motor-cycle. Clip had recently bought the machine of Ed Penny, and had equipped it with new tires, so that it was in a perfectly serviceable condition.

Twenty miles an hour for five hours would turn the trick. But that was too close figuring. The boys were a quarter of an hour late getting away. This time would have to be made up, and, besides that, Matt wanted to gain on the schedule so as to have a little leeway for possible accidents.

"How's the going between the Arizona Canal and Castle Creek Cañon, Clip?" queried Matt, as they whirled into the Black Cañon road.

"Fine to Frog Tanks," answered Clip. "From there to the cañon not so good. In the cañon it's mighty poor."

"Then we'll have to make all the time we can at this end of the route. Open 'er up, Clip!"

Both boys opened the throttles and let the reserve power shoot through the machinery. The needle of Matt's speedometer indicated thirty-two miles an hour.

"Great!" cried Matt, after giving Clip the figures. "That little one-cylinder is just naturally humping herself, Clip. We've got five hours for the trip, but at this pace we could almost do it in three."

"Hard trail in the cañon, Matt. There'll be plenty of lost time there. What's the game, anyway?"

Matt explained as they dashed along. The excitement of the work ahead brought a glow to Clip's eyes.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Motor Matt, the Governor's Courier! You'll get through on time even if I can't."

"Whether you're in at the finish or not, Clip, we split that hundred dollars right in two in the middle. If we ever get started for Denver, old chap, the money will help."

"But that red roadster!" scowled Clip. "How did those roughs get next to this work of yours?"

"That's too many for me," answered Matt.

"They must have suspected something. They were there, in front of the capitol, waiting. Mighty queer!"

Matt's lips compressed into a thin line and his eyes flashed.

"We'll have to keep a keen look-out for trouble," said he, "and dodge it, if any comes our way."

A few minutes later they were crossing the bridge over the Arizona Canal. Matt pulled out his old silver watch.

"Only sixteen minutes to one," he announced, with a note of exultation, "and we're fifteen miles on our way."

"Thirty miles to Frog Tanks and twenty to the next water," said Clip. "We ought to have brought a water-canteen, too. The heat is something fierce."

"We'll drink at the well, Clip, and pick up something to eat at the same place. We ought to be

there in forty minutes, at the outside."

After they left the Black Cañon road, just beyond the bridge, Matt was in a country entirely new to him. The road was a bit cut up and sandy in places, but Clip whaled his machine along and they did a trifle better than thirty miles.

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Two or three roads entered the one they were following, and they were all as well traveled. Here Matt's wisdom in bringing Clip along, even at the loss of some speed on the *Comet's* part, was made manifest. But for Clip, Matt might have gone astray on the wrong trail.

The boys were now in the region of big sahuara cacti, and the great trunks flashed past them as telephone-poles recede behind a rushing train.

In the dusty places of the road the broad tracks left by the tires of an automobile could be plainly seen. The red roadster was ahead of them. Matt studied the skyline in advance, wondering how far away the two ruffians were and what their designs could be. He saw nothing of the red car, and presently the square walls and flat roof of an adobe house broke on his vision.

Behind the house was a primitive stable, thatched with grass, and a small corral constructed of ocotilla poles braided together with wire. Between the house and stable was an iron pump and a watering-trough.

"That's the ranch where we get our water," remarked Clip. "Two bits apiece for a drink. There's Gregory, the rancher, out in front."

Gregory, the rancher, got up in surprise as the boys came to a stop at the pump. He stared at the machines.

"Waal, I'll be hanged!" he muttered. "They've got them hossless wagons on four wheels an' two wheels. Reckon they'll be havin' 'em on one wheel next. Dry? Help yerself. Two bits apiece fer all ye kin swaller. Water costs money in the desert."

Leaning their machines against the water-trough, the boys began working the pump.

"Did you see a horseless wagon on four wheels go past here, Mr. Gregory?" asked Matt.

"Sure. Two fellers was on the seat. They stopped fer water an' then hiked right on, jest as though they was in a hurry ter git some'r's. Friends o' your'n?"

"No, we don't know them," answered Matt. "How long since they passed?"

"Less'n five minutes."

"Got anything to eat in your place?" went on Matt. "We can't stop more than a minute or two."

"Sho!" exclaimed the man. "Ever'body 'pears ter be in a hurry this arternoon. I got jerked beef, crackers, an' all kinds o' canned goods, say nothin' erbout—"

"'Jerked' and crackers'll do," interrupted Clip. "We'll go in, Gregory. Get us a hand-out we can tote in our pockets."

"Sartain," answered Gregory.

The boys were not in the adobe house to exceed five minutes, and they wouldn't have been there to exceed three if Gregory had been a little more spry in his movements. Stuffing their crackers and dried beef into their pockets, they ran out of the house and to their machines. Scarcely taking time to look the motor-cycles over, they pulled them upright and got into the saddles.

Matt pedaled away, twisting on the gasoline and the spark. But the motor did not work—he was still pushing the machine ahead with the pedals. He halted to investigate and find out what was wrong, and at that moment a startled cry came from Clip.

Matt looked around. Clip was having the same trouble getting his motor-cycle started. But Clip had made another discovery which sent a shock of consternation through both him and Matt.

"Our gasoline-cans!" cried Clip. "Where are they?"

Then, for the first time, Matt saw that his reserve supply of gasoline had been removed from the head of the *Comet*. Clip's can had disappeared in the same mysterious manner. With a sudden, paralyzing thought, Matt examined the tank back of his saddle.

The tank was empty!

Doubling up his fists, Clip jumped for Gregory. The latter sprang back and stared at Clip in astonishment.

"You know who did it!" shouted Clip menacingly. "The men on that red roadster hired you to stop us! You had some one hiding here. While we were in the house the gasoline was taken away. We'll give you a minute to get it back. Sixty seconds, Gregory!"

The rancher continued to stare.

"I don't know nothin' about what you're gittin' at," he muttered blankly. "I ain't makin' trouble fer no one, an' them other fellers didn't hire me ter do a thing. Keep away, I tell ye! Thar's two o' you, but I'll give ye a hot time if ye git too hostile!"

Gregory picked up an ax as he stepped back, and then stood confronting the boys threateningly.

CHAPTER VI.

SURMOUNTING THE DIFFICULTY.

While this clash was going forward between the rancher and Clip, Matt's mind had been busy. The result of his thinking forced the conclusion that Gregory was innocent of any underhand work.

First, the rancher seemed to be alone at the ranch. If that was really the case, then there had been no one belonging to the place to interfere with the machines. Furthermore, some knowledge of the mechanism of the motor-cycles had been necessary in order to strip the machines of their gasoline in the short space of time in which the work had been done. It was not to be supposed that any confederate of Gregory's could have had this knowledge.

"Hold up, Clip," said Matt, dropping a hand on his chum's arm. "You're on the wrong track. I'm sure Gregory didn't do this, or have any one do it."

"There wasn't any one else," flared Clip. "If Gregory didn't do it, he knows who did."

"The red roadster may have stopped farther along the trail, and one of the men may have come back. Have you got any gasoline, Gregory?" inquired Matt.

"Nary, I ain't," answered the rancher. "That's what them other two fellers wanted ter know."

Clip cast a quick look at Matt.

"Mebby they're running short themselves," said Clip. "They found Gregory didn't have any. Then they made a dead set at ours."

"Or," went on Matt, "those fellows may have asked Gregory just to make sure we couldn't get a fresh supply from him when they had taken what we had. We'll go on for a while and use the pedals."

"We've lost out," cried Clip angrily. "Just at the start, too. Nice thing for you to tell the governor."

Matt looked gloomily at his watch, then started off with all the speed he could throw into the pedals. But the weight of the machinery, now suddenly useless, pulled him back.

His hopes were down, way down. His mysterious enemies had scored a telling stroke at the very start-off. [Pg 10]

"What time is it, Matt?" asked Clip, in a discouraged tone, toiling along beside his chum.

"Twenty-five minutes of two," was the answer.

"We've got three hours and twenty-five minutes to go sixty-five miles!" Clip laughed gruesomely. "We couldn't do it in two days, at this rate."

While the boys were talking they came to a long slope that ran downward through a thick chaparral of greasewood, palo-verde, and ironwood. The road twisted serpentlike to avoid rough ground. From somewhere in the thicket below a muffled *thump, thump, thump* came up to them, as though some one was wielding an ax.

"What's that?" queried Matt, looking at Clip.

"Mexican wood-cutters, I reckon," was the response.

The boys went on down the slope, coasting at a rapid gait. Half-way down the descent, a turn brought them into the proximity of an automobile, and so suddenly that they had to clap on the brakes in order to avoid a collision.

The car was a red roadster. It was at a standstill in the middle of the trail, and neither of the two men was near it.

Astounded at this stroke of luck, Matt and Clip, for a moment, could do no more than stare at each other. The blows of the ax, off in the chaparral, were louder in their ears now, and they could hear a mumble of voices.

"Wow!" gasped Clip. "Am I dreaming? Can I believe what I see? Say, Matt, this is too blamed good to be true!"

Matt, getting quick control of his wits, had been running his eyes over the roadster. One of the rear tires was flat. On the ground near the flattened tire lay a new one, just taken out of the brackets that had supported it.

"Well, well, this *is* luck!" breathed Matt, getting off his machine and hurrying to the automobile. "A tire blew up on them. They haven't a jack along, and they've gone into the brush to cut a couple of pieces of ironwood, in order to lift the axle and get on a new tire."

"They may be back—"

"Sure, and we've got to hustle." Matt was already on the running-board. "Here are our canteens," he went on excitedly, picking both of the gasoline-cans out of the rumble. "And they're full, too," he added. "Take one, Clip, and empty it into your gasoline-tank."

It was a time for action rather than words. The chopping had ceased in the chaparral, but the talking was still going on, and, from the sound of it, the two men were not as yet coming any nearer.

"We're using up our reserve supply," said Clip, while they were emptying the canteens into the

tanks.

"We'll fill the canteens again out of the car-tank," returned Matt, "if we have time."

"Bully!" chuckled Clip. "Then let the rest of the gasoline out into the road. Give 'em a dose of their own medicine. It'll serve 'em right."

Clip was a lad of quick temper. The Indian blood in his veins undoubtedly lay at the root of this, but the resentment he felt at being looked down upon by some of the Phoenix boys who regarded the mixed blood as a taint had had a good deal to do with it.

Had Matt not interfered at the well, Clip would certainly have set upon Gregory, for rarely did Clip's temper allow him time to reason a matter out. This reprisal against the two men who had the roadster, however, had already taken form in Matt's mind before Clip had suggested it. By stranding the car in the desert, thirty-five miles from a gasoline-filling station, Matt could clip the claws of his enemies and render them harmless.

The moment the *Comet's* tank had been filled and capped, Matt carried the canteen to the motor-car and proceeded to replenish it out of the supply belonging to his two enemies.

Then, while he was filling Clip's canteen, Clip was busy making Matt's fast to the head of the *Comet*. Both boys were so hard at work that they did not notice the sound of voices had died out in the chaparral. As Matt stepped back from the motor-car and finished screwing the cap on the canteen, a man jumped out into the road. The man was carrying a six-foot length of ironwood. With a yell of anger, he hurled the heavy stick straight at Matt.

Matt dodged, and the timber just grazed his head.

"Jem!" whooped the man; "this way—on the jump!"

Running around the front of the automobile, Matt made a rush for his machine, at the same time yelling to Clip to get into the saddle and make off with a rush.

The man, darting around the rear of the roadster, started to plant himself in Matt's way. Matt fainted as though he would pass on the right side. When the man had thrown himself in that direction, Matt plunged by on the left, whirling the canteen by the strap and striking his enemy a fierce crack on the side of the head.

The man toppled over against the automobile. By then Matt had reached the *Comet*. Still hanging to Clip's canteen, he jerked the motor-cycle away from the bushes, got into the saddle, and started the pedals. Clip had already started, but was going slow and looking back to see if his help would be needed.

Jem, the driver of the roadster, crashed through the bushes just as the *Comet* was getting under its own headway. He carried an ax and another piece of freshly cut ironwood.

"That's King!" whooped Jem's companion. "Stop him! You've got to stop him!"

Clip flung back a taunt. Matt, as the *Comet* gathered speed like a mettlesome racer, wondered how Jem was going to cover the fast-widening gap and do anything to stop either of the motor-cycles.

The next moment he understood what the last resource was the two men were going to fall back upon.

There came a "pop" like an exploding fire-cracker, and a bullet whistled past Matt's ear. Bending lower over the handlebars, he opened the throttle with a twist of his left hand. The road was down-hill and the *Comet* was going like a thunderbolt.

In about two seconds Matt had caught up with Clip; then, in an instant more, both boys were screened from their enemies by a turn in the road.

CHAPTER VII.

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SMOKE-SIGNALS.

"Thunder!" muttered Clip, as the breakneck pace was slackened a little. "Just made it, Matt. By the skin of our teeth. And we didn't dump their gasoline into the road, either. They'll be after us just a-smoking when they get that new tire on."

"We're playing in great luck, Clip, to get off as well as we did," answered Matt. "Here, take your two quarts of gasoline."

Clip took the canteen and hung the strap over his handlebars.

"We're ahead now, anyway," said he, with grim satisfaction. "That's a heap better than being behind."

Matt listened to the steady hum of the *Comet's* twin cylinders with an exultation he could not conceal. What had happened had been almost like snatching victory from certain defeat.

"How much time did we lose?" asked Clip.

"It's two o'clock," answered Matt, juggling his watch with one hand.

"And we're in the lead. That makes a heap of difference. There'll be no underhand work ahead of

us, after this. We'll beat the news to Potter's Gap."

The trail slid away into the flat desert at the foot of the slope. As the boys wheeled across the sandy level, they cast a look backward at the brush-covered slope, to see if they could discover any traces of the red roadster and of their enemies.

