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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOTOR MATT'S REVERSE; OR, CAUGHT IN A LOSING CAUSE ***



MOTOR STORIES

THRILLING
ADVENTURE

MOTOR
FICTION

NO. 25
AUG. 14, 1909.

FIVE
CENTS

MOTOR MATT'S REVERSE OR CAUGHT IN A LOSING CAUSE

BY THE AUTHOR
OF "MOTOR MATT"

MOTOR STORIES
THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION

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MOTOR MATT'S REVERSE;

OR,

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CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR IN THIS STORY.

Matt King, otherwise Motor Matt.

Joe McGlory, a young cowboy who proves himself a lad of worth and character, and whose eccentricities are all on the humorous side. A good chum to tie to—a point Motor Matt is quick to perceive.

Ping Pong, a Chinese boy who insists on working for Motor Matt, and who contrives to make himself valuable, perhaps invaluable.

Amos Murgatroyd, an enemy of Motor Matt, and who cleverly manipulates the various wires of a comprehensive plot only to find that he has championed a losing cause.

Amy, Murgatroyd's niece, who helps right and justice, turning against a relative in order to befriend a stranger.

Siwash Charley, a ruffianly assistant of Murgatroyd who proves to be one Cant Phillips, a deserter from the army.

Pecos Jones, who has no principles worth mentioning, plays a double part with friend

and foe, and abruptly vanishes.

Lieutenant Cameron, an officer in the Signal Corps, U. S. A., who proves to be the cousin of an old friend of Matt, and who nearly loses his life when the aëroplane is tested.

CHAPTER I.

PLOTTERS THREE.

"There's no use talkin', Siwash," and Pecos Jones leaned disgustedly back against the earth wall of the dugout; "he's got one o' these here charmed lives, that feller has, and it ain't no manner o' use tryin' to down him."

Siwash Charley was cramming tobacco into the bowl of a black pipe. He halted operations long enough to give his companion an angry look out from under his thick brows.

"Oh, ye're the limit, Pecos!" he grunted, drawing a match across the top of the table and trailing the flame over the pipe bowl. "The cub's human, an' I ain't never yet seen a human bein' that couldn't be downed—purvidin' ye went about it right."

Pecos Jones scowled discontentedly.

"Then I opine," said he, "ye ain't got sense enough to know how to go about it. That last attempt at Fort Totten wasn't nothin' more'n a flash in the pan. What did ye accomplish, huh? Tell me that. Here y' are, holed up in this dugout an' not darin' to show yer face where it'll be seen an' reckernized. The sojers want ye, an' they want ye bad. Ye come purty nigh doin' up a leftenant o' the army, an' that's why the milingtary is on yer trail, but if they knowed as much o' yer hist'ry as I do, they'd be arter ye a lot worse'n what they——"

"Stow it!" roared Siwash Charley, leaning toward his companion and bringing a fist down on the table with force enough to make the flame leap upward in the chimney of the tin lamp. "Ye'll hush about my past hist'ry, Jones, or thar'll be doin's between you an' me."

The place where this conversation was going forward was a hole in the hillside—an excavation consisting of a single room with a door and a window in the front wall. A shelf of earth running around three walls offered a place to sit, as well as a convenient ledge for the stowage of food supplies and cooking utensils.

The window was darkened with a blanket, so that the light would not shine through and acquaint any chance passers with the fact that the interior of the hill was occupied.

Pecos Jones was a little ferret of a man. His face had "undesirable citizen" written all over it.

Siwash Charley was larger, and on the principle that there can be more villain in a large package than in a small one, Siwash was the more undesirable of the two. [Pg 2]

He banged the table and scowled so savagely that Pecos Jones pulled himself together with a startled jerk. Before he could say anything, however, a set of knuckles drummed on the door.

Pecos gasped, and stared in affright at Siwash. The latter muttered under his breath, grabbed up a revolver that was lying on the table and stepped to the door.

"Who's thar?" he demanded huskily.

"Murg," came a muffled reply from the other side of the door.

Siwash laughed, shoved a bolt, and pulled the door wide.

"Come in, Murg," said he. "I was sorter expectin' ye."

A smooth-faced man, wearing gauntlets, a long automobile coat, and with goggles pushed up above the visor of his cap, stepped into the room. He carried a rifle over his arm, and for a moment he stood blinking in the yellow lamplight.

Siwash Charley closed the door.

"Got yer ottermobill fixin's on, eh?" said he, facing about after the door had been bolted; "an' by jings, if ye ain't totin' of er Winchester. Them fellers at Totten arter you, too, Murg?"

Murgatroyd's little, gimlet-like eyes were becoming used to the lamplight. They shot a reproving glance at Siwash, then darted to Pecos Jones.

"Who's that?" he asked curtly.

"Him?" chuckled Siwash. "Oh, he's the Artful Dodger. I reckon he does more dodgin' across the international boundary line than ary other feller in the Northwest. Whenever things git too hot fer Pecos Jones in North Dakotay, he dodges inter Manitoby, and vicer verser. Hoss stealin' is his line."

"Never stole a hoss in my life!" bridled Pecos Jones.

"Thunder!" snickered Siwash. "Why, I've helped ye."

"How does Pecos Jones happen to be here?" demanded Murgatroyd.

"He got ter know this place o' mine while we was workin' tergether. Arter that flyin' machine was tried out at Fort Totten, o' course I had ter slope ter some quiet spot whar I could go inter retirement, an' this ole hang-out nacherly suggested itself. When I blowed in hyer, lo! an' behold, hyer was Pecos."

Murgatroyd appeared satisfied. Standing his rifle in one corner, he pulled off his gauntlets and thrust them in his pockets, sat down on the earth shelf, and hooked up one knee between his hands. For a while he sat regarding Siwash reflectively.

"Is Pecos Jones known at Fort Totten?" he asked.

"Bet yer life I ain't," said Pecos for himself. "What's more," he added, nibbling at a slab of tobacco, "I don't want ter be."

"He works mostly around Turtle Mounting," explained Siwash Charley. "Why?"

"I think he can be useful to us," answered Murgatroyd. "Those other two fellows who helped you at Totten—where are they, Siwash?"

"They was nigh skeered ter death, an' made a bee line fer Winnipeg."

"That was a bad bobble you made at Totten," resumed Murgatroyd. "Motor Matt, in spite of you, put Traquair's aëroplane through its paces, met the government's requirements in every particular, and the machine was sold to the war department for fifteen thousand dollars."

"Things didn't work right," growled Siwash. "I tampered with that thar machine the night before the trials—loosened bolts an' screws an' filed through the wire guy ropes—but nothin' happened till the flyin' machine was done sailin' an' ready ter come down; then that cub, Motor Matt, got in some lightnin' headwork an' saved the machine, saved himself, an' likewise that there Leftenant Cameron of the Signal Corps."

"The boy's got a charmed life, I tell ye," insisted Pecos Jones. "I've heerd talk, up around Turtle Mounting, about what he's done."

"Think of a full-grown man like Pecos Jones talkin' that-a-way!" exclaimed Siwash derisively.

"Motor Matt is clever," said Murgatroyd musingly, "and I made a mistake in sizing him up. But there's a way to get him."

"What do you want to 'get' him fer?" inquired Pecos Jones.

Murgatroyd drew three gold pieces from his pocket and laid them in a little stack on the table, just within the glint of the lamplight.

"Pecos Jones," said he, "Siwash, here, has vouched for you. In the little game I'm about to play we need help. You can either take that money and obey orders, or leave it and get out."

There was a silence, while Pecos eyed the gold greedily. After a little reflection he brushed the coins from the table and dropped them clinking into his pocket.

"I'm with ye," said he. "What's wanted?"

"That's the talk," approved Murgatroyd. "Our plans failed at the aëroplane trials,^[A] but I've got another scheme which I am sure will win. You know, Siwash, and perhaps Pecos knows it as well, that Motor Matt was demonstrating that aëroplane for Mrs. Traquair, who lives in Jamestown. Motor Matt came meddling with the business which I had with the woman, and the fifteen thousand, paid by the government for the aëroplane, was divided between Mrs. Traquair and Matt. Half——"

[A] What Murgatroyd's plans were, and why they failed, was set forth in No. 24 of the MOTOR STORIES, "Motor Matt on the Wing; or, Flying for Fame and Fortune."

"We know all that," cut in Siwash.

"Well, then, here's something you don't know. Mrs. Traquair has a quarter section of land near here, on which her husband borrowed one thousand dollars of me while perfecting his aëroplane. After Traquair was killed by a fall with his flying machine, I felt sure I could get that quarter section of land on the mortgage. Now Motor Matt, by helping Mrs. Traquair, has made it possible for her to pay off the mortgage. She hasn't done it yet, because I haven't been in Jamestown since your failure to wreck the aëroplane at Fort Totten. I've been traveling around in my automobile with my niece, who is in poor health. She is in Sykestown now, while I am making this night trip out here. I visited this place once before, you remember, and I kept its location so well in mind that I was able to find it without much trouble. I felt fairly certain, Siwash, that you would be here, so——"

"Well, what's your scheme?" interrupted Siwash Charley.

"I'm getting to that," went on Murgatroyd. "Motor Matt and his friend Joe McGlory, together with the Chinese boy, Ping Pong, have been at Fort Totten ever since the aëroplane was sold to the government. The war department will take another of the Traquair aëroplanes at the same price paid for this one in case it can be finished and delivered by the first of the month, in time to go to Washington for trials of dirigible balloons and other devices at Fort Myer. Motor Matt is building an aëroplane for this order, and it is nearly completed. I don't care anything about that. What concerns me is that quarter section of land. For reasons of my own, I want it—and I am going to have it, if not in one way, then in another."

"What's yer scheme?" asked Siwash Charley impatiently.

"My scheme is to give Motor Matt such a reverse that Mrs. Traquair will have to come to his rescue and buy his safety with the quarter section."

"Ye never kin do it!"

"I believe that I can." Murgatroyd took a letter from his pocket and laid it on the table. "That," said he, nodding toward the letter, "is to be delivered to Motor Matt at Fort Totten by Pecos Jones, and Jones is to tell a story which will run substantially like this."

Thereupon Murgatroyd entered into a more lengthened review of his crafty scheme, Siwash Charley's eyes gleaming exultantly as he proceeded.

"It's goin' ter win!" declared Siwash, thumping a fist down on the table to emphasize his declaration. "I've got ter saw off even with that young cub, an' I'm with ye, Murg, chaps, taps, an' latigoes! So's Pecos. Ye kin count on the two of us."

"Very good," responded Murgatroyd, getting up and drawing on his gauntlets. "Succeed in this, Siwash, and I'll not only secure the quarter section, but you and Pecos will get more money and, what's better, a promise from the government not to trouble you because of what happened at Fort Totten—or what's going to happen. You understand what you're going to do, so no more need be said. I'll get away before my absence from Sykestown arouses any remarks. So long."

The door closed, and presently the two in the dugout heard the muffled "chugging" of a distant motor car fading into silence in the direction of Sykestown.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW AEROPLANE.

Motor Matt was as happy as the proverbial bee in clover—and fully as industrious.

A quarter of a mile below the post trader's store, on the Devil's Lake Indian Reservation, a tent, with its sides rolled up, was being used as a workshop. Outside the tent there was a portable forge, anvil, and full outfit of blacksmith's tools. Inside there was a bench with an ironworker's vise, and also a carpenter's bench and well-equipped chest.

For two weeks Matt had been laboring about Camp Traquair, as the little rendezvous was called, assisted in his work by his cowboy chum, Joe McGlory, and with the Chinese boy, Ping, in charge of the culinary department.

Immediately after Matt had finished the aëroplane trials, with so much credit to himself, an order had been given for a new aëroplane at the same price the government had paid for the first one, providing only that it should be finished and tried out by the first of the month. This would enable the machine to be taken apart, crated, and forwarded to Fort Myer for a competitive test in an event that was to determine the abilities of an aëroplane for signal corps' services, as against other types of machines, such as dirigible balloons.

Matt and his two friends had plunged zealously into the work. While McGlory and Ping were erecting the work tent, and furnishing it with wood and iron-working tools, Matt had made a trip to Jamestown for a talk with Mrs. Traquair, and then to St. Paul after materials.

The tough spruce needed for the wings, or "planes," every bolt, screw and wire guy, and the motor, Matt had secured in St. Paul. At a large cost for expressage these materials had been shipped direct to Fort Totten and had arrived there on the same day that witnessed Matt's return.

Then began a season of feverish activity, during which Lieutenant Cameron and others from the post had watched the king of the motor boys with wonder and admiration.

That Motor Matt was possessed of mechanical skill the officers at the post had long known, but that his genius in construction was fully equal to his ability as an aviator became evident from day to day, and was in the nature of a revelation.

"You're the best all-around chap at this business I ever saw in my life," Lieutenant Cameron had declared.

Matt laughed.

"Why, Cameron," he answered, "I used to work in a motor plant, in Albany, New York."

"That may be, Matt, but building a motor is a different proposition from building a flying machine."

"Traquair laid down the plans. All I have to do is to follow them. It's really very simple. An aëroplane, you know, is nothing more than two oblong pieces of canvas, fastened together one above the other and pushed against the air by a motor and propeller. If the motor drives the wings fast enough, they're sure to stay up."

But Cameron shook his head and continued to believe that Motor Matt was something of a phenomenon, whereas Matt knew that he had merely the "knack" for the work, just as he had acquired the "knack" for using the aëroplane in the first place.

"The machine," he declared to Cameron, "is only a big toy."

"Toy?" echoed Cameron. "It's more than that, Matt."

"For the army and navy, yes. Aëroplanes can be used for scouting purposes and for dropping bombs down on hostile armies and war ships—providing they can keep clear of bullets and shells fired from below; but, even for such work, the aëroplane has its limitations."

"The government," laughed Cameron, "is buying these Traquair aëroplanes in spite of their limitations."

"Our war department," answered Matt, "has got to keep abreast of other war departments, and poor Traquair has given you fellows the best aëroplane so far invented."

"Don't you think the Traquair machine will ever be used for commercial purposes? Won't there be fleets of them carrying passengers and merchandise between San Francisco and New York and making the trip at the rate of sixty or one hundred miles an hour?"

"That's a dream," averred Matt; "still," he added, "dreams sometimes come true. My old dirigible balloon, the *Hawk*, was a wonder. She could be sailed in a pretty stiff wind, and a fellow didn't have to use his head and hands every blessed second to keep a sudden gust of air from turning his machine upside down. I traveled thousand of miles in the *Hawk*, but there was always a certain amount of worry on account of the gas. If anything happened to the silk envelope, no amount of work with your head and hands could keep you from a tumble."

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"Well, anyway, you're in love with air ships."

"I'm in love with this," and Matt's gray eyes brightened as he touched the motor which he was at that moment installing in the new aëroplane, "and I'm in love with every novel use to which a motor can be put. Explosive engines will furnish the power for the future, and every new way they're used helps that coming time along. But I'm giving a lecture," he smiled, going back to his work, "and I couldn't tell you exactly how I feel on this gas-engine subject if I talked a thousand years. The motors have got a strangle hold on me—they're keeping me out of college, keeping me from settling down, and filling my life with all sorts of adventures. But I can't help it. I'm under the spell of the gas engine, and that's all there is to it."

It was during this talk of Matt's with Cameron, along toward the last days of the busy two weeks, that Ping came into Camp Traquair with a dagger.

"You savvy knife, Motol Matt?" asked Ping, offering the dagger for inspection.

Matt dropped his wrench and took the weapon from the Chinaman.

It was not more than seven inches in length from the end of the handle to the tip of the blade. The blade was badly rusted, and the handle was incrustated with earth.

"Where did you get this, Ping?" inquired Matt, beginning to clean the dagger with the edge of a file.

"My makee find in woods. You savvy place Siwash cally Ping one piecee night he fool with Flying Joss?"

"Flying Joss" was Ping's name for the aëroplane. His heathen mind made a joss of things he could not understand, and this machine of Traquair's had impressed him more than anything else he had ever encountered.

"I remember," answered Matt. "Siwash Charley carried you off into the timber, near the lake shore. You found the dagger there?"

"All same."

"Some Indian must have dropped it," put in Cameron. "From the way it's rusted, it looks as though the redskin must have dropped it a hundred years ago."

"Hardly as long ago as that," returned Matt. "It's a pretty dagger, as daggers go, although I don't admire things of the kind. The blade is of mighty fine steel, and the handle is of sterling silver, set with a ruby, or a piece of colored glass to represent a ruby, at the end. And here are some initials."

A little scraping with the file had bared a flat plate in the handle. Matt studied the initials.

"No," he remarked, "this couldn't have belonged to an Indian, Cameron. Redskins are not carrying silver, ruby-mounted daggers with initials engraved on them."

"Some red may have traded pelts for it," suggested the lieutenant.

"Possibly."

"What are the initials? Can you make them out?"

"There are two letters, sort of twined together," answered Matt. "I make them out to be 'G. F.,' although I—"

An exclamation escaped Cameron.

"Let me see it!" he cried, stepping forward and showing an astonishment and eagerness which bewildered Motor Matt.

For several minutes Cameron turned the blade around and around in his hands, staring in amazement and muttering to himself.

"Will you let me have this for a little while, Matt?" asked the lieutenant when he had finished his examination. "This may be a most remarkable find—remarkable as well as of tremendous

importance. I can't tell about that, though, till I have a talk with some of the others at the post."

"Of course you can take it," said Matt. "But what makes that rusty piece of steel so important?"

"I'll tell you—later."

Thereupon the lieutenant whirled in his tracks and made off at speed in the direction of the post.

McGlory had been under the aëroplane fitting in the pipe that led from the tank to the carburetor. He had overheard the talk, however, and had caught a glimpse of the dagger while the lieutenant was examining it.

"Tell me about that!" he exclaimed, crawling out from under the aëroplane. "There was something about that rusty old knife that knocked Cameron slabsided. What do you think it was?"

"Give it up, Joe," answered Matt. "How much too long is that pipe?"

In this offhand way Matt dismissed the dagger from his thoughts—but not for long. An hour later, Cameron could be seen chasing down the road from the post trader's, wildly excited.

"I've got to talk with you, Matt," said he breathlessly, as he reached the side of the aëroplane. "You'll have to give me some of your time, and no two ways about it. There's a tragedy connected with this knife—tragedy, and a whole lot of treachery. It's more than likely, too, that Siwash Charley is mixed up in the whirl of events that have to do with the dagger. Come into the tent with me for a little while."

