

No. 92.—DETECTIVE TALES FOR EVERYONE.—1^D. *Week ending March 10, 1917.*

THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY.

1^D



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HUNTERS; OR,

THE LAW OF THE WILD

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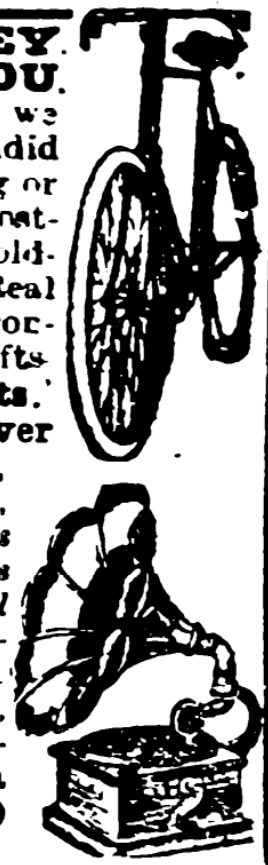
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CHAPTER I.

The Hunt is On—The News at Long's Camp.

ON the whole of the long overland trail to the Yukon there was no more important point than Long's Camp, at the top of the Chilcoot Pass. Although only a few miles from Dyea, the starting-point on the Dyea River and at the very beginning of the long trail, so to speak, Long's held its importance because it was the first stopping-place after the long, gruelling pull up the Pass for those inward bound, and likewise the last relay camp for those outward bound.

There the newcomers met those who had been in the land of gold, and were coming out again either with pockets filled with wealth or with hopes blasted by the remorseless law of the wild. From Long's Camp the trail led down the slopes of Chilcoot to Lake Linderman, twenty-eight miles from Dyea, then on to Bennet and the Dawson trails, across frozen waste of lake and river and wide, awe-inspiring stretches of uncharted white, fringed by mighty peaks, which were nameless.

Any night and every night the Last Out Saloon at Long's Camp was crowded. There, in the friendly warmth of the saloon and dance hall, parkas were thrown open, packs tossed aside, and the dangers left behind, the dangers to come forgotten.

As one entered the Last Out Saloon one came first to the long bar, which stretched along the right-hand side. In the centre was a huge drum stove, usually red-hot, around which were placed several rough wooden chairs and benches. At a convenient point in the square formed by the chairs and benches was a large box of sawdust, into which those who sat about the stove expectorated tobacco-juice, and which, incidentally, they never missed.

Back of the stove was the part of the place given over to dancing, and here every night girls from Dawson, from White Pass City, from Vancouver, Seattle, Tacoma, and the great world outside danced with burly men in parkas and mackinaw coats, and with shoe-packs on their feet.

A single squeaky fiddle provided the music, and although it was very crude, very raw, and very much of the frontier, the Last Out Saloon, nevertheless, formed one of the few bright, warm spots on the long trail from Dyea to Dawson.

At one side of the Last Out were the gaming tables, where those who preferred gambling to dancing could indulge their fancy. At one time or another, during the great rush to the Yukon, every well-known gambler and card-sharp in the great North-West had passed through Long's Camp, and had shuffled the cards at the Last Out.

Honest men and criminals, professional men and sharps, one-time clergymen and confidence men, tenderfeet just out of school, and old-timers who knew every mining camp in the world, all rubbed shoulders at Long's.

And the lodestone of each was the golden finger, which beckoned them from the Yukon. No one questioned anyone else as to where he might have come from or what his past might have been. In the great North-West a man passed for what he was and what he should be, not for what he had been. Probably sixty per cent. of those who went over the Chilcoot Pass were under assumed names, but no one questioned them. Every man was there with just one definite aim in view—to reach the Klondyke and to stake out a claim.

It was on a clear, cold night in the spring that two strangers climbed Chilcoot Pass, and, mushing on through a frost fog, finally pulled up at Long's Camp. Like everyone else who came to Long's, they made for the Last Out Saloon, and, opening the heavy outer door, stamped on moccasined feet into its smoky, friendly warmth.

On this particular night Long's was crowded. Over a score of men, outward bound for Dyea, stood at the long bar spending some of the gold they had dragged from the flanks of the Yukon.

Around the red-hot stove sat a dozen old-timers, who had watched the coming and going during many seasons. From White Pass City and Chilcoot, along the White, the Pelly, and Nordenskold clear to Dawson they operated, and to these old-timers went the smaller, but sure and steady, profits of the wild.

They were the men who broke trail and built relay camps. They were the men who operated the scattered trading-posts throughout the Klondyke—the men who followed the migration of the big caribou herds each autumn, and shot down thousands of tons of meat.

They were the men who collected the money of the gold-seekers, both coming and going, and they were the men who would ultimately win out in the Klondyke.

At the gaming tables were men going out and men coming in, with the usual sprinkling of professionals, who were always ready to relieve a man of the strike he had made, be it large or small. Indeed, many a man made Long's Camp with a rich stake in his pocket and the firm intention of taking it back with him to civilisation, and many a man never got past Long's Camp with it.

When it was gone, the only thing to do was to turn back again with those going in. And as he mushed along the trail to join a new rush, he would curse his luck, and make that oft-broken resolve that when he had another stake he would travel from Dawson to civilisation, and touch neither drink nor cards.

On the dance floor the usual crowd was dancing, and at the edge of it were grouped men in mackinaw coats and parkas, waiting for a chance to claim one of the girls as a partner.

The two newcomers loosened the poke-strings of their packs, and dumped them into one corner of the saloon. Then, throwing back their parka hoods, they stamped the snow from their feet and walked across to the stove.

As they did so the light from one of the swinging oil lamps overhead shone full upon them, revealing the fact that while one of them was a man grown,

the other was but a lad. Yet boyish-looking as was the younger, his passage of the Chilcoot was far from being the first adventurous journey he had taken, for the new arrivals were Nelson Lee and Nipper, and probably no lad living had travelled more widely than had Nipper.

With his parka hood thrown back, Nelson Lee nodded to the old-timers who sat around the stove, receiving friendly greetings in return. They discussed the condition of the trail up from Dyea for a few minutes, then Lee went across to the bar to order hot drinks and food. They had the drinks at the bar, then passed into an adjoining room for the food. And by the time they emerged once more the fun had reached its height.

They stood watching the dancers a little time, and a close observer might have noticed that Nelson Lee glanced keenly at every man who went out over the floor. Then they sauntered round to the gaming tables, where they scrutinised every player and every idle watcher. Their course had brought them back near the stove again, and they were just about to sit down when the door opened and a man stamped into the place.

His parka hood and his beard were white with the night frost of the trail, and at first it was difficult to tell what his age might have been. But when he had thrown back his hood, and the heat of the place had dissipated the frost from his beard, it could be seen that the whiteness had not all been due to the frost of the trail, for he was a man past middle age.

He hailed the old-timers by the stove genially and by name. Then his eyes fell on Nelson Lee, widening in amazement as they did so. He stared at Lee for a few seconds, then, as Lee rose and smilingly held out a hand, the old-timer stuttered:

“Is it—can it be——”

Lee interrupted him before his name had been spoken, and something in his eye warned the old-timer that he did not wish it mentioned there. The old-timer, wise in his generation, merely mumbled something for a name. Then, taking Lee's arm, he walked across to the bar with him. When they were standing at one end of the bar alone, he said in a low tone:

“It is you, Lee, isn't it?”

Lee nodded.

“Perfectly right,” he said, “but I didn't want my name spoken out. Not that I'm travelling under an assumed name, for I'm not. I had no idea you were in the Yukon district, Temple,” he went on. “It's years since I've seen you.”

Temple, the old-timer, smiled.

“It must be ten years since we met in Mexico,” he said. “I've heard about you frequently since then. And when I was in London a couple of years ago I intended looking you up.”

“Why on earth didn't you?” asked Lee.

“Well, as a matter of fact, I was only there a week, on my way to Australia, and I had so many things to attend to I couldn't seem to get round to it. By the way, when I saw you in Mexico you were on a man hunt. Did you ever get your man?”

Lee nodded grimly.

“I got him in Mexico City,” he said. “And, Temple, I'll tell you something. I'm on a man hunt now.”

The old-timer looked surprised.

“On a man hunt up here!” he exclaimed. “You've got your work cut out. There's no law but the law of the wild up here, Lee.”

“I know that,” responded Lee. “But, nevertheless, I'm going after my man, and I'm going to get him.”

“Is he a newcomer?”

"Yes. I have followed him all the way from London. He's a forger—put over a forgery of a hundred thousand pounds in London, and got away with it. He forged some South American Government bonds, and sold them to a private banking firm. He had two weeks start of me in England, but I managed to trace him to Montreal.

"In Montreal I discovered that he had been in the Yukon and Alaska, and it occurred to me that he might make back for his old stamping ground. In Toronto I found I was just a week behind him, but I lost a few days in Vancouver picking up the trail there. There were indications that he had made for Japan, but that was only a blind, and I finally traced him to Prince Rupert.

"I reached Prince Rupert, to discover that he had gone on to Dyea, and, of course, I made up my mind he was heading for the Yukon by way of the Chilcoot Pass. I got track of him in Dyea all right, and ascertained that he came up the Pass yesterday. I thought I might overtake him at Long's Camp to-night, but I can't see him in the place."

"What is his name, and what does he look like?" asked Temple, the old-timer.

"He passed under the name of Smith in London," replied Lee; "but in Montreal I discovered that he had travelled under the name of Costigan, and it is under that name he has come north."

The old-timer's brows came down.

"Costigan!" he said quickly. "There was a Costigan on the Yukon some years ago. He was a crook and a gambler, and was mixed up in a nasty affair on the Pelly. I didn't hear what became of him after that."

"Did your man have a long scar on his right cheek?" asked Lee.

"Yes, he did," answered Temple.

"Then I should not be surprised to discover that it is the same man," said Lee. "The man I am after is travelling, as I said, under the name of Costigan, and he has a long, vivid scar on his right cheek."

"I'll bet it's the same man," said Temple. "If he has gone on from here he must have made for Linderman Landing. I came across to the right of Linderman, and didn't stop there. But if he has come to Long's and gone on, I can soon find out for you. I am building relay camps along the Pelly, and my partner is sitting over there by the stove. If your man went through Long's my partner will know it. I'll get hold of him and ask him in a few minutes. If Costigan is still at Long's my partner will know that, too."

"I'll be much obliged to you," said Lee. "If Costigan has gone on to Linderman it looks as though he were trying to make Dawson City."

"That will be his aim all right," grunted Temple. "The Yukon is his old stamping-ground, and he'll feel safe there. You'll have your work cut out, Lee, to bring him out of it."

Lee shrugged.

"When I go back he goes with me," he said.

They chatted a few minutes longer, then they walked back to the fire, and Lee sat down again beside Nipper while Temple went across to speak to his partner.

It was about half an hour later that he signalled to Lee, and, rising, sauntered over to the bar. Lee followed him.

"Your man has passed through Long's all right," whispered Temple. "My partner—Jim Price—says Costigan struck Long's last night. He used to know him on the Yukon, and he recognised him at once. He says, too, that Costigan seemed very flush, and that here, at the Last Out Saloon, he ran into a couple of gamblers who used to operate at Selkirk and Dawson.

Price says they all belong to the same gang. Anyway, that pair—Abe Mattoe and Jerry Constantine—went on with Costigan this morning. They bought three teams of dogs here at Long's and made for the White River trail. They're probably at Linderman Landing or Bennet Post to-night."

Lee tapped the bar thoughtfully.

"I suppose there will be others of the old gang still on the Yukon," he said.

"You can just bet your life!" replied Temple. "In the old days Costigan had them all organised, but since he left they've been broken up. It looks as though he were starting already to get them together again, and, if he does, there'll be some doings on the Yukon again."

"I'll have to start after him the first thing in the morning," said Lee. "I wonder if you can tell me, Temple, if I can pick up a dog team here at Long's?"

"You can have mine," replied Temple promptly. "They're still fresh, and they've only done forty miles in the last week. There are no better dogs between here and Dawson. They're Mackenzie River huskies, and the lightest one weighs a hundred and thirty-five pounds. Are you packing much stuff?"

Lee shook his head, and pointed to the two packs in the corner.

"That's all we've got," he said. "We're travelling light, and we'll get what we need as we go along. I'll buy your dogs, Temple, and I'll get away from here early in the morning. I think Costigan knows he's being followed, and in that case he will not lose any time on the trail."

"Then you will have to try and catch him between here and White River," said the old-timer. "White River is the last post before Selkirk, and it's a straight jump of two hundred and fifty miles between them."

Lee nodded.

"Yes, we mustn't lose any time," he said. "Let's get down to business and settle about the dogs; then I'll make my arrangements to get away early in the morning."

It did not take them long to conclude the matter, for the simple reason that Temple asked a fair price and Lee paid it without question. Then he arranged at the Last Out for some grub for the trail, and after that he and Nipper turned in.

At five o'clock the next morning Lee and Nipper were ready to leave for Linderman Landing. There were several other teams going through, and they had collected outside the Last Out Saloon, where the huskies were snarling and snapping savagely.