The car was not in sight, but rising straight upward in the still air was a thin column of smoke. Suddenly the column was broken, and one, two, three balls of vapor floated aloft; then the straight, grayish plume was in evidence again; after a moment the smoke-balls reappeared and wound up the spectacle.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Matt. "What sort of a performance do you call that, Clip?"

Clipperton's face was ominous as he answered:

"Smoke-signals. Those two back there must belong to Dangerfield's gang. They were telling some of the rest of the gang that we're coming." A look of savage pride crossed Clipperton's face. "You know why I know," he added. "It was born in me."

Motor Matt had been the first true white friend Clipperton had ever had. Perhaps that was because he had looked for the worth and manliness in the depths of Clip's nature, and had found more than any one else had ever taken the trouble to hunt for. Clip's ancestry was a raw wound, principally because there were some who took malignant pride in never allowing it to heal; and yet he was defiantly proud of it.

"I wish I had had a little of the same kind of knowledge born in me, Clip," said Matt generously, and Clip threw him a grateful look, and his surliness vanished.

"See there!" cried Clip abruptly, pointing toward a range of dim blue hills to the north. "The signals were read. They're being answered."

A long way off, but perfectly plain in the clear air, arose a column of smoke. It was broken into little clouds, just as the other had been, and when it disappeared it vanished as quickly.

"How do they do it, Clip?" asked Matt.

"A fire of green wood and a wet blanket. That's all. There's Frog Tanks," and Clip indicated a cluster of adobe walls and thatched roofs, midway between them and the point where the answering signals had shown themselves.

It was twenty minutes after two when the boys wheeled through the little Mexican settlement. There was no sign of the red roadster behind them, but, for all that, they were expecting trouble on account of the smoke-signals.

"Two hours and five minutes on the road," cried Matt, "and we're forty-five miles from Phoenix. We're still ahead of the schedule, Clip."

"The worst part of the road's ahead," said Clip briefly. "Here's where we begin to strike it."

Just at that moment the trail dipped into a rocky ravine and climbed a steep bank on the opposite side. There was no water in the ravine, but the rocks were jagged and sharp, and they had to use much care to save their tires. With all the reserve power thrown into the machinery, the *Comet* made hard work of the hill. Clip had to get off and drag his motor-cycle up by hand.

For a mile beyond the ravine the trail was heavy with sand. Matt began to appreciate the difficulties ahead of him and to worry a little about the outcome. Clip noticed the serious look that crossed his chum's face.

"Don't fret," said he. "The cañon won't be as bad as this. The bed of the cañon is hard enough. What makes it a tough trail is the boulders brought down in the freshets. That automobile couldn't get up the cañon at all. You and I can go around the rocks. There's the opening into the gulch. Just ahead."

At the edge of the flat Matt saw a high, rocky ridge. The ridge was broken by a notch, and the road crawled through the opening and into the defile.

The sides of the notch were steep, and the boys rode through it in single file, Matt taking the lead. When they were about half-way through, a crash broke on their ears, followed by a rumbling sound that grew swiftly in volume.

A yell of warning came from Clip.

Matt had just time to catch a glimpse of a rock rushing down the side of the notch. In a trice he speeded up the *Comet* and leaped forward toward the cañon, sand and loosened pebbles dropping all around him.

From behind him came a ringing shock. With his heart in his throat he shut off the power and clamped on the brake, stopping so suddenly that he was nearly thrown over the front wheel.

When he turned to look around, the rumbling had ceased. Clip's machine lay on its side, with a twisted and bent rear wheel, and Clip himself was just rising from the ground.

"Are you hurt, Clip?" Matt asked, bracing the *Comet* against a boulder and running back.

Clip was frantic with rage and disappointment. One look at his machine was enough to tell him that he was out of the race.

"Those smoke-signals did it!" he snorted angrily, lifting his eyes to the slope of the notch wall. "Some one loosened a rock. The skulking coyote! It's a wonder we weren't killed."

Matt saw the stone. It was round, water-worn, and as big as a barrel. Evidently it had caught Clip's machine just as it was all but out of the way. The impact had whirled it around and bent and twisted the wheel.

"Nothing but a repair-shop can ever fix that," said Matt, almost as much disappointed as his chum was. "What'll you do, Clip?"

Clip did not answer. He had seen something up the steep slope that brought a snarl of anger to his lips and sent him clawing and scrambling up the rocks.

Matt ran after him. If there was to be a fight with any of the Dangerfield gang, Matt was determined not to let Clip go into it alone.

The climb was a hard one, but the hard, well-trained muscles of the two boys made record work of it.

Twenty feet up the wall was a shelf. Clip was over the edge of the shelf first, having had the lead of Matt in the start. As Matt crawled over, he saw a roughly dressed man scurrying to get up the wall at the back of the shelf.

Clip jumped for the man, clutched his feet, and pulled him down. A torrent of imprecations, in some unknown tongue, burst from the man's lips. Throwing up his hands, he caught Clip about the throat, and the two rolled over and over, struggling desperately.

They would have gone over the edge of the shelf and rolled and bounded down the wall, had not Matt, quick to note his chum's danger, darted for the fighters to grab and hold them back.

Catching the man by the shoulders, Matt flung him sideways, on his back. The fellow had a knife in his hand, and made a vicious stab at Matt's breast. Clip, by a quick movement of his lithe body, caught the man's wrist and held the weapon back. Then, while all three were on their knees on the rocky shelf, a strange scene was enacted. Clip and the man stared at each other with startled eyes. The fight went out of each of them in a flash. An expression of amazement crept into their faces, and along with Clip's astonishment came a tinge of bitterness.

"What's the matter?" queried Matt, getting to his feet.

Neither Clip nor the man spoke a word. There was a clatter as the knife dropped on the shelf.

The man was tall and wiry. His face was even more swarthy than Clip's, his eyes were small and piercing, his hair was straight and black, and there were rings in his ears. He wore moccasins and buckskin leggings, and a dingy-blue flannel shirt, open at the throat.

Both the man and Clip got up slowly.

"*Tio! Tio mio!*" said Clip, in a hoarse whisper.

A slow grin worked its way into the man's face. From the edge of the shelf he looked down to where the disabled motor-cycle was lying.

Then he said something in a language Matt could not understand, and took a step toward Clip, with hand outstretched. Clip muttered and struck the hand aside. The man did not appear very much cast down by this lack of courtesy, but bent over coolly and picked up his knife. Returning it to his belt, he folded his arms, leaned back against the wall at the other side of the shelf, and studied the two boys curiously.

Clip clenched his hands as some strong emotion swept through him. Then abruptly he stepped toward the man and began speaking. What he said Matt could not understand. The words came swiftly, fairly tripping over each other. That Clipperton was upbraiding the man there was no doubt; but why he should do that, or why either of them should act in the queer manner they were doing was a puzzle.

Clip's fierce words seemed to make an impression on the man. The grin faded from his lips and a more serious expression took its place. As soon as he could break into the torrent of Clip's talk, the man spoke. He spoke for a full minute, and Matt pricked up his ears as he heard the name of Dangerfield mentioned.

When the man had finished, Clip said something in a sharp tone and started down the slope, beckoning Matt to follow. The man came to the edge of the shelf and watched them as they slipped and scrambled to the trail, but he made no move to follow.

"Smoke-signals," said Clip, in his usual terse fashion. "They got us into this fix. And brought me a big surprise. But it may be a help to you, Matt, in the long run."

Clip's face was moody, although his words were spirited enough.

"What in the wide world is that fellow?" queried Matt. "What sort of a hold have you got over him, Clip?"

"There's a chain of men watching Castle Creek Cañon," said Clip, not seeming to hear Matt's question. "The smoke-signals are passed on. From the other side of Frog Tanks, they reach Dangerfield, at Tinaja Wells. Some of the gang are laying for you above here. You'll have to go on alone. Think you can find the way?"

"It's right up the cañon, isn't it, until I get to the trail that leads over the right-hand wall?"

"Yes. Take the first trail that leads over the wall. You can't go wrong. While daylight lasts," and a cunning look rose in Clip's eyes, "there'll be more smoke-signals coming from here. I'll be back of them. *And they'll help you through.*"

Clip turned and led the way to the boulder where Matt had left the *Comet*.

"You'd better hike, Matt," said he. "You can't lose any more time."

"But who's that ruffian, Clip?" asked Matt again, as he got into the saddle.

"That ruffian"—there was mocking bitterness in Clip's voice, as he spoke—"is my uncle. He's a half-breed. His name is Pima Pete. He's one of the gang. He didn't recognize me when he rolled that stone down the hill. We haven't seen each other for two years."

Clip whirled around, as though he would make off without another word. Matt was dumfounded. He recovered himself, however, in time to call sharply:

"Clip!"

Clipperton turned and saw Matt holding out his hand. "Can't you say good-by, pard, and wish me luck?" asked Matt.

Clipperton hesitated a moment, then rushed forward, caught Matt's hand, and wrung it fervently. But he could not trust himself to speak.

Another minute and Motor Matt was in Castle Creek Cañon, headed north.

CHAPTER VIII.

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ON THE DIVIDE.

It was five minutes to three, and there were fifty miles of cañon and up-and-down trail over the divide to be covered. This meant that Motor Matt must average twenty-five miles an hour for the next two hours. In favorable parts of the trail he must do better than that, to off-set losses of time where the going was most difficult.

The bed of the cañon was strewn with boulders, ranging in size from a bucket to a hogshead. The road was plainly marked, but the last freshet had sprinkled it with stones, large and small.

Mountain-wagons, constructed for service in such sections of the country, were hauled over the smallest of the boulders, and where the largest were met, and could not be avoided by a detour, the driver of the wagon got out and rolled them away.

As Clip had said, however, the trail was impassable for automobiles. A high-wheel wagon could bump and jerk its way over the stones, but a low-wheel car with pneumatic tires would not have lasted half an hour in the cañon, nor have traversed a mile of it.

On the other hand, the narrow tread of a motor-cycle enabled it to dodge the rocks, leaving the trail only at points where the rocks were so close together the machine could not get between them.

But sharp eyes, a firm hand, and unerring judgment were needed for every foot of the way. This, of course, made anything like the best speed impossible.

For several miles Matt weaved his way in and out, speeding up on the comparatively clear stretches, and slowing down for places where the most obstacles were encountered. The avoiding of sharp stones and boulders at last became almost mechanical. With his gaze on the road immediately in advance, his hands instinctively turned the *Comet* right or left, as the exigencies of the case demanded.

When he could spare a little of his attention from the running of the machine, his thoughts reverted to Clipperton and his heart saddened with the hurt pride smoldering in Clip's eyes when they had parted in the notch.

Clip's uncle—his mother's brother, most probably—was a half-breed and a member of Dangerfield's gang. How Clip's sensitive soul must have recoiled from confessing the truth to Matt! And yet Clip had been manly enough to face the issue, and Matt liked him all the better for it.

"What a fellow's people are," thought Matt, "don't amount to a picayune; it's what the fellow is himself that counts. But it was tough on Clip to run into a relative and find him passing smoke-signals along for that prince of rascals, Dangerfield. And then, it was pretty near the last straw to have that relative roll a stone down the bank and put Clip out of the running. I don't blame him for getting worked up."

A study of the speedometer showed Matt that he was not averaging more than twenty miles an hour. This worried him. The necessity for doing better than that was vital to the success of his mission, and yet, without great risk to his machine, he did not see how he was going to accomplish it. Hoping constantly for a better piece of road, he pushed doggedly on.

The walls of the cañon were wide apart and high. They formed themselves into pinnacles, and turrets, and parapets, and a fanciful mind could easily liken them to the walls of a castle. From these features of the cañon it had, no doubt, derived its name of "Castle Creek."

A stream flowed through the defile, but a stranger would not have discovered this from a casual survey of the cañon's bed. The stream was like most water-courses in Arizona, and flowed *under the sand* and next to the bed-rock. Here and there, at irregular intervals, the water appeared in

pools, pushed to the surface by a lifting of the underlying rock.

Once Matt halted to snatch a drink from one of the diminutive ponds, but in less than a minute he was astride the *Comet* again and pushing resolutely onward.

Here and there he passed a "flat," or level stretch of earth, brought down by the waters from above and lodged in some bend of the gulch. These flats were free from stones and covered with a scant growth of cottonwoods and piñons.

Some time was gained by riding across these level, unobstructed stretches.

A little more than half an hour after leaving the notch, Matt passed a flat that lay at the foot of a gully running into the ravine. There was an adobe house on the flat, a corral, and other evidences of a rather extensive ranch. A man was standing in front of the house as Matt hurried past. He was staring at the motor-cycle like a person in a trance.

"What place is this?" called Matt, as he went by.

"Hot Springs," the rancher called back. "What sort of a contraption y'u got thar, anyways?"

Matt told him, but probably the backwoodsman was not very much enlightened.

North of Hot Springs the road was tolerably clear for several miles, and the *Comet* leaped along it at top speed. When near the end of the good going, the road forked, a branch entering a gap in the right-hand wall and climbing steeply toward the top.

Matt's heart gave a bound.

"Here's where I take the divide!" he muttered, swerving the *Comet* into the opening and giving it every ounce of power for the climb. "Now for Potter's Gap and Sheriff Burke."

Up and up went the trail, twisting back and forth in long horseshoe curves. But for those curves, no wagon could ever have scaled that frightful ascent. In places the road had seemingly been blasted out of a sheer wall, and it was so narrow that a wagon would have had to rub against the cliff-face in order to keep the opposite wheels from slipping over the dizzy brink.

Matt's view of the cañon and of the surrounding hills opened as he ascended. He had not much time for the view, however, for when he was not peering at the trail, or catching a look at the face of his watch, he was studying the speedometer. It was after four o'clock, and he was making barely four miles an hour!

Higher and higher he climbed, coming steadily nearer to the top of the divide. A light breeze fanned his face, and all around him he could see mountain peaks pushing upward into the clear blue sky. Only the *chug-chug* of his laboring motor-cycle broke the stillness. Probably never before, since time began, had those hills echoed with the puffing of a steel horse.