Matt gave a regretful look at the motor. He would rather have kept busy with that than listen to the most absorbing yarn that was ever told. Nevertheless, there was no denying the lieutenant, and the king of the motor boys, accompanied by McGlory and Ping, followed Cameron into the shade of the tent.

CHAPTER III.

TREACHERY AND TRAGEDY.

"I'm no hand at spinning yarns," remarked Cameron after he and the rest had seated themselves comfortably in canvas chairs, "but this is no yarn. It's history, and has to do with the dishonor of a brother officer, one Captain Goff Fortescue, of the —th Infantry, who, two years ago, was stationed at Fort Totten. It isn't pleasant for me to tell of a brother officer's disgrace, but the story will have to be repeated or you won't be able to understand what the finding of this dagger means."

"The knife belonged to Captain Goff Fortescue?" asked Matt, remembering the initials on the handle.

"Yes. There now appears to be not the least doubt of that. I went up to the post and showed the knife to a member of the Signal Corps who used to belong to Fortescue's company. He declares that he has seen that dagger in Fortescue's possession a dozen times. Fortescue picked it up in Italy once while he was abroad—in Italy, the home of the stiletto. He was very proud of it, and always had the weapon about him, in a small sheath."

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Cameron was silent for a little, examining with pensive eyes the rusted dagger which he had laid on a table in front of him.

"Fortescue came to Totten from the Presidio, at San Francisco," he finally went on. "I presume you have heard how eager one nation is to secure the plans of another nation's defenses——"

"I know a good deal about that," interjected Matt grimly. "Other nations are just as eager to find out about submarine boats belonging to another nation—and to destroy them, if possible. When your cousin, Ensign Glennie, went around South America with me in the submarine *Grampus*, we had our hands full keeping clear of the Japs."

"Exactly," said Cameron. "I know about that. Well, our defenses in and around San Francisco Bay, their strength as to guns and calibre of the guns, the situation and power of the disappearing cannon, and all that, might become of importance to several nations. Such information, if it can be secured, is well paid for. That is the pit into which poor Fortescue dropped—killing as bright a prospect as ever lay before any officer in the service."

"While Fortescue was stationed at Totten, he went across to Devil's Lake City on a week's leave. His excuse was that he had to make a business trip to St. Paul, and when he went he carried a suit case with him. The eastbound train was late, and Fortescue checked his suit case at the hotel and went to pass an hour or two with friends. In some way, the clerk at the hotel mixed the checks, and a commercial traveler from Omaha got Fortescue's grip by mistake, while Fortescue was visiting his friends.

"Both grips, it transpired, looked exactly alike—you've seen suit cases that way, I guess—and when the drummer took the grip to his room he was surprised to find that his key wouldn't unlock it. It was necessary for the drummer to get into the case, and he broke the lock. Instead of finding what he was looking for, he discovered a mass of plans and blue-prints, with sheet after sheet of memoranda, all descriptive of our defensive works in and around San Francisco!

"Naturally, the drummer was astounded. Then, for the first time, he looked at the lettering on the

end of the suit case. Just as you found on that dagger, he discovered on the suit case the initials, 'G. F.' While he was looking over the documents Fortescue burst wildly into the room and demanded his property. Of course, the drummer gave up the suit case and the papers. He thought no more of the matter just then, for Fortescue was an officer of the army and, the drummer believed, entitled to the documents.

"Three days later Fortescue was discovered dead in the woods not far from the place where Ping was found by the Indian the afternoon of the aëroplane trials. He had been slain by a dagger thrust and stripped of all his personal possessions. There was no marks of a scuffle, and the affair became a great mystery, for Fortescue's dagger—that dagger—was missing, although the sheath was still in Fortescue's breast pocket.

"The news got out. The drummer, who was at Grand Forks, read an account of the affair in a newspaper, and immediately started for Totten. He told what he knew about the plans in Fortescue's satchel. This information pointed to shame and disgrace, in the matter of Fortescue, but every one reserved judgment, not wishing to judge the captain until more concerning the affair had come out.

"Fortescue had started for St. Paul. Why had he not gone there? Instead, he was found south of the lake, in the woods, dead from a dagger thrust.

"Why had he the plans and memoranda in his possession? And where were the suit case and the plans?"

"Some thought he had been going to sell the plans to the agent of some foreign nation, that he was afraid the commercial traveler would tell of the mistake made in the hotel, and that he had got rid of the satchel and taken his own life. The bottom of the lake, just off the place where Fortescue was found, was dragged, but the satchel could not be found. Nor has it been found to this day."

Cameron paused.

"That's what happened, Cameron," said Matt. "Fortescue was treacherous. When he saw he had been discovered, his treasonable designs so worked upon him that he probably destroyed the satchel and the plans and killed himself."

"Wait, Motor Matt," proceeded Cameron; "there's more to it. The same day Fortescue started across Devil's Lake to take the train east, a soldier named Cant Phillips deserted from Fort Totten. This Phillips also came from the Presidio, and belonged with Fortescue's company. The soldier was never found—and this, you will remember, happened two years ago."

"But what has Phillips to do with Fortescue and the plans?"

"Here is where guesswork comes in. Ping found the knife on the spot where Siwash Charley and two of his villainous comrades carried the boy the night the aëroplane was tampered with. Suppose Siwash Charley had dropped the knife?"

"More likely," returned Matt, "Fortescue dropped it after he stabbed himself."

"No. The ground was searched all around in that vicinity, and the knife could not be found. If Fortescue gave himself a mortal wound, he would have had to drop the knife on the spot. It wasn't there at that time. The knife, as a matter of fact, hasn't laid so long in the woods as its appearance would indicate. The rust is only on the surface of the steel, and fifteen minutes' work will clean the dagger so that it will be almost as bright as ever. I don't think it has been in the woods more than two weeks. In short, it's my notion that Siwash Charley dropped it when he and his pals carried Ping to the place where he was left."

This was rather startling, but still Matt and McGlory were unable to puzzle out the point Cameron was driving at.

"How could Siwash Charley get hold of the knife?" asked Matt.

"Siwash Charley appeared in this part of the country, from nowhere in particular, some year and a half ago. He was accused of stealing horses, but the crime was never proved against him."

"I'm a Piute," breathed McGlory, "if I can see what Siwash has to do with this Fortescue party." [Pg 6]

Without seeming to notice the comment, Cameron went on:

"Cant Phillips may have been concerned in the treachery that has to do with Fortescue's plans. Possibly he met Fortescue in the woods, here to the south of the lake, the day he deserted; that he and Fortescue quarreled; that Phillips felled Fortescue with a blow of the fist and then took the dagger from Fortescue's pocket and completed his work; and then, following that, Phillips may have skipped out with the suit case, the plans—and the dagger."

"But how," said Matt, still puzzled, "could Siwash Charley get the dagger from this man Phillips, assuming that what you guess about the affair is true?"

"I believe," and here Cameron leaned forward and spoke sternly and impressively, "that Cant Phillips and Siwash Charley are one and the same!"

Matt, McGlory, and even Ping were profoundly stirred by this announcement.

"But," cried Matt, "does Siwash Charley look like Cant Phillips?"

"Not much, so far as I've been able to discover. Still, two years will make a big change in a man—especially if the man does what he can to help on the change. Fortescue killed himself two years ago, and it was a year and a half ago that Siwash Charley appeared in this part of the country. At

times there is a soldierly bearing about Siwash Charley which may have been the result of training in the army. Besides, he is about the height and build of Phillips. A soldier looks vastly different out of his uniform and in rough civilian clothes."

"Then," observed Matt, watching through the open side of the tent as a horseman came galloping down the road from the direction of the post trader's, "the military have a double purpose in capturing Siwash Charley."

"They will have," declared Cameron grimly, "as soon as I air my suspicions. For the present, though, keep what I have said to yourself. Ah," he finished, as the horseman drew up beside the tent, "a visitor, Matt, and rather a rough one, at that."

Cameron excused himself, picked up the fateful dagger, and started back toward the post. Matt stepped out to pass a few words with the horseman, while McGlory went to his work on the aéroplane.

"My name's Hackberry," said the horseman, a wiry, ferret-like figure of a man, "an' I got a letter here fer Motor Matt. Which is him?"

CHAPTER IV.

MURGATROYD'S FIRST MOVE.

Motor Matt was a keen reader of character. At first glance, and from a distance, he had not liked Hackberry's appearance any too well; and now, at closer view, he liked it less.

"I am Motor Matt," said he.

"Sho," muttered the horseman; "hit it first clatter out o' the box, didn't I?"

After a cautious look around, he dismounted and thrust his arm through the loop of the bridle.

"What I got to say is private," said he, "an' I guess we better go off some'r's by ourselves."

"We couldn't talk with any more privacy if we were a hundred miles away. Where are you from, Mr. Hackberry?"

"From over in Wells County. Ye see, I got a claim over there, an'— But say, are ye plumb sure it's safe fer us ter talk? I was warned ter look out fer Siwash Charley an' his friends, and fer any other tin horns that might be workin' fer Murgatroyd."

"Who warned you?"

"Mrs. Traquair."

"Then you're from Jamestown?"

"Not much I ain't! Mrs. Traquair ain't in Jimtown. Say, what sort of a lookin' feller is this Siwash Charley?"

"Never mind about that just now. Siwash Charley isn't around here, nor are any other of Murgatroyd's friends. Tell me how you came to have a talk with Mrs. Traquair?"

"Well, as I was sayin', I got a claim over t'other side o' Sykestown. It jines corners with a homestead Harry Traquair took up—the same Harry Traquair what mortgaged his quarter section fer enough ter go ter Jimtown an' build a flyin' machine. Well, I haven't put down a well on my claim yet, so I gits my drinkin' water from Traquair's claim, that bein' the nighest. There ain't been any one livin' in Traquair's shack fer a year, an' I was kinder surprised, t'other day, when I seen a man movin' around the place. I talked with the feller while I was gittin' a bucket o' water, an' he says he's come there ter take keer o' the crops. He was a tough-lookin' chap, an' I didn't like his looks any too well, but if Mrs. Traquair had sent him, and he suited her, why, he ort ter suit me, too.

"While I was talkin' with the man, me by the pump an' facin' the side of the house, an' him standin' with his back to the wall, a piece of paper was pushed out from between the boards an' dropped down on the ground.

"At first I was goin' ter tell the man about it, an' then I allowed it was purty queer—that shack leakin' a piece o' paper through the side that way, an' I held in about it. You know how these claim shacks is built—some of 'em jest throwed tergether, with cracks between the boards big enough ter heave a dog out of.

"Bymby the feller I was talkin' to excused himself an' went inter the house. The road I took carried me along the wall, an' as I went by I stooped down an' picked up the paper. There was writin' on it, an' I wah plumb surprised when I read that writin'. Here, I'll let ye see it fer yerself."

Hackberry dug up a three-cornered scrap of brown paper from the depths of his pocket, shook some loose tobacco out of it, and handed it to Matt.

Matt managed to make the following out of the hastily written scrawl:

"I have been waiting, Mr. Hackberry, and trying to get word to you. If you see this, and pick it up, it will inform you that I was lured to this place from Jamestown, that I am being kept a prisoner here, and that I must talk with you as soon as possible, or the

homestead will be taken away from me. Come quietly to the side of the house, where you picked up this paper, at night. I can whisper to you what I want, and the man who is keeping me a prisoner will never know. You used to be a friend of poor Harry's, so I hope you will help me.

"MRS. TRAQUAIR."

It would have been hard to describe Matt's feelings as he read this penciled scrawl. It had been a week since he had received a letter from Mrs. Traquair, and the cunning Murgatroyd might have carried out many underhand plans in a week!

"Did you go to the house that night, Mr. Hackberry?" asked Matt.

"Did I? Why, o' course I did. Bein' such a friend o' Harry Traquair's, why shouldn't I try ter help his wife? They was allus good neighbors."

"What did Mrs. Traquair say to you?"

"What we said was all whisperin' an' through a knot hole that was broke out in the wall. She said a feller named Murgatroyd had wanted ter git the homestead away from her, an' that he wasn't goin' ter let her go back ter her children until she give him a quitclaim deed ter the hundred an' sixty. I told her ter let me go ter Sykestown an' git the deperty sher'ff, an' that him an' me 'u'd snake her out o' that shack too quick. But she wouldn't allow that. 'No,' she says, an' her voice was that sobbin' an' plaintive it would have moved a heart o' stone; 'no,' she says, 'cause then Murgatroyd might hear what was goin' on an' have me took away ter some other place.' She d'ruther have me, she says, come ter Fort Totten an' give a letter ter Motor Matt. 'He'll know what ter do,' she says, 'an' he's a lad o' fine sperrit, an' I owe him a lot.' So she poked out this letter, an' I've rid hossback all the way from my shack, an' I been all o' two days makin' the trip."

As he finished, Hackberry dug up the letter from another pocket. It was inclosed in a soiled yellow envelope and was addressed to "Motor Matt, Fort Totten."

Matt tore off the end of the envelope, and drew out a sheet of paper of the same color as that which Hackberry had already shown him. The letter was short, but sufficiently startling.

"MY DEAR FRIEND: I have fallen into the hands of Murgatroyd—Mr. Hackberry will tell you where I am. Murgatroyd seems determined to get the homestead. I know you will come to my rescue, but come quickly.

"MRS. TRAQUAIR."

"Anythin' else you want ter know?" asked Hackberry.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed Matt. "I can hardly think even Murgatroyd would do such a thing."

"I don't know nothin' 'bout that. I ain't acquainted none with this Murgatroyd, but I can tell ye there's some mighty tough citizens in this here State."

"How in the world could Murgatroyd lure Mrs. Traquair away from Jamestown?"

"Ye got me. Mrs. Traquair didn't say. We didn't talk much more'n we had to, seein' as how the feller that had charge o' the shack might come in on us at any minit."

"And how," went on Matt, "can Murgatroyd hope to make Mrs. Traquair give up the claim?"

"I guess he expects ter keep her a pris'ner until she signs the quitclaim."

"A quitclaim deed, secured like that, wouldn't hold in law for a minute! Murgatroyd has loaned enough money to understand that."

"Like enough, but it's some sich game he's tryin', jest the same."

Motor Matt was puzzled. Hackberry's story seemed straight enough, but there were points about it that made him incredulous.

"What ye goin' ter do, Motor Matt?" asked Hackberry.

"I'm going to look after Mrs. Traquair," declared Matt.

"Sure! That's what she said ye'd do. Better git a hoss an' ride back with me."

"It has taken you two days to come, Hackberry. Why didn't you come by train?"

"Fer one thing, I didn't have no money. Fer another, I was afeared Murgatroyd might have some spies hangin' around Sykestown, so I dodged the place by comin' cross-kentry. I reckon we'd better go back the same way I come, hey?"

"No, it's too slow. I'll go by train."

Hackberry appeared disappointed.

"What'll I tell Mrs. Traquair?" he asked.

"You'll not be able to tell her anything—I'll get to her homestead long before you do. Where is it?"

"Eighteen mile due west o' Sykestown; anybody kin tell ye the place when ye git started from Sykestown on the main road. I won't be able ter go with ye, seein' as how I got my hoss ter git back."

"Well, Hackberry, you follow Mrs. Traquair's instructions and say nothing to any one. She evidently knows what it is best to do. I'll look after her, and after this man Murgatroyd, too. Mrs.

Traquair has money, and you'll be well repaid for your trouble."

"Money 'u'd come handy ter me, an' that's a fact," said Hackberry, "though I'd have done this fer Mrs. Traquair if there hadn't been a cent comin'. When'll ye start?"

"Just as soon as I can."

"Ye'll go by the way of Sykestown?"

"There's no other way if I go by railroad."

"All right, then. The responsibility is off'n my shoulders an' ont'er yourn. Good-by."

Hackberry rode off along the road in the direction of the town of Lallie, which lay on his homeward route. Matt, as soon as the messenger had started, hurried up to the post.

There was a telegraph office there and he sent a couple of messages. One was to Mrs. Harry Traquair, Jamestown, North Dakota, and asked if she was well and at home. The other was to a lawyer in Jamestown named Matthews, with whom Matt had some acquaintance, and requested the lawyer to let him know, at once, whether Mrs. Traquair and Murgatroyd were in Jamestown.

Matt was suspicious of Hackberry, and wanted to be sure of his ground before he made any move. At the same time, Matt realized that there was not a moment to be lost if Mrs. Traquair was really being held a prisoner in the shack on her homestead.

In order to get to Sykestown by train, Matt would have to go to Carrington, change cars, and proceed on the branch to his destination. At the post he learned that there was a train on the branch only every other day. More than that, the train south from Minnewaukon had left for that day and there would not be another until the following morning. If he waited until morning and took the train, he would be set down in Carrington on one of the days when the train was not running on the branch. It seemed as though he was bound to lose at least two days before he could get to Sykestown, and that it might have been better, after all, if he had gone with Hackberry on horseback.

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Greatly disturbed, he went back to Camp Traquair and told McGlory the latest news.

"It's a scheme o' some kind," averred the cowboy. "I'll bet money, pard, you get a telegram from Mrs. Traquair saying she's all right."

But Matt received no message from Mrs. Traquair. He did get one from Matthews, however, and Cameron brought it down from the post.

Hastily Matt tore open the message and read it.

"Murgatroyd not in town for two weeks; Mrs. Traquair not in town for a week. Can't find where either has gone.

MATTHEWS."

Matt believed, then, that Hackberry had told the truth and that the letter was genuine. And so it happened that Murgatroyd's first move in his rascally game was attended with success.

CHAPTER V.

A STARTLING PLAN.

"What's up, Matt?" asked Cameron. "You've been sending telegrams from the post, and here's an answer to one of them."

Matt repeated Hackberry's story, then showed the lieutenant the ragged note and the letter.

"It's a fishy yarn," mused Cameron. "For a clever man of business, like Murgatroyd, to extort a quitclaim deed from a woman in that way is rank foolishness, say nothing of the criminal part of it, which is very apt to get the scoundrel into trouble. No, I can't believe Murgatroyd would do such a thing. Who is this fellow Hackberry?"

"He says he has a claim joining Traquair's on the——"

"Yes, I know what he says, but where is the proof that what he says is true? This villain, Siwash Charley, is a bitter enemy of yours, Matt, and he isn't likely to stop at anything."

Matt told Cameron of the messages sent to Mrs. Traquair and to Matthews.

"I haven't heard from Mrs. Traquair," he finished, "but here's the message from Matthews."

Cameron read it over, his brow clouding.

"Do you know Matthews very well, Matt?" he inquired.

"Yes. He's a friend of Mrs. Traquair's and no friend of Murgatroyd's."