Just across from the saloon a big pile of brush had been laid, and soon it would flare up to light them out of Long's on to the first dip of the trail. But as yet a match had not been touched to it, and the frosty night still held everything in its embrace.

Overhead the stars sparkled coldly, like glittering points of steel set in a purple dome. From the north came the flaming Northern Lights, one moment surging up like a river of fire, the next receding and stabbing the sky with long, vicious points of light. Every snow crystal in that waste was a frozen diamond from which the flaming sky lights were thrown back in millions of facets of red and cold-blue, green and yellow.

Back of it all was the heavy, sombre purple of the timber line, and, ahead, the indigo pool of shadow which marked the dip in the trail. It was a flaming night without heat—a night of intense colour and sombre shadow. It was the night of the Far North.

Temple and his partner, Jim Price, were on the scene at five o'clock to see that Lee and Nipper got started all right. Temple had not exaggerated in

his statements about the huskies which he had sold to Lee. They were all heavy-bodied Mackenzie River dogs, with a big strain of wolf in them, and the leader would have made over a hundred and forty pounds—a hundred and forty pounds of solid bone and muscle. Behind him ranged the four other dogs, the wheel dog being last. And, like a good musher, Temple examined their paws by the light of a lantern before they started out.

There were still some bits of ice clinging between the cushions of the paws, and these he bit out with his teeth. There was no need to break the trail from Long's Camp to Linderman, for there was sufficient traffic along it to keep it open.

Lee decided, too, to allow some of the other dog teams to start off first. Nipper was to lie on the sled with the packs and do the driving, while Lee himself would handle the tail rope and run close to the sled, resting from time to time on the tail.

They were all ready to start, the lashings of the gee-pole had been examined, the harness had been scrutinised, and the packs strapped on securely, when the great pile of brush flared up, and with a loud "Mush, mush, mush!" the leading dog teams got away, tearing down the trail and into the dip where the mounting flames of the brush pile became lost in the deep pool of shadow.

Nipper threw himself flat on the sled, cracked his whip, and roared out "Mush!" as had the others. Lee grasped the tail rope and waved his hand to the two old-timers who stood watching their departure. Then the dogs leaped away, and, with the wise old leader following the trail of the sled ahead, they went dashing into the dip with the keen, frosty air tingling about their ears.

Gripping the tail rope firmly, Lee kept close to the sled while they shot into the dip and up the other side. Then, as they reached the crest and started on the long down-run to Linderman Lake, he threw himself on the tail of the sled and clutched the side. They were travelling downwards, and at a terrific pace. As Temple had said, the dogs had had little work lately, and every instinct of the trail was aroused in them by the speeding sleds ahead.

The stars still hung bright in the cold sky, and the stabbing flames of the Northern Lights at times seemed to envelop the whole northern stellar hemisphere. Ahead of them still hung the snow smoke of the leading sled, and on the still, frosty air their own snow smoke trailed a hundred yards behind them.

Now and then the trail crossed a small creek, and here Lee would leap to his feet again to run beside the sled and keep the tail rope taut. At the speed they were travelling a hummock in the ice might mean disaster, and if the sled should once start to slough it might sweep all the dogs off their feet and mix sled, dogs, and humans up in a sliding, snapping, fighting tangle. But Lee had mushed before, and knew just how much weight to bring to bear on the tail rope.

Once across the creek and on the main trail again he would throw himself back on the sled, and they would go dashing on with the huskies snapping viciously as they ran and the snow smoke lying like a plume behind them.

So they came down the trail to Linderman Lake, and, crossing the ice in the wake of the other sleds, brought up at Linderman Landing. There they paused for breakfast, and afterwards Lee and Nipper scouted about the place seeking news of the man they sought.

They were only able to discover that a big crowd had mushed on to Bennet Post the day before, and, thinking Costigan would be with that crowd, Lee prepared to move on at once.

Just as they were ready to start three more teams dashed in from Long's, and, not stopping at Linderman, raced along the Bennet Post trail. On the leading sled Lee recognised Temple and his partner, Jim Price. Temple shouted as he went past that he would see Lee at Bennet Post or White River. Then Lee grasped the tail rope and they raced on through the dawn towards Bennet Post.

Soon the flaring lights of Linderman Landing were behind them, and the slow, grey dawn of the north was lighting the way. The steely stars had disappeared some time since, and the drear darkness of the early northern morning had succeeded.

The trail from Linderman to Bennet was still a fair one, and although Lee and Nipper were more heavily loaded than some of the teams, none succeeded in passing them.

They reached Bennet Post that day to discover that Temple and his partner, Jim Price, had continued on to White River. There was no sign of Costigan, and it was now apparent to Lee that the fleeing forger was losing no time in getting to the Yukon, where, no doubt, he deemed he would be safe.

Notwithstanding this, Lee determined to stop for the night at Bennet Post, for he now began to figure on the possibility that the trail would lead clear on to Dawson, and he had no intention of crocking up his dogs early in the game.

He and Nipper turned in immediately after supper, and slept soundly until five o'clock. Then they prepared to start once more, and by a quarter to six, with another flaming night lighting the way, they started for White River.

Almost the first person they saw as they dashed into White River was Temple, the old-timer. In fact, he had come along from the post to meet them, and as the dogs came to a sudden stop he said:

"They haven't gone the White River trail at all, Lee. They have dodged here, at White River, and have headed for the Nordenskold. It looks as though they were going to try to make Dawson by the old Dalton trail."

"The Nordenskold! The old Dalton trail!" exclaimed Lee. "What do you mean?"

The old-timer waved his hand towards the west.

"The Nordenskold is over there," he said. "It's a shorter trail to Dawson than the White River trail, but it's more difficult. To get to Dawson that way you work over from White River and cross the Kennet River. Then you pick up the Nordenskold and work down the middle fork of the Nordenskold to Selkirk, at the mouth of the Pelly; then it's a straight run down the Yukon to Dawson. And that's the way your man has gone, Lee."

"Are there any relay camps on the way?"

"On the Kennet there is a Tutchi Indian village, and on the Nordenskold itself my partner, Jim Price, has a camp. That's about six miles from the Kennet. But there's nothing between Price's camp and Selkirk. But once you pick up the Nordenskold it isn't so bad. If you watch out for the bad places you can run the whole way to Selkirk on the river. Or you can take the White River trail and try to get to Selkirk before Costigan makes it by the Dalton trail."

Lee shook his head stubbornly.

"No," he said. "If Costigan has gone by the Dawson trail we'll go the same way."

"Well, I waited here to tell you," said Temple. "I thought you'd do that, so I told my partner to be on the look-out for you."

"Has he gone on to the Nordenskold, then?" asked Lee.

Temple nodded.

"He left about two hours ago," he said. "You stick to the broken trail and you're bound to pick up the camp. But let me tell you something about the Kennet River, Lee. The Indians have got a big mob of dogs at their village that hunts down the river every night. Take my tip and cross the Kennet during daylight. If you get away from here soon you ought to be able to make my partner's camp on the Nordenskold to-night."

Lee nodded.

"We'll get something to eat and leave at once," he said.

Temple volunteered to look after their dogs for them. So, turning the team over to the old-timer, Lee and Nipper hurried along to get something to eat. They satisfied their hunger with a juicy caribou steak, washed down with scalding tea. Then, emerging from the restaurant, they prepared for the run through to the Nordenskold.

Lee rearranged the packs a little, and loosened one of the rifles in case it should be needed. Then he took off his mackinaw coat and strapped it on the sled, preferring to run with only his parka. Nipper, who was still to attend to the sled work, did not remove his mackinaw.

While these preparations were going forward, Temple had been instructing Lee as to the trail. And then, when they were ready to start, the dogs were swung to the left of White River, and sent flying westwards towards the Kennet.

It was early afternoon when they got away from White River, and, with ordinary luck, they should make the Kennet before dusk. From the Kennet to Price's Camp, on the Nordenskold, it was fourteen miles, and as Price had said the trail should be new, they had little fear of missing it. If they should be delayed, it was Lee's idea to drive up the river to the Tutchi Indian settlement and remain there for the night.

With Lee clinging to the tail-rope, they went flying up the trail, climbing a little from White River to the crest of the rise, from which they would run down to the Kennet. It was a well-defined trail, picked out by a master trail-breaker, for it followed the easiest slopes of the ground, and finally reached the crest of the rise in a wide sweep.

As they topped the crest and looked back towards White River, they saw Temple standing clear of the buildings, and looking like a tiny black speck against the white background. Lee waved to him, then the sled went flying over the crest, and, throwing himself on the tail, he clung on for the tearing run down to the lake and river country beneath.

On reaching the bottom of the hill he leaped to his feet again, and raced along beside the sled, while the dogs dashed down a bank and tore across a small lake. Then it was over frozen lake, and hill, and creek, and gorge the trail led all through the grey afternoon, until, just when dusk was descending, they sighted a broad, level expanse of white ahead, which they knew must be the Kennet.

Nipper wielded the whip energetically, and they went dashing on past thickening lines of spruce, until at last the trail broke on to the surface of the river. Here the frozen snow was hard and wind-swept, and the trail not so plainly defined. But, as he raced along, Lee noted that it branched in two, and, shouting to Nipper to heave on the gee pole, he brought the dogs to a standstill. He studied the branching trail for a few moments, then said:

"Temple didn't tell me anything about the trail across the Kennet branching; my lad. It seems to part here, but the more distinct marks go to the north. I wonder which we had better follow?"

"The northern branch must be the most travelled," said Nipper.

"Quite true," responded Lee. "But that doesn't say it is the right one. However, since Temple didn't mention it, I suppose we had better stick to the northern branch."

With that decision they started across the Kennet towards the distant bank; but, about two-thirds of the way across, Lee had suddenly to throw all his strength on the tail rope as the dogs swerved wildly, and circled round a cloudy spot ahead.

"Shell ice!" yelled Nipper, as they dashed past the spot. "There's more of it ahead. Watch it, gov'nor."

Lee was too occupied in keeping the tail of the sled steady to reply, and he had just got it running smoothly again when the dogs swerved a second time, and raced round the edge of some cloudy shell ice, which seemed to stretch clear to the shore, now lying some thirty yards away.

Lee, who had been pounding at full speed beside the sled, saw the danger when it was too late. He made a frantic effort to swing the tail of the sled around, and succeeded. But, as it shot away on solid ice, he himself went sliding ahead towards the treacherous shell ice.

Realising that the impetus of his running would carry him into the shell ice, he threw himself bodily down in order to stop his momentum. But it was too late, for, strive as he would to cling on to the treacherous surface of the river, he went sliding along to the very edge of the shell ice.

Then there came a sharp, cracking sound, and the next moment he was in the icy water up to his armpits. For an instant the shock was so terrific that he was literally paralysed. Then, as the realisation of his danger rushed upon him, his arms rose and fell mightily as he thrashed his way to the shore.

In the meantime Nipper had got control of the dogs, and had brought them to a standstill. Now he came flying back towards the edge of the shell ice, but, without stopping in his progress, Lee called:

"Get ashore quick! Get some boughs down and light a fire. It's the only thing you can do to help me."

Nipper, comprehending that Lee spoke the truth, swung the dogs again and raced shorewards. He brought them to a standstill in a clump of spruce, then, jerking out his hunting-knife, dashed for a blasted spruce, the branches of which should light easily.

Slashing them off, he scooped out a deep hole in the snow, and laid them cross-wise. Then he lit them, and by the time Lee had managed to smash his way through the shell ice to the bank a big blaze was mounting up.

Nipper ran to help him as he staggered up the bank, his clothes already stiffening in the intense cold.

While Lee got as close to the fire as he dared, Nipper unstrapped one of the packs and got out some dry clothing. Then he unrolled the blankets, and, together, they managed to rip off Lee's freezing garments. They had to work swiftly, for in that intense cold the chill of the icy water on Lee's chest was full of danger. But they finally managed the change, and then, putting a pannikin over the fire, Nipper melted some snow and made some tea.

Lee drank great draughts of it, and as the scalding liquid coursed through him his body warmed in response.

In the meantime night had fallen, and already through the spruce-trees they could see the steely jewels of the night sky. More time had passed than they thought, and now that Lee considered the danger had been averted, they decided to push on without delay.

While Lee wrapped his parka about him, Nipper strapped the pack and blankets on the sled again. Then they got the dogs on the trail once more,

and with Lee running beside the sled to keep his blood moving they started on the fourteen-mile mush to Price's Camp, on the Nordenskold.

They had gone, perhaps, a mile, when suddenly far behind them a strange sound rose. Through the slush—slush—slush of the runners and the crunch of Lee's moccasins on the hard-packed snow the sound at first did not seize upon their attention. But as it rose persistently, and grew steadily nearer, Lee suddenly lifted his head and brought the dogs to a stop. Then the sound was borne to them with startling distinctness, and Nipper came to his feet with a bound.

"Wolves, gov'nor!" he exclaimed, glancing back over the trail.

Lee was standing motionless, listening. Then suddenly he made a sharp gesture to the lad.

"On to the sled quick, Nipper!" he cried. "They are not wolves, but worse than wolves. They are the dogs from the Tutchi Indian village, which Temple said hunted down the Kennet every night. They fear men less than wolves—and they are always half-starved. If they scent us it will be a race for life."