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At last the climbing trail dipped into a level tangent just below the top of the mountain. After a straight-away run of a hundred yards, it coiled serpentlike around the mountain's crest.

On Matt's left was a broken granite wall running vertically to the top of the peak; on his right was a chasm, falling hundreds of feet into a gloomy gulch. Between the chasm and the wall ran the ribbon of road, eroded in places by wind and weather until it had a perceptible slant outward.

A skidding of the wheels, the relaxation for an instant of a cool, steady grip on the handlebars, or a sudden attack of dizziness would have hurled the young courier into eternity.

In that hazardous place speed was not to be thought of. "Slow and sure" had to be Matt's motto. He finished the tangent and began rounding the curve. In no place on that fearsome bend was the road visible for more than a dozen feet ahead.

While he was avoiding the fissures, and carefully picking his way around the curve, a savage growl broke suddenly on his ears. With racing pulses, he lifted his eyes and saw a huge dog crouching in the path before him.

The dog was a Great Dane, big enough and seemingly savage enough for a bear. While Matt stared, and wondered how and why the dog happened to be there, a man in a blue shirt, sombrero, and with trousers tucked in his boot-tops, emerged suddenly from behind a shoulder of rock. He carried a club, and a look of intense satisfaction crossed his face as he came in sight of Matt.

"Take him, Bolivar!" yelled the man, and Motor Matt was brought suddenly face to face with unexpected peril.

With a vicious snarl, the dog lifted his great body into the air and plunged toward the *Comet*. Matt had come to a quick stop, disengaging his right foot from the toe-clip and bracing the motor-cycle upright. He had time for no more than to throw his left arm over his face, when the dog struck him.

The impact of the brute's body was terrific. Matt went down, with the motor-cycle on top of him, head and shoulders over the brink of the precipice.

CHAPTER IX.

A RUSE THAT WON.

Of course, the smoke-signals, passed along by Dangerfield's chain of guards, were responsible for Matt's predicament. The man and the dog were at that difficult place in the trail to capture the governor's courier, and just at that moment it looked as though they had succeeded.

Unarmed as he was, what could Motor Matt accomplish against the ruffian and the dog? This problem rushed through the boy's brain as he lay at the edge of the trail.

The Great Dane, crouching close and snarling, watched him as a cat watches a mouse. Matt stared into the brute's fiendish little eyes, and reason told him that the bared white fangs would instantly fasten upon his throat if he moved.

He was not injured, although somewhat bruised, and his mind was as keen and alert as ever. Why not, he asked himself, "play possum" with the man and the dog, and pretend to be badly hurt and unconscious? The ruse might not help him any, but there was a chance that it would.

Closing his eyes until he could just see through them and keep track of what was going on, he held his breath, lay silent, and watched.

The man drew close, leaned on his club, and stood looking down.

"Hello, thar, young feller!" he called.

Matt did not answer.

"Hello, I say!" repeated the man, nudging Matt with the end of the club. "I reckon you're the one Bolivar an' me's been waitin' here fer, an'—what's the matter with ye, anyhow?"

Still no answer from Matt.

"Must hev hit his head a crack when he went down," muttered the man. "You're some sizeable, Bolivar, an' when ye fall on anythin', ye come down like a thousand o' brick. Git away from him! I reckon ye've done yore part. I'll get a rope on him now. Clear out!"

The dog slunk away along the road to a distance of two or three yards. Then the man pulled the *Comet* away and leaned it against the rocks.

"Fust time I ever seen one o' them steel bronks," he remarked, talking to himself. "Pussonly, I ain't got no use fer a hoss that drinks gasoline. They'd be hard ter ride, an' I don't reckon they'd be reliable."

Before picking up the machine, the man had dropped his club. He now laid hold of Matt and drew him away from the brink of the precipice. When he finally let loose of Matt, Matt's hand was close to the small end of the club—one arm, in fact, was lying upon it.

"If Bolivar had knocked ye a couple o' feet farther, young feller," pursued the man, still talking to himself more than to Matt, "ye'd hev tumbled inter the gulch, iron hoss an' all. Now, we'll see what ails ye, an' then I'll make a stagger ter git ye ter Tinaja Wells, so Dangerfield an' the rest kin size ye up an' find out what yer bizness is."

Bolivar, who did not seem to relish taking a back seat just as his prey had come under his paws, began growling and dragging himself forward.

The man turned and, with a savage oath, ordered the animal to keep away. While his back was toward him, Matt knew that then, if ever, was his time to bolt.

Like lightning the boy gained his feet, lifting the club with him. In two leaps he was beside the *Comet*.

Hearing his quick movements, the man faced around with a frantic yell.

"No, ye don't!" he roared, and flung at Matt with his bare hands.

The club whirled and Matt brought it down on the man's shoulder with all his strength. It was a glancing blow, but it was enough to daze the man and send him reeling backward.

Matt lost not an instant in dropping the club, getting astride the *Comet*, and starting. Just as the motor got busy, the dog dropped beside Matt, gripping his right sleeve and tearing a piece out of the stout leather.

The boy reeled under the shock, but he was not again overturned. To get away from the man and the dog he must have speed, and he must set the *Comet* to going its best in spite of the perils of the trail.

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As he tore around the curved course, his resolute eyes following the path in front of the machine, he heard the snarling of the dog and the patter of his cushioned feet on the rocks.

The loss for an instant of the control of the machine would have spelled death for Motor Matt. To keep the *Comet* away from the edge of the cliff, and away from the loose stones fringing the wall on the other side of the road, was the problem with which Matt had to contend. It was a hair-raising problem, too, and called for every ounce of nerve and every particle of skill the boy possessed.

He dared not look behind to note the situation in that quarter. The man, he knew, he could easily distance, and it was the bounding Great Dane he feared.

His ears told him that the dog was holding his own—exerting all his power and neither gaining nor losing. But he was too close for comfort. Should he snap at the rear wheel and puncture the tire—Matt's thoughts could not carry the danger further. A good many things, just then, swung in the scales of chance, and what the dog might do was only one of them.

A minute passed, a minute so full of peril that it seemed like an hour, and the darting *Comet* reached the other side of the peak and passed from level ground to a steep descent.

Below him, Motor Matt could see the trail, winding in steep horseshoes just as on the other side of the mountain. But there was no precipice at its edge to threaten destruction.

By its own weight the machine would have coasted down the mountain at a clip never before equaled. Matt diminished the power that fed the racing pistons, but still he continued to drop like a thunderbolt down the steep slope.

The wind sang in his ears, and rock, bush, and stunted tree flashed by like so many missiles hurled at him by a giant hand. The speedometer could register up to sixty-five miles an hour, but the needle had gone out of business. If Motor Matt was not doing a good seventy an hour, on that hurricane drop toward the mountain's foot, he was far afield in his reckoning.

It could hardly be called a ride. It was more like a fall through space.

Naturally, such a fierce gait could not last long. Matt was at the base of the mountain before he fairly realised it, and the *Comet* was plunging away on a mesa toward a V-shaped cut in a ridge.

He had time now for a quick look rearward. The Great Dane was not in sight. All Motor Matt had to show for the perilous encounter on the cliffside was his torn sleeve, a few bruises, and an uncomfortable remembrance.

As if to make up for the worrisome struggle through the cañon and the snail's pace toward the top of the divide, Matt had now a fine, hard road under him and plenty of room.

How much time he had lost he did not know, but that down-grade had put his schedule many minutes to the good. He was going a mile a minute now, and he was still gaining on the miles lost in the cañon.

As he closed in on the V-shaped opening in the ridge, he slowed down, to make a preliminary survey of the country ahead. The road led on through the bottom of the "V," and Matt suddenly took note of a man on horseback, directly in front of the charging *Comet*. The horse, frightened by the motor-cycle, was bucking and leaping sideways at the roadside.

"What place is this?" shouted Matt, as he swung past.

"Potter's Gap!" answered the man.

The boy's heart gave a bound, and he shut off and stopped the *Comet* within a dozen yards. Facing about, he waited for the horseman to spur his prancing mount closer.

"That's another o' them darned new-fangled machines that folks keep inventin'," remarked the man. "Where'd ye come from, kid, an' what's yer bloomin' hurry? The way ye was shootin' along, it looked as though ye'd git to where ye was goin' purty nigh before ye started. Whoa, blast ye!" he added to his horse. "If I had time, I'd make ye eat oats off'n that two-wheeled thing-um-bob."

"My name's King," said Matt. "Can you tell me where I'll find Sheriff Burke, of Prescott?"

"You bet I can! Go right around that projectin' rock an' ye'll be in our camp. What ye lookin' up Burke fer?"

Matt did not stop to answer. Turning his machine the other way, he sped on around a projecting spur of the ridge, and found himself among a dozen men and horses.

The men were all armed, booted, and spurred. The camp had been pitched beside a spring, and some were watering their horses, and others were rolling up their blankets. Matt's sudden appearance drew the attention of all, and there was a chorus of wondering exclamations as he brought his machine to a halt.

"Blamed if here ain't one o' them new kind o' bicycles!" cried one of the men. "Slid right in on us afore we suspected a thing! It kain't be this kid's one o' the Dangerfield gang?"

A tall, broad-shouldered, red-whiskered man pushed through the crowd that was gathering about Matt.

"Who are you?" the man asked sharply.

"I'm looking for Sheriff Burke," replied Matt.

"Then you've made a bull's-eye, first crack out of the box. I'm Burke."

"What time is it, Mr. Burke?" asked Matt, getting out of the saddle and standing beside the machine.

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded the Prescott man, staring.

"Why, I was told to get here at five o'clock—"

"Ye was, hey?" asked one of the posse, looking at a watch. "Then ye're ahead of time, my boy. It lacks five minutes of five."

Matt's delight must have been reflected in his face, for Burke's interest in him manifestly deepened.

"Who told you to get here by five o'clock?" he asked.

"Governor Gaynor."

"Gaynor?" repeated the sheriff.

"Yes. I left Phoenix at quarter-past twelve——"

"Last night?"

"No—at noon to-day."

"An' you've come a hundred miles in five hours on *that* thing?"

"Yes."

The bystanders were astonished. Not only that, but their respect for the *Comet* visibly increased. [Pg 16]

"What's the governor got to say?" proceeded Burke.

Matt took the letter out of his pocket.

"Read that, Mr. Burke," replied Matt, "and it will tell you. Don't throw away the envelope. Just write on the back of it, 'Received at five minutes of five, Thursday afternoon and sign your name. I want to take it back and show it to the governor.'"

CHAPTER X.

AT POTTER'S GAP.

All those rough and ready men were amazed at Motor Matt's performance. Their interest in the boy and his machine, however, was pushed to the background by their curiosity to learn what sort of a message the governor had sent to Burke.

The sheriff read the message through, then slapped the letter excitedly with the back of his hand.

"Here's a go and no mistake, boys!" he cried. "The governor and McKibben have picked up a hot clue about that Dangerfield outfit. If Motor Matt, here, hadn't got this message through in the time he did, the smugglers would have got away from us."

"How's that, Burke?" asked the man Matt had met in the gap, riding forward and joining the rest of the posse.

"First off," Burke explained, "Juan Morisco has been nabbed in Phoenix. He was getting out of town with a wood-hauler, but he had been acting queer, and McKibben was having him watched. While in Phoenix, Morisco wore a piece of courtplaster on one side of his face. The wood-hauler's team ran away, just as he and Morisco were leaving Phoenix, and, in the excitement of catching it, the courtplaster must have got knocked off Morisco's face. Anyhow, when McKibben saw him after the team was stopped, there was that cross-shaped scar, plain as anything. That was all McKibben needed to see. Morisco was taken to jail, and it was what McKibben got out of him that concerns *us*."

"What in thunder was Juan Morisco doin' in Phoenix?" queried one of the men. "I thought he was with Dangerfield, an' movin' this way, on the road to Mexico."

"Morisco told McKibben," went on Burke, "that Dangerfield sent him on an important piece of work. He also told McKibben that the smugglers are rounded up at Tinaja Wells, and that they have heard we're waiting for them at Potter's Gap, and that they're going to leave the Wells to-night, give us the slip, and go south by way of the Rio Verde."

This revelation caused a tremendous amount of excitement, all the men talking back and forth.

"How'd Dangerfield ever find out we was layin' fer him here?" asked one.

"The governor don't say anything about that; but Dangerfield must know it, or Morisco wouldn't have been able to tell McKibben. The governor says," proceeded Burke, glancing at the letter which he still held in his hand, "that Morisco tells McKibben Dangerfield is going to leave Tinaja Wells to-night, but that he—the governor, mind you—hopes to get this letter into my hands by five o'clock this afternoon, so we'll have a chance to rush the smugglers at the Wells by daylight." He folded up the letter and shoved it into his pocket. "It's twenty miles to the Wells, my lads, and if we start at once we can make it. Saddle up in a hurry. One of you make my horse ready."

Instantly the camp became a scene of bustle and excitement. While the men were making ready, Burke turned to Matt.

"I don't know how you ever got through in the time you did, King," he observed. "That machine of yours must be a jim-dandy."

"It's the best ever," answered Matt.

"Tell me about your trip—just the main points."

Matt began with the red roadster and the trouble he had had with the two men who were traveling in it.

"Dangerfield has a heap of friends through this part of the country," commented Burke. "There's a whole lot of people, you know, who don't think smuggling Chinks into the United States is very much of a crime. Dangerfield must have been expecting something to go crossways in Phoenix and had some of his misguided friends watching McKibben. But go ahead."

Matt told about the smoke-signals, and how they were passed on along the rim of Castle Creek Cañon. The stern lines deepened in the sheriff's face.

"Dangerfield was sure doing everything he could to make a safe getaway into Mexico," said he. "They say he has fifteen men, whites and half-breeds, working his underground railroad. I'm willing enough to believe about those smoke-signals. The two in the red automobile sent word ahead that you and your chum were coming. Well, did that make any trouble for you, King?"