"Then his word, in this matter, ought to be as good as his bond. But, how in Heaven's name, was it possible for Mrs. Traquair to let herself be spirited away?"

"Murgatroyd is a loan shark," explained Matt, "and he is full of plausible tricks. He's not in Jamestown, and Mrs. Traquair isn't there. Hackberry's story, hard as it is to believe, in some respects, is beginning to prove itself."

"I don't like it, anyhow," and Cameron shook his head forebodingly.

"That's the way I stack up," declared McGlory. "I've got a hunch that there's a screw loose in all this crossfire of talk and letters—talk through knot holes and letters pushed through the walls of houses. Rot!" he grunted disgustedly.

"Maybe there's nothing in Hackberry's yarn," said Matt decisively, "but I can't turn my back on it. If Mrs. Traquair is in trouble, I must do what I can to help her out."

"Sufferin' brain twisters!" cried McGlory. "Why didn't she let Hackberry bring the deputy sheriff from Sykestown? But, no. She had to send Hackberry over here, using up two valuable days, just to get you."

"Murgatroyd might have spies in Sykestown watching the deputy sheriff," replied Matt. "It would be easy for the spy to carry a warning to the Traquair homestead and have the man in charge of the shack remove Mrs. Traquair to some other place."

"Gammon!" snorted McGlory. "Somebody's playin' lame duck, you hear me."

Cameron brightened suddenly.

"You got a letter from Mrs. Traquair the other day, didn't you, Matt?" he asked.

"That was a week ago," answered Matt.

"How does the handwriting compare? Is it the same in the letter as it is in these two scraps brought in by Hackberry?"

Matt rummaged through his satchel and brought out Mrs. Traquair's letter. Then they all, even Ping, began comparing the writing.

"I give up," said Cameron. "The writing's the same. Suppose we take the train for Sykestown tomorrow, Matt, and go to the rescue of Mrs. Traquair?"

"There's no train out of Carrington until day after to-morrow," said Matt.

"Let's get a hand car, or one of these gasoline speeders, and go over the branch to Sykestown," suggested McGlory.

Matt's eyes sparkled at mention of the gasoline speeder, for as yet he had had no experience with one of them.

"We wouldn't be liable to find such a thing as a 'speeder' in a small place like Carrington," said he.

"Then we'll get an automobile from Devil's Lake City," put in Cameron. "By Jupiter, Matt, I'm pretty nearly as warm about this business as you are. An automobile, that's the thing!"

"It might be hard to get one," continued Matt. "You fellows can come in an automobile, but I think I'll go by air line."

"Air line?" echoed the lieutenant, puzzled.

"Yes," was the quiet reply. "Two hours' work will finish the aëroplane, and——"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the lieutenant, aghast; "it's a new and untried machine. You don't know whether it will fly or not."

"If it won't fly, then the government won't buy it, and it will be a good thing for us to know that as soon as possible. But it will fly, Cameron."

"But, listen," proceeded Cameron gravely. "You're proposing a two-hundred-mile flight, straight away—something unheard of in the use of aëroplanes. Heavier-than-air machines have only been tried over a prescribed course, up to now—from the starting point, through the air, and then back to the starting point again. This plan of yours, Matt, looks like madness to me."

"It would be a fine introduction of the machine to the tests at Fort Myer if it could be said that the aëroplane sailed for two hundred miles over a straight-away course!"

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Matt's face glowed at the thought. To do something different, something daring that would advance the science of aviation, *that* would certainly be worth while.

"Besides this," pursued Matt earnestly, "I'll have an advantage over Murgatroyd and his villainous helpers. They will not be expecting a rescue through the air, while they may be prepared to ward off one by automobile. It is not impossible," he finished, with a trace of enthusiasm, "that I may be able to pick Mrs. Traquair up and bring her to Fort Totten in the aëroplane. Think of that! She would be rescued by her husband's invention."

"You wouldn't get her to ride in that aëroplane in a thousand years," declared McGlory. "She's scared of it, and has been even before her husband was killed. Shucks! Give it up pard, and go with us in the automobile."

Matt shook his head.

"I'm going in the machine," he answered. "You fellows can follow in the automobile."

"Follow! Speak to me about that. Why, pard, if the automobile is any good at all we'll lead you all the way to Wells County."

"Not if there's no wind, or only a very little. I figure that the new aëroplane can do better than sixty miles an hour. But let's get busy, Joe; there's more work to be done."

Cameron left at once to go across the lake and secure an automobile, Ping proceeded to get supper, and Matt and McGlory put their finishing touches on the aëroplane's motor.

"Here's a thing you haven't thought of, pard," remarked McGlory, when the last bolt had been tightened, "and that's about sending this machine to Washington. If anything happens to it, or if you're delayed in Wells County, there's fifteen thousand gone up the spout."

"The money is not to be considered if there's a chance of helping Mrs. Traquair," returned Matt.

But the possibility opened up by McGlory filled the king of the motor boys with regret. He had set his heart on building the new aëroplane, putting it to the test and then selling it to the government just as he had sold the first one. This particular machine was the work of his own hands, while the other had been Traquair's. He was proud of it, and it struck a pang to his heart to think there was even a bare chance of his not being able to turn the machine over to the government, now that it was built. However, he put his regret resolutely behind him.

"I'm not looking for a reverse, Joe," said he, "at this stage of the game. Luck's been on my side for quite a while, and I don't believe it will go back on me. I have yet to be caught in a losing cause—and this won't be a losing cause if we can find and rescue Mrs. Traquair."

At that moment Ping showed himself around the lower end of the tent and shouted, in his high cackle, "Suppa' leddy!"

The boys ate supper. There was not much talk during the meal, for all were thoughtful, and McGlory, at least, was troubled with forebodings.

The meal over, Matt and McGlory tried the motor. It failed to work as it should, and Matt kept at it until it was going properly. Then, cautiously, he turned the power into the propeller. The machine, when started according to custom, got its initial impetus by having the power applied to a set of bicycle wheels. The blades of the propeller, slapping the air, however, developed a force that started the aëroplane, and Matt had to shut off the power in a hurry.

"Sufferin' race horses!" murmured the astonished McGlory. "Who ever heard of the like of that?"

"Mr. Maxim discovered it first," replied Matt. "Why, he drove a boat through the water, at the rate of six miles an hour, merely by having a propeller turn in the air! But let's go to bed; we've a lot on hand for to-morrow."

If the intrepid king of the motor boys had only guessed what was waiting for him in Wells County, his sleep would probably not have been so sound or so peaceful as it was.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AIR LINE INTO TROUBLE.

Motor Matt had the Wells County country firmly fixed in his mind. He had never been over it, but he had studied the map and secured a fairly good theoretical knowledge. Sykestown was at the end of the branch road, the railroads east and west, and north and south, forming a right angle with respect to Fort Totten. Carrington, the junction point, was at the corner of the angle.

By using the aëroplane, Matt believed he could fly straight across the gap between Fort Totten and Sykestown, giving Carrington a wide berth. There were some hills, but what were hills and roads to him while in the air? Rough country would bother the automobile—it could not affect the aëroplane.

Aëroplanes, Matt had gathered from his reading on the subject, were peculiar in this, that no two machines ever conduct themselves exactly the same in flight. A pair of "flyers" may be built exactly on the same model, with all dimensions and power equipment identical, and yet the moment they leave earth and launch themselves into the blue each develops eccentricities peculiar to itself. In a great measure, every machine has to be "learned."

This was the one point that bothered Matt. Would the new aëroplane be easy or difficult to learn? If difficult, he might have to make a few trial flights at Camp Traquair before setting off for Sykestown.

Morning dawned propitiously. The sun was bright, the day cloudless, and only a breath of air stirring.

While the boys were at breakfast, Cameron came chugging into camp with a powerful touring car—a six-cylinder, sixty horse, so trim and "classy"-looking that Matt had to smother a fierce desire to drop into the driver's seat and change his plans.

Soldiers, under Sergeant O'Hara, were to strip the camp while the boys were away, removing everything to the post.

In building the aëroplane, Matt had made a number of departures from Traquair's original designs. One of these was the equipping of the flying machine with two gasoline tanks instead of one, the supply of fuel being taken from either at will.

With tanks full and oil chambers brimming, McGlory and Cameron pushed the aëroplane into the road. Just before Matt took his seat the lieutenant tried to force upon him a loaded six-shooter.

Matt waved it away with a laugh. "I'd rather trust to my heels, Cameron," he said, "than to one of [Pg 10]

those things."

"But you might need it," insisted Cameron.

"Couldn't use it if I did. When a fellow's up in an aëroplane both hands are occupied."

"We'll keep up with you, pard," said McGlory.

"I don't think you will, Joe, if everything works as I hope and expect. I'm going in an air line, while you fellows will have to follow the road. Where'll we meet in case we get separated?"

"Sykestown, to-morrow morning," suggested Cameron.

"All right," Matt answered as he took his seat on the lower plane and swung his feet to the foot rest. "Don't run with her to give her a start—let's see if I can't get her off without any help."

McGlory, Cameron, and Ping drew away and watched. The motor began to pop, and then to settle into a steady hum. A pull at a lever sent the power into the bicycle wheels. The aëroplane leaped off along the hard road, gradually increasing its speed as the air under the wings continued to lighten the weight on the wheels. At a distance of a hundred feet the aëroplane soared into the air, under perfect control.

Those on the ground, as well as the soldiers engaged in stripping the camp, gave three hearty cheers.

"Hoop-a-la!" chattered Ping. "Him plenty fine Cloud Joss."

"Matt's aëroplane is a better one than that of Traquair's—it flies steadier," averred Cameron, enthusiastically.

"Speak to me about this!" muttered the cowboy, his eyes on the great white machine as it swooped upward and onward toward the west. "Let's dig out, pards," he added, suddenly starting toward the automobile. "We've got to put in some mighty good licks if we keep up with Mile-a-minute Matt."

Ping had already thrown a bag of rations into the tonneau of the motor car, and Cameron sprang around in front and began cranking. Just as the engine took up its cycle, and Cameron was starting to take his seat at the steering wheel, McGlory called his attention to a trooper who was galloping down from the direction of the post trader's.

"What do you suppose that swatty is after, Cameron?" the cowboy asked. "He's coming this way just a-smoking, and look how he's waving his arms. Something's up."

"We've got to wait for him," growled the lieutenant, "and that means we lose a couple of minutes. And we haven't got many minutes to waste," he added, with a look at the swiftly diminishing white speck in the western sky.

"Telegram for Motor Matt, leftenant," cried the trooper, reining in his horse and jerking a yellow envelope from his belt.

"You're too late, Latham," said Cameron. "Motor Matt's swinging against the sky, a mile away."

"The operator says it's important," insisted Latham.

"I hate to tamper with Pard Matt's telegrams," remarked McGlory, "but I reckon I'd better read this one. What do you say, Cameron?"

"Read it—and be quick. I'll start, as I don't think there'll be any answer to send back. Anyhow, if there should be an answer we'll forward it from Minnewaukon."

The fretting motor had its power thrown into the wheels. As it glided away at steadily increasing speed, McGlory tore the end off the envelope and drew out the inclosed sheet. The next moment he gave a wild yell.

The cowboy was on the seat beside Cameron, and the latter caught his breath and gave him an amazed sidelong look. McGlory's face had gone white under its tan and he had slumped back in his seat.

"What in Sam Hill is the matter, McGlory?" cried Cameron.

The cowboy jerked himself together and leaned toward the lieutenant.

"Overhaul the flyin' machine!" he shouted hoarsely. "You've got to! If we don't get a word with Matt something's sure going to happen to him."

"How's that?" asked the startled Cameron.

Ping, catching the general alarm, leaned over the back of the seat.

"Telle pidgin!" he implored. "What tleleglam say, huh?"

"It's from Mrs. Traquair," replied McGlory.

"From Mrs. Traquair?" echoed Cameron. "Then she's got away from Murgatroyd and his rascally hirelings."

"Got away from 'em?" bellowed McGlory. "Why, they never had her at that homestead! The whole blooming business is a frame-up, just as I thought, all along. Murgatroyd and Siwash Charley are trying to play even with Matt. Hit her up, can't you, Cameron? For Heaven's sake, let her out! If you don't Matt will get away from us and drop right into the hands of those scheming scoundrels."

Cameron pushed the automobile for all it was worth. The ground raced out from under the flying wheels. The road was like asphalt, and the speedometer indicator ran up and up until it pointed to fifty miles an hour.

"Do better than that!" cried McGlory, his wild eyes on the white speck in the sky. "You've got to do better than that, Cameron. Matt said he could do sixty miles. If you can't equal that, Murg and his men will beat us out."

Cameron had sixty horses under the touch of his fingers, but there was nothing he could do to send the automobile at a faster gait.

"Where did the telegram come from?" he shouted, bending over the wheel and watching the road as it rushed toward the swaying car.

"From Jamestown," yelled McGlory.

They had to talk at the top of their voices in order to make themselves heard in the wind of their flight.

"What does it say?"

"It says that Mrs. Traquair has been making a little visit with friends in Fargo; that she has just got back and found Matt's telegram; and that she is well. That proves that this whole game is a trap—Hackberry, Hackberry's letters, and all. Oh, sufferin' tin horns! I'm crazy to fight, crazy to do something to stop Matt and to put a crimp in in that gang of sharks and double-dyed villains. Can't you do any better than this, Cameron?"

Cameron was doing all that he possibly could. The aëroplane was a mere speck against the blue of the sky, steadily increasing the distance that separated it from the racing automobile.

"We no ketchee!" panted Ping. "By Klismus, Motol Matt all same eagle bird. Woosh! No ketchee!"

"The Chink's got it right, McGlory," cried Cameron. "Unless something happens to the aëroplane we'll never overhaul it. Matt's gaining on us right along."

"And all we can do is to watch and let him gain," fumed the cowboy. "I feel like I did, once, when I was tied hand and foot and gagged while a gang of roughs were setting fire to a boathouse in which Pard Matt lay asleep. Oh, speak to me about this!"

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Then, all at once, the motor went wrong, and the car lost speed until it came to a dead stop. McGlory groaned.

"Of course this had to happen," he stormed. "If you're ever in a hurry something is bound to go wrong with these blooming chug carts. We're out of the race, Cameron. Take your time, take your time. Hang the confounded luck, anyway."

Cameron got down and went feverishly to work locating the trouble. Ping tumbled out of the tonneau and fluttered around, dancing up and down in his excitement and anxiety.

McGlory did not get out of his seat. Gloomily he kept his eyes on the fading speck in the heavens until he could see it no more.

"It's out of sight," he muttered heavily.

"The aëroplane?" asked Cameron, fumbling with the sparking apparatus.

"What else do you think I mean?" snapped the cowboy, in his worst humor. "Matt's done for, and all we can do is sit here and let him rush on at the rate of a mile a minute straight into the trap that has been set for him. Sufferin' snakes! Did you ever run into anything like this before?"

CHAPTER VII.

NOTHING DOING IN SYKESTOWN.

Cameron, by a happy blunder, finally located the trouble, and repaired it. McGlory had a little knowledge of motors and he might have helped, but his dejection was so profound that all he could do was to sit in the car, muttering to himself.

"Buck up, McGlory," said Cameron, jerking the crank and noting that the motor took up its humming tune as well as ever. "While there's life there's hope, you know. We'll be able to do something yet."

"Oh, yes," giped McGlory. "With a car going fifty miles we'll be able to overhaul a flying machine doing sixty."

"Of course," went on Cameron, getting into the car and starting, "we can't expect to overtake Matt unless something should go wrong with the aëroplane, but——"

"If anything goes wrong with the aëroplane then Matt breaks his neck. That won't do."

"I was going to say," proceeded the lieutenant as he teased the car to its best pace, "that we're to meet Matt at Sykestown in the morning. If anything is to happen to him, McGlory, it will be on the other side of Sykestown. Calm down a little, can't you? We'll reach the meeting point by morning, all right, and then we can tell Matt about the message from Mrs. Traquair."

The cowboy had not thought of this point, and yet it was so simple that it should have occurred to

him before. Instantly his worry and alarm gave way to hope.

"Right you are, Cameron," said he. "When I go into a taking I always lose my head and slip a cog. We can't catch up with Matt. That's out of the question. As you say, though, we can sure find him in Sykestown."

The car swung into Minnewaukon, and there was a momentary pause for counsel.

"If Matt's taking the air line, as he said he was going to do," remarked Cameron, "then he'll be cutting the corner between here and Sykestown. There are poor roads and bad hills on that lap, and we'll make better time by taking the longer way round and going by Carrington."

"Maybe he didn't go that way," said McGlory. "If he has to come down for anything he'll have to have a fairly good stretch of trail in which to get a start before the flying machine can climb into the air. Like as not he went by way of Carrington, himself."

"We'll soon settle that," and Cameron made inquiries of a man who was standing beside the car.

Yes, the man had seen the aeroplane. It had passed over the town and went southwest.

"That settles it, McGlory," said Cameron. "Matt cut the corner. If he'd gone by way of Carrington he'd have started south."

"He's taking a big chance on his machine going wrong," muttered the cowboy, "but Matt can take more chances and come out right side up than any fellow you ever saw. It's Carrington for us, though."

Cameron headed the machine southward and they flickered out of Minnewaukon like a brown streak. Nothing went wrong, and they hit a steady, forty-mile-an-hour gait and kept it up through Lallie, Oberon, Sheyenne, Divide, and New Rockford. Here and there was an occasional slough which they were obliged to go around, but the delay was unavoidable.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when they reached Carrington, and they congratulated themselves on the ease with which they had covered so much of their journey.

They halted for an hour in Carrington, Cameron and McGlory going over the machine and replenishing the gasoline and oil. At four they pulled out for Sykestown, and had barely crossed the Carrington town line before accidents began to happen.

First, a front tire blew up. A flying stone gouged the shoe and the inner tube sprung a leak.

An hour was lost repairing the damage. Nevertheless, the cowboy kept his temper well in hand, for they had not planned to reach Sykestown and meet Matt before morning.

A mile beyond the place where the tire had blown up the electricity went wrong; then the carburetor began to flood; and last of all the feed pipe became clogged.

"Let's leave the old benzine-buggy in the road and walk the rest of the way," suggested McGlory. "A pair of bronks and a wagon for me, any old day."

It was eleven o'clock at night when they got into Sykestown and pulled to a halt in front of the only hotel in the place. There was no garage, and Cameron backed the car under an open shed in the rear of the hotel.

While he was doing this, McGlory was making inquiries regarding Motor Matt.

"Nothing doing, Cameron," announced the cowboy, meeting the lieutenant as he came into the hotel.