As Nipper threw himself on to the sled, the dogs raced on once more. And, sometimes running beside the sled, sometimes kneeling upon it, Lee sent them at top speed along the trail to the Nordenskold.

A mile slipped by, two miles, and still the howling Bedlam behind them grew nearer and nearer. Lying flat on his face, Nipper got the rifles loosened ready for quick work, panting as he did so to Lee, who was now kneeling on the sled:

"How many do you think there are, gov'nor?"

"Temple said over two hundred," said Lee. "There is no hope of shooting them off. Our only chance is to outrace them, and we are travelling heavily while they have nothing to hold them back."

They were on a down grade now, and the Mackenzie River huskies, scenting the danger which lay behind them, were flying along, their bodies almost touching the ground as their legs stretched before and behind them. Lee was easing the load as much as he could, but the pace was a stiff one, and from time to time it was absolutely essential that he throw himself on the sled to recover.

At the bottom of the slope down which they were racing they broke on to the level surface of a small lake, and, as they went tearing across it, Lee leaped to his feet once more. When they were about half way across he looked back, and his heart leaped within him as he saw a great, dark-moving cloud come tearing on to the lake.

The Tutchi Indian dogs were less than a mile behind now, with six miles still to go. As they raced up the slope on the other side of the lake the pack behind seemed to gain on them with terrible swiftness. Then the Mackenzie River dogs were over the crest, and another long downward run was ahead of them. Two more miles, and the pack was less than half a mile behind them. A few of the leaders were even closer, and Lee's heart sank within him as a sharp upward rise appeared just ahead of them.

He pushed his dogs frantically, running up the slope beside them as he did so. Overhead the Northern Lights were flaming blood red, lighting up the snow on every side in patches of deep crimson. Then, as the lights receded, the crimson would turn to black shadow, with only the cold stars reflecting back from the frozen snow crystals.

The howling of the hunt pack behind them was now a perfect pandemonium, and as they reached the top of the short rise Lee looked back. Less than a quarter of a mile separated them from the leaders now, and they had still several miles to go. As they started down the slope he threw him-

self on the sled, but shook his head as Nipper suggested that he was fresh and should now take up the running.

As the Mackenzie dogs raced down the slope, their lean flanks pounding with the strain of the race, Lee and Nipper looked behind once more, and as they did so a black wave seemed to sweep over the crest of the hill and roll down towards them. On and on they tore, crossing a small creek, then up a slope, and down again to another small lake.

The leaders of the hunt pack had crept up to within two hundred yards, and were now travelling without a sound. Only at the rear of the pack were any of the dogs howling. As they went up the short rise from the lake Lee sprang off the sled and grasped the tail-rope once more.

"Pick off a leader if you can, Nipper," he shouted.

Nipper, throwing the muzzle of a rifle to the rear of the sled, lowered his cheek against the stock and pulled the trigger. The leading dog of the pack sprang in the air and rolled over in the snow.

A black wave engulfed him. The pack seemed to quiver rather than pause. Then they swept on, leaving behind them under the flaming night-lights of the sky a picked skeleton, white almost as the snow upon which it lay.

Another, and another, and another Nipper brought down, but it only served as a sop to the pack, which stripped the carcass, running. Then they topped the next rise, and for a moment lost sight of the pack once more. They knew not how far it was yet to the Nordenskold, nor did they know even that they were on the right track. As a matter of fact, it was still two miles to Price's cabin, and ahead of them lay a solid mile of smooth down grade.

As the danger approached still closer the Mackenzie River huskies seemed endowed with a supernatural strength. Full well they knew the meaning of what was behind them. And full well they knew that safety lay more with man than in aimless flight. Down that mile they literally flew, and during its course the leaders of the hound pack were only able to wear down the distance another fifty yards.

But as they struck the level the pack began to gain again, and it was with grim despair clutching at his heart that Lee began running once more. From time to time Nipper picked off one of the leaders, but, as before, it served only to cause a quivering motion throughout the living wave which pursued them. And behind, at intervals, lay the cleaned skeleton marking the trail as one of death.

Along the last mile of the race the pursuing pack gained rapidly. Fifty yards was cut off, then twenty, then forty. And so near were the leaders now that the front surge of the wave changed to an edging of grey.

As the shadow of a spruce clump made an inky pool across the trail, Nipper could see the eyes of the pursuing dogs gleaming like balls of fire. Then the grey crest of the wave would surge out under the flaming night-lights of the sky again, and the fiery orbs would disappear.

After half a mile Lee was forced to throw himself on the sled again, but as he noted that the Mackenzie River dogs were beginning to flag, he summoned all his strength and sprang off the sled once more.

Now the leaders of the pack were up to within forty yards of the sled, and Nipper was picking them off rapidly. It was impossible to miss, and as three went down in quick succession it served to halt the pack for one precious moment. Then it surged on again, and, as they swung through a small clump of spruce, Lee debated whether they should take to the trees.

His own dogs were still striving mightily, but animal strength could not for ever endure such a strain. And it was more from thought of the dogs

than himself and Nipper that Lee decided to make one last spurt for safety.

As the pack dashed into the clump of spruce after them their bodies became blended with the heavy shadow. Their eyes blazed out, and it seemed as if a thousand fiendish orbs were pursuing them through the night. Then, as the sled raced out from the clump of spruce, Lee saw ahead a wide stretch of white which he thought must be the Nordenskold.

The next instant a shot rang out, and one pair of flaming eyes disappeared for ever. Following that they heard a man shout, and the Mackenzie River huskies instinctively swung from the trail. They raced full tilt towards the open door of a shack, in which a man was standing, firing rapidly at the pursuing pack.

Nipper just managed to bring them to a stop before the door, then the man sprang out and assisted them to bundle the dogs and sled bodily into the hut. They hurled themselves after, and slammed the door shut just as the wave of howling grey swept upon the shack. Another quarter of a mile, and Lee and Nipper would have been swamped beneath that surging wave.

Like the Mackenzie River huskies, they dropped to the floor, panting with exhaustion, while Jim Price—for it was Temple's partner's shack they had reached—thrust the barrel of his rifle through a loophole in the door, and began firing indiscriminately into the howling pack outside.

For two hours the three of them kept up the slaughter. Then, baffled, and howling in impotent rage, the remnants of the Tutchi Indian pack turned and made back for the Kennet, the only result of their hunting being their own kind.

And it was only when Jim Price had elucidated that Nelson Lee knew Costigan and his companions had deliberately made the trail over the Kennet beside the shell ice.

"They're humping it down the middle fork of the Nordenskold now," remarked Jim Price, as they prepared to turn in.

"Then down the Nordenskold we go in the morning," grunted Lee, as he rolled up in his blanket.

CHAPTER II.

Dawson at Last—The Gold Rush to Caribou Creek—The Flight—Costigan's Escape.

NELSON LEE was wrong in prophesying that he and Nipper would get away from Price's Camp the next morning. They found that the Mackenzie River huskies were too crooked up by the race to continue, so they spent the next day and night at Price's Camp. On the second morning, however, they got away down the Nordenskold, with full instructions from Price how to make Selkirk by the Dalton trail. It was a little over two hundred miles, and Lee figured on making it in four days.

It proved to be less difficult than he had anticipated, and by handling his dogs carefully he was able to keep to the schedule he had set himself. On the fourth evening they made Selkirk, where Lee was able to discover that Costigan and his two companions had passed only thirty hours before.

All down the Nordenskold to the Pelly they had seen signs of Costigan's camps, and Lee had strongly hoped that he would overtake his man at Selkirk. But Costigan was evidently travelling with the definite idea to reach Dawson as quickly as possible, and he had not tarried long at Selkirk.

The main trail down the Yukon to Dawson was well broken, and after a short pause at Selkirk Lee and Nipper started down it.

They reached Dawson to find the place in the throes of a new gold rush. For some distance along the Yukon before they reached Dawson they had passed many dog teams racing up river at top speed. But it was not until they got to Dawson itself they discovered the reason.

A new gold strike had been made on Caribou Creek, about seventy miles from Dawson, and it seemed that every man in the place was joining in the rush. Lee and Nipper drove their team along to be taken care of. Then they made their way up Main Street to McLeod's restaurant in order to get a much-needed meal. Main Street was crowded with men in mackinaws heading for the river, and as they sat down at the table Lee said:

"I fancy our chase will not end in Dawson after all, Nipper. Costigan and his bunch will join in the rush, unless I am greatly mistaken. A new camp acts like a magnet to gentlemen of his kidney. If he still fears pursuit there could be no better place for him to hide than in a new rush camp. We'll scout about as soon as we finish here. But, unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall have to mush along to Caribou Creek with the rest of them."

At the time Lee and Nipper reached Dawson that place had passed the zenith of its boom, but was still an active centre of the gold district. River steamers were already plying up the fifteen hundred miles from the mouth of the Yukon, and the town was beginning to lose the first crude appearance which had marked it during the earlier gold rushes.

The first feverish boom was over, but the Yukon had steadied down to regular mining life, and, like all such places, the natural centre had lost a good deal of its boom population. As good a meal could be bought there as could be obtained in civilisation if one wanted to pay for it.

On this particular occasion Lee and Nipper were eating caribou steak at a dollar and a half, or, roughly, six shillings a plate. The day before the price had been a dollar. But with over four hundred men rushing Caribou Creek, the stock of caribou meat in Dawson had been materially depleted. And, as on previous occasions, the eating houses boosted up the price while they could.

When Lee and Nipper had finished the meal they made their way out of McLeod's, and strolled up Main Street, past the New Hotel and Opera House, which were then being erected. The crowds were still heading riverwards, for it was just past noon, and the main rush to Caribou was still proceeding.

Lee and Nipper went into the hotel, and from there visited almost every bar in the place, searching for Costigan. But he was not to be found. And as they retraced their steps back along Main Street Lee said:

"There's nothing for it, Nipper, but to follow the rush to Caribou Creek. I feel certain Costigan has gone there."

"How about the dogs, gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

"They'll be all right," responded Lee. "They had it pretty easy coming along from Selkirk, and they are better dogs than the average. We'll give them an hour, then we'll start. Let's go down to the river while we're waiting, and watch the teams start off."

They strolled along to the bank of the Yukon, and paused at the point where the crowd was gathered, watching the start up river towards Caribou Creek. Across from them, on the left bank of the Yukon, there was another black line of watchers, who had crossed the ice to watch the start of the teams from that side. In a good many cases a man had his running mate, and where this occurred one of them was feverishly strapping on the packs while the other saw to the harness and the lashings of the gee pole.

A gold rush in the Klondyke, such as that rush to Caribou Creek, is one

where the securing of a claim may depend on a very small thing. That seventy miles up the river to Caribou Creek would be a mad race, in which the laggards would find themselves ousted from that part of the valley where gold had been found. Then would come the locating and measuring of the claim, after which a return must be made to Dawson for the registration.

Five hundred feet along the creek by two thousand in depth was the size of claim allowed by the law in those days, and this meant probably less than two hundred claims would take up all the area in the creek where gold showed. In that case over half of those who were joining in the rush would be too late. And for this reason every nerve was being strained to be one of the early ones away.

It is almost impossible to picture the line of pandemonium which stretched across the Yukon from bank to bank. Dogs were snarling and snapping on every side. There were over a hundred dog teams jammed into the line—which meant about five hundred dogs—every one a savage huskie, born in the wild north between Alaska and the Mackenzie, and with the breed of the wolf in him.

Every man was travelling as light as possible, and some, in their anxiety to locate, went tearing off up the river without bothering about packs at all. They were trusting to beg, borrow, buy, or steal what they needed on the Caribou.

For nearly an hour Lee and Nipper stood on the bank watching the teams get away. Then they went back for their own team, and, hitching up the dogs, swung along to the river. There was nothing there to delay them. Dogs and men had been travelling together now for a week. The dogs had worked in the same team for much longer than that, and every huskie, from the wheeler, past the fourth, third, and second dog, to the tough old leader, knew exactly what work it had to do.

Lee and Nipper had brought their team work down to a science, and now, with packs ready strapped on, they swung up the Yukon in the wake of half a dozen teams which had started at the same moment, and the dogs settled down to steady travelling. Lee was to take the first half of the journey on the sled, while Nipper handled the tail-rope. Then they were to change, and this arrangement would bring them into Caribou Creek with Nipper on the sled and Lee at the tail-rope.

Behind them came several teams, which had left shortly after their departure. But Lee made no effort to push the dogs to their utmost, for, unlike the others, he and Nipper were not racing to stake a claim. They were on a man hunt, and until it was necessary Lee did not intend to put his team to the strain. He knew not at what moment he might need all they could give him. They had had one experience of such a contingency between the Kennet and the Nordenskold, when the half-starved pack from the Tutchi Indian village had coursed them for fourteen miles. Therefore they watched team after team go flying past them.

But as the Mackenzie River dogs settled down to a steady lope of their own, both Lee and Nipper noticed that as the afternoon wore on they in turn passed several teams which had overtaken them an hour or two before. The breed of the Mackenzie River huskie was showing itself, as it had shown itself before, and Lee knew that before they reached the Caribou they would overtake still more teams.