Matt told about the boulder which had been rolled down the side of the notch, and which had crippled Clipperton's machine and put him out of the running; but he did not say a word about the half-breed.

The sheriff was deeply interested in Matt's recital. By that time the rest of the men had finished getting ready, and were pushing around Matt and listening to his experiences. As he went on with the incident on the divide, and the way he had escaped from the man and the dog, several rough hands reached over to give him an admiring tap on the shoulder.

"You're the stuff, son!" cried one of the men.

"You're a fair daisy, an' no mistake!" added another.

"If we clean up on the Dangerfield gang, it will be you as helped more'n anybody else," dropped in a third.

"Some o' us, Burke," suggested a fourth, "mout lope acrost the divide an' down the cañon, gatherin' in all them outposts. Each one means a thousand apiece."

"By the time you got there, Meagher," returned the sheriff, "you wouldn't find any of the men, so it would be a bad play. Besides, we're liable to need our whole force over at Tinaja Wells. What are you going to do, my boy?" he asked, turning to Matt.

"I'm going back to Phoenix," replied Matt.

"Take my advice, and don't try it to-night. It will be dark on the divide before you could get over it, and it's a ticklish enough place in broad day, say nothing of trying to cover the trail when you can't see where you're going. I'll leave a blanket here for you to sleep on, and a bottle of cold coffee, some crackers, and a hunk of 'jerked.' You can get an early start in the morning, and probably poke this envelope into the governor's hands at noon."

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Fishing the stump of a lead-pencil out of his pocket, Burke wrote a few words on the back of the envelope that had contained the governor's message, and gave it to Matt.

"Before I leave, son," went on the sheriff, taking Matt's hand, "let me say that I think you're the clear quill. You've done a big thing to-day, and if you hadn't had more pluck and ginger than common, it's a cinch you'd have lost out. Now it's up to us, and if we can make good, as you did, everything will be all serene."

Burke turned away and jumped into his saddle. The rest of the men also shook Matt's hand, and then got on their horses.

"There's the blanket," called Burke, tossing a roll in front of Matt. "*Adios*, my lad, and always remember that Burke, of Prescott, is your friend. Spurs and quirts, boys!"

Away dashed the posse, Burke in the lead. They vanished in the direction of the Gap, although their road to Painted Rocks and Tinaja Wells was not to take them over the divide.

Matt was tired, and the prospect of a rest appealed to him mightily. With a cloth taken from his toolkit, he proceeded to dust off the *Comet*, and to look it over and make sure it had suffered no damage. He attended to this before he looked after his own comfort.

After finishing with the machine, he spread out the sheriff's blanket under some bushes near the spring, and ate a supper of jerked beef and crackers and drank the bottle of coffee.

A feeling of relief and satisfaction ran through him. He had finished his "century" run and had delivered the governor's message to Burke on time. Now, if only Clip had been with him, his enjoyment would have been complete.

He fell to wondering what Clip was about, and how he had expected to help with his smoke-signals. It would have been easy for Clip, aided by the half-breed, to send signals along the line carrying information that the trouble was over with. But Clip had not been able to do that, or the encounter would not have occurred on the divide.

While Matt's mind circled about his chum, darkness fell suddenly, as it always does in Arizona, and coyotes began to yelp shrilly among the hills. Feeling perfectly secure, Matt lay back, pulled the side of the blanket over him, and fell asleep.

He must have slept several hours, when he was aroused by a rustling in the bushes near him, and a sound as of some animal sniffing about his camp. Reaching for the bottle that had contained the coffee, he threw it into the brush. There followed a yelp, and the animal—coyote or wolf—could be heard scurrying away.

Getting up, Matt walked down to the spring and took a drink. As he lifted himself erect, far off across the hills toward the north and west he saw a fiery line rise in the air and burst into a dozen flaming balls. Perhaps a minute later the rocket was answered by another, off to the south.

"There's a whole lot going on in these hills to-night," thought Matt, returning to his blanket. "By this time, I guess, Burke and his men must have reached Tinaja Wells and done their work there. The smuggling of Chinks across the Mexican border is getting a black eye in this part of the country, all right."

Once more Matt fell asleep. When he was aroused again it was by a sound of voices close at

hand. He started up quickly, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

Morning had come, and in the gathering light he looked through the bushes and off toward the spring. Two men were standing by the pool, one an American and the other a Mexican. They were both travel-stained and looked as though they had been doing some hard riding.

The American was dressed after the fashion prevailing in the hills, and had a couple of revolvers dangling at his hips. Each man had a horse, and the animals looked worn and tired.

Matt wondered who the two travelers could be, for he could not remember having seen either of them among the sheriff's men. As he gave the Mexican more critical attention he was amazed to discover that he was the wood-hauler who had fled from Phoenix at the time McKibben had arrested Juan Morisco.

This was a disquieting discovery, and Matt thought that if he could levant without being seen it would be well for him to do so. The *Comet* was not far away, and Matt got on his knees and began crawling toward it.

A bit of brush snapped under him, however, and startled exclamations escaped the two men. Matt sprang up, with the intention of making a run for the motor-cycle, but before he had taken two steps, an authoritative voice shouted: "Halt!"

Over his shoulder he could see that the American was pointing a revolver at him. Matt halted, of course. There was no reason in the world why the two men should interfere with him, and now that he had been unable to slip away unnoticed he faced them boldly.

CHAPTER XI.

JOE BASCOMB.

As Motor Matt walked toward the man with the leveled revolver, the wood-hauler cried out a startled "*Madre mia!*" and gave a jump for the other man's arm.

"What's the matter with you, José?" demanded the American, keeping his eyes on Matt as he talked.

José launched into a torrent of Spanish. Matt could not understand a word of what he was saying, any more than he could understand the talk which Clip had had with his uncle, the half-breed, but the change that came over the face of the American was remarkable.

In the American's eyes there was a look like that in the orbs of a cornered panther. He had fine features—features that told of an iron will and a fearless spirit; nevertheless, they had a gloomy cast. While José spoke, something akin to kindness crept through the hard, somber lines, the lips twitched and the eyes softened. The man lowered his revolver, tucked it away in the swinging holster, and turned to José.

Then, in the same language José had used, he spoke rapidly and at considerable length. Matt stood and waited, trying to guess what the wood-hauler had said to cause such a change in the man's bearing. [Pg 18]

"Who are you, my lad?" inquired the man civilly enough.

"That's a fair question, all right," returned Matt; "but you might have asked it before you went through all those motions with the gun. And then, too, I don't know why I should talk about myself until I learn a little about you."

"That's straight, anyhow," said the man. "I like a fellow that comes out flat footed and says what he thinks. My name's Joe Bascomb, and I belong with Burke's crowd."

"You wasn't with Burke's crowd when I saw them here yesterday afternoon."

"No more I wasn't. Yesterday afternoon, you see, I was on detached duty. But I was in at the skirmish at the Wells!"

Bascomb frowned, as though the memory was not pleasant.

"There was a fight?" Matt asked eagerly. "Were Dangerfield and his gang captured?"

"There wasn't much of a fight. You see, the smugglers weren't expecting trouble, and Burke took them by surprise. A few shots were fired, mainly by Burke and his men, but they went wild. The smugglers were making for their horses. Six of their number were captured, but a few more got away. Among those who escaped was Dangerfield. I'm trying to get to Phoenix on business, and I wonder if five hundred dollars would tempt you to let me have that wheel?"

Bascomb pulled a roll of bills from his pocket as he spoke, and held it up for Matt to look at.

"Can you ride a wheel?" asked Matt.

"Never rode one in my life!"

"Then you couldn't use the motor-cycle. You'd go off the trail on the divide as sure as fate."

"Bring the machine down here and let me look at it."

Matt rolled the *Comet* down. After Bascomb had studied it a while he shook his head disappointedly.

"I reckon you're right," he muttered. "What did you say your name was?"

"Matt King."

"Then you're the chap who covered the trail between Phoenix and Potter's Gap yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Well, Matt, I've got to get to Phoenix as soon as I can, and if you're not in very much of a hurry, I'll climb into my saddle and we'll go together. If——" Bascomb hesitated. "If any of Dangerfield's scattered gang happened to waylay me, there's something I'd like to have you do for me in Phoenix. That's why I'd like to have you along."

"If you're waylaid, Mr. Bascomb," said Matt, "they'd be liable to get me, too. Dangerfield and his men aren't feeling any too friendly toward me after what I did yesterday afternoon."

"No, they wouldn't get you," insisted Bascomb. "You could run away from 'em like a streak on that motor-cycle. If I ask you to do anything for me," he added significantly, "I'll pay you well for it."

"All right," said Matt, "we'll travel together."

Bascomb turned to José, and again spoke to him in Spanish. The Mexican immediately pulled off his ragged slouch-hat and his tattered coat. Removing his own hat and coat, Bascomb put on the Mexican's; then, after transferring his personal belongings from one garment to the other, he turned to Matt.

"Not much of a disguise, is it?" he remarked. "But maybe it's enough to keep the gang from spotting me."

"What's that Mexican doing here?" demanded Matt. "He was with Juan Morisco in Phoenix yesterday, when Morisco was arrested. This fellow cut out a horse from the runaway team and got away."

"Sure he did; and he rode all day and most of the night to find me. We came across each other by chance, not more than two miles from here."

"If he's a friend of yours," said Matt suspiciously, "and a friend of Morisco's, why——"

"You don't know Mexicans, King. José doesn't know any more than the law allows, but I rendered him a service once, and he's never forgotten it."

José, apparently paying no attention to the talk, was putting on Bascomb's expensive Stetson, and a coat which was infinitely better than the one he had exchanged for it.

"Here's where our trails divide, José," said Bascomb, in English, taking the roll of bills from his pocket and stripping a bank-note from it and handing it to the Mexican. "You've made some mighty bad mistakes, but I give you credit for doing your best. *Adios*."

"*Adios!*" answered José.

Both men mounted their horses; and when Bascomb and Matt made off, José, on his jaded beast, sat watching them until they got around the spur on their way to the Gap.

Bascomb led the way, spurring his animal into a slow gallop. Matt followed, accommodating the speed of the *Comet* to the gait of the horse. The long flat was crossed and the mountain climbed and descended—all without mishap, and without a word of talk between the two travelers.

Matt's mind was busy. To pull the wool over his eyes was not an easy matter, and the story told by Bascomb was figuratively speaking, too full of holes to hold water.

José had been with Juan Morisco. Juan was one of the Dangerfield gang. José would not have run from the sheriff unless he had had a guilty conscience. Yet, when he had run away, he had taken the trouble to ride a hundred miles and hunt for Bascomb. Bascomb had explained that José was indebted to him, and had hunted him up for that reason. But that, as Matt looked at it, was no reason at all.

Then what did that exchange of coats and hats mean? Why was it necessary for an officer of the law to disguise himself? Here, again, Bascomb's explanation did not explain.

Although these reflections shattered Matt's confidence in his companion, the boy did not allow it, for the present, to make any difference in his treatment of the man.

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Bascomb grew talkative when they reached Castle Creek Cañon and started over the clear stretch of road toward Hot Springs.

"What became of the little girl that figured in that runaway?" he asked. There was an eagerness in his voice which Matt did not fail to notice. "José said you stopped the horses, picked up the little girl, and was going to carry her into the house when Juan Morisco interfered. José didn't see any more, as the sheriff came up just then."

"I took her into the house," answered Matt, "and we sent for a doctor."

The man started in his saddle and bent his piercing eyes on the boy.

"Was she as badly hurt as that?" he demanded.

"The doctor said he didn't think she could live."

"What!" Bascomb's eyes were glaring like an animal's as they met Matt's. "No, no," he added,

dropping back in the saddle and brushing a hand across his forehead, "it can't be. I won't believe it. You stopped the horses, and I don't see how she could have been so badly hurt as all that."

"She was tied to the 'reach' of the wagon," explained Matt, "and the front wheels broke away from those behind just before we got the horses stopped. The girl was dragged for a ways. If she hadn't been tied, she wouldn't have been hurt so bad."

"She's been living at José's for a month," muttered Bascomb to himself, but in a voice loud enough for Matt to hear, "and she could stand him, but José said she couldn't bear Juan Morisco. It was bad business sending Juan after her. José had to tie her to the wagon to keep her from running off when Morisco came. But that doctor was wrong!" and Bascomb raised his voice and once more turned to Matt.

This soliloquy of Bascomb's gave Matt fresh food for thought. Bascomb spurred his tired horse cruelly, and they got past Hot Springs at a fairly good gait.

"What did the girl say?" asked Bascomb, when they were well to the south of Hot Springs, and picking their way among the litter of stones. "Did she say anything about herself, or about her folks?"

"She wouldn't say anything about herself or her people," replied Matt.

"True-blue!" muttered Bascomb huskily. "She'll pull through—she always had grit; but I wish I was sure!"

A mile north of the notch Bascomb's horse fell under him. He had been forcing the animal ahead impatiently, and as he fell floundering to the ground over the horse's head, he swore a fierce oath.

One of the revolvers had dropped out of Bascomb's belt. Unseen by its owner, Matt picked it up.

Bascomb, in spite of his temper over the giving out of the horse, knelt beside the animal and unrove the cinches. Pulling the saddle loose, he cast it aside; then he removed the bridle and threw it after the saddle.

"You served me well, you poor brute," said he, "but not well enough."

He whirled away. Matt was looking at him along the barrel of the revolver. He started back with another oath.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried. "Haven't I got enough to torture me without——" He bit the words short, and glared.

"Take that other gun from your belt," commanded Matt, "and throw it away. You can't fool me, Bascomb! You're one of the Dangerfield gang. I don't think you intended going to Phœnix, but you're going now, whether you want to or not!"

Matt's voice was steady, and his gray eyes snapped in a way that meant business.

CHAPTER XII.

BOLIVAR TURNS UP.

"You're the last person in the world, King," said Bascomb, with more injury than hostility in his voice, "who ought to butt in on me like this. If you knew *all*——"

He stopped short and pursed up his lips. His gloomy face and haunted eyes were touched with sadness.