"Matt hasn't got here yet?"

"He hasn't been seen or heard of. That's some queer, I reckon. He took a crosscut. Coming at sixty miles an hour, barring accidents, he ought to have reached Sykestown by noon."

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"Well," said the optimistic lieutenant, "it's a good thing to know he hasn't got here and gone on without waiting for us. Matt knows we were not to meet until morning. He may be waiting at some farmer's shack, somewhere out of town. Let's get a hand-out and then go to bed. Wrestling with a refractory motor is tiresome work."

This was sensible advice, and the cowboy, although he did not accept Cameron's explanation of Matt's absence, concluded to accept it.

McGlory was up at dawn, however, inquiring anxiously for news. There was none. Taking a chair out in front of the hotel he sat down to wait.

An hour later, Ping came scuffling around the corner of the hotel.

"Where have you been, Ping?" McGlory asked.

"My makee sleep in choo-choo car," replied the Chinaman, taking an upward squint at the sky with his slant eyes. "Cloud Joss no makee come, huh?"

"Nary, Ping. I'm which and t'other about this, too. We're up against a rough game of some kind, and I'd give my eyeteeth to know what it is."

"Plaps Motol Matt makee lescue Melican lady all by himself."

"There's no Melican lady to rescue, and that's the worst of it."

At this moment Cameron issued from the hotel. He had his khaki jacket over his arm and the handles of a brace of six-shooters showed above the tops of his hip pockets.

"No sign of Matt yet, eh?" he asked cheerily.

"Nary a sign, Cameron," replied McGlory. "Unless something had gone crossways, he'd have been on here early this morning."

"I don't believe in crossing bridges until you get to them," said Cameron, dropping down on a bench. "You know Motor Matt better than I do, McGlory," he went on, "but I'm well enough acquainted with him to know that he keeps his head with him all the time and never gets rattled."

"He's the boy on the job, all right," averred the cowboy, with a touch of pride. "But what good's a cool head and plenty of pluck if a flying machine up-ends with you a couple of hundred feet in the air?"

Cameron grew silent, and a little bit thoughtful.

"There was a still day yesterday," said he, at last, "and only a bit of a breeze this morning. It's not at all likely that any accident of that kind happened."

"I'm not thinking of that so much as I am of Murgatroyd and his gang," went on McGlory. "That bunch of tin horns may have laid for Matt somewhere between Sykestown and Minnewaukon."

"Hardly. They wouldn't be expecting him by air ship, and across country, the way he started."

"Hackberry, you remember, wanted him to get a horse and ride cross country."

"But Matt told Hackberry he expected to reach Sykestown by train. Because of that, no matter what the plans of Murgatroyd and his men were, they'd have to give over their designs and lay for Matt somewhere between here and the Traquair homestead."

"That's where you're shy some more," said McGlory. "Hackberry, coming on horseback from Minnewaukon, hasn't got to where Murg is, yet, so he can't have told him what Matt was expecting to do. Take it from me, Cameron, there was a gang on that cross-country road, last night, layin' for our pard."

"Well, if there was," returned Cameron easily, "then Motor Matt sailed over their heads. But all this is mere guesswork," he added, "and mighty poor guesswork, at that. We'll just wait here until Matt shows up."

There was a silence for a while, Ping getting a crick in his neck holding his head back and watching the sky toward the north and east.

"No makee see Cloud Joss," he murmured.

Neither McGlory nor Cameron paid much attention to the report. If Matt had been coming in the aeroplane the excitement in the town would quickly have apprised them of the fact.

"I can't understand," said Cameron musingly, "what this Murgatroyd hopes to accomplish by all this criminal work."

"You can't?" echoed McGlory. "Well, Matt butted into Murgatroyd's game and knocked his villainous schemes galley-west. That don't make Murg feel anyways good, does it? Then there's Siwash Charley. He's a tin horn and *mucho malo*, and there's no love lost between him and the king of the motor boys. What's the result if Murg and Siwash get Matt in their clutches?" The cowboy scowled and ground his teeth. "You ought to be able to figure that out, Cameron, just as well as I can."

"Murgatroyd isn't anybody's fool," said Cameron. "He's not going to go to any desperate length with Matt and run his neck into a noose."

"Murg won't, but what does Siwash Charley care? He's already badly wanted, and he's the sort of cold-game gent who does things when he's crossed. Murg will play safe, but Siwash is apt to break away from Murg's plans and saw off with Matt in his own way. What that way is I'm afraid to think about, or——"

The noise of a motor was heard up the road, accompanied by the hollow rumble of a car crossing the bridge over Pipestem Creek.

"Another car coming this way," remarked Cameron, looking in the direction from which the sound came.

Buildings intervened between the front of the hotel and the bridge, effectually shutting off the view.

A moment after Cameron had spoken, however, a big car came around a turn in the road and headed for the hotel.

The car carried two passengers—a man and a woman. The moment the car hove in sight, the proprietor of the hotel came out and leaned against the wall of the building near the door.

"I don't know what's to be done now," muttered the proprietor. "There's only room in that shed o' mine for one automobile, an' your machine is there. What'll Mr. Murgatroyd do with his car?"

"Murgatroyd!" exploded Cameron, jumping to his feet.

"Murgatroyd!" cried McGlory.

"Woosh!" chattered Ping. "We no ketchee Matt, mebbysy we ketchee Murg, huh?"

Up to that moment there had been nothing doing in Sykestown; but now, with startling suddenness, there seemed to be plenty on the programme.

BROUGHT TO EARTH.

If McGlory, Cameron, and Ping were delighted with the start of the new aëroplane, Motor Matt was doubly so. Matt was "at the helm" and capable of appreciating the machine's performance as his friends could not do.

Preserving an equilibrium, and riding on a more or less even keel, is the hardest point to be met in navigating an aëroplane. The centre of wind pressure and the centre of gravitation is constantly changing, and each change must be instantly met by manipulating the wings. In the Traquair machine, equilibrium was preserved by expanding or contracting the wing area, giving more resistance to the air on one side and less on the other, as necessity demanded.

Matt, facing westward in the direction of Minnewaukon, could give no attention to his friends, every faculty being required for the running of the flying machine. Every condition that had so far developed the aëroplane was meeting wonderfully well; but new conditions would constantly crop out and Matt was still in doubt as to how the great planes and the motor would take care of them.

At a height of a hundred feet he steadily opened up the throttle. Faster and faster whirled the propeller, and below the machine the prairie rolled away with dizzy rapidity. Almost before Matt realized it he was over the town of Minnewaukon, with the jubilant cheers of the citizens echoing in his ears.

He made a half turn to lay the machine on her new course. The inner wing dipped as the aëroplane came around, but the expanding and contracting device kept the craft from going to a dangerous angle, and it came level again on the straightaway course.

Even on a day that seems still and quiet the air is a veritable maelstrom of conflicting currents close to the earth's surface. Barns, houses, hills, trees deflect the streams of air and send them upward to churn and twist in numberless whirlpools. To get out of this unruly atmosphere an aëroplane must mount.

Having made sure of the machine's performance at a lower altitude, Matt climbed higher. Three hundred—four hundred—five hundred feet upward he went soaring, then rounded gracefully into a level course and was off at speed along the air line.

It would be hard to describe the exultation that arose in the breast of the king of the motor boys. It was not alone that he was doing with an aëroplane something which had not before been attempted—striking out a new line for the air navigators of the world—but it was the joy of a new sensation that thrilled him, spiced with the knowledge that he was rubbing elbows with death every instant the machine was aloft.

On his clear brain, his steady eye, and his quick hand hung his hope of life. A wrong twist of the lever at a critical time would overset the machine and fling it earthward, a fluttering mass of torn canvas, twisted wire ropes, and broken machinery, himself in the very centre of the wreck.

Higher above the earth the wind was stronger, but steadier, and the motor hurried the aëroplane along at its top speed.

It was difficult for Matt to estimate the rate at which he was traveling. There were no landmarks to rush past him and give him an inkling of his speed. Once, however, he saw a farmhouse in the distance ahead; and he barely saw it before it was swept behind and lost to his eyes under the lower plane.

Wherever he saw a road he followed it. If anything happened, and he was obliged to descend, a flat stretch of hard earth would help him to remount into the air again.

Matt had secured his watch on the seat beside him so that he was able to glance at its face from time to time. He had started from Camp Traquair at eight o'clock. When the hands of the watch indicated nine-thirty, he made up his mind to descend at the most favorable point on the surface below him.

He presently found the place he wanted, hard by a farmhouse, shut off the power and glided downward. A kick at a footlever dropped the bicycle wheels into position, and the aëroplane brushed against the earth of a hard road, moved a little way on the wheels, and then came to a stop.

A man and a boy, who had been watching the strange sky monster from a wheatfield, hurried toward the machine as soon as it had come to a stop. They were full of excitement, and asked many questions, to all of which Matt patiently replied while looking around to see that wings, rudders, and motor were still in perfect condition.

"How far is it to Sykestown?" Matt asked, as soon as his examination was finished.

"About a hundred miles," answered the man.

"And how far are you from Minnewaukon?"

"Eighty miles."

"Great spark plugs!" laughed Matt, resuming his seat in the machine; "I'm traveling some, all right. I've been only an hour and a half coming from Totten."

"Do tell!" gasped the man, in wonder. "Why, neighbor, them there hossless wagons couldn't travel much quicker'n that!"

"I should say not! I've some friends following me in an automobile, but they're nowhere in sight."

Matt got the bicycle wheels to turning. When they were carrying the aëroplane at the rate of thirty miles an hour the planes took the lift of the air and swung upward clear of the earth.

A pull at the gear turned the power into the propeller, and away rushed the machine like a new style of comet.

"I'm going to reach Sykestown in time for dinner," thought Matt, "and McGlory and Cameron are not expecting to meet me there until to-morrow morning. I'd have time to go to the Traquair homestead to-night and perhaps get Mrs. Traquair out of the shack and carry her in to Sykestown."

The idea appealed to Matt. Talk about a test for an aëroplane! A manœuvre of that sort would put the Traquair machine far and away ahead of any air craft so far invented. What heavier-than-air machine was there that could travel away from its starting point and keep going, asking no odds of anything but gasoline and oil and a firm surface for launching into the void?

This demonstration of the new aëroplane was succeeding beyond Motor Matt's wildest dreams.

"We'll not take her apart and put her in a crate to send her to Washington," thought the jubilant young motorist. "I'll fly her there. I didn't think the machine could travel and hold her own like this!"

Having plenty of time at his disposal, he began manœuvring at various heights, slowing down and increasing his speed, and mounting and descending.

In the midst of this fascinating work, he caught sight of an automobile in the road below him. The car contained only two passengers—a man and a woman—and was proceeding in the direction Matt was following.

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The car was traveling rapidly, but not so rapidly as the aëroplane.

Matt decided to swing the aëroplane to a point alongside the automobile and not more than a dozen feet above the ground, traveling in company with the car and making inquiries of the man in the driver's seat.

If he carried out his plan to go to the Traquair homestead that night, it would be well to learn something about the location of the farm, and the man in the automobile might be able to give him the information he required.

No sooner had he made up his mind what he was going to do than he proceeded to put the plan into execution. Hovering over the automobile, he slowed down the engine, turned the small steering planes in front and slipped down the slope of air as easily as a hawk coming to earth.

Some fifteen feet above the prairie, just far enough to the right of the automobile so that the left-hand wings cleared the car safely, Matt struck into a horizontal course.

He had not had a good look at the man in the car, as yet, although both the man and the girl were watching his movements with the utmost curiosity.

"Hello!" called Matt, still keeping his eyes ahead and holding his mind to the work of attending to the air ship.

There was no answer, or, if there was, Matt did not hear it.

"Are you acquainted with the country around here?" Matt went on.

"A little," came the response from the man.

"Could you tell me where Harry Traquair used to live?"

"You'll have to bear off to the right if you go there. The Traquair homestead is twenty miles from ___"

Something in the voice drew Matt's eyes quickly to the man.

"Murgatroyd!" cried the young motorist. "Great spark plugs!"

A twist of the rear rudder sent the aëroplane away from the road; a touch of the lever increased the machine's speed; then, the next moment, he would have mounted high into the air—had not something happened.

The crack of a rifle came from below, followed by the crang of a bullet on metal, a woman's scream, and a sickening lurch of the aëroplane.

Matt tumbled from the lower wing, and then experienced a shock that almost drove his spine up through the top of his head.

Dazed and bewildered, he lay where he had fallen.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COIL TIGHTENS.

Matt's brain was a jumble of vague and half-formed ideas. He did not seem able to grasp any notion firmly, or hold to it realizingly. As his brain began to clear, its first lucid thought had to do with the rifle shot and the man in the automobile. Instinctively he turned his head so that he could have a view of the road.

The automobile had come to a halt a little distance away. The woman, who had been riding in the tonneau and who must have given the scream which was still echoing in Matt's ears, had thrown open the car door and stepped down from the machine.

She was young and pretty, wore a long dust-coat and had the ends of a veil flying out behind her well-shaped head.

Matt shifted his eyes to Murgatroyd. The latter was coolly getting out of the car. Reaching back, as soon as his feet had touched ground, he pulled a rifle from one of the seats, turned and walked a little way toward Matt, halted and leaned on the gun. He did not speak, but his dark, piercing eyes roved over Matt and then leaped on beyond, to where the aëroplane was lying.

Matt withdrew his gaze to give it to Murgatroyd's fair companion.

"Are you hurt?" cried the girl, as Motor Matt lifted himself and looked toward her.

"What is it to you, or that scoundrel with you, whether I am hurt or not?" he answered angrily.

A hurt look crossed the girl's face. She had been hurrying toward Matt, but she now paused and drew back.

"Your business is with me, Motor Matt, and not with my niece," snapped Murgatroyd sharply. "She doesn't know anything about our affairs, and is undoubtedly feeling hard toward me because I fired that shot and brought you down."

"Why did you do that, Uncle Amos?" demanded the girl shrilly. "You might have killed him!"

"No danger of that, Amy," was the cool answer. "I shouldn't have tried to bring him down if he had been high enough in the air for the fall to hurt him."

"Why did you try to bring him down, anyhow?"

The girl's alarm was merging rapidly into indignation and protest.

"Well," said Murgatroyd, "I wanted to talk with him, and he didn't seem at all anxious to stay alongside the automobile."

"So you ruined his flying machine and took the chance of hurting him!"

"Get back in the car, Amy," ordered Murgatroyd sharply. "You don't understand what you are talking about. This young rascal deserves all he receives at my hands, and more."

"He doesn't look like a rascal, or——"

"Will you mind?"

Murgatroyd turned and pointed toward the car. The girl hesitated a moment, then walked slowly back to the automobile and climbed into the tonneau.

Matt, meantime, had picked himself up, glad to find that he had no broken bones. He was bruised and sore, and his coat was torn, but he did not care for that. He had had a lucky escape, and just at that moment was more concerned about the aëroplane than he was about himself.

The flying machine, so far as Matt could see, did not appear to be very badly broken.

"I'll hold you responsible for this, Amos Murgatroyd," said Matt, turning on the broker. "It was an unprovoked attack."

"You've given me plenty of cause to lay violent hands on you," answered Murgatroyd. "What are you doing in this part of the country?"

"That's my business, not yours."

A snaky, malevolent smile crossed Murgatroyd's smooth face.

"It may be my business, too," said he. "You asked for the Traquair homestead. Is it your intention to go there?"

"I don't care to discuss that point with you. Just understand that you'll be called on to answer for all the trouble you have caused me and also Mrs. Traquair. This scoundrelly attack on my aëroplane will come in for part of the accounting."

"Yes?" was the sarcastic response. "The machine, to look at it from here, hasn't the appearance of being very badly hurt. Suppose we give it a closer inspection?"

Matt wondered at the man's desire to learn more about the damage to the aëroplane. It was an hour or so before the reason was made clear to him.

Keeping a wary eye on Murgatroyd's rifle, Matt stepped over to the aëroplane.

The bullet had struck one of the propeller blades, snapping it off. The blade, in turn, had struck and cut through one of the small wire cables that formed a stay for the rear rudder.

"You've put the machine out of business," said Matt. "The fall, too, may have damaged the motor pretty seriously. I can't tell that until I make a closer examination."

"It will take you an hour or two, I suppose, to get the machine repaired?"

"An hour or two!" exclaimed Matt. "I shall have to get some farmer to haul it to the blacksmith shop, in Sykestown."

A guileful grin swept like an ill-omened shadow across Murgatroyd's face. Without another word he went to the automobile, climbed to the driver's seat, leaned the rifle against the seat beside him, and started the car. He did not continue on toward Sykestown, but made a turn and went back over the course he had recently covered.

"The scoundrel!" cried Matt. "He knew I was here to do what I could for Mrs. Traquair—that question I asked him about the homestead would have proven that, even if he had not guessed it from the mere fact of my being in this section. He injured the aéroplane to keep me from carrying out any plan I might have for the rescue of Mrs. Traquair. He knows it will take me some time to get the aéroplane fixed, and while I'm doing that he'll be moving Mrs. Traquair from the homestead to some other place. That's why he was so anxious to find out how badly the machine was damaged. If it hadn't been seriously broken, no doubt he'd have put another bullet into it. He'll pay for this if I've anything to say about it."

For a few moments Matt sat down on the prairie and looked ruefully at the helpless aéroplane.

This reverse meant much to Motor Matt. Quite likely it would prevent the sale of the machine to the government, for it was now practically certain the aéroplane could not be repaired and turned over to the government for shipment east by the first of the month. This would have been impossible, even if Matt had had leisure to repair the damage—which he did not have on account of the necessity he was under of helping Mrs. Traquair.

How far back on the road the last house was situated Matt could not remember. He would have to go there, however, and hire the farmer to transport the aéroplane to Sykestown. The quicker this was done, and the sooner the damage was repaired, then the more speedily he could use the machine in helping Mrs. Traquair.

If repairs were going to consume too much time, then he could join Cameron, McGlory, and Ping and go to the Traquair homestead in the lieutenant's borrowed motor car.

Greatly cast down by his reverse, yet firmly determined to carry out his original purpose at any cost, Matt set his face back along the road.

He was guessing good and hard about the young woman who was in the automobile with Murgatroyd. She was the broker's niece, but she was not in favor of any of his villainous designs—that fact was beyond dispute. If the girl felt in this way, why had Murgatroyd had her along while pursuing his dark schemes against Mrs. Traquair?

It was an enigma that baffled Matt. He gave up trying to guess it, and began reproaching himself for becoming so easily entangled with the motor car and its scoundrelly owner. He should have made sure that the man was not an enemy before bringing the aéroplane so close.