The main trail up the Yukon swung from the left bank to the right as the condition of the ice made it necessary. But there was no need here to search for the trail. The flying teams ahead of them were sufficient guide.

As dusk came on and the steel lights in the sky shone out, they lost sight

of most of the teams ahead, though they could still hear the shouts of the men, and behind them arose a roar as the main cataract of the race dashed along in their wake.

Those who started late were driving furiously, recklessly, and Lee and Nipper were to find that, under cover of the night, some of them were driving treacherously. It was not until two teams came racing along on either side of them that Lee saw they were running a risk which must be guarded against. He shouted as the two sleds shot in dangerously close to them, but as the other drivers paid no heed, he began to realise that he and Nipper were being worked into a trap, the idea of which was to put them out of the race.

Before he could shout a second warning the sleds on either side came crashing in against them at the same moment. He had just time to sing out to Nipper when the force of the blow caused their sled to leap into the air, and, as the other two pulled away, to come down on its side runners.

He and Nipper clung on for dear life, and by a terrific effort Lee managed to heave the sled over on its runners again. The strain had dragged on the dogs severely, but the quick righting of the sled steadied them before they got tangled up.

The two plotters, seeing the failure of their first attempt, lashed their dogs in again until their sleds were starting on a sharp slide which would send them crashing once more into the sled on which Lee and Nipper clung. As he saw that they intended to repeat their act, Lee bent close to Nipper and said:

“Wait until they get close, then get hold of the uprights. When I shout, heave up with all your strength.”

There was little time to prepare for what Lee intended to do, for the two other sleds had already started on their swift slide, and the next moment they were running close beside the sled which they had jammed between them. But before the drivers had time to bump in for the crash Lee shouted to Nipper, and, clinging on for dear life, he bent down and clutched one of the uprights. Nipper did likewise.

Then Lee shouted again, and both heaved with all their strength. Up—up each one brought the side of the sled he clutched, until suddenly it went over the balance. Then there came yells and curses and a crash. And as the Mackenzie River dogs dashed onward pulling Lee and Nipper out of the trap, the other two sleds crashed together. The next moment both teams of dogs were in a snarling, snapping tangle, and following that the main body behind swept upon the wreckage.

As Lee and Nipper went flying ahead they left behind them such a tangle of dogs and men and sleds as had never before been seen upon the Yukon.

It was nearly midnight that night when a bright flare appeared ahead of them on their left. Someone had lit a huge fire at the entrance to Caribou Creek, and, as Lee and Nipper drew still nearer to it, they saw several teams ahead swing round beyond the fire and disappear from view.

A few minutes later they followed suit, and then they burst upon a scene which beggars description.

From the mouth of Caribou Creek up along the left bank as far as the eye could reach were huge brush fires which lit up the whole valley in a weird tangle of flare and shadow. Along the creek and up the sloping left bank were gangs of men moving forward and back, up and down in feverish haste to stake out their claims. As the new arrivals burst into the creek they would drive their teams frantically along beside the bank until they came to the last claim which was being staked. Then they would pull up and make a wild dash to secure the next plot.

Lee and Nipper pulled up in the centre of the creek and watched the play of life about them with keen interest. Not for years had the Klondyke seen such a rush, and for days men would be pouring in from all over the Yukon basin.

Already one enterprising man was busy erecting a shack at the entrance to the creek, and by the morrow a painted cotton sign would probably announce that it was the "Caribou Hotel." There at the point it would form the nucleus for the new settlement, and over its rough counters would go most of the gold secured on the Caribou.

But with this lone exception every one else was concentrating on one thing—the staking out of a claim. And there, along the barren hillside, were plots of ground which, in the summer months to come, would change hands at figures from ten thousand dollars to a million dollars.

Later on, when the placer gold had been worked out, the miners would drift away to a new field, and the side of Caribou would lie lone, and stark, and silent, its scars hidden only when the white blanket of winter descended upon it. But now there was no thought of that. Gold had been found, and there was more there.

The discovery which had caused the rush had been made on the left bank near the point where the Caribou debouched into the Yukon. For that reason the next claims to be staked had been measured out as close to the original find as possible. As the line stretched higher and higher up the creek the possibility of the placer gold extending that far lessened materially. But men would stake and search, even when the hope seemed forlorn, on the chance of striking an outcropping of the gold.

In the bustle about them no one had eyes for Nelson Lee and Nipper. Each was too occupied in pacing out his claim and getting to work at the necessary preliminary arrangements before running back into Dawson to register.

Based on the distance of Caribou Creek from Dawson, each man had twenty-two days in which to locate his claim and register, for the law allowed ten days for a distance of thirty miles from Dawson, and three days for each succeeding ten miles, and, as Caribou Creek was seventy miles, the time worked out at twenty-two days. That meant a good deal of preliminary work could be done before the start was made down the Yukon.

Basing his calculations on the supposition that if Costigan had joined in the rush he would be one of the earliest to arrive on the Caribou, Nelson Lee figured that such being the case, he would be more likely to find him near the mouth of the creek than higher up.

With this idea in mind, he and Nipper left the dogs where they had pulled up, and slipping their automatics into the outer pockets of their mackinaw coats, walked back along the creek scrutinising each man who came within the light of the regularly-placed fires.

Nelson Lee had not followed his man all the way to the Yukon River without a constant strengthening of his determination to take Costigan back with him. While he had one concrete case against the man, there were several other affairs which had been pulled off in London of which Lee strongly suspected Costigan as being the organiser.

His last coup had gone through without a hitch, and, had not several days passed before Nelson Lee was called in on the case, the chances are he would have pinned down his man before he had managed to get away from England.

The other affair had been daringly conceived and boldly carried out. Certain Serial Bonds of a South American Republic had been forged by Costigan. The amounts of these bonds had been a thousand pounds each,

and on the plates he had engraved, Costigan had turned out a hundred of them.

Following that he had posed as a South American banker seeking a loan in London, and for the purposes of his coup, had bought a hundred thousand pounds' worth of the genuine bonds of the Republic. He had numbered his forged bonds with exactly the same serial numbers. Then, after reselling his genuine bonds to a large South American bank, he had gone to a private London banking firm with the bogus bonds.

Naturally, on investigation, the private banking firm had discovered that a hundred thousand pounds' worth of the bonds of the republic in question and of the serial numbers of the bonds offered to them had been duly registered. Considering everything in order, and as the bonds of this republic were known as a good investment, they had duly purchased. But when they had gone to register trouble had started.

Just the day before the South American Bank had registered in their name the genuine bonds which they had purchased from Costigan, and, of course, when the other lot of bonds came in it was discovered that they were a forgery.

Four valuable days had been lost in futile investigation. Then Nelson Lee had been called in, and at the end of a week had been able to discover that Costigan, alias Smith, alias Senor Mendoza, was the man they wanted.

He traced Costigan's flight to Liverpool, but a cable to the Montreal police failed to have the man apprehended on his arrival in Canada. Lee had returned to London, and there his clients had given him carte blanche to go after Costigan and bring him back.

It is already known how Lee and Nipper traced their man to Montreal, then on to Toronto and across the continent to Vancouver.

Costigan must have feared pursuit, for in Vancouver he had booked a passage for Japan, and by this strategy had almost succeeded in fooling Lee. It was only by sheer accident Lee had discovered that while passage to Yokohama had been booked and paid for, his man had not sailed for that port.

Another clue pointed to San Francisco, but on the eve of leaving for that city Lee discovered a definite trail leading to Prince Rupert. At Prince Rupert the scent was strong, and at Dyea his man had not been far ahead of him.

Then had followed the chase over the Chilcoot Pass, past Long's camp, and on to Bennet Post and White River. Then came the run to the Nordenskold and down the old Dalton trail to Selkirk, from which they had followed the Yukon to Dawson. They had missed their man at Dawson, but the trail had seemed to point to Caribou Creek.

And now, as Lee and Nipper walked down past the line of fires, they were searching keenly, carefully for the man whom they had followed thousands of miles. Even if the chase led to Alaska and across through Asia or back to the Mackenzie and up the Slave to the vast unknown stretches of the wide-flung North West, Lee would still stick to it until he had run his man to earth. And if the final act should be played where the laws of civilisation could not be enforced, then was he determined to secure his man by applying the law of the wild.

As they grew nearer the mouth of the creek it became evident to them that something out of the ordinary of the routine of even a gold-rush camp was happening. For at one point just ahead of them a large crowd of men had gathered, and more were running in that direction.

Team after team came dashing into the creek, and as they saw the gathering, pulled up beside it. Lee and Nipper quickened their footsteps, and

a few moments later they were on the outskirts of the crowd, which seemed to be surging around one central point.

"What's the matter here?" asked Lee of a burly miner who crowded in beside him.

"Wrong measuring," replied the other. "We've been lining out the claims with Costigan's rope, and it isn't on the level. Costigan and his bunch have worked in six-hundred-foot claims between them and the others have only got four-hundred-foot claims. I'm all right, because I paced mine out myself. But there'll be trouble here in a minute, you'll see."

So Costigan was there after all!

As he realised this Lee pushed his way in still further through the crowd, and then, as the men ahead of him surged aside, he caught a fleeting glance of the man he sought. Costigan, surrounded by his own gang, made up of gamblers and all the riff-raff of the Yukon, was facing over a score of men whose claims he had measured falsely. A hot argument was in course, and from the temper of the men it seemed as though a fight must ensue.

Several of the late arrivals, seeing that they had little hope of staking a claim and filled with disappointment and chagrin, were only too ready to vent their feelings upon Costigan and his crew.

Like most gatherings of the sort, the fight was precipitated by an outsider who had no part in it whatsoever. From the outskirts of the crowd a piece of ice was hurled which caught the miner who faced Costigan full in the face. He, thinking it had come from one of Costigan's men, struck out with his fist and sent Costigan staggering back. The next moment the whole crowd surged forward, and a terrible fight started.

With three hundred men striking out blindly, and in many cases not even knowing whether they were hitting foe or friend, it is easily to be imagined what pandemonium reigned.

Lee and Nipper, seeing that the riot must run its course, and realising that under cover of the fight they might be able to reach their man, joined the party which was opposed to Costigan and his crew, and, buttoning up their mackinaws, sailed into the fight with both fists going. The quarters were too close for gun work, though a good many of the men had clubbed their weapons and were using them mercilessly.

There, under the flaring lights of the fires, in that wild, barren spot of the north, the passions of three hundred men broke loose—the passions of men who, by the very nature of the lives they led, were those who daily faced life in its raw, crawling state. Not for them the veneer of civilisation, not for them the appeal to the slow process of the law. Brute strength had taken, and brute strength would take back. Strong men of the savage Northland they were, and; like the wild country about them, their methods were harsh and primitive. He who could take and hold was the one who would possess. Might was right—the might of brawny arm and gnarled fist.

Gradually the struggling mass of fighters pressed out from the centre of the throng and spread out across the creek. By now every man had placed himself with the side which he favoured. And as a great rush sent him reeling back into another section of the melee, Lee saw that Costigan's gang was much the smaller. At the same time, there was no harder clement in the whole of Klondyke than the gang which gathered about him. Almost every man had a weapon clubbed, and was using it viciously, while, until then, most of the better element had depended on their fists.

In the outsurging which carried him back Lee lost most of the ground he had gained, and it now became evident to him that he would never be able to fight his way through the crush to Costigan. Nipper was in a rough-and-tumble with a man just off to his left, and as the lad drove in a blow

to the solar plexus, sending him down with all the wind knocked out of him, Lee got hold of the lad and dragged him out of the fight.

"Come on!" he panted. "We'll never reach Costigan this way. Let's get round on the flank and work through from there."

Some of the surrounding miners heard the words, and as Lee and Nipper ran round the outskirts of the struggling mass half a score followed them. On the outskirts of Costigan's crowd they crashed again, and now, clubbing their revolvers, they started to drive a wedge in towards where Costigan stood.

For ten minutes it was one of the quickest rough-and-tumbles either Lee or Nipper had ever taken part in. Alone, it would have been impossible for them to drive a way into Costigan, but the half-score of men behind them had been augmented by others, and, steadily taking blow for blow, they forced their way ahead foot by foot.

Then, when only twenty yards or so separated Lee and Nipper from Costigan, someone on the bank of the creek hurled great piles of green spruce boughs on top of the two nearest fires. Immediately the fighting mass was thrown into shadow, and under cover of the darkness Lee made a desperate rush to reach his man.

By sheer strength of his own efforts and the press of men behind him he was driven forward towards the spot where he had last seen Costigan. He arrived there just at the moment when the fires flared up again. But though he turned his eyes in every direction there was no sign of the man he sought. And so great was the crush about him that neither Lee nor any of the others saw three dog teams dash down the Caribou towards the Yukon, and, on reaching it, swing up river.

Half an hour later the gang which had followed Costigan's lead had been beaten down-creek and out on to the Yukon. There they had broken and fled, and marching back up the Caribou the victors had at once prepared to remeasure the claims.

Half through the night Lee and Nipper searched for signs of Costigan. But finally they were forced to conclude that during the melee he had escaped, and as they made their way towards one of the fires Lee said:

"Well, my lad, it looks as though he had fooled us again. I doubt if he will dare to come back to the Caribou. In that case we shall have to start on the trail once more."