"I know enough to figure out that you're trying to fool me," said Matt. "The yarn you told me back there in the gap won't wash. It's my opinion, Bascomb, that you're no more of a deputy sheriff than I am. Anyhow, I'm going to take you to McKibben, in Phœnix, and give him a chance to pass judgment on you. That other gun, if you please."

Bascomb thought the matter over for a moment, then drew the revolver.

"Do you want it?" he asked quietly.

"Throw it over there in the brush," ordered Matt. Bascomb obediently flung the weapon into the thicket. "You're right," said he, "I'm one of the gang. I ought to have known better than to try to fool you—you're too keen; but I wanted to go to Phœnix, and I wanted you to be with me on the way, so if any of Burke's men laid me by the heels I could get you to transact a little honest business for me. I'm going to town, King, and I want to get there in a rush. I'm willing to go as your prisoner and I'll make you no trouble, providing you take me to see that little girl before you take me to McKibben. Is it a bargain?"

There was something about the man that Matt liked, in spite of the deceit he had practised at the start-off of their acquaintance.

"When a fellow has lied to you once, Bascomb," returned Matt, "you never feel as though you could trust him. But I'll go you this time. I'm going to keep this gun, though, and watch you every minute."

"That's not necessary, but I'm willing to have it that way if it will make you feel any easier in your mind."

"What was it you were going to have me do?" went on Matt. "I don't know as I want to mix up in any of your lawless operations."

"I wouldn't ask you to do that," said Bascomb sharply. "I can't tell whether I want you to do anything or not until after we get to the notch. We're losing time here," he finished, "and I've told you I'm in a hurry to reach town. You ought to know it's important when I'm willing to lose my liberty in order to get there."

"Well," returned Matt, "start on, Bascomb. You'll have to travel on foot, and I'll keep close behind you."

Without further loss of time, Bascomb swung off down the cañon.

"I can pick up a horse at the Tanks," he called back, over his shoulder, "and when we leave there we'll make better time. We'll have to stop at the notch, but I hope we won't have to be there long."

"If you're figuring on having some of the gang meet you in the notch, and side-track me," said Matt, "I don't think we'll stop there at all."

"I give you my word," protested Bascomb, "that I'm not going to make you any trouble."

"Your word's not worth very much."

Bascomb made no answer to this, but gave his undivided attention to the road and swung into a dog-trot. In less than a quarter of an hour afterward he reached the notch, Matt wheeling into it close at his heels.

Bascomb halted and looked around expectantly. Apparently he did not see what he wanted to find, and he placed his fingers on his lips and gave a shrill whistle.

Matt had the revolver in his hand, and as he waited and watched his fingers closed resolutely on the stock.

Following the whistle, there was a sound of quick movements up the steep wall. A form bounded off the shelf and came tearing down the slope in the direction of Bascomb.

A startled exclamation escaped Matt's lips. The newcomer was a dog, and the dog was the Great Dane!

It was plain that the dog recognized Matt. As the animal crouched at Bascomb's feet, his baleful eyes turned in the boy's direction, and he growled menacingly.

"I'll shoot the brute if he comes near me!" shouted Matt.

"I'll not let him touch you," answered Bascomb, stooping to pat the dog's neck. "His recollections of you aren't of the pleasantest, I reckon. Quiet, Bolivar!" he added.

The next moment Bascomb had untied a cord from the dog's collar and removed a note. He read the note quickly, then tore it in fragments and threw the pieces away. Taking a note-book from his pocket, he proceeded to pencil some words on a leaf. Tearing out the leaf he folded it compactly and carefully secured it to the leather band.

"Clear out, Bolivar!" he cried, when he had finished. "Off with you, old boy!" he added, and waved his hand toward the hills.

The dog got up, gave a final snarl at Matt, then leaped away. In a few moments he had whisked out of sight.

Matt was somewhat in doubt as to whether or not he ought to stop this proceeding. It was dear that Bascomb had received a communication from some of the scattered gang, and had sent one in return. Was he planning to help them evade Burke and his posse?

Bascomb must have divined what was going on in Matt's mind, for he turned to him as soon as Bolivar was out of sight.

"There was nothing lawless about that note, or the one I sent back, King," said he. "It was private business, entirely. Now I'm going to scribble a few lines for you, and you can read them in a few days, or any time after we get to Phoenix."

More pencil work followed in the memorandum-book. Another leaf was torn out, folded, and handed to Matt. He put it into his pocket along with the envelope returned to him by Burke.

The winding up of this incident seemed to give Bascomb a good deal of relief.

"Now," he observed, "I'm ready for a quick trip to Phoenix, and for whatever happens there."

He whirled and started through the notch at a brisk pace.

"It's not often," he continued, talking as he strode along, "that a boy makes the hit with me that you have, Matt. You'll find out why as soon as we get to where we're going. How long have you been in this part of the country?"

"A year," replied Matt.

"Where did you come from?"

"Albany, New York."

"I'd have gambled something handsome you were from the East. I'm from New York City, myself, but I've been knocking around these hills for two years. You see," he added, "I'm a close friend of Dangerfield's, and his ideas and mine, about that Chinese Exclusion Act, are identically the same."

If this is a free country, how can we keep the Chinks out, any more than the Eskimos, or the Dutch, or any one else that wants to come here? There's a hundred in cold cash for every Chink that's run across the border, and Dangerfield has been smuggling them in in droves. He has the system worked out fine, and there are good, reliable men at every station on his underground line. Juan Morisco is the first of the outfit that ever went wrong."

For a while, Bascomb hurried along in silence; then he commenced talking again.

"I reckon you understand, by now, how well Dangerfield had organized his gang. There wasn't a loop-hole he didn't have watched. Men in Phoenix were looking after McKibben, and the minute Morisco was jugged they knew it; and when Morisco turned traitor and told what he knew, they found that out, too. For more than a year Dangerfield has been doing his work and laughing at the authorities. But things were getting too hot for him, and he was planning to go over into Mexico and go to mining in Sonora. He was ready for the dash across the border when Burke got wind of it and went into camp at Potter's Gap, hoping to head the gang off. Up at Tinaja Wells we knew what he was doing, and if Dangerfield hadn't sent Juan Morisco on a special mission to Phoenix the lot of us would have got away from Burke and he'd never have caught us."

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Bascomb fell silent again, and for a mile or more he kept up his steady, swinging gait.

"It was you, King," he went on, but with no malice in his voice, "who put a spoke in Dangerfield's wheel. If it hadn't been for you and the *Comet*, the governor couldn't have got word to Burke before we had all slipped past him and gotten well off toward the border. That's the way luck will take a turn sometimes."

All this was information that might be used against those of the gang who had been captured, and Matt wondered at Bascomb's recklessness in telling it.

"If José had used persuasion with Ollie instead of tying her to the wagon," Bascomb continued, with a tinge of bitterness, "there wouldn't have been any trouble, and Juan and José would have gotten clear. But a greaser never does a thing like a white man. It was while José was tying Ollie to the wagon, telling her he was doing it just to keep her from falling off, that the team got scared and began to run."

Bascomb muttered something to himself, his shoulders heaved and his hands clenched spasmodically. Some terrible emotion ran through him, as it had done before, and Matt was puzzled to account for it.

By that time they had drawn near the descent that led into the ravine. Before they started down, some one sprang out into the road in front of them.

"Matt!" yelled a familiar voice.

"Great Scott!" cried Matt, astounded. "What are you doing here, Clip?"

"Waiting for you," answered Clip, peering at Bascomb. "Think I was going back to Phoenix without finding out something about how you'd come out? Who's this?"

"One of Dangerfield's gang," said Matt. "I'm taking him in."

"Fine!" exclaimed Clip. "But don't go on just yet. The red roadster is at Frog Tanks. Those two roughs are in the *tienda*. If this is one of the gang, those two will make us trouble."

"An automobile?" cried Bascomb; "at the Tanks?"

Clip nodded. With a leap Bascomb sprang away down the slope.

"Bascomb!" shouted Matt. "Come back here!"

The revolver was in Matt's left hand. Before he could do anything with it, Clip grabbed it out of his hand, leveled it after the receding form, and pulled the trigger. A futile *snap* followed. Again and again Clip tried to shoot, but always with the same result.

"I'll get him!" said Matt resolutely.

But before he could start the *Comet*, Clip had caught him and tried to hold him back.

"They'd kill you!" growled Clip. "Your life's worth more'n a thousand dollars. Let him go."

"I'll catch him before he reaches the Tanks," answered Matt.

The motor started, and Matt was dragged out of his chum's hands.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RED ROADSTER AGAIN.

Bascomb was ascending the farther slope of the ravine as the *Comet* reached the bottom. He looked over his shoulder at Matt, then promptly jumped into the rocks and started for Frog Tanks cross-lots. Bascomb could scramble and make headway up the scarred bank, but there was no chance for the motor-cycle to follow.

Nonplussed, Matt came to a halt and waited for Clip to come up with him, wheeling his crippled one-cylinder.

"Tough luck!" said Clip commiseratingly, "But it's a good thing, too. It wouldn't do for you to go

to the settlement while those two men are there. They're armed. And there's something in their guns that will go off. How long were you driving the fellow in with that useless piece of hardware?"

"Something funny about that," muttered Matt.

"Did you know the revolver wasn't loaded?"

"No."

"Well, the other fellow didn't." Clip chuckled. "You're the boy to do things. Too bad you couldn't win out on this."

"Wait a minute, Clip," said Matt, "and you'll be as much at sea as I am. Bascomb knew that gun wasn't loaded."

"He did and you didn't?" Clip's eyes widened. "Then why did he let you drive him ahead with it?"

"That's where the queer part comes in. He must have been willing to be a prisoner."

"Then he changed his mind. Bolted as soon as he heard about the red roadster."

"That makes it all the more mysterious. Bascomb is a mighty hard fellow to understand."

"Let's forget it. He's gone, Matt, and that's the last of him. Where were you at five o'clock yesterday afternoon?" [Pg 22]

"Potter's Gap!"

"Bully!" Clip jerked off his cap and waved it. "The governor knew what he was doing when he got Motor Matt to make that 'century' run. Did our smoke-signals help?"

"Did you send up any?" queried Matt.

"Did we! Why, we started just as soon as you bolted up the cañon. 'False alarm; everything O. K.' That's the kind of smoke we sent up."

"Maybe they did help, old chap. I wasn't interfered with until I got to the divide."

"Then I was of some use, after all. There were two or three men between the notch and the divide. Tell me all about it."

Matt sketched his experiences briefly. Clip's black eyes glistened as he heard of the clash on the cliffside. Matt followed on down and told of meeting Bascomb and José at the gap, and of his travel Phoenixward with Bascomb.

Clip was vastly puzzled over Bascomb, just as Matt knew he would be.

"If he's one of the gang," said Clip, "why is he in such a hurry to get to Phoenix? Why does he want to go to Phoenix at all? It's putting his head in the lion's mouth."

"That little girl has something to do with it," declared Matt.

Clip was thoughtful for a minute.

"Here's how I size it up," said he. "That fellow, Bascomb, is what he said he was, at first. He's one of Burke's men. But he didn't want to argue the case with you. So he let you have your way. All he wanted was to get to Phoenix as quick as he could. He thinks Rags can tell him something about Dangerfield and his gang. Part of the gang's captured and part's on the run. If Bascomb can find out quick enough, maybe some more of 'em can be nabbed."

Matt shook his head.

"I don't think you've hit it off, Clip," said he.

"I'll bet money or marbles I have. That red roadster'll get Bascomb to Phoenix in short order."

"If he's one of Burke's men," argued Matt, "what will he do with the two rougns who have the machine, and are working for Bascomb?"

"He'll get the best of 'em," persisted Clip. "Anyhow, Bascomb gets the roadster. See if he don't."

"He's not armed, and the other two men are."

"Never you mind, Matt. Watch how it comes out."

Matt got off the *Comet* and sat down on the rocks.

"How long are we going to be hung up here, Clip?" he asked.

"Till it's safe for us to pass the Tanks. It won't be long, now, if Bascomb gets in his work."

Clip braced his crippled machine up alongside the *Comet* and dropped down beside his chum.

"What became of—of your uncle, Clip?" queried Matt, after a moment.

It was a delicate subject, and he hated to approach it. Still it covered a point that he felt he ought to know about.

The look of hurt pride flashed into Clipperton's face.

"He left me last night, Matt," said he. "I couldn't forget he was of my blood, low as he's dropped. I told him the gang was about done for; warned him to clear out. That's what he did. But he helped send up the smoke-signals."

"You did right, exactly right," approved Matt.

"Fine come-down for me, though," said Clip, through his teeth. "Nice family I've got! What's the use of trying to be somebody? Sometimes, I—I—"

A lawless light rose in Clip's eyes. Matt laid a friendly hand on his knee.

"You've got it in you to be whatever you want to make of yourself, pard," said he. "At least you know who your folks are, but I don't. I know that my name's not King, but if I'm square with myself and play the game fair, what's the odds? I hate a chap who thinks he's somebody just because his people amount to something; and I'd hate a fellow just as hard who thought he didn't amount to anything because his relatives weren't all he'd like to have them. The thing to do is to stand on your own feet, and that's the *only* thing!"

"It takes you to put heart into a fellow," returned Clip. "You've been a mighty good friend to Tom Clipperton. And in spite of his Indian blood. If it was known in Phoenix that my uncle——" Clip gulped on the words and did not finish.

"It will never be known there," said Matt.

"I know you'd keep still about it. If it got out in any other way, though, I'd never set foot in the town again."

"It won't get out, Clip, so let's forget it. You stayed in the ravine to wait for me?"

"Sure. I wasn't going back to Phoenix without you."

"You slept on the rocks?"

"Didn't you sleep in the gap?"

"What have you had to eat?"

"The stuff we took away from Gregory's place."

"There wasn't half a square meal in all of it!"

"I started for the Tanks, an hour ago, to get something. Saw the red roadster in front of the *tienda* and changed my mind."