It is always easy to look back over our conduct and discover the mistakes. In the present case, Matt was blaming himself when there was really no cause for it. If anything was at fault it was fate, which had brought the disastrous encounter to pass.

Every step Matt took reminded him of his bruises. His head throbbed and every bone in his body seemed to ache. He continued to stride rapidly onward, however, keeping his eyes constantly ahead in the hope of discovering a farmhouse.

Suddenly he saw a fog of dust rising from the trail in the distance. The cloud was moving toward him and he had a quick thought that it might be the automobile. The next moment the dust was whipped aside by the rising wind, and he was sure of it.

The car was coming, but there was only one man in the driver's seat. The girl had vanished from the tonneau.

"Murgatroyd took her to some farmhouse," ran Matt's startled thought, "and he is coming back to try some more villainous work." The young motorist's fists clinched instinctively, and a fierce gleam darted into his gray eyes. "We'll see about that," he muttered, between his teeth.

The automobile came on swiftly, and Murgatroyd brought it to a standstill close beside Matt.

"Get in here," the broker ordered, nodding his head toward the tonneau.

"I've got other business on hand," answered Matt. "If you're going on to finish wrecking the aéroplane—"

"Don't be a fool!" snarled the broker, standing up and lifting his rifle. "I've invited you to get into the car, but I can *order*, if you force me to do that, and back up the order with this gun."

"You've used that gun once to-day, Murgatroyd," said Matt, giving the broker a defiant look, "and I guess you'll find that's enough."

He passed on along the roadside close to the side of the automobile. The door of the tonneau was open. As he came abreast of it, a form that had been hiding in the bottom of the car leaped out.

Matt, taken by surprise, tried to leap away. Before he could do so, however, he was in the grip of a pair of strong arms, and the face of Siwash Charley was leering into his.

"This hyer's once things didn't come yer way, my bantam!" gritted Siwash Charley. "Stop yer squirmin', or I'll give ye a tap on the head that'll put ye out o' bizness."

CHAPTER X.

THE DOOR IN THE HILLSIDE.

In spite of Siwash Charley's threat, Matt struggled as fiercely as he could. With a muttered curse, the ruffian drew back one fist.

"Steady there, Siwash!" cried Murgatroyd. "Don't be any rougher with him than you can help. Wait! I'll come down there and lend a hand while we get a rope on him."

Murgatroyd picked up a rope from the bottom of the car, jumped to the ground and came rapidly up behind Matt. Between the two of them, the scoundrels succeeded in bearing the young motorist to the ground and putting lashings on his hands and feet.

Siwash Charley lifted himself scowling and drew his shirt sleeve across his damp forehead.

"He's a fighter, all right," he muttered, "but he kin gamble on it that we've got the upper hand o' him now."

"You took the girl away and got Siwash Charley, eh, Murgatroyd?" asked Matt.

"You're a young man of rare perception," was the broker's sarcastic response.

"You'll both pay for this," went on Matt steadily.

"Who'll make us pay?" grunted Siwash Charley. "Not you, my bantam. I've got inter enough trouble on your account, an' I ain't intendin' ter git inter any more."

This was a luminous remark of Siwash Charley's. Matt would have liked to ask him how he expected to keep out of trouble by continuing his lawless work, but there was not time. Lifting the prisoner roughly Siwash Charley heaved him onto the seat in the tonneau, and slammed the door; then Siwash got up in front. Murgatroyd was turning the engine over. When he was done, he climbed to the driver's seat and started the car. He did not go on toward Sykestown, but, as before, made in the opposite direction.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Matt.

"Ye'll know," answered Siwash Charley, turning around savagely, "when ye find out—an' not afore."

"Where are you taking me?" persisted Matt.

"Ye'll find that out quicker'n ye'll find out the other."

There was clearly no satisfaction to be got out of Siwash Charley.

"Something will happen to that aëroplane," said Matt, "if it's left alone on the prairie."

"Don't worry erbout that thar flyin' machine. We're goin' ter take keer o' it."

"Murgatroyd," cried Matt, "if you do any more injury to that machine, you'll have to pay for it."

"Sing small," answered the broker, giving all his attention to his driving; "you'll be a whole lot wiser before I'm done with you."

"That machine," went on Matt, "is to be delivered to the government, at Fort Totten, on the first of next month. If it isn't, I'll lose the sale of it. If you keep me from making the sale, you'll have to pay the government price—fifteen thousand dollars."

Siwash Charley lay back in his seat and guffawed loudly.

"Talks big, don't he, Murg?" said he.

"Talk's cheap," was the laconic answer.

Owing to his bonds, Matt had difficulty in keeping himself upright on the seat while the automobile pitched and slewed along the road.

When two or three miles had been covered, Murgatroyd turned the machine from the road and drove toward a range of hills, or coteaus, that fringed the horizon in the northwest.

Over the crisp, crackling grass the heavy car passed, now and then chugging into a gopher hole and slamming Matt around in the tonneau.

When they had reached the foot of the hills, Murgatroyd followed along the foot of the range and finally halted.

"This will do," said the broker. "Take the ropes off his feet, Siwash, and make him walk. I guess he won't try to get away. You can keep a grip on him and I'll trail along with the rifle."

"Oh, I guess he won't try any foolishness with me," cried Siwash, swinging down from the car, "not if he knows what's best fer him."

Opening the tonneau door, Siwash Charley reached in and removed the rope from Matt's ankles.

"Come out here," he ordered.

Murgatroyd stood up in front, rifle in hand, and watched to see that the order was obeyed. Matt supposed that all this was to keep him from going to Traquair's homestead and helping Mrs. Traquair. But, bound as he was, and with two desperate men for captors, he was helpless.

Without a word he got up and stepped out of the car. Siwash Charley caught his arm and led him toward a steep hillside, Murgatroyd following with the rifle. At the foot of the almost

perpendicular wall of earth they stopped.

"Hold the gun on him, Murg," said Siwash, "while I fix the winder so'st ter throw a little light inter the dugout."

"Go ahead," answered the broker curtly.

Siwash stepped apart. Matt, with ill-concealed astonishment, saw him push a hand along the hillside and push back a square curtain of canvas painted the color of the yellowish brown of the dried grass. A small window was revealed. To the right of the window another curtain was lifted, disclosing a door. Siwash opened the door and stepped back with an ill-omened grin.

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"Conduct the gent inter the hang-out, Murg," he leered.

"Go on," ordered Murgatroyd, touching Matt with the muzzle of the rifle.

"What kind of a place is this?" asked Matt, hesitating.

"Look at it from the inside an' mebbly ye'll have a better notion of it," answered Siwash, grabbing Matt's arm and hustling him through the doorway.

Motor Matt's heart sank when he looked around at the earthen walls of the excavation. It looked like a prison, and undoubtedly it was to be a prison for him.

"I'll make him lay down on the shelf," observed Siwash, "an' tie him thar."

"Put him in a chair and tie him to that," said Murgatroyd. "He'll have to lie down at night, and change of position will be something of a rest for him. I don't want to be any rougher than we have to."

"Bah!" snorted Siwash. "From the way ye talk, Murg, a person 'u'd think ye had a weak heart. But I know diff'rent. I shouldn't think ye'd be so onreasonable when ye stop ter think o' the hole this feller's got us both inter."

"He's going to get us out of the hole, and give me something I've set my heart on, besides. I reckon he's entitled to all the consideration we can give him."

Siwash kicked a chair forward and pushed Matt into it; then, with another rope, he tied the prisoner with coil on coil, drawn taut about his legs, waist, and shoulders. When Siwash was done, Matt could hardly shift his position an inch.

"Now," proceeded Murgatroyd briskly, "we'll have to hurry. I left my niece at a farmhouse, and I want to get back there and make sure that she doesn't cause any trouble."

"Trouble? What kind o' trouble kin she make?"

"She's not used to this sort of work, and it was tough luck that she was in the car when Motor Matt came along in that flying machine. She's very much put out with me because I fired a bullet into the aëroplane in order to stop Motor Matt. She's a girl of spirit, and I must talk with her to make sure she doesn't do something that will play hob with my plans."

"Wimmen ain't no good, anyhow," growled Siwash Charley. "Will ye go right on ter Sykestown ter-night?"

"I think not. It will be best to stay at the farmhouse until I make sure whether my talk will do any good. If I think Amy will leave my hands free, we'll make for town in the morning."

Murgatroyd turned to Matt.

"Where's McGlory?" he asked.

"I don't know," Matt answered.

"Was he to meet you in Sykestown?"

Matt was silent.

"Ye kin gamble, Murg, that cowboy feller was ter meet him some'r's. Wherever ye find one of 'em ye're purty sure ter find t'other. I'm wonderin' why McGlory wasn't in the flyin' machine along with Motor Matt."

"If they were to meet anywhere," said Murgatroyd, "it was in Sykestown. Motor Matt would hardly try to rescue Mrs. Traquair alone."

A snaky smile accompanied the last words. Siwash Charley chuckled.

"It worked like a house afire," the latter muttered.

"Bring writing materials, Siwash," said the broker.

The other went to a box cupboard, swinging against the wall, and brought out some paper and envelopes, a bottle of ink and a pen. These he placed on the table in front of Murgatroyd.

"How many letters ye goin' ter write, Murg?" queried Siwash, hanging expectantly over the table.

"Three," replied the broker. "One letter will be sent to Lieutenant Cameron, another to Joe McGlory, and another to Mrs. Traquair."

Matt could not understand these allusions to Mrs. Traquair. If she was a prisoner at the homestead, why was Murgatroyd writing a letter?

It required an hour's time to write the three letters. Murgatroyd allowed Siwash to read each one as soon as it was finished.

Siwash became jubilant as the reading progressed. When the last letter had been gone over, he brought his fist down on the table with a smashing blow.

"They'll do the trick, by jinks!" he declared. "Ye'll git what ye're arter, Murg, an' so'll I. Thunder, but I wisht I had your head!"

"It takes something of a head to make money and keep out of jail, these times," laughed Murgatroyd, getting up.

The letters were folded and put in the addressed envelopes, and Murgatroyd slipped the three missives into his pocket.

"I'm off, now, Siwash," said he, stepping toward the door. "It may take a week to wind up this business, and it may not take more than three days. See that the prisoner don't get away, whatever you do."

"Waal, ye kin bank on me from the drap o' the hat!" cried Siwash Charley effusively. "Blamed if I ever had anythin' ter do with sich a slick game as this afore, an' it does me proud ter have a hand in it. Count on me, Murg, count on me!"

With a derisive grin at Motor Matt, Murgatroyd stepped through the door in the hillside. A few moments later Matt could hear his automobile gliding off across the prairie.

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 18]

A REVELATION FOR MATT.

Motor Matt, in spite of his helpless situation, was not at all worried about his own safety. What did alarm him, though, was the plot which Murgatroyd seemed to be putting through with so much success.

Why had the broker written the letters to Cameron, McGlory, and Mrs. Traquair? What did they contain? And why should a letter be written to Mrs. Traquair when she, like Matt, was supposed to be a prisoner of Murgatroyd's?

These were all matters of grave import, and the king of the motor boys turned them over and over in his mind.

He knew that Murgatroyd, for some reason of his own, was intensely eager to secure the Traquair homestead. Probably he could have bought it for a fair amount, but that was not the broker's way. He had made his money by lending on mortgages, and then foreclosing, thus securing property for a fraction of its value. This seemed to be his desire in the present instance, and he was taking long chances to put his plans through.

Siwash Charley, after the broker was gone, was in great good humor. He gave Matt a drink of water from a pail on the earthen shelf, and then filled and lighted his pipe and dropped down on a cot. For purposes of ventilation the door was left open, and Matt, his brain puzzled and bewildered, watched the sun sinking into the west.

The afternoon was drawing to a close. Somewhere, along the road to Sykestown, McGlory, Cameron, and Ping were making their way in the borrowed motor car. During the night, if all went well, the party should reach Sykestown. Matt would not be there to meet them in the morning: but Murgatroyd would be there, and would scarcely be able to evade Cameron and McGlory.

What Matt's friends would do when they encountered the broker was problematical. Matt had abundant faith in Cameron's good judgment, and in his cowboy pard's courage and determination. Something of importance would happen, the king of the motor boys was sure, and that something would be of help to Mrs. Traquair.

"What's Murgatroyd up to, Siwash?" asked Matt.

"He knows, an' I know, but you don't," answered Siwash, "an' what's more, ye ain't a-goin' to. So stop yer quizzin'."

"Why is he writing to Mrs. Traquair if she's a prisoner of his, out on the Traquair homestead?"

Once more Siwash enjoyed himself.

"He's goin' ter send the letter out thar," replied Siwash. "Now stop askin' questions. Ye'd better be congratulatin' yerself that we're handlin' ye so keerful. Arter what ye've done ter Murg an' me, knockin' ye on the head an' drappin' ye inter some slough wouldn't be none too good. Howsumever, ye're wuth more ter us alive than ye air with yer boots on—which is mainly whar yer luck comes in. Hungry?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll git ye a snack."

Siwash went to the cupboard from which he had brought the writing materials and secured some dried beef and crackers. Removing a knife from his pocket, he began cutting the dried beef into small pieces.

There was something about the knife that reminded Matt of the rusty dagger Ping had found in

the woods, and recalling the dagger brought Cameron's story of Goff Fortescue abruptly to Matt's mind.

The prisoner eyed Siwash sharply. There was that about the ruffian that suggested the soldier—a certain precision of movement acquired in the ranks. Matt began to whistle softly.

For a moment Siwash Charley paid no attention; then, as the air Matt was whistling came to him, he lifted suddenly and glared.

"Stop yer whistlin'," he snapped.

"Do you know what that is, Siwash?" he asked.

"No!" almost shouted the scoundrel.

"They call it reveille up at the post. Here's 'stable call'——"

Siwash made one spring at Matt, the knife still gripped in his fist. He flashed the blade in front of Matt's eyes.

"If I thought—if I thought——"

Siwash breathed the words hoarsely and stared menacingly at Matt. There followed an awkward silence. Presently Siwash turned away and went on carving the dried beef.

"I don't want ter hear 'stable call' nor nothin' else," he snarled. "Don't like whistlin' nohow. Shut up, or I'll put a gag between yer jaws."

Matt deemed it best to keep silent after that. Nevertheless, it seemed to him as though he had touched a raw spot in Siwash Charley's past history. Had Cameron got the matter right? Was Siwash Charley really the deserter, Cant Phillips?

When the food was ready, Matt asked Siwash to release his hands so that he could help himself. But Siwash refused, and the prisoner was compelled to take his food from the ruffian's hairy paws.

A change appeared to come over Siwash Charley. He was moody and reflective, and kept his pipe going continuously.

Leaning back against the earthen wall of the room, he surrounded himself with a fog of vapor, which, because of the poor ventilation of the dugout, almost stifled Motor Matt.

The sun went down in a blaze of red, night fell, and Siwash closed the door and lighted the lamp. He neglected to curtain the window, however, which may have been an oversight on his part.

Matt fell to musing upon the aëroplane, and about the watch which he had left on the aëroplane seat. [Pg 19]

Would anything happen to the machine while he was a prisoner in the hands of Murgatroyd and Siwash? He roused up suddenly.

"Siwash," he asked, "what's going to be done with that flying machine?"

"I've had all I want out o' you," growled the ruffian, with savage emphasis. "If ye know when ye're well off, ye'll hush."

Matt "hushed." Frogs began to croak, and their husky voices came faintly to the prisoner's ears. Somewhere inside the dugout a cricket chattered. A rat ran over Matt's feet and a lizard crawled slowly along the earthen shelf at his side.

"A pleasant hole, this," muttered Matt grimly; then, again and again, thoughts of those three letters recurred to his puzzled mind.

Siwash fell asleep in his chair, and his snores were added to the weird sounds that drifted in from the prairie.

Matt's limbs, bruised and sore from the fall out of the aëroplane, felt numb from the bonds. His whole body was aching, and his head throbbed as though a thousand demons were pounding it with hammers. But, in spite of his pain and discomfort, he fell to wondering if there was not some way by which he could free himself from his bonds.

He had an invincible nature, and never gave up a fight so long as there was breath in his body. Slowly he began an effort to free himself. It was a fruitless attempt, doubly bound as he was, and his desperate labors caused the chair to overturn and land him sprawling on the clay floor.

The noise awoke Siwash Charley.

"Tryin' ter git loose, hey?" he cried with an oath. "I ought ter make ye sit up all night fer that, an' I got a blame' good notion."

Roughly he jerked the chair upright and began removing the coils of rope. When they were off, he examined the cords at Matt's wrists.

"Go over an' lay down on the cot," he ordered.

Matt's feet were free, and, had the door been open, he would have been tempted to make a dash through it and try to lose himself from his captor in the darkness of the open prairie.

Passing over to the cot he dropped down on it, and Siwash tied him there with more coils of rope, passing them around and around the side pieces of the cot, under and over it.

The change of position was a rest, in a measure, although the tight wrist cords kept Matt's arms

numb clear to his shoulders. It had been a trying day, and Matt presently dropped off to sleep. The hour was late when he closed his eyes. Although he had no means of telling the exact time, yet he knew it could not be far from midnight.

A mellow chink as of metal awoke him. He opened his eyes and saw daylight shining through the window.

Siwash was at the table, humped over it and counting a small store of yellow gold. An old leather pouch lay on the table beside the coins.

Matt, cramped and in an agony of discomfort, was on the point of crying out and asking to be untied from the cot and put back in the chair, but he saw a head push across the window on the outside of the dugout, and the call died suddenly on his lips.

It was the face of Hackberry!

Hope arose in Motor Matt's breast. Hackberry was a friend, in some manner he had learned where Matt had been taken, and he had come to his rescue!

Scarcely breathing, Matt watched the face of the man at the window.

Hackberry was not looking at Matt, but had centred his attention on Siwash. The latter, finishing his count of the gold pieces, swept them from the table and into the pouch; then, crossing to the wall by the cupboard, he knelt down, removed a flat stone, and pushed his yellow wealth into its cache. After placing the stone in position once more, Siwash Charley got up and stepped toward the door.

Before he could open it, the door was pushed ajar in his face.

"Pecos!" exclaimed Siwash, startled.

"Shore," laughed Pecos. "Ye didn't think it would take me more'n a day and a night to git back from Totten, did ye? The hoss is plumb tired, an' I've jest picketed him close to water an' grass. And the scheme worked, hey?" he went on, with a grin at Matt. "I reckoned I'd put up a purty good bluff."