"And we almost reached him during that scrap," remarked Nipper. "I thought you actually had your hands on him, gov'nor."

Lee shook his head.

"I reached for him all right, my lad, but he wasn't there. He must have slipped away when the fires went down. But, never mind, we'll try and pick up his trail to-morrow."

With that they squatted down by the fire and prepared to boil some tea.

CHAPTER III.

Dawson Again—News of Costigan—The Kanitchi—The Fight—Lee Wounded—Nipper's Disappearance.

THE next morning it became evident beyond a doubt that Costigan and his closest satellites had made good their escape. Lee and Nipper made a close survey over every claim which had been staked along the Caribou, but they could find no signs of the man they sought. The claims which Costigan had staked out had been absorbed by the new measurements without protest, and that was sufficient in itself to indicate that Costigan

had thrown up the game on the Caribou. The only next move possible was a return to Dawson; and by midday the following day Lee and Nipper were ready to start.

Lee was more than a little disappointed over the manner in which Costigan had managed to elude him. To be so near the man, to have his hands almost upon him, then to lose him during that few moments of darkness which had descended upon them, was sufficient to annoy the most persistent individual, and Nelson Lee certainly ranked in that class.

The return trip to Dawson was made without any particular incident. On arriving there they sent the dogs to be taken care of, then they went along to McLeod's Restaurant to secure a room and get something to eat. Almost the first person they saw on entering was Jim Price, from the Nordenskold. He waved to them as he caught sight of them, and Lee and Nipper walked along to his table.

"It is rather a surprise to see you here," remarked Lee, as he shook hands.

"I didn't intend to come," responded Price. "But some matters came up which made it necessary, and I thought I'd better make it before the spring break-up. In my opinion it will be on us earlier than usual this year." Then Price lowered his tone. "Have you found Costigan yet?" he asked.

Lee waited to order for himself and Nipper before replying, then he said:

"I have seen him, but he gave us the slip."

"Where did you pick him up?"

"I heard of him at Selkirk, and was told that he had come on to Dawson. We followed on here, but arrived to find the whole place in the throes of a gold rush. There wasn't a sign of Costigan in Dawson, so I figured he had joined the rush to Caribou Creek. My calculations were correct, for we went on to the Caribou, and he was there all right."

Then Lee told Price of the fight which had taken place on Caribou Creek, and how, afterwards, it had become evident to him that Costigan had made good his escape.

Jim Price nodded when Lee had finished.

"That's exactly the sort of thing Costigan would do," he said. "It was something like that he and his gang pulled off on the Pelly a few years ago."

"We came back to Dawson in the hopes of getting track of him," said Lee. "We just got-in a few minutes ago, and haven't had time to scout about yet. But I am in hopes we shall locate him before long."

The old-timer shook his head.

"I don't think you'll find Costigan in Dawson," he said. "After that fight on the Caribou he and his gang will have to lie low for a bit. I think you'll find your trail lead away from Dawson rather than to it."

"Do you think he'll try to get out of the Klondyke, then?" said Lee.

Price shook his head.

"No, I don't think that," he said. "What I do think is that he will make up along the Yukon, the White, or the Pelly. If he's got plenty of money, as he seems to have, it's hard to tell what he'll do. Anyway, the only thing for you to do is to stick about Dawson and try to get wind of him. I'll be here myself a few days, and I may hear something. I'll keep my eyes and ears open, anyway."

Lee thanked him, and as the waiter brought their caribou steaks that moment he shifted the talk and began discussing the gold rush.

That evening, in Price's company, they visited most of the saloons in the place, seeking news of Costigan, but failed to come upon anything of any value. Dawson was more than usually quiet that evening, anyway, for a great proportion of the able-bodied men were on Caribou Creek.



The pack gathered round the tree up which Nipper had climbed, springing up in futile attempts to reach him.—(See p. 37.)

All the next day Lee and Nipper kept up their search, and occasionally they ran into Jim Price, but he appeared to have heard nothing. Three days passed, and Lee was just debating whether to remain longer in Dawson or to go on to Selkirk when, on the third evening, Jim Price sought them at McLeod's. Lee knew by his manner that he had news, and when it was safe to talk the old-timer said:

"I've got news for you, Lee—news of Costigan."

"What is it?" asked Lee quickly.

"I know where he is. I saw Jim Mackenzie, from the Kanitchi River, to-day. The Kanitchi is forty miles from here, and Mackenzie had a trading post a hundred miles up from its junction with the Yukon. Well, he told me to-day that he'd sold out the post for forty thousand dollars. And who do you suppose he sold it to?"

"Costigan!" exclaimed Lee.

"You've said it," responded Price. "Costigan is the man who bought it, and he paid cash for it, too. It's one of the best posts up the Yukon, for it has the regular trade of over two hundred Indians. I pumped Mackenzie, and he told me that three others turned up with Costigan."

"That means the post is a hundred and forty miles from here," remarked Lee.

"That's right," rejoined Price. "Forty miles from here to the mouth of the Kanitchi, and a hundred miles up it. There's only one other post up the Kanitchi, and that is Simpson Post, about ten miles from the Yukon. You would have passed the mouth of the Kanitchi on your way to Caribou Creek."

"I'm much obliged for the information," said Lee. "We shall be able to get away to-morrow."

"You'll go after him then, will you?" asked Price.

Lee's jaw set grimly.

"I'll go after him, and this time I'll get him," he said.

Would he?

That evening he and Nipper made their final preparations to leave for the Kanitchi the following morning. Lee had decided to take two days for the journey, stopping at Simpson's Post the first night, then making the ninety-mile run through to Costigan's Post the second day.

They got away fairly early in the morning, and, following the main trail up the Yukon, finally picked up the mouth of the Kanitchi forty miles above Dawson. They pulled up there, and, building a fire, boiled some tea with which they washed down the pemmican they had brought along with them. Then, in the early afternoon, they started on for Simpson Post, and it did not take them long to run through the ten miles.

Even during the three days since they had come down the Yukon from Caribou Creek Lee saw distinct signs that the spring break-up was not far off. In the Kanitchi particularly shell ice appeared frequently near the shore, and along the edge of the river the ice was beginning to show that damp, dead-white appearance which always presages the spring break-up.

If things went on as they were going and the heavy rains should come soon, another ten days should see the free ice running out of the rivers. And following that, winter would literally leap into spring. He was anxious, therefore, to get up to Costigan's post and back to Dawson before the break-up should come.

As soon as the ice was out there would be a steamer up the Yukon on the first spring trip, and Lee was anxious to catch it if possible. He had been away from England some time now, and it was imperative that he should get back without any unnecessary delay. If he could catch the first steamer

out from Dawson it would save the long portage by canoe up the White River, for the White Horse Railway had not been built then. Also he would be able to make quicker connections with Vancouver.

Jim Price had given him a note of introduction to Simpson, of Simpson's Post, and on their arrival there they found Simpson himself. He, like Price and Temple, was an old-timer, and Price's note was sufficient for him to give Lee and Nipper a warm welcome. He was anxious for tidings of the outside world, and over the big fire that evening they told him all the news. On coming down the Kanitchi, Mackenzie had told him about selling his post to Costigan, and already Simpson was exercised over the affair.

"I know Costigan of old," he said puffing savagely at his pipe. "He's one of the biggest crooks that ever struck the Yukon, and you can bet your life he never bought Mackenzie's post just to trade with Mackenzie's Indians. He'll make a bid for the whole of the Kanitchi country, and if he does that there's going to be trouble.

"Mackenzie and I got along all right because we divided the country up and didn't butt into the other's game. But some of my Indians have already told me that they have been approached by Costigan and offered bigger prices than I am paying. Just as soon as I can get proof of this I'm going after Costigan, and when I do there'll be something doing on the Kanitchi."

Up till now Lee had not told Simpson his reasons for going on to Costigan's Post. But as he realised Simpson's feelings towards Costigan he told him why he had come up the Kanitchi. When he had finished he said:

"For the reasons I have told you, Mr. Simpson, I do not believe you will have much trouble with Costigan. I have come to the Yukon after him, and I am not going back without him."

"Well, if you want any help," said Simpson, "you can count on me."

"Thanks," said Lee. "If I need you I'll remember your offer; but I think we can play the game alone. I prefer to do so if possible."

Early the next morning Lee and Nipper got away for Costigan's Post. It was a ninety-mile run through, but Simpson had said they could make the whole distance by the river, and that the trail was fairly good. It was still starlight when they started, and they had covered a good twenty miles of the distance before day broke.

The Kanitchi proved to be a far different type of river from either the Upper Yukon, the White Horse, Lewes, the Nordenskold, or any of the smaller streams which Lee and Nipper had seen. On either side the banks were low-lying and flat, and in places the river widened to two or three miles, and became dotted with small islands covered with a heavy growth of spruce.

Although the ice and snow held everything in its grip, it was easy to see that in the summer the valley of the Kanitchi would be a glorious spot. The trail led in an apparently erratic manner among the small islands, and if they had tried to negotiate that section of the river by night they would have become greatly confused.

They paused at mid-day by one of the small islands to boil some tea and eat some pemmican, and, by the description of the river which Simpson had given him, Lee knew they had covered two-thirds of the distance, and that it was only another thirty miles on to Costigan's Post.

They pushed on after a short pause, and when they had covered twenty miles Lee began to feel that they had arrived at last near the end of their journey.

The river narrowed here somewhat, and the flats gave place to high spruce-clad banks. It was still daylight, though drawing near dusk by the time

they had covered another five miles, and both began to look keenly for the first sign of Costigan's Post.

They had covered another two miles, and had reached a point where the trail swung in close to a high point of the bank, when suddenly on the clear frosty air there broke out the sharp sound of a rifle shot. Almost at the same instant the ice close to the sled was chipped up by a bullet and the particles driven into their faces.

Lee, who was holding the tail rope and running close to the sled, sloughed the tail round, and between them they got the dogs closer in to the bank.

Three more shots rang out in rapid succession, one of them plunging into the front pack on the sled. They were able to ascertain now that the bullets were coming from the shelter of the spruce overhead, and so close were they there could be no question but that those who were firing were shooting to wound, if not to kill.

When they had pulled the dogs up under the shelter of the bank they unstrapped their rifles, and running out on to the ice, fired several rounds up into the spruce. A sharp volley came back at them, kicking up the ice all about them. And realising that they were in a position which was far too exposed, Lee and Nipper dodged back under the bank, where the shots from overhead could not reach them.

"Who do you suppose it is, guv'nor?" whispered Nipper.

"Costigan and his gang, of course," replied Lee. "They've got wind of our coming, and are out to stop us. If they stick where they are we'll hang here until it gets dark, then we'll try to race past them and reach the post."

It soon became evident that Costigan and his men did not intend to remain in the cover of the spruce overhead, for a few minutes later a couple of bullets came from a new point and kicked up the ice close to them. Like a flash Lee and Nipper began firing back. Then about a hundred yards up the river they saw four men rushing towards them and firing as they came.

"Come on, Nipper," rapped Lee. "It's two against four, but the only thing to do is to rush them. Don't waste a shot."

They started to run forward as Lee spoke, and in passing the sled Nipper gained a little on Lee. Therefore he did not see Lee stagger back with a bullet through the shoulder and totter drunkenly to fall unconscious across the sled.

Nipper was still running ahead, but the scraping of the sled as the dogs swung round caused him to turn back, and, as he saw Lee sprawled helplessly along the sled with the dogs starting to run away down the river, he started to run towards them in an attempt to head them off.

As he sprang forward the sledge swept by a bare yard from him. Then as he threw himself frantically at it his feet slipped from under him, and he plunged headlong to the ice.

The next moment the heavy butt of a rifle caught him on the back of the head, and as darkness descended upon him, the Mackenzie River dogs tore down the Kanitchi, dragging the sled on which lay Lee's unconscious body.

It was at an early hour the next morning that Simpson, at Simpson's Post, was aroused by the snarling and howling of dogs. Cursing the brutes energetically, for he thought they were stray Indian dogs, he emerged from the post to club them away.

The next moment, however, he had dashed forward with a sharp exclamation, for, under the steely stars and the flaming swords of the Northern Lights, he recognised the team, and had seen the body which lay sprawled

along the sled. He drove the dogs into the post, and shouted loudly for the Indian runner. Between them they carried the body inside, and laying it out on the table of his council chamber, Simpson made a swift examination.

It took him only a few minutes to discover the wound in the shoulder and to recognise the unconscious individual as Nelson Lee. Fortunately, Lee's underclothing had stuck to the wound, forming a clot, and the loss of blood had not been as great as might have been expected.

With the rough and ready methods of the frontier Simpson sponged out the wound and bandaged it. Then he got the patient to bed. But he could gain no information from the wounded man, for by this time Lee was babbling in the grip of a high fever.

And that evening the heavy spring downpour started, making it impossible for Simpson to get up the Kanitchi to discover what had happened to Lee's companion.

CHAPTER IV.

The Spring Break-Up — Nipper's Escape — Treed!