Matt fished his last piece of jerked beef out of his pocket and put it in Clip's hand.

"Now, regale yourself," he laughed.

Clip began on the meat, and while he was eating the pounding of a motor reached their ears.

"The automobile!" he gasped.

"And coming this way," added Matt, swerving his eyes up the slope.

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"The three of them are coming back," went on Clip. "They're after us, Matt!"

"How do you make that out, Clip? If Bascomb is one of Burke's men, he couldn't be coming back with two of the Dangerfield gang. If he's coming back alone he's unarmed, and we'll be more than a match for him."

"Maybe Bascomb failed to get the roadster! Maybe the two roughs are heading this way! If——"

The words faded on Clip's lips. Just then the red roadster showed itself at the top of the rise. Bascomb was on the driver's seat and the other two men were not in evidence.

Bascomb came down the slope slowly and halted the roadster in front of the boys.

"All aboard for Phoenix!" said he calmly. "One of you get in the rumble with the machines; the other climb up here beside me. Hurry! You know I'm in a rush, Matt."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON TO PHOENIX!

This was the biggest surprise the mysterious Bascomb had yet sprung. Clip stared at him for a moment, with jaws agape, then trundled his motor-cycle forward and lifted it into the rumble. He fixed himself on the seat, and leaned down to help Matt lift up the *Comet*. Neither of the boys spoke—they were too bewildered.

"What you got in that canteen?" asked Bascomb.

"Gasoline," said Clip.

"Good enough! Hand it over here."

Clip unslashed the canteen and gave it to Bascomb. He at once began emptying it into the roadster's tank.

"I was afraid the fuel would play out on us," remarked Bascomb, when he had emptied the canteen, "but now we're safe for the run to town. Are you as handy with an automobile as you are with a motor-cycle, Matt?" he asked.

"I guess yes," Matt answered.

"Then get in behind the steering-wheel. I'm not much good at it, and we've got to go over the line for a record. See how quick you can get us to Phoenix."

Matt went down to the foot of the hill to turn around. When they had toiled up the bank to a level stretch, he let the roadster out, and they went through Frog Tanks like a red streak.

Jem, who had driven the car, and the other man who had left Phoenix with him, were sitting on the steps of the *tienda*. They made no move to stop the car, but watched moodily as it passed them.

Matt could not see Clip's face, but he knew his chum must have been thunderstruck. Matt himself had begun to take all these surprises as a matter of course.

"You thought I was running away from you, I reckon?" said Bascomb.

Matt nodded.

"Well," went on Bascomb, "I didn't have time to explain. I was afraid the roadster would get away before I could reach the *tienda*."

"Did you have any trouble getting it?" Matt asked.

There was a bitter undertone in the laugh Bascomb flung back.

"Why should I have any trouble?" he returned. "Those two men are not in the gang, but they're friendly toward Dangerfield. When I told them it was Dangerfield's business that was taking me to Phoenix, they were willing I should have the machine. Who's your friend, Matt?"

"My name's Tom Clipperton," said Clip, answering for himself.

Bascomb started.

"A relative of Pima Pete?" he inquired, turning around.

"What's that to you?"

"Nothing; but it may mean a lot, one of these days, to you and to Motor Matt."

There was a veiled meaning in the words, but Bascomb was full of veiled meanings. Neither Matt nor Clip pressed him for an explanation.

The power of sixty horses was tucked away under the long hood of the roadster. All this energy was under Matt's control. As always, whenever he had anything to do with motors, his delight grew as their headlong rush increased.

Up the slope they dashed, and past the place where Matt and Clip had had their encounter with Jem and the other ruffian. The little adobe at the desert well leaped at them and fell away behind with the swiftness of thought.

Three men and two horses were standing in front of the adobe. One of the men was Gregory. The other two were put to it to keep their horses from getting away. Matt recognized both the horsemen as belonging to Sheriff Burke's posse.

"Do you know those two with the horses?" shouted Bascomb, in Matt's ear.

Matt ducked his head.

"And you didn't stop! A good thing for you, Motor Matt. You're beginning to trust me a little, and you'll not lose by it."

The afternoon sun was half-way down the sky. The gray desert sparkled and gleamed in front of the roadster, but behind it was blotted out by the dust of that mad flight.

And *why* they were racing, Matt did not know. "Hit 'er up! Hit 'er up!" was the constant cry of Bascomb.

In the narrow seat behind, Clip lurched, and swayed, and rattled the motor-cycles.

"Hang on, Clip!" yelled Matt. "We don't want to drop you off."

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"Never mind me," roared Clip. "I'm in the seat about half the time. On the motor-cycles the other half. But you can't lose me."

They reached the Black Cañon road and went spinning into it, some of the wheels in the air. Down the old familiar Black Cañon road they shot, and fairly jumped the bridge at the canal.

"You're a wonder, Motor Matt!" cried Bascomb huskily. "I've seen driving, in my time, but never any like this!"

"If it's speed you want——"

"You're giving it to me! It may be a race with Death who—who knows?"

Matt pondered those words as well as he could with every faculty centered in the running of the car.

"You're mighty anxious to get yourself behind the bars, Bascomb," said he.

"Bars!" burst out the man. "What do I care for bars and stone walls at a time like this? Take me to the house where you left Ollie—the shortest way."

"Ollie?"

"The little girl. Didn't she tell you her name?"

"She said it was 'Rags.'"

A groan came from Bascomb's lips.

"That's what it's been for the two years I've been in Arizona. Now that everything was going to be different, *this* had to happen. Hit 'er up, King! Can't you do better?"

Every pound of power was purring in the cylinders. No motor ever made had run as sweetly, nor hurled a car over a road so surely and easily. The machinery responded instantly to the slightest touch.

Matt's blood tingled with the joy of it all. He ceased to bother his brain with Bascomb and his affairs, wrapping himself completely in the noble work of the roadster.

It was not necessary to go through Phoenix to reach the McReady home. A cross-road from the Black Cañon road would place them in the thoroughfare that ran past the house.

Matt took the cross-road on two wheels, and, half a minute later, lurched into the main thoroughfare in the same way.

A horse and buggy were standing in front of the McReady gate. Matt slowed down so as not to frighten the horse.

"Why are you doing that?" asked Bascomb hoarsely.

Matt nodded toward the rig.

"We don't want to have a runaway," he answered.

"How much farther have we got to go?"

"That horse and buggy are in front of the house. They belong to the doctor."

"That means," faltered Bascomb, "that—that——"

"That the doctor's making a call."

Matt brought up the roadster beside the walk, a little way from the horse. Bascomb was over the side of the car before it had fairly stopped. He ran to the gate, threw it open, and hurried along the front walk to the porch.

Matt followed him as quickly as he could. He got to the gate in time to see Welcome Perkins and Chub confronting Bascomb at the steps.

"What's the matter with ye?" Welcome was demanding. "Don't ye know we got sick folks in this house? Ye're slammin' around like ye didn't care how much noise ye made."

"Is the little girl here?" queried Bascomb, lowering his voice.

"She's here, all right, but she can't be disturbed. The doctor's in there——"

"Matt!" exclaimed Chub, catching sight of his chum for the first time. "Well, I wasn't expectin' to see you. Who is this feller? Put me wise. What's the matter with him?"

"He wants to see Rags," said Matt. "Let him into the house."

"But she can't last long, Matt, and the doctor said she wasn't to be disturbed."

Bascomb leaped up the steps, pushed Welcome and Chub right and left with his strong arms, opened the door, and disappeared inside the house.

"Shade o' Gallopin' Dick!" scowled Welcome. "That feller acts like he owned the place. What in tarnation ails him?"

Matt did not take time to answer. Stepping to the open door, he looked in.

Bascomb, just over the threshold, was confronted by the doctor and Susie.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked the doctor, in a low tone.

"I want to see the girl," panted Bascomb. "This is no time to say no to me."

"Who are you?"

"That's nothing to you. I've got as good a right here as anybody."

Bascomb hurried on to the couch. Rags, her tangled hair lying all about her on the pillow, was lying quietly, with closed eyes. Bascomb stumbled to his knees beside the couch.

"Ollie!" he murmured. "Ollie?"

Matt saw the eyes open and stare upward into the face bowed over the couch. Then, as he, and the doctor, and Susie breathlessly watched and listened, the little girl's arms went up and twined about the man's neck.

"Dad!" she murmured. "Am I dreamin', 'r w'at? Is it yous, dad?"

The doctor started, then, seizing his hat, he vanished from the room, got into his buggy, and whipped away as fast as his horse could travel. [Pg 25]

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF THE MYSTERY.

Matt and Susie withdrew to the porch and softly closed the door behind them. The minds of both

of them were in a daze. There were tears in Susie's eyes.

"Fellers useter act that way when I was rampin' around in the hills," growled Welcome, with a fierce look at the closed door; "but they was mostly lawless, an' didn't keer fer no one. I got a mind to go right in there an' drive the feller out!"

"Sh-h-h!" admonished Susie; "not so loud, Welcome. It's Rags' father."

"Father!" echoed Welcome, Chub, and Clip.

"Yes," said Matt. "Don't it beat anything you ever heard of, Clip? Bascomb is Rags' father! No wonder he was in a hurry to get here. José, the Mexican that was with Juan Morisco when the team ran away, found Bascomb in the hills and told him of the accident. After I fell in with Bascomb he started to asking me about Rags. I'd no sooner told how badly hurt she was, when he got in the biggest kind of a hurry to reach Phoenix."

"We certainly got here on the jump," said Clip. "If you want to get speed out of a motor, put Motor Matt in charge."

"Didn't Rags tell you anything about herself?" asked Matt.

"Not a word," said Chub.

"And she can't get well?"

Susie shook her head.

"Who's her father, anyhow?" spoke up Welcome.

"Joe Bascomb," answered Matt. "He's one of the Dangerfield gang."

"You been mixin' up with that gang, Matt King?" went on Welcome.

"You bet he has," said Clip. "Matt's done a lot of mixing. Pretty hot, some of it."

"Where'd you go so sudden, pard?" came from Chub. "What was it the governor wanted of you?"

"He wanted me to turn a 'century' in five hours," answered Matt.

"Up Castle Creek Cañon and over the divide, at that," interpolated Clip. "He did it in less than five hours. And fought smugglers all the way."

"But where'd he pick up this Bascomb?" persisted Welcome. "That's what's worryin' me a hull lot."

"It's too long a yarn to spin now, Welcome," replied Matt. "You'll get it all some time. What came over the doctor all at once? Does anybody know?"

"Not me," said Chub. "He dug out o' here like he had a hurry-up call over in town somewhere. Never said a word, but just rolled into his buggy and began kicking up the dust."

"He's coming back," reported Clip, his eyes up the road. "Seems to be in as big a rush to get back as he was to get away."

"That isn't the doctor," said Susie, as the rig drew nearer. "There are two men in the buggy and neither of them is the doctor."

"One's McKibben," said Chub, "and the other is Sparks, his deputy. I'm next now. The doctor found out Bascomb was one of the Dangerfield gang, and hot-footed it for the sheriff's office."

The rig drew up with a rush in front of the gate, and the two officers dropped out. Leaving Sparks to tie the horse, McKibben hurried into the yard. Matt went down the porch steps to meet him.

"Ah, King!" exclaimed the sheriff, a sparkle in his eyes. "I thought you'd be back to-day. Made good, as usual, eh? The doctor says one of the gang is here."

"He's in the house," said Matt. "He's the father of the little girl, and——"

"The doctor told me that. Ever since Morisco told me what he knew, I've been half-expecting this would happen. The only thing in the way was having the girl's father find out how badly she was hurt. Who told him?"

"The Mexican that rode off on the horse when you arrested Morisco."

"He couldn't have told him all—he didn't know it."

"Well, I told Bascomb what I knew."

"Bascomb?" queried the sheriff.

"That's the man's name."

"Oh!"

"I'd leave him alone in there for a while, Mr. McKibben," went on Matt. "He's having a hard time of it."

"I'll not bother him yet." McKibben turned to his deputy who was just coming through the gate. "Go around to the rear of the house, Sparks," said he, "and see that he don't get out that way."

Sparks disappeared around the corner of the building.

"Did Morisco tell you anything about the girl, Mr. McKibben?" queried Matt.

"He told me all about her," replied the sheriff. "Morisco was sent on here to get the girl and take her out to the Rio Verde. When the gang came along her father was to pick her up and take her

with him to Mexico. This here Bascomb came from the East, and left the girl behind him. From what I got from Morisco, I figure that the little one had a hard time of it. Bascomb, knowing the gang was soon going to change its location, sent East and had the girl come to Phœnix. José is a brother of Juan's, and Bascomb had the wood-hauler take charge of his daughter until he could get hold of her himself. When a man's a criminal, his operations are a bit hampered. That's the way it was with Bascomb. He had to watch his chance, send Juan in to town, and have him bring the girl to the Rio Verde. Only Juan didn't. Matters went a little wrong for him. Trust a couple of greasers to botch things up! Why, one of my men had spotted Juan Morisco the minute he hit the Mexican quarter. We couldn't just identify him, that was all. A piece of courtplaster covered the scar on his face. The governor will be mighty tickled, Matt, when he hears how you've made good."

"Have you heard how Burke came out?"

"Got a wire from Prescott an hour ago. Six of the gang were captured at Tinaja Wells; the rest, including Dangerfield, made a run of it and got clear. But I reckon the smuggling of Chinks into this section has been pretty well discouraged. You did a cracking good piece of work for Uncle Sam yesterday, my boy."

"I wish it had turned out a little different," said Matt, looking away.

"Different?" asked the sheriff. "How do you mean?"

"If poor little Rags could only have pulled through——"

"We've got to take those things as we find 'em," said McKibben gruffly. "It's hard lines, of course, and I'm sorry for Bascomb. But he brought it all on himself. If he'd have led an honest life, Rags wouldn't have been left to shift for herself. Every man that goes wrong pays the penalty—and sometimes makes others pay part of it. How long has he been in there?" The sheriff nodded toward the house.