Here was a revelation for Matt, a revelation that broke over him in a flash and brought with it a grievous disappointment.

A clever trap had been laid by Murgatroyd, and, in spite of all his precautions in testing Hackberry's story, Matt had walked into it!

CHAPTER XII.

PECOS TAKES A CHANCE.

"Was that story of yours a lie?" demanded Motor Matt.

"Well," drawled Pecos, "it wasn't exactly the truth, not as anybody knows of. I gave it to you jest as Murg give it to me, an' it certainly took fine!"

The astounded expression on Matt's face caused Siwash Charley to go into another roar of mirth. It was a very good joke—to Siwash and Pecos Jones. Pecos, riding over to Fort Totten, had claimed to be an honest homesteader, doing his utmost to help a neighbor in distress. The idea of Pecos Jones posing as an honest homesteader still further added to Siwash Charley's enjoyment.

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"Isn't Mrs. Traquair at the homestead?" inquired Matt.

"Not onless she went thar o' her own accord—which I don't reckon possible."

"And your claim doesn't join the Traquair quarter section?"

"Oh, but that's rich!" whooped Siwash Charley, wiping his bleared eyes.

When Matt's amazement left him he felt a sense of relief. It was something to know that Mrs. Traquair wasn't in danger, something to feel that he had now only himself to think about.

"I'm hungry," said Pecos Jones, throwing himself down on the shelf. "Got any grub, Siwash?"

"Don't I allers have grub?" returned Siwash. "It's thar in the cupboard, Pecos. Help yerself."

Pecos helped himself to a chunk of beef and a handful of crackers.

"I reckon," he observed as he ate, "I ought ter have a good bit o' money fer what I done, eh, Siwash?"

Siwash Charley immediately grew cold and formal.

"Why, you little wart," he answered, "how much pay d'ye want fer goin 'ter Totten an' back? Ain't sixty dollars enough?"

"It was my work as done the trick," protested Pecos. "I'll bet Murg is givin' you a hull lot more'n sixty cases."

"That's my bizness an' Murg's. Sixty you got, an' sixty's all ye git."

Pecos looked at his diminishing piece of beef reflectively.

"Well," he remarked, "you an' me's allers been good friends, Siwash, so I reckon we needn't ter

quarrel. Oh, I come purty nigh fergittin'. On my way here I rode past Jessup's shack. Murg come out an' hailed me an' said he wanted ye ter come over there, right away."

"Thunder! Why didn't ye tell me afore?"

"Ye ain't lost much time. Take yer own hoss, don't put a bridle on mine. My critter's all tired out. How long'll ye be?"

"It won't take me more'n an hour ter go an' come," answered Siwash, picking up his hat. "If Murg don't keep me long, I reckon I'll be back in an hour an' a half. What d'ye think he wants me fer?"

"Give it up. He ain't tellin' me any more o' his bizness than what he has ter."

"No more he ain't, an' I reckon it's a good plan, too. I suppose it's somethin' about that niece o' his. Don't let Motor Matt bamboozle ye. If he gits contrary, thar's Murg's rifle leanin' in the corner."

"I don't need no rifle while I got these," and Pecos patted the handles of two revolvers that showed at his hips.

"Waal, so long, Pecos," said Siwash, moving toward the door. "The ole man may be in a hurry, so I'll tear away."

He disappeared, and Pecos continued to munch his bread and crackers. A few minutes later, through the open door, Matt and Pecos saw Siwash pounding away across the prairie.

Immediately Pecos Jones' manner underwent a change. Stuffing what remained of his crackers and dried beef into his jacket pockets, he ran to the door and watched.

"He's gone," murmured Pecos, "an' I got an hour, anyway. Sixty cases, eh?" he snarled. "What I done's wuth more, an' if Murg won't give it I take it, anyhow."

Without paying the least attention to Matt, who was watching proceedings in amazement, Pecos ran to the wall and dropped down on his knees. Removing the big, flat stone, he threw it to one side and pushed his hand into the secret cache. Presently he drew out the leather pouch and gave a croaking laugh as he shook it over his head and listened to the jingle of gold.

"I'll l'arn 'em ter beat me out o' what's my due!" he cried. "I'll git on my hoss an' dodge away inter the hills. If Siwash kin find me, then he's welcome ter take his money back. Wonder if there's anythin' else in there?"

Again Pecos bent down, thrust his arm into the hole, and drew out a suitcase, mouldy and stained. Pecos weighed it in his hands, shook it, then cast it from him.

"Nothin' there!" he grumbled, and got to his feet.

A thrill shot through Matt. Pecos had seen Siwash counting his money and putting it away in the secret cache. Being a man of no principle, and believing that he had been poorly paid, he had made up his mind to steal all he could get his hands on and leave while Siwash was away at Jessup's.

While he was handling the suitcase Matt had seen, on one end of the mouldy piece of luggage, the letters, "G. F."

There was no doubt but that Siwash Charley was Cant Phillips! No doubt but that this satchel, drawn out of the earthen cache by Pecos, was the dishonored officer's luggage—the very receptacle which had contained the San Francisco plans!

"Pecos!" cried Matt, as the thief darted toward the door.

The man paused.

"I ain't got no time ter bother with you," he answered.

"You got me into this," begged Matt, "and why not set me at liberty?"

"I'm takin' enough from Siwash, I reckon," said Pecos.

"But if it hadn't been for you I wouldn't be where I am now."

"An' if ye wasn't where ye are now," answered Pecos, by a strange process of reasoning, "I wouldn't be entitled ter this!" He shook the jingling pouch.

"I've got money in my pocket——"

"Oh, ye have!" cried Pecos, with a complete change of front. "That's diff'rent."

He pushed the pouch into the breast of his coat and came to the side of the cot.

"I'll give it to you," said Matt, "provided you take the ropes off my hands."

"Ye don't have ter give, my buck, so long as I kin take! I'll not let ye go, but I'll take what ye got an' save Siwash the trouble."

Matt's personal property had not been tampered with by his captors—probably on orders issued by Murgatroyd, who seemed to have his own ideas about how the prisoner should be treated.

Pecos, in feverish haste, bent over Matt and tried to get at his pockets. The tightly drawn coils of the rope interfered. Swearing volubly, he grabbed up Siwash Charley's knife from the table and hacked one of the coils in half.

This cutting of one coil released all the others, and Pecos was free to pursue his search unhindered. With a grunt of exultation he drew a small roll of bills from Matt's pocket, stuffed it

into his trousers, and was away like a shot.

Matt had the use of his feet, and, now that the coils securing him to the cot had been severed, he was able to rise to a sitting posture.

For a few moments his brain whirled dizzily. Just as it began to resume its normal condition, a thump of galloping hoofs sounded outside the door, and Matt struggled erect and reeled to the opening.

Pecos Jones was putting his tired horse to its best pace. Odd as it seemed to Matt, he was hurrying in the direction of Sykestown.

Perhaps that was the best course for Pecos to take if he wanted to avoid Siwash. He would not go into the town, but could give it a wide berth, and make for regions to the southward.

Weak and tortured with his numbed limbs, Matt sank down on the earthen shelf.

Bound though he was, Matt knew he could escape. Siwash, as yet, had not been gone half an hour. He would certainly be back in an hour, full of wrath and eager for revenge.

Matt did not believe that Murgatroyd had sent for Siwash, but that Pecos had told the story simply to get the other out of the way while the robbery was being perpetrated. If this was true—and Matt felt positive that it was—the fury of Siwash would pass all bounds.

It would be better for Matt not to be there when Siwash returned, but there was Goff Fortescue's suit case. Matt felt that he was in duty bound to take it with him, and this he could not do unless he had the use of his hands.

How was he to free himself? The knife lay on the floor where Pecos had dropped it—and the knife suggested possibilities.

Getting up from the shelf, he walked over to the knife and knelt with it between his feet; then, with his numbed fingers, he fumbled for the blade, lifted it upright, and shoved his feet together with the knife between his heels, edge side out.

This manœuvre took time, for Matt had to try again and again, but at last the blade had a fairly rigid support, with the handle between his heels and the back of the knife against his body.

After resting a moment—for the work, so trifling in the telling, had brought into torturing play every muscle—he pushed the wrist cords up and down the sharp edge. He cut himself slightly—it was impossible to avoid that—but the cords were severed, and, with a groan of relief, he drew his swollen hands around in front of him.

Almost fagged, he fell over upon the floor, feebly rubbing his arms to restore circulation. While he was thus engaged, the beat of hoofs, coming swiftly and the sound rapidly growing in volume, reached him.

Siwash Charley! was the thought that darted through his brain. It did not seem possible that the man had been gone an hour.

It was too late, now, to leave the dugout, and Matt got up and staggered to the door. For a moment he stood there, looking. He was seen, and a furious yell came echoing across the prairie. There was no doubt of the approaching horseman being Siwash Charley.

The crack of a revolver was heard, and a bullet thumped spitefully into the woodwork of the door frame.

Matt drew back, closed the door, and shoved the bolt.

Right then and there he and Siwash Charley would have out their little differences. But Siwash was not the only one of the two who was armed.

Matt remembered the rifle which belonged to Murgatroyd, and to which Siwash had called Pecos Jones' attention. Pecos, in his haste, had left without it, and Matt now hurried to the corner and picked it up; then, returning to the door, he crouched there and waited.

CHAPTER XIII.

BESIEGED.

The king of the motor boys hated the very touch of a firearm. He had seen so much wanton use of such weapons when in the Southwest, that he had become imbued with horror and disgust for anything that carried powder and ball.

But here he was forced to fall back on whatever he could find in order to withstand the attack of a frenzied and desperate man.

Counting out the rage Siwash must feel over the trick that had taken him away from the dugout, if he once broke into the room, found his money gone, and the satchel in Matt's possession, there was no telling what demons would be turned loose in him.

Having discovered the satchel, Matt was determined to turn it over to Cameron. It was this resolve that had held Matt to the spot, and now forced him to brave the wrath of Siwash Charley.

Bang! bang! bang!

Leaden hail rattled on the door, but the door was of stout plank and the metal could not penetrate it. The barrier Siwash Charley had constructed for his own preservation, in time of possible stress, now proved a good shield for Motor Matt.

Having announced himself, in this violent fashion, Siwash dismounted and tried the latch. The door, of course, refused to yield, and Siwash hurled himself against it. The stout planks trembled, and the earthen wall quivered.

"Steady, there, Siwash Charley!" cried Matt. "I've got Murgatroyd's rifle, and I don't intend to let you come in here."

This announcement seemingly carried an effect. The attack on the door ceased and Siwash began a parley.

"Did that coyote of a Pecos Jones set ye loose?" he demanded.

"No."

"How'n thunder did ye make it, then?"

"Pecos Jones robbed me—cut the ropes that tied me to the cot so he could get at my pockets. You had left my feet unbound, and I managed to juggle a bit with a knife that lay on the floor."

"Waal, it won't do ye no good. Ye're in thar, an' I'm out hyer, ye've got a rifle an' I've got a brace o' Colts, an' on top o' that ye've got the use o' yer hands, but that don't mean that ye're goin' ter git away. I ain't wantin' ter harm ye—ye heerd what Murg said when he left—so ye might as well open the door an' let me in."

"I'll not do that," answered Matt firmly.

"Why won't ye?"

"Because, now that I'm free, I'm going to stay that way."

"Ye ain't free! All the freedom you got is ter run eround that two-by-twice hole in the ground an' dodge bullets. Whar's that coyote? I got a bone ter pick with him."

"He's not here."

"I know that, kase I seen that his hoss wa'n't down by the spring whar he picketed him. Whar'd he go?"

"I don't know."

"What did he play that bloomin' trick on me fer? Murg wasn't at Jessup's—he an' the gal had been gone from thar fer two hours."

Here was Matt's chance to laugh, but he was not in a mood to take advantage of it.

"Do you remember counting your gold this morning, Siwash?" asked Matt.

A startled exclamation broke from the ruffian.

"Did ye see that?" he returned. "I thought ye was asleep."

"I wasn't the only one who saw it. Pecos Jones was looking through the window. Pecos not only saw you counting the money, but he also saw where you put it."

A bellow of fury broke from Siwash.

"Why didn't ye tell me he was at the winder?" he fumed.

"Why should I?" returned Matt. "You fellows had led me to believe that Pecos Jones' name was Hackberry, and that he was a friend of mine. I had an idea that he was coming here to rescue me, and that's the reason I kept quiet."

Matt could hear Siwash tramping about and easing his wrath as this shot went home.

"What did that coyote do?" roared Siwash. "Tell me that."

"He took your money and ran away with it."

"Did—did he take anything else?"

"Well, some of my money that I had in a vest pocket."

"Anything else?"

"No."

"Ye know whar that cache is?"

"Of course. How could I help knowing when Pecos Jones rifled it under my eyes?"

"I'm suspicionin' you," yelled Siwash, "with yer whistlin' o' reveilles an' stable calls! Ye kain't fool me, not fer a minit."

Matt had been afraid of this discovery, but there had been no way of preventing it. He had told Siwash about Pecos in the hope of having the ruffian trail away in pursuit of the thief.

"Why don't you take after Pecos, Siwash?" asked Matt.

"Kase it's wuth more ter me ter plant myself right hyer an' look arter you. Open this door, 'r I open up on ye, rifle or no rifle."

"I'll not open the door," answered Matt firmly, "and if you try to break it down I'll send some

bullets through it. The planks can turn a revolver bullet, but a slug from a rifle will go clean through the wood. Get away from here, Siwash. Your cue is to take after Pecos Jones."

The words ended amid a crash of broken glass. Siwash Charley was shooting through the window. Four shots had already been fired. Matt counted three more. These made seven, and five more shots would empty the ruffian's revolvers.

If he had no more cartridges, he would be helpless. But this was something on which Matt could not count with certainty.

"Keep away from that window, Siwash!" cried Matt, pressing close to the door. "Show yourself there and I'll fire!" [Pg 23]

Bang! bang! bang!

"Seven and three are ten," computed Matt. "He'll soon have those weapons emptied. I don't believe he'll show himself at the window, but perhaps I can coax him to shoot again."

Dropping down on hands and knees, Matt crept to a point directly under the window. Having reached this spot, he placed his cap on the muzzle of the rifle and lifted it.

Bang!

"Eleven," thought Matt.

Then he gave a loud cry and allowed the cap to waver back and forth.

Bang!

"Twelve!" exulted Matt. "Now, if he hasn't any more cartridges, I'll be safe."

Matt had allowed the cap to drop at the last shot. Outside he could hear a tramp of running feet.

"I told the cub," came the voice of Siwash. "He ought to've knowed better than ter——"

Siwash Charley's head was thrust in at the opening, rimmed with its jagged points of glass. The scoundrel's words died on his lips, for his eyes were blinking into the muzzle of the rifle.

"Clear out, Siwash!" said Matt calmly. "I don't like guns, and I don't like shooting, but I dislike your society more than either one. Go away from here, and go quick."

What Siwash said Matt could not hear, but he vanished from the window as if by magic.

There was no more firing. In order to test his theory regarding Siwash Charley's ammunition, Matt showed himself boldly at the broken window.

The ruffian was not more than twenty feet away. Quick as a flash he raised one of his weapons and pulled the trigger. There was only a metallic click, which made it manifest that Siwash had not kept such close track of the ammunition as Motor Matt had done.

"Go away, I tell you," ordered the king of the motor boys. "I've had enough trouble with you, and I intend to get to Sykestown in time to prevent Murgatroyd from carrying out his plans. If——"

Matt paused, aghast. Across the prairie he could see a swiftly moving blot—a motor car, he was sure, and undoubtedly Murgatroyd's.

Siwash Charley was likewise looking at the approaching car.

"Oh," he yelled, "I reckon ye ain't got everythin' your way, arter all. Hyer comes Murg, an' ye kin bet Murg ain't out o' ammunition even if I am!"

Matt's heart went down into his shoes. Wasn't luck ever to turn for him? Was there to be no end to this reverse which had come his way?

As he continued to gaze at the approaching car, it grew plainer to his eyes. There was more than one man aboard, he could see that, and the car didn't look like Murgatroyd's, but of a different color. This car was brown!

As Matt's hopes arose, Siwash Charley's began to sink. A moment later, Siwash rushed for his horse.

"Cameron!" cried Matt, hardly able to believe his eyes; "Cameron and McGlory!"

Turning from the window he ran to the door, flung it open and leaped outside.

Yells came from the car, and some one stood up in front and waved his hat wildly.

Matt, pointing to the fleeing Siwash, shouted at the top of his voice:

"Capture that man, Cameron! He's Phillips, the deserter! He is armed, but his revolvers are empty! Capture him!"

If Matt's words were not heard or understood, at least his gestures were. The car turned and darted after Siwash Charley.

The king of the motor boys, leaning against the front wall of the dugout, watched the race.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BROKER'S GAME.

The remarks of the landlord, in front of the hotel, had given McGlory and Cameron a clue of which they were not slow to take advantage.

Here was Motor Matt's enemy, the very man who had set in motion the plot which, through Hackberry, had lured the king of the motor boys into Wells County on a useless quest.

Coolly enough Murgatroyd brought his car to a stop in front of the hotel and faced the angry lieutenant and cowboy.

"Your name Murgatroyd?" demanded Cameron.

"My name, yes, sir," answered the broker, half turning in his seat so as to command a better view of the lieutenant. "But," he added quietly, "I believe that you have the advantage of me."

"Cameron's my name."

"Ah!" A flash crossed Murgatroyd's face. "I might have known who you were, just by seeing you with McGlory there. This is a fortunate meeting."

"Fortunate!" cried McGlory, dancing around the front of the car. "Speak to me about that! I should say it was fortunate, you old tinhorn—for us, if not for you. What's this game you've put up on Motor Matt?"

"If we do any talking," said the broker mildly, "you'll have to express yourself in terms that I can understand."

"You'll savvy a heap before we're done with you."

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"Just a minute," went on Murgatroyd. "My niece is in the car with me, and I think it well that she should not listen to your violent talk." He looked around. "Amy——"

The girl was white, but she made no attempt to get out of the tonneau.

"I'm not going to leave, Uncle Amos," said she. "I want to hear more of this talk."

"You will please obey me, Amy, and leave the car."

"It is your car," she answered, "and I haven't any right to stay in it if you don't want me to."

Cameron opened the door for her and held out his hand to help her down. She paid no attention to the extended hand, but passed into the hotel.

"Before we begin," proceeded Murgatroyd, "let me ask you if you recognize this watch."

He offered the timepiece as he finished.

"It's Matt's!" exclaimed McGlory, snatching the watch.