NOT in the memory of any of the old-timers had the spring break-up on the Yukon come so early. All down the White Horse Valley, the Lewes, the Pelly, the Yukon, the Selwyn, the White, the Porcupine, and the Tenana, along the full fifteen hundred miles through Alaska to the mouth of the Yukon, the spring rains came down in torrents.

Spreading from north of the Arctic Circle far south of the Chilcoot Pass, from the Mackenzie River basin to Baring Straits, the whole country was getting the downpour, and from the glaciers in the north to the ice-packed streams farther south the rain and the snow and the ice were causing the rivers to rise into terrific rushing torrents.

In the spruce woods the snow had melted, swelling the little creeks, which in turn emptied into the larger streams. Bumping and groaning and crashing, the ice went rushing along in the current, to grind into powder on its course, to melt on the way, or, in the case of some of the larger floes, to join the great fields which would drift south from Baring Straits.

For the time being no trail was possible. The dog sleds would be useless for another five months, and not yet dared one to launch canoe or boat in the ice-running stream. The moss turf was sodden and wet; the ever-green trees dripped sombrely beneath the downpour. In another few days the other trees and shrubs would begin to bud, and the swift-riding Spring of the North would soon cover the whole country.

At Selkirk and Dawson men prepared for the first river steamer down the Yukon. It was not possible to make White Horse by boat, for not yet had the White Horse Railway been built. The contracts had been placed, but if a man wished to go south by Chilcoot or White Pass he must still travel by canoe and portage.

At Simpson Post Nelson Lee still lay weak and ill, though recovering from the effects of the bullet wound in his shoulder. He was still too sick to talk, and for six days he had lain in the grip of the fever which had come on him during the night when the Mackenzie River huskies had covered ninety miles to Simpson Post.

And Nipper—what of the lad? What had happened to him after he had been struck down as he fell to the ice? While he was still unconscious Costigan and his three companions had bound Nipper with thongs. Then they had thrown him on one of the sleds which they had concealed a few hundred

yards up the river. Following that they had mushed on to Costigan's Post, and Nipper had been thrown on to a pile of blankets in a small room adjoining the store house. He had lain there all during the night, and not until morning had consciousness returned to him.

A tiny, iron-barred window lighted the place, but, small though it was, it was sufficient for Nipper to see that the spring rains had already started. He had no means of knowing how long he had lain there, but when he discovered that, beyond a lump on the back of his head, he was not wounded, he shrewdly guessed that it must be the morning following the fight on the river.

The forenoon dragged on, and he fancied that it must be nearly noon when the door of the little room opened and a man stepped in.

Bending over, he jerked Nipper to his feet, and slashed the bonds which bound his ankles. He did not untie his wrists, but, pushing him along in front, passed through the big store-room, and then, opening a heavy door, thrust the lad into a small council room.

At one end of the long council table was a man whom Nipper recognised as Costigan, and on either side of him was a man typical of the North. Nipper's guide now cut the thongs which bound the lad's wrists, and pushed him forward towards the end of the table. As he stumbled against the chair, Nipper saw that a plate of caribou steak and a mug of tea had been placed there. Costigan gestured for him to sit down, and uttered the single word, "Eat." Nipper needed no second bidding, for he was nearly famished, and, seating himself, he wolfed the food to the last morsel.

He scarcely looked up while he was busy eating, but his thoughts were active. Nor was he thinking of Costigan, and what might be his purpose, but of Lee, and what had happened to him. He did not know whether Lee was in Costigan's power or not. His knowledge of what had happened had ended as he fell to the ice, and the last thing he had visualised was the dog team racing down-stream, with Lee sprawled out on the sled. He knew Lee had been wounded, perhaps killed, and his heart was heavy within him as his thoughts dwelt on the possibility.

So far Costigan had bested them at every turn, but, no matter what had happened to Lee, Nipper was determined to carry on as far as possible the work which his master had begun.

When he had finished the food and drunk the tea he pushed the plate from him, leaned back, and glowered along the table at Costigan, who was sitting with a sneer on his face.

"Now, my young bucko," said Costigan, "you have satisfied your hunger, and I intend that in return you shall satisfy my curiosity. I'm going to ask you some questions, and you'll be wise to answer them."

Nipper shrugged, but made no reply.

"To begin with," went on Costigan, "I want to know who you are, and why you are following me. I heard, away back at Bennet Post, that I was being followed, and later I discovered that you and your companion had trailed me to Dawson. I saw you at Caribou Creek, and I hadn't been here long before I heard you were on your way up the Kanitchi. You were looking for trouble, and you got it. I guess we've settled your companion all right, and it depends on how you answer my questions what happens to you. This is the Northland, and it's run by the Law of the Wild, so let me advise you to be careful how you answer. Now then, speak up."

Nipper's eyes flashed.

"I won't have to be careful how I answer," he snapped, "for I don't intend to tell you anything."

"So?" said Costigan. "Perhaps I can jog you up a little."

As he spoke, he thrust his hand in his pocket, and drew out a packet of papers.

"These were taken off you," he said, "and there's enough here to tell me that your companion was Nelson Lee, and that you are his assistant. Now will you answer my questions?"

"If you have found out that much, you ought to be able to find out the other things you want to know," jeered Nipper.

Costigan flushed angrily, and half rose from his chair. Then he slumped back into it, and brought his fist down on the table.

"Look here," he snapped. "I don't intend to fool round long with a brat like you. I'll give you one more chance to answer my question; if you don't, then I'll find a way to deal with you which will give you a real taste of the Northland."

"I'm in your power, and you can do what you want to," rejoined Nipper. "But you can't make me talk. And you'll have to put in a long summer trying to do so."

Costigan was silent for a moment, then, looking towards the man who stood behind Nipper's chair, he rapped:

"Take him back, Jim. I'll find a way to handle him later."

Nipper was yanked to his feet, and hustled out through the store-room to the little room adjoining. He was thrust inside, then the heavy door slammed, and he heard the key turned in the lock.

"Well, anyway," he muttered, as he slumped down on his blankets, "Costigan didn't make me answer his question, and I have discovered that the gov'nor isn't a prisoner here. But I wonder—I wonder if he managed to get down the river all right?"

So, during the grey afternoon, and long into the night, Nipper brooded over Lee's possible fate, never dreaming for a single instant that at the moment Lee lay wounded and tossing in a raging fever at Simpson Post.

So it was that five days and nights dragged on their monotonous course. Once a day, about noon, Nipper was given either some caribou steak or dried pemmican to eat, and a mug of tea to wash it down. The food was brought by one of Costigan's men, who would open the door, thrust it inside, and leave again without speaking. Not until he brought the food on the following day would he remove the dishes left from the day before.

The rain kept up almost continuously, adding to the discomfort of Nipper's cramped quarters. Costigan himself left the lad entirely alone, but more than once Nipper heard Costigan's voice outside the building, and twice he had pulled himself up by the iron bars, and had seen Costigan passing towards the palisade.

Judging from the sounds which he could hear in the store-room, he surmised that a good many Indians were coming to the post, and this made him remember what Simpson had told him and Lee the night they had spent at Simpson's Post. From that his thoughts dwelt on the possibility of relief coming to him from up the river, but he knew that at present it would be practically impossible to travel. Yet he knew, too, that, if he were a free agent, Lee would strain every nerve to make Costigan's Post and rescue him.

By the end of the fifth day he was beginning to feel distinctly uneasy about Lee. Although Lee and Nipper had been in a good many tight situations together, neither of them had ever indulged in much sentiment. Lee himself was not one to exhibit his feelings. And, as he had grown up under the other's guidance, Nipper had gradually evolved the same characteristics. In the dangerous life, which was necessarily concomitant to their profession, there arose many occasions when life hung by but a single thread. Still, Nipper knew that if anything happened to him, Lee would

carry on just the same, and more than once Lee had told him that, should he go under, Nipper must follow out to the end whatever there was to be done.

So suddenly had come Lee's collapse on the ice that it had been impossible for Nipper to see exactly what had happened. He felt certain, however, that Lee had been wounded, and wounded badly. Nor was this uneasiness dissipated as the days dragged by, and there was still no sign of Lee.

On the sixth day the routine of his imprisonment was varied, for, after he had consumed his day's rations, the door opened again, and the man whose special care he seemed to be, beckoned to him.

"You're to be permitted to walk about the post," he growled. "And see that you don't try to get away."

With that he pushed Nipper along through the store-room, where the lad saw Costigan and the other two white men bargaining with several Indians. Then at last he was in the open air, and as he plunged into the sunshine, which had come with the afternoon, he could smell the breath of spring which hung heavy over the land.

The palisade gates were open, and as no one attempted to stop him he wandered through and made his way to the bank of the river. Here the trees had been cleared away, but just below him and across the river the spruce-trees shone under the sun, while the buds of the poplar-trees were already swelling to the bursting-point. The mossy ground beneath his feet was still sodden, and farther down, he knew, the frost extended for a great distance.

The Yukon summer was never long enough to thaw out the frost, which, through the glacial ages, had crept deeper and deeper into the earth. Free ice was still running in the river, but the blocks were now far smaller than they had been a few days before. They were only the stragglers of the army which had surged on ahead, and many of them would disappear entirely before the mouth of the Kanitchi was reached.

In another day or two canoeing would be safe to a certain extent. And as he stood there, gazing upon the marvellous change which had been wrought during the days of his imprisonment, Nipper was filled with a deep wonder at the strange ways of the Northland. He did not pause to think that, for a solid two weeks, an almost imperceptible thaw had been at work gnawing away the ice, and that it only needed the muggy rains to complete the work.

Farther south, where the summers were longer, the spring would come more slowly, but in the North, where the streams are only open from May to September, nature has had to adjust herself to the needs of the climate, and she has met that need, as she always does.

During the afternoon Nipper wandered up and down the bank, and often his eyes turned longingly in the direction where he knew Simpson Post lay. Some of those very pieces of ice at which he gazed would pass close to Simpson Post, and he wondered how long it would take for them to cover the ninety miles which lay between. Reckoning that the current was running at the rate of about five miles an hour, he estimated that those which survived and were not hung up on the way would pass Simpson by noon the following day, and by that night they would be into the Yukon.

He examined the woods which stretched densely along the banks of the river, and while he stood there several Indians left the post and struck into a trail which seemed to lead through the spruce down-stream. The incident gave rise in Nipper's mind to thoughts of escape, and he wondered if by any chance that trail might lead through to Simpson Post.

He was given little time then, however, to figure upon the possibility, for, a few moments later, his jailer appeared at the stockade gate, and

curtly beckoned to him. Since there was nothing to be gained by mutiny, Nipper turned and passed through the stockade gate. The other followed him along through the store-room, and when Nipper had gained his prison once more, slammed and locked the door. But the sight of that free-running ice racing steadily towards Simpson Post, and the thought of the trail which led through the spruce, caused him to ponder. And late into the night he debated his chances of escape.

Before he went to sleep he had made up his mind that, heavy as were the odds against him, if he were allowed the run of the post next day he would make an attempt to get away.

At noon the next day his rations were brought as usual. Nipper drank the tea, but put the pemmican in his pocket, and a little later, when the door opened once more, his heart gave a great leap within him.

As on the previous afternoon, he was conducted through the store-room and pushed into the open air. He loitered about near the stockade for a little, then he sauntered out through the gate towards the river. He kept in sight there for a little while, but as no one at the post seemed to be watching him, he moved gradually towards the trail which led through the spruce.

On the river bank was a canoe, which for a moment he thought of taking, but finally considered it too risky and decided to attempt the trail only.

As he edged nearer and nearer to the trees he expected each moment to hear a shout behind him. But neither sign nor sound came from the direction of the post, and at last he was within the shelter of the spruce.

Once there, he lost no time in getting started. While the trail was not wide, it was distinct enough, and, breaking into a run, Nipper set out to put as much distance between himself and the post as he could before his guard should come to call him.

He ran on, and on, and on, keeping to a steady pace and slumping through the sodden moss with little regard for the soaking he was getting. From time to time he could catch glimpses of the river, and from that he knew that, so far, the trail was following its course. He had run a matter of what he judged must be a couple of miles or so when he was forced to drop into a walk, but, despite the patch ice which still clung to the moss and the pools of water in the hollows, Nipper was able to make fairly good progress, and by the time the afternoon sun had sunk, he reckoned that he must be at least ten miles from the camp.

The spring twilight of the North was already drawing out, and so distinctly marked was the trail that he was able to keep going for another couple of hours. Then he cast about him for a place to sleep, and deemed it wisest to find a spot a little distance off the trail. Without blankets or ground sheet it was impossible for him to sleep on the ground, and, of course, he dared not light a fire. He sought about until he found a big, flat-limbed spruce, and climbing into this, he found a place about ten feet from the ground which he decided should be his couch for the night.

It was a strange couch indeed, but by straddling two of the branches he was able to ease himself into a fairly comfortable position. By unstrapping his belt and passing it round the trunk of the tree as well as his body, he was able to guard against the danger of falling out while asleep. And in this strange position the lad composed himself for the night.

He slept only in snatches, however, for all through the night the distant howling of dogs and the clanking and groaning of the ice floes in the river brought him up sitting with maddening regularity. He was filled with a constant dread lest Costigan and his men should appear at any moment.