"About half an hour," answered Matt.

"I reckon that's long enough."

McKibben walked to the steps and ascended to the front door. Just as he was about to lay his hand on the knob, the door opened and Bascomb shambled out.

He hardly looked like the same man. His shoulders were drooping forward, his head was bowed, and his face was heavy with grief. McKibben stepped up beside him and laid a hand on his shoulder. Bascomb started at the touch and lifted his head passively.

"Well?" said he, in a low tone.

"You're under arrest, Dangerfield," said McKibben.

Matt and Clip hardly believed their ears. Dangerfield! Had McKibben made a mistake?

"Nothing much matters now, McKibben," returned the prisoner wearily. He held out his hands, wrists together. "I'm not armed, and I wouldn't make you any trouble if I was."

A pair of handcuffs were snapped into place, and the sheriff tucked a hand under his prisoner's arm and led him down from the porch.

"All right, Sparks!" called the sheriff.

While the deputy was coming around the house, the prisoner turned to Matt.

"Joe Bascomb Dangerfield, King, is my full name," said he. "I only gave you part of it. Some things you didn't understand before I suppose are perfectly clear to you now."

He faced the sheriff.

"Understand this, McKibben," he went on, "it was Matt King who brought me in. He took charge of me in Castle Creek Cañon. The reward goes to him."

"He'll be taken care of," said McKibben briefly.

Once more Dangerfield turned to Matt.

"You did your best for Ollie, King," he continued, a shake in his voice. "Give me your hand."

The handcuffs rattled as Matt shook the prisoner's hand; then, between McKibben and Sparks, Dangerfield was led away.

Criminal though Dangerfield was, Matt pitied him from the bottom of his heart. Instead of using the doctor's rig for the return to town, the officers appropriated the red roadster. Sparks got in behind, with the prisoner, and McKibben took the driver's seat. They were soon across the bridge and lost to sight.

"Waal, snakes alive!" muttered Welcome Perkins. "Blamed if Matt didn't ketch the leader o' the gang without never knowin' it."

Matt whirled and went into the house. Susie was already in the front room. She motioned toward the couch.

Rags was lying still and silent, her hands crossed on her breast.

CHAPTER XVI.

MATT REPORTS TO THE GOVERNOR.

It was half-past five that afternoon when the *Comet* came to a halt at the steps of the capitol building. Motor Matt, in no very cheerful frame of mind, got off the machine and made his way to the governor's office.

"Why, it's King!" smiled the secretary, meeting him in the outer room.

"Is the governor here yet?" asked Matt.

"Yes, and expecting you. Mr. McKibben is with him. The governor usually goes home at half-past four, but he stayed later to-day, expressly to get your report. Just a minute."

The secretary went to the door of the private office, knocked, and vanished inside.

"Go right in," said he, when he had reappeared.

Cap in hand, Motor Matt passed into the other room. Governor Gaynor met him at the door with a warm handclasp.

"Motor Matt, King of the Motor Boys!" exclaimed the governor, leading Matt to a chair. "Sit down, my lad," said he. "I'm not going to let you get away from here for quite a while."

Matt pulled the envelope from his pocket.

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"There, governor," said he, handing it over, "that will tell you what time I made on that 'century' run."

Governor Gaynor read the penciled words on the back of the envelope, and laughed. Then he passed the writing on to McKibben. The sheriff chuckled.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Matt, puzzled.

"Didn't you read it?" asked McKibben.

"Haven't had much time to read it, Mr. McKibben, since the sheriff gave it to me."

"Listen," and the sheriff read the following:

"GOVERNOR: This will certify that Motor Matt delivered your message to me at five minutes of five, of the same day he carried it out of Phoenix. It will also certify that he made the pluckiest and most successful hundred-mile run ever pulled off in the Southwest. You ought to make him your official courier, at ten thousand a year.

BURKE."

Matt flushed.

"Oh, I don't know that the trip was anything to brag about," said he. "Luck was with me—and the *Comet* can go."

"Luck and pluck have a way of moving along together," said the governor, taking a roll of bills from the desk and handing them to Matt. "There's your hundred. But for your work, Matt, Burke would have been helpless. I am pleased to say that there'll be a thousand more coming to you just as soon as a few formalities can be attended to. You won't leave for Denver until after that?"

"Had I ought to take that reward-money, governor? I don't feel right about it, somehow."

"Well, bless my soul!" exclaimed the governor. "It's good money, and well-earned."

"What's more, Dangerfield himself wants you to have it," put in McKibben. "It's the queerest situation I ever went up against, governor," he added, turning to Gaynor. "In spite of the fact that Matt captured Dangerfield and brought him in, the boy seems to have made a bigger hit with Dangerfield than with any one else."

"I didn't really capture him, Mr. McKibben," protested Matt. "Dangerfield was coming to Phoenix, anyway."

"Well, he's trying to help you to the tune of a thousand dollars, and you'd better let him. Of course," went on McKibben whimsically, "Sparks and I can use the money if you can't."

"There—there'll be some expenses on Rags' account," said Matt, "and I want those to come out of the money."

The governor leaned back in his chair and studied Matt thoughtfully.

"You're a queer one, Matt," said he, "and your sentiments are an honor to you. Let it go that way, McKibben," he added to the sheriff.

"Sure!" said the sheriff heartily.

"And now," went on the governor, handing McKibben a cigar and lighting one for himself, "tell us the whole thing, Matt, from start to finish. Don't leave anything out. I don't care if I never get supper."

Matt plunged into the recital. There were parts of it he tried to glide over, but neither McKibben nor Gaynor would let him. One or the other was always ready with an adroit question which brought out the whole story.

"Why," said the governor, when Matt had finished, "that 'century' run alone was enough to make you famous, but the finest part of your work was the way you came in with Dangerfield."

"You can't beat it!" declared McKibben. "I need a deputy sheriff, Matt. How'd you like the job?"

Matt shook his head. The sheriff was joking, and Matt knew it. Anyhow, one job like that he had just finished was enough for Matt.

"I'm going to need a secretary pretty soon," remarked the governor; and he was in earnest, even if the sheriff had not been. "How would you like *that* job?"

"I'd like it fine," answered Matt, "if there was a gasoline motor mixed up in it."

"I wish there were," murmured the governor, "for I can see where your work is cut out for you." He got up and took his hat. "I'll see you again before you start for Denver. It will probably be a few days before that thousand will be turned over."

They left the office together, and the governor got into his automobile at the curb.

"What will they do with Dangerfield, Mr. McKibben?" inquired Matt, as he got ready to ride home on the *Comet*.

"He'll stand trial, along with the six men captured by Burke," replied the sheriff. "All of them will get good, long terms in a government prison. Also," added the sheriff, "the two rascals who got out of town ahead of you in that red roadster will have a chance to explain matters. I'm holding the car, and they'll have to come to me after it."

The red roadster was never claimed. Probably this is not to be wondered at, considering the difficulties the two men would have gotten themselves into had they shown up at the sheriff's office.

Who the men were was never discovered. They had been boarding in an obscure hotel, and had kept the machine in a private garage. It was supposed that they were criminals of some sort, and, if not actually allied with the Dangerfield gang, had been commissioned by the leader to keep watch of the sheriff.

Yet, be that as it might, both men vanished from Frog Tanks and were never afterward located.

Two days later Ollie Dangerfield was laid away under the palms and umbrella-trees in the Phoenix cemetery. [Pg 28]

Susie, Chub, Welcome, Matt, Clip, and many others of the townspeople attended the funeral. The little girl's story had become known through the town, and had excited much interest and a good deal of sympathy for Dangerfield.

During the days that followed, and while Matt was waiting for the reward, a great plan had formed itself in Clipperton's brain. He called on Matt at Mrs. Spooner's, and placed it before him in all its dazzling grandeur.

"That red roadster is a fine car, Matt," said Clip. "You ought to know. What do you say?"

"It's a fast car," answered Matt guardedly. "Why, Clip? What of it?"

"Suppose nobody claims it? What will be done with it?"

"Give it up."

"Couldn't it be bought? Ought to be a bargain."

"Look here!" cried Matt, starting up in his chair. "What are you trying to get through your head, anyhow?"

"Why, it would be a heap easier for us. On that Denver trip, I mean. If we could get hold of that ___"

"That's a dream, old chap," laughed Matt. "Where's the money to come from?"

"You'll have some. I can raise as much, I reckon."

A motor-car!

Matt's enthusiasm must have shown in his face. He knew Clip's project was impracticable, for, even if they could raise money enough between them to get the red roadster, it would have been madness to put all their funds into such a venture.

"We can do it, Matt!" cried Clip excitedly.

"No, Clip," returned Matt, coming down to earth again, "we can't do it. We'd look nice with all our money tied up in an automobile, wouldn't we? Get your machine fixed—"

"I've had it fixed."

"Well, the motor-cycles ought to be good enough for us."

"Don't you ever want an automobile? Wouldn't you rather have it than a motor-cycle?"

"Sure; but we can't afford to own one. By the way, just to change the subject a little, I've got something here that'll interest you."

Matt took a folded paper out of his pocket.

"What is it?" inquired Clip, stepping to Matt's side.

"Just a minute, Clip," said Matt. "Did I tell you that Dangerfield gave me a note, there in the notch, on our way to Phoenix, and told me to read it any time after we reached town?"

Clip nodded.

"Well, I just read that note an hour ago. Most of the things we couldn't understand about Dangerfield have been cleared up, but here's a new mystery."

"You say it concerns me?" asked Clip, surprised.

"In a way, yes. Read it, and you'll see how."

Clip opened the note. It ran as follows:

"MOTOR MATT: In a few days one of my men, named Pima Pete, will try to get your help in a certain undertaking. It's an honest undertaking, too, and I advise you to do what you can. *You will find it profitable to yourself.*

BASCOMB."

The name of Pima Pete brought a flush to Clipperton's face.

"If Pete shows himself," said he, "he'll be arrested."

"I guess he knows that, all right," answered Matt. "Whatever the work is, he may find a way of asking my help without doing it in person."

"Will you help him?"

"That depends, Clip. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

"As you say," said Clipperton, "it's a thing that interests me. Promise me one thing: That you'll give me a chance to help Pima Pete myself, in case you hear from him."

"I had already made up my mind to that, Clip," replied Motor Matt. "It may be a false alarm, though, and nothing come of it."

Clip shook his head.

"I don't think Dangerfield is in the habit of giving false alarms. Something is going to happen. And soon."

Whether Clip would prove a true prophet or not, only the future could tell, but Matt, having won out, did not mean to borrow trouble, and so, boylike, let the morrow take care of itself.

THE END.

THE NEXT NUMBER (4) WILL CONTAIN

MOTOR MATT'S RACE

OR,

The Last Flight of the *Comet*.

Trouble On the Road—The Stampede—Clip's Note—McKibben's Tip—A Victim of Circumstances—The Pride of Tom Clipperton—Laying Plans—The Rifled Cache—The Break in the Road—Prescott—Matt Makes a New Move—The Old Hopewell Tunnel—Quick Work—Steam vs. Gasoline—In Court—Conclusion.

MOTOR STORIES
THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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NEW YORK, March 13, 1909.

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"I really think it was just the neatest thing that I ever did in that line," said the grizzled old Captain Gapsill.

"To what do you allude?" I inquired, knowing that I was about to hear something interesting.

"That little affair I had with Black Ben."

"Black Ben? Who is he?"

"Hain't you ever heard tell of him?" demanded the captain, in amazement; and then, recollecting himself, he added: "I forgot; that was before your time—at least, you must have been quite a younker then. Black Ben, next to Mike Fink, was one of the greatest pirates that ever infested the Mississippi."

"What became of him?"

"I was going to tell you. In the first place, you mustn't imagine he was a negro because he was called Black Ben. He had a skin as dark as a mulatto's, and a fearful lot of great, black, bushy hair, which stood up like bristles; and, as he always went without a hat, I can tell you he was just about the most villainous-looking creature you ever saw. Besides that, he had jet-black whiskers, short and sticking out like needles, and growing up almost to his eyes; so when you looked at him you saw about a bushel of black, bristling hair, and in the midst his great eyes glowing like coals of fire. He wasn't more than five feet in height; he had short legs, very long arms, and immense muscular power. He generally went dressed as a backwoodsman, and had two comrades—ordinary-looking men, but as bloody and merciless cutthroats as he.

"Black Ben had been seen as far up as Cairo, and as low down as Natchez. He was such a queer-looking creature that it was impossible for him to disguise himself enough to go among the towns or where he would have run any danger. His principal hunting-ground was from the mouth of the Arkansas north to the Tennessee line. Here he had all the opportunity he wished for hiding himself, and I don't believe a party of red Indians ever could have hunted him to his hole. If he hadn't met his fate in the queer manner he did he might have hunted there until he died of old age.

"In those days a great many flatboats used to pass down the Mississippi on their way to New Orleans, and these were the favorite prey of Black Ben and his men. As the river navigation, with its snags and sawyers, is always so dangerous, these boats often lay to under the bank during the night, when the chances are ten to one that the sharp eyes of these pirates detected them, and, at the dead hour of midnight, they stole out as silently as shadows, crept over the boat, cut the throats of the unsuspecting sleepers, gutted the craft, then scuttled it and set it afloat. Out in deep water it would sink, and that would be the last ever seen or heard of that flatboat.

"Black Ben was a horrid dog, and it was no wonder that there was such terror of him all along the river. Captain Hallongton, an old friend of mine, had his boat served in this manner, but the night was so dark that he managed to swim off, although his three men were every one of them murdered. The captain had a hard story to tell, and he offered five hundred dollars to any one who would shoot this bloody cutthroat.

"I had been from Cincinnati down to New Orleans fully a dozen times without once encountering this redoubtable Blue Beard. I had lain to at a place where, it was said, he would be sure to find us; but never once did we catch sight or sound of him, and I would have doubted his existence but for the testimony of Captain Hallongton and his friends, whom I could not refuse to believe.