"Him Motol Matt's clock, allee light," breathed Ping. The hotel proprietor was the only person, besides Cameron, McGlory, and Ping, within reach of the broker's words.

"This conversation is of a private nature, Brackett," said Murgatroyd significantly, "even though it is taking place in the street in front of your hotel."

Brackett excused himself and passed around the corner of the building.

"That watch," proceeded the broker, "will prove to you that your friend is in my hands. He is being kept safely in a place which you will not be able to find. I have written three letters, one to you, Lieutenant Cameron, one to McGlory, and one to Mrs. Traquair. It will not be necessary to post two of them, for I can tell you, face to face, what the letters contain.

"The one to you, Cameron, has to do with some little unpleasantness connected with the aëroplane trials recently held at Fort Totten. Siwash Charley and, through him, myself were wrongly suspected of complicity in an accident connected with the flying machine. This has been very annoying to me. Your letter contained the information that, other matters being satisfactorily adjusted, your friend Motor Matt would be released under written promise from the authorities at Fort Totten to give over persecuting me and Siwash Charley for a crime of which we are entirely innocent."

McGlory, to put it figuratively, immediately "went up in the air." Before he could air his views, however, Cameron silenced him with a look.

"Motor Matt, according to your proposition, as I understand it," returned the lieutenant calmly, "is to be released providing the military authorities promise you and Siwash Charley immunity?"

"That is one of the conditions governing the release," answered Murgatroyd.

"What are the other conditions?"

"Well, the letter to McGlory contained that. Mrs. Traquair, as satisfaction for the mortgage which I hold against the Traquair homestead, west of here, is to turn over the quarter section to me. That is all. My letter to Mrs. Traquair contains that proposition, and my letter to McGlory requests him to write Mrs. Traquair that what I say, regarding the capture of Motor Matt, is true. McGlory is also to advise her to accept my terms. If those terms are accepted, and if the authorities at Fort Totten agree not to persecute me, or Siwash Charley, any further, Motor Matt will be released."

The cowboy was so full of language that he could hardly restrain himself. Cameron laid a hand on his arm and pushed him away.

"Murgatroyd," said the lieutenant, "you have just made the most impudent and brazen proposition I ever heard. You deliberately plan and commit a crime, and then plan and commit

another to save you from legal responsibility for both."

"You look at it in a prejudiced way," returned the broker, apparently not in the least ruffled. "What is your answer?"

The lieutenant was thoughtful for a space.

"I have no power to promise you immunity," said he.

"You will take it up with your superior officer at Fort Totten?"

"I won't say that, but I will say that I will think it over."

"That is all I can ask. How about you, McGlory?"

"Sufferin' wildcats!" gurgled McGlory. "Have I got to answer that? Have I——"

"He'll think it over, Murgatroyd," broke in Cameron, "just as I intend doing. Where is Motor Matt?"

"That is my secret," and the wily broker actually smiled.

"Is he far from here?"

"Another secret. While you are thinking the matter over, I will hunt for a place to stow my car."

He got out to use the crank, and Cameron caught McGlory's arm and led him into the hotel.

"Why didn't I hit him?" the cowboy was murmuring dazedly. "Why didn't you let me hit him, Cameron, or else hit him yourself?"

"Because, McGlory, we've got to talk this over and—— Ah!" The lieutenant broke off as a slender form swept toward him across the office. "This is the young lady, I believe, who was in the car with Mr. Murgatroyd?"

The girl was still pale, but there was resolution in her face and manner.

"I have not much time to talk," said she, "for what I say must be said before my uncle comes in. Mr. Murgatroyd is my uncle. I am a school teacher and live in Fargo with my mother. For some time I have been in poor health, and Mr. Murgatroyd suggested that I take an automobile trip with him through this part of the country, where he was coming to look up some of his investments. For a few days our headquarters have been here. Yesterday afternoon we were riding to the north and west of Sykestown when an aëroplane came sailing toward us, dropped down close to the automobile, and a young man whom I afterward learned was Motor Matt hailed my uncle and asked him some question. When my uncle answered, Motor Matt seemed to recognize him, and tried to turn the air ship away. My uncle had a rifle near him, and he fired at the aëroplane, injuring the machinery so that it fell and——"

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"No," the girl broke off, seeing the look of alarm that crossed the faces of her auditors. "Motor Matt was not seriously injured, but the aëroplane was damaged. This happened about ten miles out, on the road to Jessup's. My uncle turned around and took me to Jessup's, where he left me. I am very sure that he then went some place, secured Siwash Charley to help him, and made a prisoner of Motor Matt. I do not know where your friend was taken, but it could not have been a great way from Jessup's home—west of the road, I think, and along the base of the hills, for that is the way my uncle came when he returned to the farmhouse. We stayed at Jessup's all night and came here this morning. On the way, we passed the aëroplane, and my uncle got out, looked the machine over, and came back with that watch.

"That is all I can tell you. Do not try to keep me any longer, or to ask me any questions. I shall go back to Fargo by train, for I do not like the way my uncle is doing. I—I hope that you will find your friend and that—that no harm has happened to him."

The girl had spoken rapidly, and with nervous impatience, continually watching the door. When she finished, she turned away and passed hastily up the stairs leading to the second floor.

The amazing news she had given held McGlory, Cameron, and Ping spellbound. While they stood, gazing at each other, Murgatroyd entered the office.

"As soon as you have come to a decision," said he, "let me know."

Then he, too, passed up the stairs.

Cameron was the first of the three to recover his wits.

"Quick!" said he, catching McGlory's arm, "there's no time to be lost. Run over to the railroad station and send a telegram to Mrs. Traquair, McGlory. Tell her to pay no attention to any letter she may receive from Murgatroyd. While you're doing that, I'll get out the car and we'll make a run out on the road to Jessup's."

McGlory, inspired with the necessity for rapid work, hustled for the telegraph office. Cameron hurried to the shed after the car. While he was getting the machine ready, Ping mysteriously disappeared.

As the lieutenant pulled out of the shed, he looked for the cowboy and the Chinaman. Neither was in sight.

Two minutes later McGlory appeared, and crossed from the railroad station to the car on a run.

"Where's Ping?" demanded Cameron.

"That's too many for me," said McGlory. "I thought he was with you."

"And I had the idea that he had gone with you. Well, we can't wait for him," and Cameron drove the car around to the front of the hotel.

A man was crossing the street. Cameron hailed him.

"Which is the road to Jessup's?" he asked.

The man pointed it out. Barely had he given the directions when Murgatroyd ran out of the hotel and vanished around the corner of the building.

"He's after his car!" murmured McGlory.

Some one jumped to the footboard and scrambled into the tonneau just as Cameron threw in the switch. It was Ping. He was breathing hard, and his yellow face was as near white as it could possibly be.

"What's the matter with you, Ping?" asked McGlory.

The Chinaman held up one hand. As the flowing sleeve fell away his yellow fingers could be seen gripping a switch plug.

"Murg forgettee plug," chattered Ping. "My findee car, takee plug——"

Cameron let off a shout as he coaxed the automobile into a faster pace.

"That knocks out Murgatroyd, so far as chasing us is concerned," said he. "Shake hands with the chink for me, McGlory. I'm too all-fired busy."

CHAPTER XV.

CANT PHILLIPS, DESERTER.

The car slammed its way across the bridge over the Pipestem and hustled at a fifty-mile-an-hour clip in the direction of Jessup's.

"There's a schoolma'm that's worth her weight gold bullion," remarked McGlory. "Her uncle must have found out that she told us something, or he wouldn't have scattered after his car like he did."

"Much good it will do him now," chuckled Cameron, "since Ping has robbed the machine of the important plug. For once the broker was careless."

"And to think of him putting a bullet into the aëroplane and bringing it down!" said McGlory through his teeth. "I reckon that spoils the sale to the government."

"It may," returned Cameron, "but all I can say is I'm sorry if it does."

"How we're to find Matt is a conundrum," went on the cowboy. "Turn west from the road to Jessup's and follow the hills. That may be all right, and it may not. Sufferin' horned toads, but all this is gettin' on my nerves." [Pg 26]

"Siwash Charley is taking care of Matt——"

"Taking care of him! I can imagine how the tinhorn is doing that. I hope Pard Matt is able to stand it."

Ten miles were covered in short order, and those in the flying car had a glimpse of the aëroplane beside the road.

"It doesn't seem to be hurt much," remarked Cameron.

"It must be damaged considerable, for all that," said the cowboy. "If it hadn't been, Matt would have got away before Murgatroyd could take the girl to Jessup's, pick up Siwash, and then come back and lay him by the heels."

Cameron brought the car to a halt, jamming down on both brakes.

"Ping," said he, "go back and watch the aëroplane. Here's a revolver. Don't let any one tamper with the machine. We'll be along after a while."

Ping was accustomed to obey orders. Without a word he took the weapon Cameron handed to him and got out of the car. The lieutenant threw in the switch and away they went again.

"There's the hills," announced McGlory, after a period of speeding, pointing to the misty blue line of uplifts.

"I believe I'll break from the trail and head straight for them," said Cameron.

"Might as well," assented McGlory. "It's all a guess, anyhow, and that move is as likely to be right as any other we can make."

There were broad marks of automobile tires in the dust. Cameron had been watching them. Although he said nothing about it to the cowboy, yet he turned from the road at a point where another car had made the turn.

Straight for the hills the lieutenant headed, and as they came closer, McGlory suddenly dropped a hand on Cameron's arm.

"Do you hear it?" asked the cowboy excitedly.

"Hear what?"

"Firing. There it goes again."

Cameron heard it, but it was very faint.

"That sounds as though we were going to get next to something," said McGlory.

"And looks like it, too. Isn't that a horse I see against the background of a hill, over there?"

The cowboy looked straight ahead.

"You're right!" he cried. "There's a horse there, and a man farther along. The man's shooting at the face of the uplift. There! Hear that, Cameron? What's he wasting ammunition like that for?"

Cameron did not answer; he was busy looking and listening and running the car.

"Thunder!" exclaimed McGlory, as the scene opened clearer and clearer before his eyes, "there's a hole in the hillside—two holes, or I'm a Piute, for another just opened up."

"And the man's mounting the horse," said Cameron.

"And some one is coming through that hole in the hill. Sufferin' surprises! Why, it's Matt! Look, Cameron! He's pointing toward the man, and saying something. I can't hear what he says, but it's a cinch he wants us to follow the man."

"And it's a cinch we'll do it, too!" cried Cameron. "Pull that other revolver out of my hip pocket, McGlory. Don't use it, though, till I tell you to. The bare sight of it may be enough to bring the man to a halt."

Cameron had turned the car and was plunging across the prairie in hot pursuit of the fleeing horseman. The car was going five feet to the horse's one, and the pursuit was drawing to a rapid close.

"It's Siwash Charley!" announced McGlory.

"I'd about made up my mind to that," said Cameron. "He was shooting at Matt. It looks as though we had arrived just in time, McGlory."

As the car leaped and swayed across the prairie, the cowboy stood up, hanging to Cameron with one hand and waving the revolver with the other.

"Halt!" he shouted.

Siwash Charley turned in his saddle and shook his fist defiantly.

"He's going to fight," said Cameron. "Look out for a shot when we come close. But don't fire yet, McGlory."

"What's the use of waiting?" demurred the cowboy. "It's a wonder Siwash hasn't opened up on us before now."

"We'll run him down in a minute. His horse— Ah, ha! See that."

Siwash had been giving rather too much attention to the pursuing car and too little to his horse. The animal dropped a foot in a gopher hole and turned a somersault on the dried grass. Siwash shot out of the saddle as though he had been fired from a cannon, caromed across the prairie, and then lay still.

Cameron nearly ran over the scoundrel before he could shut off and clamp on the brakes. The horse, escaping a broken leg by almost a miracle, scrambled to its feet, gave a frightened snort, and dashed on at full speed, stirrups flying.

"Never mind the horse," said Cameron. "Let Jessup have the brute. Siwash is the one we're after."

"He's coming easy," returned McGlory, dropping the revolver on the seat and following the lieutenant out of the car.

Siwash was lying silent and motionless on the ground. Cameron knelt beside him and laid a hand on his breast.

"Is he done for?" asked McGlory.

Cameron shook his head.

"Stunned, that's all. If we had a rope——"

"The only thing we've got in the way of a line is the piece of string Ping tied around our lunch bag," broke in McGlory, picking the weapons out of Siwash Charley's pockets. "These are no good," he added, after a brief examination. "Every cartridge has been used. Let's load Siwash into the tonneau, Cameron, and I'll agree to keep him quiet until we can get to where Matt is waiting for us."

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Between them Cameron and McGlory lifted the huge bulk of the unconscious ruffian and deposited him, none too gently, in the rear of the car. The cowboy climbed in beside him, and the lieutenant cranked up, took his seat, and started back along the foot of the hills. Matt greeted them cheerily as they drew up at the door of the dugout.

"How are you, pard?" whooped McGlory.

"Bruised a little and mighty hungry, but otherwise all right. How's Siwash?"

"In need of a rope, Matt," said Cameron. "Have you got one handy?"

Matt ran into the dugout and picked up part of the rope that had been used to secure him to the chair and the cot. With this Cameron and McGlory made Siwash Charley secure before his wits returned, thus avoiding a possible struggle.

As soon as this part of the work was finished, the cowboy sprang from the car and gripped Motor Matt by the hand.

"You've had a rough time, pard," said he, "and something of a reverse, if what we've learned is true, but you're stacking up pretty well for all that. What sort of a place is this, anyhow?"

"It's Phillips' old rendezvous," said Matt.

"Phillips?" echoed Cameron. "Do you mean Siwash Charley, Matt?"

"No one else."

"Have you any proof of it?"

"Wait a minute."

Matt ran into the dugout and presently reappeared with the suit case.

"Chance threw that in my way," said he, "and, by trying to save it for you, Cameron, I very nearly got myself into more trouble than I could manage. Look at these initials." Matt pointed to the letters "G. F." on the end of the stained and mouldy grip. "This must be the very satchel, don't you think," he added, "that the drummer received by mistake, over in Devil's Lake City?"

Cameron was so amazed he could not speak. Taking the suit case from Matt, he opened it up on the ground. It was not locked and opened readily.

There were stained and mouldy documents inside—blue-prints, tracings, and pages of memoranda.

Cameron rose erect and stared down at the satchel's disordered contents.

"There's no doubt about it," he muttered. "This is the identical suit case that Captain Fortescue carried across the lake with him that day it was supposed he started for St. Paul, and——"

A call came from the wagon.

"What you fellers roughin' things up with me fer? Murgatroyd has got somethin' ter say ter you. When you hear that you'll be lettin' me go."

"He's still hazy," said Matt. "He doesn't remember what's happened."

They all stepped to the side of the car and looked down at Siwash Charley where he lay helpless on the tonneau seat.

"Murgatroyd," said Cameron sternly, "has already told us what he had to say."

"Ye kain't do nothin' ter me fer takin' keer o' Motor Matt," rambled Siwash Charley. "I treated him white, an' he'll tell ye the same thing."

"That's not what we've captured you for," went on Cameron. "You're a deserter, and your name isn't Siwash Charley, but Cant Phillips. You're for Totten, my man, and a court-martial that will probably land you where you won't be able to break the law for a long time to come."

Then, for the first time since his senses had returned, Siwash Charley appeared to understand all that his capture meant.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOSING CAUSE.

Murgatroyd must have had an extra switch plug with him, for Brackett, proprietor of the hotel, was authority for the assertion that he left town shortly after Cameron, McGlory, and Ping had taken their departure. Murgatroyd, however, went east, while the other car took a western trail.

What became of Murgatroyd was for some time a mystery. He was not met along the road between Sykestown and Carrington, and he was not seen in the latter town.

His niece likewise vanished, taking the train—this, also, on the authority of Brackett—and presumably returning to Fargo. For her, Motor Matt and his friends always thereafter treasured a warm regard. She had turned resolutely against a relative in order to make sure that right and justice were meted out to a stranger.

Cant Phillips, alias Siwash Charley, was removed to Fort Totten. After a trial, during which it could not be proved that he had lost the dagger which Ping had found in the woods, or that he had met Captain Fortescue by agreement or otherwise and dealt foully with him, or that he had stolen the suit case and the plans, he was sent to the government prison at Leavenworth to serve a long term.

Phillips' story was to the effect that he had deserted to go into the "business" of stealing horses with Pecos Jones, and that the suit case and the plans were in Jones' possession when he—Phillips—joined him.

But Phillips could not deny his identity, nor the evident fact that he was a deserter. For this he received a sentence that was the limit for desertion, lengthened somewhat by the belief of those presiding at his trial that he had at least a guilty knowledge of the other crimes imputed to him.

Mrs. Traquair was very much wrought up when she discovered how Murgatroyd, using her name, had beguiled the king of the motor boys into a trap destined to free the broker and Siwash Charley of "persecution" by the military authorities, and, at the same time, to secure for the broker himself the Traquair homestead.

It was an audacious plan, and a foolish one, but the several steps by which it was worked were covered in rather a masterly way.

Mrs. Traquair had departed suddenly for a visit with friends in Fargo. Learning of this, and from this one insignificant fact alone, Murgatroyd had built up the whole fabric of his plot. It was a losing cause, and Matt had been caught in it, for, if the audacious scheme was to be successful, the king of the motor boys would be the one factor that made it so. Everything hinged on him.

The aëroplane was guarded by Ping until Matt, Cameron, and McGlory reached Sykestown over the trail to Jessup's and sent a team and wagon back to bring the damaged machine into town. The same wagon that hauled it into Sykestown likewise hauled it across country and back to Fort Totten.

Matt, McGlory, and Cameron, before leaving the dugout to return to Sykestown with their prisoner, lingered to talk over recent events, hear each other's account of what had happened, and to make a further examination of the earthen room.

Nothing of any importance was found, save a slender supply of food in the box cupboard, which was promptly confiscated. When the friends left, they closed the door, allowed the painted screens to fall into place over the door and the broken window, and then marked with astonishment how, at a little distance, even they were at a loss to mark the particular place of that lawless retreat.

"It's a regular robbers' roost," declared McGlory, looking back as the car carried them toward the road.

"It ought to be destroyed," said Cameron. "A knowledge of its presence is an invitation for some other lawless men to make use of it."

"Pecos Jones, for example," added McGlory. "How much money did that fellow get from you, Matt?"

"Twelve dollars," answered Matt. "If he hadn't been in such a hurry, he might have found my money belt and secured three hundred more."

"You got off easy," said Cameron.

"Not so easy, after all, lieutenant. I wouldn't go through that set-to with Siwash Charley again for all the gold that was ever minted. I don't like guns, anyway."