And when the first hush which precedes dawn came, Nipper nibbled a little of the pemmican, and slipping from the tree, started on once more.

He did not attempt to run; he knew the folly of that, and he knew he would make better time in the long run by sticking to a steady pace. He tried to regulate his speed as near three miles an hour as possible, and when the sun told him it was about mid-day he paused to drink copiously from one of the pools of water, then he allowed himself a little more of the pemmican.

Nipper did not fear that he would be unable to walk the distance from Costigan's to Simpson's. His long mush from the Chilcoot to Dawson and then to Caribou Creek and the Kanitchi had made him magnificently fit: and his five days' imprisonment had not been sufficient to soften him to any appreciable extent. His only fear was hunger, for a single ration must serve him for the whole journey. For that reason he ate sparingly, and filled up with huge draughts of the cold water, which was plentiful enough.

After half an hour's rest at noon he started on again, a good deal puzzled that he had not yet seen any signs of pursuit. He estimated that he had come at least thirty-six miles from Costigan's, and a possible forty, which was something over half way to Simpson's. He plodded on all through the afternoon until the twilight failed. Then he divided the remaining pemmican into two portions, eating one and reserving the other for the morrow.

He reckoned that he must now be something over fifty miles from Costigan's Post, and, if he could keep up the pace which he had managed so far, he should make Simpson's the following evening, providing he was not overtaken. All during the afternoon he had been skirting the flat lands where the river widened and scores of little spruce-wooded islands were scattered.

While the trail was more open here, it was far more swampy, and continually he had been forced to plunge through morass after morass which in some cases had reached to his waist. That night, when he climbed into a spruce, he was wet to the skin, and as soon as the natural warmth of his exertions had subsided he began to shiver with a sharp chill. The climbing sun was warm enough, but the nights were still bitterly cold. And when he finally climbed down from the tree the next morning, Nipper was stiff in every joint.

He ate the last of his pemmican, drank copiously of water, then by sheer will-power forced himself to go on. And as he started on what he hoped would be the last day of his journey little did he dream that all the way from Costigan's Post he had been closely followed by Costigan himself.

Nipper had not understood the depth of cunning which was centred in Costigan's nature. The lad was under the impression that his escape had been entirely due to himself. He did not know--he could not know that it had all been carefully planned by Costigan. •

The Indians whom Nipper had seen plunge into the trail through the spruce had been sent that way by Costigan to show the lad a trail did exist. The next afternoon he had been allowed out again with the expectation that he would do exactly what he did do. Nor could he know that ever since his interview with Costigan in the council room Costigan had kept nearly two score half-starved Indian dogs without a scrap of food.

Costigan's vengeance had been planned with an aim to achieve a refinement of torture of which only a fiend in human form could be capable. It was his intention to let Nipper plod along the weary trail to Simpson's, suffering all the possible hardships of the journey as he went. Then, when the lad was practically in sight of his objective, Costigan intended to let loose the starving whelps which he had brought with him.

Mad with hunger, they would course down the trail in search of food, and, overtaking Nipper, the grey cloud of death would sweep upon him. And who would ever know that the bleaching skeleton on the trail was aught but another natural toll of the Northland—the price which the adventurous must pay?

So it was that as he plodded on hour after hour, each moment drawing near to Simpson's, Nipper never dreamed that only a few miles behind him came nearly two score of starving dogs more dangerous even than wolves.

By noon he reckoned that he was only eighteen miles from Simpson's. His pemmican was all gone, but he filled up on water, and without pausing to rest, plodded on again.

Mile after mile went slowly by until the afternoon sun began to sink, and now Nipper stared ahead with bloodshot eyes, seeking for the first sign of the post.

As a matter of fact, he was about four miles from Simpson's when, through the fever which was beginning to cloud his consciousness, there finally impinged upon his brain the realisation that a new sound had risen behind him. Nipper had too vivid a remembrance of that terrible race from the Kennet to the Nordenskold not to recognise at once the meaning of the sound.

Some sort of a hunt-pack was coming along the trail after him, and as the full meaning of his danger burst upon him, he broke into a stumbling run. But it soon became evident to him that there was no hope of escape that way, and as the sound grew steadily nearer he sought frantically for a tree in which he could seek safety.

A long blasted poplar close to the trail seemed to offer the best opportunity, and as, looking over his shoulder, Nipper saw the pack racing towards him, he put on a final spurt to reach the tree. Springing up, he grasped the lower branches and pulled, gripping the trunk with his knees as he did so.

Now the pack of dogs was only a few yards away, and as with one last frantic effort Nipper pulled himself into the branches, a pair of vicious jaws just grazed his heels.

Then the pack gathered round, springing up in futile attempts to reach him. A quarter of a mile away in the shelter of the spruce Costigan watched while his lips twisted into an evil sneer. Then he turned to his companions and said:

“That settles his hash. He'll either have to starve in the tree or let the dogs get him.”

Not until dusk had shut the view from his sight did he turn to go back along the trail, leaving Nipper facing his fate and the coming night. As a first precaution Nipper strapped himself to the trunk of the poplar, for the fever was gripping him stronger each moment, and the spells of light-headedness were increasing in frequency.

With the descent of dusk the starving savage whelps sat on their haunches, their mouths open and their eyes gleaming like balls of fire. Shortly after that Nipper lost all account of time. He would come out of the fever by fits and starts to realise his position, then he would drop back into the lethargy of the fever again.

The evening dragged through to midnight, and then by some subtle accord the dogs began to howl. Nor did either dogs or Nipper know that coming along the trail was a man who sprang to attention at the sound of that chorus. Yet he was drawing nearer each moment with his Indian runner just behind him, for it was Simpson who had been on a long trail

that day in an attempt to discover to what extent Costigan had succeeded in seducing his Indians.

Had Costigan not delayed the final act of the drama he had planned for so long, Simpson and his Indian runner would never have come upon the scene, for they had only arrived on to the main trail from a side trail half a mile on from the blasted poplar.

Moving with caution, Simpson and his Indian runner came up the trail towards the spot where the whelps were gathered. Then the keen eyes of the old-timer saw the grey cloud gathered about the tree, and in a moment he read the reason.

"It's a hunt pack from one of the Indian villages," he whispered to the runner. "They've got something or somebody treed."

He jerked out his revolver as he spoke, while the Indian runner levelled his rifle. Then, shouting at the dogs, they rushed forward.

Now while these dogs would not hesitate to tree an unarmed man--for no animal in the world is more cunning or understanding than the huskie of the North Country--they knew full well the meaning of the human beings who rushed upon them with sticks which belched forth noise and flame and death.

As several of the pack went down the rest hesitated, then turned and went yelping up the trail, to a use a few hundred yards away and dismally howl their disappointment in the night. Firing a parting shot after them, Simpson made for the tree, and the next moment he had discovered the lad, who was strapped to the trunk.

Lithely the Indian climbed up and released him, handing him down to Simpson. It was not difficult for the woodsman to discover that the lad was in a burning fever, and by the light of a match he studied his features.

Then there flashed upon Simpson the full understanding of what had happened, and with a grunt which meant worlds, he shouldered Nipper and strode off along the trail towards his post.

Behind him cringed the baffled dogs until they came to the poplar where their dead kind lay. Then they hurled themselves upon the carcasses, and a frightful orgy ensued. If Costigan could but have seen the end of his vengeance!

CHAPTER V.

Convalescent--The Attack on Costigan's Post--The Capture of Costigan--To the Outside World.

FOR two days Nipper lay at Simpson's Post in a raging fever, and with heavy congestion threatening his chest. On the third day, however, the fever departed suddenly, and that afternoon both he and Lee were allowed down to the council room, where they sat in the big carved chairs and enlightened each other as to what had happened. Simpson bundled them back to bed early that evening, but the following morning they had both improved wonderfully, and it was then that Simpson permitted himself to speak. After a few preliminary remarks, he said:

"I know what Costigan was when he was here before, and I know what he is now. I know what he has done to you, Mr. Lee, and it wasn't hard to

guess the game he tried to work on the lad. In the last few days I've been able to discover, too, how he has been demoralising the Indians in my territory. You went up the river before to work the thing off your own bat, but failed. If I know anything about you, you'll try it again, but this time I'm going with you. I've got a score to settle with Costigan myself. If I had known Mackenzie had wanted to sell out I'd have bought his post, but I was away at the time, and only saw him when he was coming out. But I can tell you this much—I'm going to drive Costigan out of the Kanitchi, and I'm going to keep him out of it. Now what do you say?"

"Just as soon as I am able I'm going back to Costigan's," said Lee. "And we will certainly be glad to have you with us."

Simpson rose.

"I figure you'll both be ready to start in about three days' time," he said. "While you're getting your strength up I'll send word for some of my Indians to come in, and also I'll be getting the canoes ready."

He stamped out as he finished speaking, leaving Lee and Nipper to their own devices. But, whether it was the natural recuperative powers of their own bodies, the anticipation of coming once more to grips with Costigan, or both, it is hard to say; but, at any rate, during the next three days Lee and Nipper mended marvellously, and on the fourth morning they were in high fettle to make the start up the river.

Three canoes had been prepared, with Indians to paddle each. Simpson had seen to rifles and ammunition, and there was plenty of grub to last for a week. He had allowed two days for the journey up the river, and if all went well they hoped to settle matters at Costigan's without delay. They made forty-five miles the first day without incident, and that evening they camped on one of the little spruce-clad islands at the beginning of the flats.

They got away early the next morning, and it was late that afternoon when they finally drove the canoes into the bank about a mile below Costigan's Post. Secreting the canoes there, they climbed up the bank to the trail. Then they padded softly along it, keeping a sharp look-out for any of Costigan's crowd.

They saw not a single soul, however, until they finally broke cover near the stockade gate. Running neck and neck, they dashed through the gates and across towards the Post House. It was not until they were close to the store-room door that they heard a shout somewhere in the building, and the next moment a bullet whizzed past close to Simpson's ear.

Then they burst into the store-room, and as they did so they saw Costigan and another white man leaping for their rifles. At the same instant the heavy door leading to the council room was flung open, and the other pair of white men rushed into the store-room.

Lee fired at one of them, bringing him down, and Nipper got his late jailer in the thigh. Simpson opened fire on the second man, who had come from the council room, and, taking the counter in a flying leap, Lee jammed the muzzle of his rifle into Costigan's face just as the latter managed to lay his hands on his own weapon.

Slowly his eyes followed the course of the rifle barrel until they met Lee's gaze. Then, as Lee snapped "Drop it," Costigan's fingers relaxed, and the next moment his hands were above his head.

It was a complete surprise and an absolute victory, and in another five minutes, with their prisoners trussed up, Lee, Simpson, and Nipper were in full command of the post.

While Simpson harangued the Indians, Lee went through Costigan's

pockets and found his keys. Then, accompanied by Nipper, he made his way through the council room to Costigan's bedroom, where he located the safe. Unlocking it, he went through the contents, discovering over fifty thousand dollars in Canadian banknotes and a pass-book on a Vancouver bank, which showed a credit in Costigan's name of nearly a hundred thousand pounds.

"He wasn't trusting to shares or investments," murmured Lee, as he pocketed both the bank-book and the notes. "He was keeping the loot ready in case he ever wanted to make a quick getaway. Well, I fancy, when we have collected all the available assets, the law will be able to reimburse for the amount he defrauded them of."

As they passed through the council room they met Simpson coming to find them.

"I have been laying down the law to the Indians," he grunted, "and I guess they know now who is boss on the Kanitchi. But I want to have a chat with you about this post, Lee. I don't know who'll have the disposal of it, but I'm ready to give forty thousand dollars cash for the post and trading rights—the same figure which Costigan gave Mackenzie."

Lee nodded with satisfaction.

"We'll fix up a bill of sale at once," said Lee. "I'll see that Costigan signs it. I've got the whip hand of him now, and I intend to use it."

At first, when Blake told Costigan what he must do, Costigan merely cursed him. But when Lee had driven it into his understanding that he was certainly going back to London to stand his trial, and that he, Lee, would be the chief witness for the prosecution, Costigan caved in and signed the bill of sale.

Simpson paid with a cheque on Dawson, and not until then did Nelson Lee show Costigan that he possessed formal authority, signed by the British Government and endorsed by the Canadian Government, to arrest one Joseph Costigan at any point in the British Isles or Canada, or, alternatively, to apply to the police of any other British colony or any foreign country with which the British Empire had an extradition agreement, to make the arrest—and to hold him for extradition proceedings.

That evening some of Costigan's Indians were ordered to get out a canoe, and the three white men who had been with Costigan were placed in it. They were given sufficient food to run them through to Dawson, and, as the canoe left the bank, Simpson warned them that if they ever returned to the Kanitchi district he would shoot them on sight.

Simpson, Lee, and Nipper remained at Costigan's Post that night, but which, in honour of Lee, Simpson rechristened "Nelson Post." They got away at daybreak next morning, reaching Simpson Post that evening. And the following day Simpson gave them Indians and a canoe to take them and their prisoner on to Dawson.