"'It is strange that I never meet him.' I once said, when he and I were conversing together regarding this river outlaw. 'It must be that he is either afraid of me, or else has a feeling of friendship toward me.'

"'Don't congratulate yourself too soon,' replied my friend. 'Depend upon it, Black Ben will yet pay you a visit.'

"'I have heard so much of him that I must say my curiosity is really greater than my terror.'

"'See here!' interrupted the captain, starting up in sudden excitement; 'you're going to start down the river next week?'

"'A week from to-morrow.'

"'Good! You take Dick and Tom, your usual help?'

"'Of course.'

"'I ship with you as a common hand, just on purpose to help you to a sight of Black Ben. What do

you say?'

"The proposition struck me very favorably, and I urged the captain to it. As he was ten times as rich as I was, I didn't exactly like the idea of his going as a common hand, although on my flatboat there was no other position for him. It was finally agreed that he should pass himself as one of my assistants; but as there was no need of his work, he was to do little more than dress himself as such, to deceive any one whom we might encounter, while he might accommodate the labor to himself.

"We made all our arrangements as if certain of encountering this fellow. We went more fully armed than we ever did before, and it was agreed that when we reached that part of the river where we had reason to expect the appearance of Black Ben, or where there was the least likelihood of his seeing us, that nobody should show themselves above deck except Captain Hallongton and myself. This was for the purpose of making the pirate believe there were only two of us on board, and thus luring him on to what we hoped would be his destruction.

"Well, we swung loose from Cincinnati one fine morning, and in due time reached the Mississippi, and lay to at Memphis, Tennessee, one stormy night, where we fixed everything to our satisfaction. When we started next morning, Tom and Dick were sent down below in the cabin, with the understanding that they were not to show themselves until they had permission to do so.

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"It was late in the autumn of 1838, and I remember that the weather was quite chilly, so much so that both Hallongton and myself kept on our overcoats all the time. We passed to and fro, plainly showing ourselves to any one who might be along the bank. Tom and Dick were allowed to come up only when the night was dark, and then they exchanged places with us, so that under no circumstances were more than two of us visible at the same time.

"Down below Helena, on the Arkansas side, we had fixed as the place where we might reasonably look for the appearance. There was a long stretch of wood country, where the wretch's most inhuman deeds had been located.

"It was a cold, blustering night that we worked our boat under the wooded shore and made fast to the identical spot, where my friend had had his memorable adventure with Black Ben. He recognized it by several landmarks, and assured me that we would hear from the gentleman before many hours had passed over our heads.

"For the last few miles, before tying up, we had kept up a sharp scrutiny of the shores, in the hope of detecting some signs of the outlaw. I saw nothing; but Hallongton was positive he caught several glimpses of a man flitting along the Arkansas bank, and maintaining a sharp watch upon our movements.

"After we had securely tied up our boat, we went below, after our supper, and then made our final arrangements. I should state here that my flatboat was one made after a fashion of my own. It was long and quite narrow, the cabin being, as usual, in the rear. This was made of double thick planking, immediately adjoining the cargo, which stretched away to the bow. A small orifice had been bored through this planking, so that one in the cabin could talk in a whisper to one who was in the main body of the boat among our cargo of pork. This was done at the suggestion of Captain Hallongton, in accordance with a plan which we had formed between us.

"When it was fully dark, Tom and Dick crept carefully over the cabin, in among the pork, and took their position near the hole which I have just mentioned. When we had chatted together a while, Hallongton did the same, while I maintained my place near the cabin.

"We were so close under the bank that a long limb hung directly over the cabin.

"As it looked quite thick and strong, I grasped it with my hands and swung myself upon it. The next moment I had climbed to the top of the tree, and seated myself near the trunk astride of a large limb, where I patiently awaited whatever was to come.

"Our plans were fully agreed upon, and I knew that I might have sat there until morning without hearing a word from them, or detecting an impatient movement upon their part.

"The night, for a time, was pitchy dark, but the moon soon came up over the river, shedding a light which made the opposite shore visible, and gave me a little uneasiness as to whether I would not be detected from the ground below. However, as our line of action had been agreed upon, it was now too late for us to make any change in our part of the program.

"I was speculating on these matters, when a slight noise below attracted my attention, and, looking down, I could discern a dark body, moving cautiously toward the boat. In the shadow of the wood, the gloom was too great to make out its identity; but, while I was looking, it leaped as lightly and dexterously as a monkey upon the gunwale, and the next minute I saw that Black Ben was on the flatboat.

"In the bright moonlight he was plainly visible, and answered perfectly the description which I have given. He circled around the boat with the silence of a phantom, and finally halted near the cabin and listened as if to hear the breathing of those within. Having finished his reconnoissance, he sprang lightly ashore and disappeared.

"I had seen no one but Black Ben, but a slight noise heard when he was on the boat satisfied me that he had one companion at least with him, and I was sure that he would speedily return.

"I was now anxious to hear whether Captain Hallongton had seen the pirate and whether he was 'posted.'

"To satisfy myself, I gave a low whistle. It was immediately replied to—a fact which convinced me

that my friends were 'all right.'

"It was plain that Black Ben had no suspicion of the little plan which we had concocted for his benefit; but whether that same little plan of ours would miscarry or not was another question, for we knew that the outlaw was a desperate character, who would play the mischief if he should ever get into close quarters.

"Now came a period of watching and waiting, continued so long that I had great fear that Black Ben had scented danger and concluded to give us a wide berth. Fully two hours passed away, with me shivering and cramped in the tree; but I had resolved to stay there until morning if the outlaw did not make his appearance before that time.

"It could not have been far from midnight when I caught the rustling of bushes beneath me, and I felt sure that Black Ben was there; but, as I peered down, I was disappointed in discerning not a man, but a large black bear that was lumbering along the shore and awkwardly approaching the flatboat. Reaching it, he waded into the water, snuffed around the boat, poked his nose against it, struck his paws against it, and made a racket which struck me as singular upon the part of a bear.

"'I would soon stop your sport,' I reflected, 'if I were not watching for bigger game.'

"I was watching the brute, when something in his manner of moving about attracted my suspicion, and I scanned him more narrowly than I had yet done. My heart gave a great leap as I penetrated the ruse, and discovered that instead of the object under me being a bear, it was only a man disguised as such. His object in making such a tumult around the boat was evidently to learn whether the men on board were asleep.

"Occasionally the creature paused and was perfectly still, as if listening; but nothing but the sullen surging of the muddy Mississippi, or the dipping of some overhanging branch was heard, and, becoming satisfied that everything was in the shape desired, the bear withdrew from the water, and tumbled away into the wood, in a style which he hardly would have dared to use had he been aware that a pair of eyes were intently scrutinizing his every movement.

"A half-hour later, a form sprang from the dark line of wood which lined the shore, landing on the gunwale of the boat at a single bound. One glance was sufficient for me to see that Black Ben had boarded the *General Jackson*, and that the critical moment was at hand.

"The hideous-looking creature glided as swiftly and silently as a shadow from one part of the boat to the other, in order to assure himself that no one was watching in any of the out-of-the-way places. He then glided back to the cabin and made a single motion with his arm. The response was in the shape of another dark form, which leaped beside him with all the agility of a monkey.

"From where I sat I had both of these precious scamps in range, and I could have sent a bullet crashing through both of them; but, as that was not the plan agreed upon, I concluded to wait.

"As I had always understood that Black Ben was accompanied by two men, I looked for the appearance of his companion; but, as the bushy-headed chief turned his head upon the shore the instant he was joined by his friend, I supposed that he was absent, and would not appear in this matter, which pleased me greatly, as it could not but make the matter all the more easy for us.

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"The two villains put their heads together and seemed to converse a while in the same manner that you frequently see horses or cows do. Agreeing upon their course of action, Black Ben quietly drew back the slide which covered the door which communicated with the cabin. Flashing a sort of bull's-eye lantern down into the gloom, he leaned his head forward and scanned every part of the cabin.

"And I know what he saw. What were apparently two human forms wrapped up in their blankets and sound asleep. The next instant the sharp report of two pistols in immediate succession broke the stillness, and Black Ben and his comrade sprang down into the cabin.

"Just what we wanted. Hardly a second had elapsed when I was on deck, and had slid the door back to its place at the same moment that Captain Hallongton and Tom and Dick hurriedly clambered up beside me.

"'We've got 'em!' exclaimed the captain delightedly. 'Be quick and fasten that down.'

"Everything had been prepared for such a dénouement as this, and not ten seconds passed ere we had Black Ben and his friend firmly imprisoned.

"The next proceeding of Captain Hallongton was to dance a double shuffle upon the deck and exclaim: 'We've got him! we've got him!'

"'Keep still,' I said; 'you act like a crazy man.'

"'Do you know there is a thousand dollars offered for his head in New Orleans?' said he.

"I didn't know that, and I felt somewhat like making as big a fool of myself over it, but I did not.

"The next thing we heard was a terrible rumpus below—swearing and yelling enough to raise the hair on your head. But what cared we? We had the mighty river-pirate, Black Ben, and one of his comrades in our power.

"Not knowing but what some of his friends might be in the neighborhood, we untied the fastenings of the boat and swung out into the stream. We ran considerable risk in so doing, as this was a dangerous part of the river, but Captain Hallongton understood the current better than I did, and we decided that this was the safest and best thing that we could do under the circumstances.

"The tempest and tumult continued below until we were in the middle of the Mississippi and gliding rapidly down the stream. Then a silence came, and Black Ben called up to us and asked us what this all meant. We told him that we had caught him trespassing on our boat and intended to take him down to New Orleans and sell him. The answer to this was a couple of pistol-shots fired at the spot where he supposed I was standing. It struck beneath my feet, and no doubt he imagined it would pass through the planking and kill me; but it was bullet-proof and there was no danger. Finding he could do no harm he took a different course of action. He tried to bribe us to let him go, and made us repeated offers until he reached a figure as high as ten thousand dollars. We told him we would take time to think about it, but we were not quite fools enough to accept any offer which he could make. We knew that all he wanted was to get out on deck, and then there would be the tallest kind of a rumpus. Our only safety was in keeping him just where he was and not give him the slightest advantage.

"Finding his efforts in this direction useless, he fell upon his first plan, of swearing. I have heard some terrible profanity in my time, but I don't think I ever heard anything to equal that of Black Ben. He kept it up until morning, and then all was still again.

"I suppose you understand the way in which we trapped our bird? Captain Hallongton had taken the trouble of finding out Black Ben's manner of doing business and had laid his plans accordingly. It was his custom to wait until the crew of the boats he intended to rob went asleep, and he then stole aboard and quietly despatched them either with the knife or pistol. Knowing this, we had arranged a couple of dummies, which, as we intended, were mistaken by the river-pirate for the entire crew of the *General Jackson*. The small orifice which I first spoke of as connecting the cabin with the main body of the boat had been made by Captain Hallongton, so that in case there was parley between him and Black Ben before surrendering the boat, the latter personage could thus be made to believe that it came from one of the forms inside, but his course of action rendered this precaution unnecessary.

"We ran a great deal more danger in capturing this renowned outlaw than any of us imagined. We had carefully removed everything in the shape of a knife or hatchet or any kind of a weapon from the cabin, and yet we had every reason to believe that both of these dogs would have their knives with them; but by a purely providential circumstance neither of them carried anything with them except their pistols. How it came about, I cannot say, for it certainly was odd. Had either of them their weapons, it would have taken them but a few hours to cut their way through the planking, thick as it was, and we would have been compelled to shoot them to save ourselves from being shot.

"If they had become satisfied that there was no hope for them, the next thing in order would have been the bottom of the boat. They would have made a leak which would have carried themselves and the flatboat to the bottom, and likely enough ourselves, too, for you must know it is no easy matter to make your way through the Mississippi at high water.

"We did not feel easy when we heard them thumping and rubbing the side of the boat, for we were well aware what wonderful things these desperate characters do when they find themselves in such desperate straits.

"Captain Hallongton stood with his loaded rifle, expecting almost every moment to see Black Ben burst out to view like a raging fury. By placing our ears against the cabin we could hear a peculiar grinding noise, which told us that the gentlemen in there were doing something, although what it was we could only guess. We could hear them muttering and talking to each other, but I could not catch any of the words uttered.

"Toward the close of the second day, just as we came within sight of the Crescent City, two pistol-shots broke the stillness. We could only conjecture what it meant. My supposition was that they had shot themselves, but Captain Hallongton suspected it was only a stratagem to get us to open the cabin door to give them a final chance to escape, or an opportunity to put a bullet through some of us who might look down. So we paid no heed, but kept on floating down the river.

"When we had tied up at the wharf, we brought a number of police officers, acquainted them with our prize, surrounded the boat, and then removed the door of the cabin. We waited a long time, but no one came forth, nor did any sound betray the presence of the men within. At last, one of the officers, more venturesome than the rest, ventured to steal up to the cabin and look down. The next instant he uttered a shout and sprang down, while we rushed toward the cabin.

"One glance showed all. Black Ben and his comrade had both shot themselves, and were stone dead. They had no knives, as I said, but with their simple pistol-barrels they had almost cut their way through the planking. I do believe that if New Orleans had been a hundred miles farther off these two precious scamps would have got out of the cabin and, perhaps, effected their escape.

"However, we had the satisfaction of receiving one thousand dollars reward, and of knowing that we had cleared the Mississippi of one of the most desperate outlaws that ever infested its banks."

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

Images may be clicked to view larger versions.

Page 1, changed "cast is off" to "cast it off."

Page 4, changed "animal's heads" to "animals' heads."

Page 7, normalized "Potters' Gap" to "Potter's Gap."

Page 13, changed "derived it's name" to "derived its name."

Page 16, changed "give up the slip" to "give us the slip."

Page 28, changed "Chubb" to "Chub" in "Susie, Chub, Welcome, Matt, Clip, and many others...."

Page 30, added missing quote before "Occasionally the creature...."

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