"Somethin' queer about that, too," observed McGlory. "Explosive engines are Matt's hobby, but set off an explosion in a steel tube, with a piece o' lead in front o' it, an' he shies clear off the road."

The next day, after the aëroplane had been brought in and sent on to Fort Totten, and the boys had learned various things from Brackett concerning Murgatroyd and his niece, the little party moved on toward Devil's Lake in the car, taking Cant Phillips with them.

When the post was reached there was a disagreeable surprise awaiting Matt. It came in the shape of a telegram from headquarters, announcing that the trials at Fort Myer had been indefinitely postponed, and that, therefore, another of the Traquair aëroplanes would not be needed.

"Bang goes fifteen thousand!" mourned McGlory.

"The department may change its mind," suggested Cameron, "when it hears about that straight-away flight of the aëroplane into Wells County."

"While the war department is changing its mind," said Matt, smothering his disappointment with a laugh, "McGlory and I will get busy putting the aëroplane into shape and then look for fresh fields and pastures new."

"That hits me, pard," said McGlory. "I've been pining for a change of scene, but I hate to leave this vicinity while Murgatroyd is at large."

"Forget Murgatroyd, Joe," counseled Matt.

"If he'll forget us, yes, but I don't think he will."

THE END.

THE NEXT NUMBER (26) WILL CONTAIN

Motor Matt's "Make and Break"

OR,

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<h1>MOTOR STORIES</h1> <h2>THRILLING ADVENTURE MOTOR FICTION</h2>

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THE DOCTOR'S RUSE.

One morning in September, 190-, there came to the office of Doctor Frederic Curtin, a young English physician in Hongkong, a native junkman from the Chinese city of Swatow, about two hundred miles northeast of the English city. The junkman brought a letter to the doctor from an old acquaintance, the Rev. James Burren, a missionary in the vicinity of Swatow; and the letter begged Curtin to come and attend the missionary's young son, who was suffering from a puzzling and lingering illness.

As none of his patients in Hongkong demanded his immediate attention, Curtin was free to respond to the call. The *Silver Moon*, the trading junk that had brought the letter of appeal, was to leave on the return voyage the next day at noon; and as this junk offered the only means of reaching Swatow for several days, Curtin engaged passage on the slow-sailing, clumsy vessel.

There had been much activity that summer among the native pirates that infest the coast waters of the China Sea; and although the doctor did not expect to encounter any of these gentry, he took the precaution of placing in his valise two heavy navy revolvers and a quantity of cartridges.

The *Silver Moon* sailed on the morrow at midday, as scheduled, and, driven by a wide spread of canvas, slipped through the deep-blue, lapping water of this Eastern sea at a much better speed than the doctor expected. That evening a nearly full moon floated in the clear sky, and gave a glory to the ocean that Curtin had never seen surpassed. He sat on deck until late, and when he did go down to his cramped berth in the cabin below, he dropped into a sleep so profound that his first intimation of danger was when he was awakened by fierce, wild cries and the scurrying and trampling of many feet on the deck overhead.

He sprang to get his revolvers. But while he fumbled with the catches of the case, there was a rush of footsteps down the passageway outside; and the next moment the frail door burst in with a crash before the attack of half a dozen nearly naked Chinamen, who had revolvers and short curved swords. The *Silver Moon* had fallen a prey to pirates, and Curtin calmly submitted himself to the invaders.

He was allowed to dress. In the meantime the pirates rummaged through his baggage, including the rather portly black leather case in which he carried his medicines and surgical instruments. When he was hustled on deck a few moments later he found lying alongside the *Silver Moon* a

huge junk, and swarming over the captured vessel a motley horde of evil-looking barbarians.

The crew of the *Silver Moon*, awed and cringing, was huddled forward under guard.

But Curtin was not placed with the other captives. At a word from the thin, wiry man who appeared to be the leader, two of the pirates marched the doctor straight aboard the strange junk, where they proceeded to bind his arms and legs with ropes, and left him near the foremast, to sprawl or sit on the hard deck, as he chose.

Then as soon as everything of value on the *Silver Moon* had been transferred to the robber junk, the crew returned to their own vessel, and cast off, leaving their countrymen to go their way in peace. The pirate junk now headed to the northeast, following the coast.

Curtin, sprawling on the bare deck in his bonds, could only conjecture what was to be his fate. He knew that the native pirates often made a practice of holding prisoners for ransom, and he fancied that his captors intended to do so in his case, otherwise they would not have singled him out from all those on the captured junk. It did not reassure him to reflect that his bank account in Hongkong was an extremely modest one, and that he had few friends in the city who could place any large sum at his disposal.

About the middle of the forenoon his attention was attracted to one of the pirate crew—a big man who was restlessly pacing up and down the sun-scorched deck not far away, apparently in intense agony. On observing the fellow closely, the doctor saw that there was an angry, unhealed wound in the muscles of his bare left forearm, and noted that the arm itself was swollen to nearly twice its normal size.

At once Curtin's professional instinct was stirred. On the impulse of the moment he stood up awkwardly on his pinioned legs, and said in Chinese:

"That is a bad wound you have in your arm. I am an English doctor of Hongkong. Perhaps if you will let me see your arm I can relieve the pain."

The big Chinaman stopped his uneasy striding to stand and look doubtfully at the speaker. The pirate leader happened to be near, heard what Curtin said, and, the wounded sailor continuing to hesitate, signed him to allow the doctor to examine his arm.

The sufferer obeyed stolidly, and one glance at the inflamed wound, which evidently had been made by a sword thrust, was enough to tell Curtin that he had to deal with a case of threatened blood poisoning. But he thought that if the arm was immediately lanced the Chinaman would have a good chance for speedy recovery.

This he told the pirate captain, who had come over to stand beside his fellow cutthroat. He said that if the black case that had been seized among his other baggage that morning was brought and his arms were released, he would at once treat the wound, although he would not guarantee to cure the man.

To the doctor's surprise, the captain answered that he had lived in Hongkong, and knew of the skill of the English doctors, and that he would be much gratified if Curtin could save the sailor, as the fellow was one of his best men.

The medicine case was quickly produced, and the doctor's hands were untied. First ascertaining that the contents of the case were undisturbed, he prepared the wounded arm by pouring a little alcohol upon it. Then he took out his instruments and quickly performed the operation.

The look of relief that came into the sufferer's face was apparent, but neither the captain nor the other members of the pirate crew, who had gathered round to watch, made any comment. Curtin carefully dressed and bandaged the wound, and as soon as he had finished, his hands were rebound. His patient moved away without a word of thanks or appreciation, yet the doctor did not neglect to say that as often as was necessary he would attend the arm again. He was anxious to make a friend of this Chinaman; for a friend, he felt, would not be a bad thing to have among that barbarous crew.

Shortly after sunset that evening the junk reached the mouth of a narrow river, and a quarter of a mile from the entrance to this stream the sails were lowered and anchor was dropped. Curtin gathered from the talk of some of the crew who stood near him that the junk was to be taken up this river to an outlaw retreat, but that they would not enter the narrow channel until the high tide of the next morning.

Not long after the evening meal was over the pirates began to turn in for the night. Most of them merely threw themselves down on the hard deck. By nine o'clock all were asleep, with the exception of a single watchman, whom Curtin could see strolling back and forth across the afterdeck.

Hours passed, and as the doctor lay outstretched on the bare deck, he tried to work his hands out of the hempen cord that bound them together behind his back. He thought that if he could free himself from his bonds, the watchman might nap, and thus give him opportunity to slip over the side of the vessel into the sea and swim ashore. But he was unable to release his hands.

Not long after this, the watchman came forward and silently passed close to Curtin, and he was rather surprised to see that the lone guard was no other than the man whose arm he had lanced that morning. He wondered idly if the fellow had been chosen for the post of watchman for the reason that suffering had rendered him sleepless.

Then suddenly, as he looked up at the big yellow man, a new idea for escape germinated, grew to a hazy outline, and in a moment took definite shape in Curtin's mind.

In his medicine case was a vial containing a quantity of a certain very powerful anaesthetic. He had told the pirate that he would dress the wound again when necessary. If on this excuse he could get his hands freed and the case in his possession, why would it not be easy to administer a few drops of the drug by a hypodermic injection, and almost immediately send the watchman into a coma that would last for hours—render him unconscious before he could rebind his captive's hands or think to make outcry?

Curtin fully realized the danger attendant upon so audacious a scheme. But he felt that as long as he was in the hands of these ruthless and merciless men his life was not safe from one hour to the next.

Immediately he hailed the watchman and asked him about his arm. The tall pirate paused and replied that it still pained him considerably. Curtin suggested that he should bring the medicine case and have his arm treated there in the bright moonlight.

The watchman was slow in answering. Curtin began to think that the natural craftiness of his race had counseled him against the proposition, when with a gesture of consent he went to the companionway and disappeared. In a few moments he came back, carrying the familiar case in his hand. Then the doctor's heart gave a joyous leap.

As soon as his hands were loosened, he quickly opened the case and took out the vial he needed and the hypodermic syringe. He poured into the syringe a few drops of the colorless fluid from the vial. Next, with hands that trembled with eagerness, he unwound the bandage from the wounded arm.

Curtin picked up the syringe nonchalantly, but it gave him a shock to note at this instant that the huge pirate had his right hand resting on the carved hilt of the short, naked sword slipped through his belt.

However, the doctor did not hesitate. He resolutely grasped the proffered arm, and carefully inserted the needle point of the instrument into the flesh so far above the wound that the powerful drug could have but little harmful effect upon the irritated region. Then, with even pressure upon the plunger, he completely emptied the vial.

He withdrew the syringe, and keeping a strong grip upon his victim's arm, began to replace the bandage.

He worked slowly, methodically, occupying as much time as possible in each step of the operation. The Chinaman soon began to show signs of a strange, unnatural drowsiness. His head nodded on his broad shoulders, his eyes were half closed, and he opened them with difficulty. All at once the doctor's vigilant eye saw a startled, apprehensive look flit across the countenance of the pirate. The next instant the man gave a half-inarticulate cry and snatched out his sword.

Curtin threw up his hand to arrest the fall of the blade, but suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, the Chinaman wavered, the uplifted arm dropped nerveless, the sword fell clattering to the deck from the grasp of the relaxed fingers. As the watchman toppled over under the influence of the drug, the doctor caught him in his arms and lowered him to the deck.

Then Curtin snatched up the sword, and, with one slash of the keen blade, severed the ropes that bound his ankles loosely together. He listened just a moment. All was still on the junk. He stooped down and finished adjusting the bandage to the senseless outlaw's wounded arm.

But he did not linger long on the pirate craft. Throwing a rope over the side of the junk, he slid down into the water and swam away.

No mishap occurred to him in the water, and soon he was following the sands of the beach to the northeast.

At daybreak he came upon a British gunboat lying a little way off the shore, and in response to his signals, a boat put out and took him aboard. That evening he was landed in Swatow. He found the missionary's son very ill with a stubborn fever; but Curtin took up the battle just in time, and at the end of a week had the satisfaction of witnessing the boy's recovery.

STRANDED ON A CHIMNEY.

"Unravel your stocking, John; begin at the toe," was a sentence which many an old-time schoolboy learned well, for it appeared in the school readers of a generation ago. It was the solution found by a quick-witted wife for the problem of rescuing her husband from the top of a tall chimney. When he had let down an end of a raveling, she tied a piece of string to it, and eventually sent him up a rope.

Something of the same sort happened not long ago to two chimney builders on Staten Island, N. Y.

They were up on the top of a big new concrete chimney, over one hundred and sixty feet tall, and started to complete their job by tearing away the scaffolding on the inside as they worked down. There was a ladder running all the way down. The men stood on some planks about ten feet down from the top. They ripped up the planks one by one, and shot them down inside the shaft.

The next to the last one, however, went a little crooked, glanced from the wall, hit the ladder, and in a twinkling tore several sections out and left the men standing on a single plank, six feet long

and two feet wide, with no means of going up or down.

It was then noon, and for more than four hours they alternately whistled and shouted in a vain attempt to attract attention. It was nearly five o'clock when another workman happened to come into the chimney at the bottom and heard their cries.

A crowd quickly gathered, and began to wonder what they could do to help. Meanwhile, the prisoners had not been idle: they had torn their flannel shirts to narrow strips and made a rope of them, and this they sent down the chimney slowly.

Firemen were soon at hand, and attached a light line to the improvised rope, and sent it up. The chief's idea was that if they threw it over the top of the chimney and let it down to the ground, he could anchor it there, and they could safely slide down the inside.

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They threw it over the top, but there it stuck, fastened in the soft concrete, and soon they could neither pull it toward them nor pay it out; yet they dared not trust their weight on it. For some time the rescue was halted, but at last another rope was secured, and with the line already in hand this was hauled up and thrown over the chimney rim. It went without sticking, and was secured on the outside.

The scaffolding that had held in place was only about fifty feet below the men, but they had used so much of their clothing in making ropes that they were both badly burned in sliding that distance.

However, they reached ground in safety, and in a few days were back at work none the worse for the adventure.

A SCRIMMAGE OF LIONS.

Captive lions, like fire flames, are fine things when under control, but when once they get the upper hand then indeed they are terrible. In her book, "Behind the Scenes with Wild Animals," Ellen Velvin describes a battle between a number of these brutes which took place in a showroom at Richmond, Virginia. It came off at a rehearsal, so that the public lost the chance to see it.

Only one man was concerned in the fight. That was Captain Bonavita, who had managed twenty-seven lions at one time. The cause of the fight was the arrival of newcomers from their native jungles.

When the arena was ready for the rehearsal, Bonavita had considerable trouble in getting the animals out, and when the first one finally appeared, it was not in the slow, stately manner in which he usually entered, but in a quick, restless way, which showed that he was in an excitable state. He was followed by seventeen others, all in the same nervous condition.

Instead of getting on the pedestals in their usual way, the lions, with one exception, a big, muscular fellow, began to sniff at the corners of the arena, where the newcomers had been exercising, and every moment added to their rage. Their fierce natures were excited by jealousy, so that when one lion presumed to go over to a corner and follow up the sniffing of another, the first one turned upon him and bit him savagely. The other promptly retaliated, and in the twinkling of an eye they were fighting fiercely.

The temper of the others flashed up like gunpowder, and almost instantly seventeen lions were engaged in a wild, free fight.

The one big fellow who had climbed on his pedestal when he entered still sat there, but at this moment the remaining nine lions appeared in the arena, followed by Bonavita.

The animals rushed forward into the battle; the big lion with an ugly snarl leaped from his pedestal into the thick of the fray, and in an instant twenty-seven lions were fighting with teeth and claws. In the midst of it all stood one man, calm, self-possessed, but with every nerve and muscle at their highest tension, for he knew better than any one else that his life hung in the balance.

Bonavita vainly tried to regain mastery over the fighting beasts. The lions were no longer the puppets of a show; they were the monarchs of the wild, turbulent and savage.

Seeing his power gone, Bonavita did his best to save his own life. He succeeded in getting out, thanks to his wonderful nerve—for he had to jump over the backs of the fighting animals, and in doing so he received a deep wound in the shoulder.

There was nothing to be done but to let the lions fight it out, which they did. For nearly two hours that awful battle raged; but, when the lions were exhausted, Bonavita, wounded as he was, went in and drove them into their cages.

Many of the lions after this terrible fight were seriously injured, and had to be treated for wounds, cuts, and tears; but they had fought themselves out, and the next week they went through their performances as mildly as kittens.

DREDGING FOR GOLD.

The many varying conditions under which gold is found is not the least interesting feature of the history of the yellow metal. In rock, sand, and sea it has been discovered, and even in the deposit of hot springs now in activity. Large nuggets have been discovered in dry gravels, while prospectors have acquired much wealth by extracting gold from river beds, by the process known as panning—i. e., separating the dirt and mud from the metal by shaking the gold-bearing earth or gravel with water in a pan.

While, however, many rivers have been thus exploited, explorers and scientists are agreed that there are still millions of dollars' worth of gold waiting to be unearthed from the bottom of rivers in different parts of the world. In New Zealand and South America, for instance, convincing proof has been obtained that rich deposits of the precious metal still lie at the bottom of many of the rivers of those countries. The gold is usually found in the form of grains at some depth below the surface, imbedded in mud and clay.

There are only two ways of recovering it—namely, either the river bed must be dredged by floating dredgers, or the river must be diverted into another channel while its bed is being stripped. The former method is the one generally adopted, dredgers having been used with considerable success on the Pacific Slope.

Attention has been attracted of late years to the possibilities of recovering gold from the rivers of Peru. For ages the gold-laden quartz of the land of the Incas—the people who covered the walls of their temples with plates of gold and used the precious metal to fashion cooking utensils—has been broken down by the denuding agencies of frost, rain, and snow, and carried into rivers, where it has remained undiscovered, until recent explorations revealed an astonishing source of wealth.

Take the River Inambari and its tributaries, for instance. An examination of 30 miles of this river revealed the fact that it contained gold to the average value of \$1.75 per cubic yard, which could be extracted at a cost of 12 cents only. The result of this examination led to the formation of the Inambari Gold Dredging Concessions, Limited.

Sir Martin Conway some time ago explored upper Peru and the famous gold-producing valleys from which the Incas gained most of their great store of wealth. He came to the conclusion that in a certain area no less than \$10,000,000 profit was to be made by extracting gold from the rivers, and in order to begin obtaining this gold it was only necessary to have a dredge on the spot. The same hour in which the dredge first begins to turn, gold will be won.

The dredges used up to the present have been almost exclusively of the endless-chain bucket or steam-shovel pattern. At one end of the boat is a powerful endless-chain bucket-dredge, which scrapes the gravel from the bottom and elevates it to a revolving screen in the boat. This in turn sifts out the bowlders, which are at once thrown to the bank of the river, while the fine material flows over tables covered with cocoanut matting, which acts like fine riffles, catching the gold in the interstices. The matting is periodically lifted up and thoroughly rinsed off, the rinsings are panned for gold, and the matting returned for another charge.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Added table of contents.

Retained inconsistent hyphenation from original ("straightaway" vs. "straight-away").

Page 9, changed "science of variation" to "science of aviation."

Page 11, added missing apostrophe to "can't catch up."

Page 14, changed "aim" to "air" ("high into the air.").

Page 15, corrected "pratically" to "practically."

Page 17, changed "waster" to "was ter" ("cowboy feller was ter").

Page 18, corrected "earthern" to "earthen" ("pail on the earthen shelf").

Page 21, corrected "himstlf" to "himself" ("How was he to free himself?").

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