Write to the Editor of

ANSWERS

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They had to wait two days in Dawson for a flat-bottomed river steamer which was going down the Yukon. But at last they got away, and, with the full bursting of spring on every side, they travelled down the full fifteen hundred miles through Alaska to the Pacific, passing in regular succession through the noble Upper Yukon, the dreary expanse of the Yukon Flats, then past the Rampart region, and finally through the long eight hundred miles of the Lower Yukon, until at last they reached the great delta. By way of the Apoon Pass they subsequently reached St. Michael's Island, where they transhipped to a steamer bound for Vancouver.

Nine days later they were in Vancouver, but before entraining for Montreal Lee forced Costigan to withdraw the money which he had placed in the bank there. When he counted the total he had secured, Lee found that he had, roughly, a hundred and twelve thousand pounds—a hundred thousand belonging to the banking firm which Costigan had defrauded, and the balance, he shrewdly guessed, part of the loot secured from other coups.

The run across Canada was made without incident, and they embarked at Montreal for Liverpool. Then from Liverpool they travelled to London, where Lee and Nipper handed over their prisoner to Scotland Yard.

A few weeks later Costigan received a sentence of ten years' penal servitude—sufficient time in which to ponder on his sins of the past. Thus ended one of the longest man-hunts of Nelson Lee's career—a hunt which had covered over sixteen thousand miles, and which, beginning in London, had ended at one of the far outposts of the British Empire.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK!

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UNION JACK—1^D.

THE ISLAND OF GOLD

A Story of Treasure Hunting in the South Sea Islands

By **FENTON ASH**

You can begin this Story to-day!

ALEC MACKAY, the hero of our story, with CLIVE LOWTHER, an old chum, DR. CAMPBELL, and BEN GROVE, a hearty old "sea dog," are comrades in an expedition to the South Seas in search of a supposed treasure island.

They meet with many adventures. One day, Alec and Clive are lost in a rocky and cavernous part of the island. They sit down to talk matters over, but immediately become the targets of a troop of huge apes, who threw pebbles at them from the rocks above. Alec examines one of the stones and finds it to be coated with gold—one of those for which the party is searching!

They fall in with a party of blacks led by a stalwart native named OLTRA, and an Irishman—one PETE STORBIN, who warns the treasure hunters against a rascally filibuster—PEDRO DIEGO, and his gang By some means the pirate has got to know the object of the expedition. This points to the necessity of a stronghold, and the very day following its completion, Pedro Diego attacks.

(Now read on.)

The Fight!

AND now that the Hawk had opened fire upon the Valda, she was making no reply beyond a volley or two of rifle-shots. And very small volleys they were—for, of course, she had not many men.

That was the worst of it. Alec's heart fell as he thought of how small a company Barron had with him, after allowing for Read and those with him on the Crow's Nest. He knew only too well that, if all that savage lot in the boats once gained the yacht's deck and came to grips with her weak crew, all hope would be gone. They must inevitably capture her.

Alec's speculations, however, were again interrupted; this time by the necessity for prompt action.

The party on the shore, encouraged by the very evident signs of fright they had seen on the part of the natives, had grown bolder, and had been stealing an advance upon them. Creeping from rock to rock while Menga had been exhorting them, and Alec's attention had been given to the yacht, some of the assailants had managed to get quite close. From behind some rocks, only fifty yards or so away, they were keeping up a constant sniping, which was causing trouble again among the blacks. Already two or three had been wounded, and they were evidently becoming panic-stricken.

"We must do something to dislodge those fellows from behind that rock, Read," Alec said, pointing to the place. "What had we better do?"

"STRANGLED" HAIR LOOKS DULL, SPLITS AND FALLS OUT.

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SECTION OF HAIR—GREATLY MAGNIFIED.



Fig. 1

Fig. 1.—Showing how Dandruff accumulates and slowly chokes the hair to death.



Fig. 2

Fig. 2.—Dry, split hair—the result of washing with Soap or Ordinary Soda and Water.



Fig. 3

Fig. 3.—"Cremex" Shampooed hair. Strong, Clean, Healthy, and Vigorous.

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ADDRESS.....

Nelson Lee Library, 10/3/17.

I don't want to use a maxim or cannon just yet. I'd rather keep 'em as a reserve."

Read nodded.

"Ay, ay, sir, I understand," he returned thoughtfully. "Tell ye what, sir, there be some rockets lyin' with the other stuff in the caves. That seems t' me t' be the sort of medicine to suit their complaint like."

"Why, of course! The very thing, Tom! What a silly I was not to think of it!" said Alec, laughing. "It's a capital idea! It'll help to make the blacks buck up, too, I'll bet, when they see how it will set those chaps down there skipping!"

Read laughed too, and went off to look for the rockets.

It has to be borne in mind that all this time firing was going on all around, and bullets were whistling overhead.

Clive's coolness in the midst of it all excited the admiration not only of Read, but also of the sailors with him. Read himself was an old man-o'-war's man, and had seen actual service. To him pluck and coolness in the midst of a fight were a sort of second nature. But he had not expected to find it in a young fellow so inexperienced, comparatively speaking, as Clive.

The real fact of the matter, was, however, that Alec was, as has been said before, filled with a hot anger against these piratical adventurers, who had resorted to such an infamous, low-down trick as that practised against the doctor and his companions.

"I'll pay 'em out for it! I'll shoot 'em down like the vile scum they are!" he growled out between his teeth. "I'll kill them with no more mercy than if they were a nest of crawling, wriggling, venomous serpents! Heaven helping me, I'll make it my special business to avenge my friends!"

Perhaps if he had not had this great incentive to take up his thoughts he might have thought more of the dangers he was courting. But the anger, disgust, and indignation he felt against Diego and his gang had lighted a smouldering fire which, for the time being, drove away all other thoughts save one—how to get even with this villainous, treacherous horde, and pay them back in their own coin.

Read soon reappeared with a bundle under his arm. From among the bundle he picked out a tripod and fitted a rocket. A moment or two later, and it started on its errand, hissing, screaming, and sending out volumes of fiery sparks.

It dropped just over the rock where the snipers had taken their stand, and scattered them like a lot of rabbits.

Alec and the sailors were on the look-out, and, as the snipers bolted, fired at them without scruple. This pleased the blacks immensely, and they entered at once into the spirit of the thing.

More rockets were fired, and sent whizzing, spitting forth fire amongst rocks where other snipers were hiding, and this time, as they bolted, Alec left the work of dealing with them to the natives.

Meantime, what of the yacht? What was Captain Barron doing?

Alas! he was eating his heart out with rage and chagrin, ready to tear his hair and rend his clothes. Instead of outwitting the pirates and leading them into the trap he had prepared for them, it was he who had become a victim to their clever treachery.

He had supposed that all the men whom he distrusted had deserted. He knew that they had disappeared, and that some, at any rate, had swum ashore in the night and gone off overland to join Diego's gang.

But he was wrong in taking it for granted that they had all done the

same, the truth being that two of them had merely concealed themselves as stowaways might.

The skipper's suspicions and fears having been thus lulled by their supposed desertion, these men carried out a little plan of their own.

While Barron had been absent early that morning they had been busy, and it was not long after his return before the effects of their sinister industry became visible.

The captain had got under weigh, had passed safely through the gap in the reef, and had given the order to steam ahead—he wanted to work round to take up a certain position—when the engines suddenly stopped.

Captain Barron roared out inquiries down the tube, and then, dissatisfied with the answers he received, had rushed down into the engine-room to interview Macdonald, the chief engineer. There he found that a pin had somehow worked loose and flown out, the machinery had jammed, and Macdonald and his assistants were working like Trojans to repair the mischief.

While this was going on the Hawk was drawing near, and was already firing at the people in the Crow's Nest and getting out her boarders in the boats.

The Valda lay helpless, drifting slowly back towards that very reef which Barron had hoped to strand the Hawk upon. And the Hawk refused to walk into the trap; instead she had halted at a safe distance from it, and was making brisk preparations for capturing the yacht while she lay helpless.

The Hawk's boats would be able to pass over the reef, and the Valda could do nothing effective to stop them.

"Well, we can at least make a fight of it!" growled Barron, as, rushing on deck again, he was just in time to feel the wind of a cannon-ball.

"Stand by with Long Tom!" he roared out to the second mate. "Now then, what are you waiting for?"

Barron suddenly felt a sort of shiver seize him. It was a premonition that something else was wrong. It proved to be well founded. There was something the matter with their one cannon. It had been spiked!

"Heavens, man! Don't you dare to tell me that!" yelled Barron at Owen, the second mate.

The skipper fairly danced along the deck in his rage and mortification, all but stopping another shot from the Hawk with his body.

"Get a drill from below and drill it out!" he ordered one of the sailors. "And, Owen, take the maxims in hand. Y—you're not going to tell me you can't work 'em?"

Captain Barron almost screamed these words. His eyes were nearly starting out of his head. His face turned a deep purple. He looked as if he would burst.

He saw it all now! While he had been busy with his plan of battle these cunning scoundrels had been secretly plotting against him in a manner he had little idea of. And now, lo! here were the results of their crafty handiwork! The yacht lay helpless. She could neither fight nor run away. She was practically at the mercy of the boatloads of boarders who were now setting out towards him!

Barron raced round the deck to the sharpshooters he had placed in position, and urged them to keep up their volleys. Then he dived below to hurry up Macdonald.

"It's no sma' matter, skipper," that worthy grunted, in answer to Barron's excited urging. "It's not likely I'm lettin' the grass grow

under me feet. But ye dinna ken the deefficulty of the job. But I'll have her right now in a little while."

"A little while!" roared Barron. "The boarders'll be here, and we shall be all knocked on the head before yer little while is up!"

He rushed on deck again like one demented. Owen and another man were busy on the gun despite the fact that bullets were singing to right and to left, and that every minute, or so a big shot came shrilling past.

One caught the gunwale of the motor-launch and sent a splinter or two flying. It gave the captain an idea. He called to a couple of his men.

"Get the launch out and tow the ship," he ordered. "Ye can keep her away from the reef, at any rate, till we can get the engines to work."

Thus it came about that Alec and Read, watching the yacht from the Crow's Nest, wondering each moment more and more at her behaviour, saw the motor-launch appear from behind the vessel with a rope and commence towing her.

Then they understood. They could only guess as to what had happened, but the miserable outcome was plain enough. The yacht was disabled. Something must have gone wrong with her engines.

A roar, half of derision, half of triumph, burst forth from the boatloads of boarders as they, too, realised what had happened. And at once they started rowing hard in order to close round the yacht and capture her while they had such a splendid chance.

Alec was in a fever of wild excitement at the sight. He was scarcely less upset than the captain on his deck.

"What on earth can have happened?" he exclaimed.

"Can't be anything very bad," Read growled thoughtfully. "Macdonald's too careful a man fur that. Some little thing p'raps as he'll put right directly——"

"But that will be too late, man," Alec cried. "Can't we help him—do something to gain time for him? Let us turn the fire of our cannon and maxims on those grinning, shouting devils in yon boats! That'll make 'em grin on the other side of their faces, and perhaps give the captain time. It's bound to stop 'em. They can't keep on under the fire we can treat 'em to."

"No, sir. It's bound, as ye say, t' stop 'em. But—have ye considered? It'll turn 'em on to us! They're bound to save theirselves. We shall have the whole lot of 'em on to us like a swarm of hornets!"

"I don't care. They may wipe us out, but it may be the saving of the yacht. Quick! There's no time to be lost!"

A minute later the triumphant, jeering filibusters were, as Alec had forecasted, grinning on the other side of their faces.

Quite suddenly, without the least warning, a terrible fire had been turned on them from the despised party in the Crow's Nest. The rattle of maxims, mingled with the booming of the cannon, throwing a six-pound shell, and the execution effected in the closely packed boats was terrible.

The boats stopped, one began to sink, and then the rest turned.

Diego, it seemed, was leading them, and he saw that there was but one thing to be done if he would avoid defeat. He must rush the crow's nest.

Some of the boats would fain have turned tail, but they dared not disobey him. All accordingly pulled madly for the shore, and, utterly regardless of the rain of bullets, they jumped ashore and raced like mad demons up the beach.

It was at that moment that the doctor and Clive with their party appeared high up on a rock in the rear, and gazed down in astonishment upon what was going on.

In a trice, as it were, Dr. Campbell's experienced eye had taken in everything, and he understood.

He had seen the helpless yacht being towed by the motor-launch, had seen the boat start forward to capture her, and heard the chorus of premature triumph which had been turned to shrieks and yells as the men on the Crow's Nest poured in their dread fire.

He had then seen the boat turn, and the men in them make for the shore, and he knew the dire danger in which the dauntless band of the Crow's Nest now stood.

He knew that Alec, in acting as he had in order to gain time for Captain Barron, had drawn the whole swarm of cut-throats against himself. It had either been a very mad thing to do, or an act of splendid, unselfish devotion. In any case, as things stood, it could have only one result.

There were but four white men on the rocky platform besides Alec. His native allies were nearly all armed with old rifles, and altogether were of little account when it came to real hard fighting with a swarm of desperadoes of the calibre of Diego and his men.

The latter were now in a seething, furious, desperate, devil-may-care state. They ran, filled with maniacal rage against the devoted band who had stopped their attack on the yacht and turned their expected victory into a retreat. Moreover, they were in that position when to stand still, to hesitate, meant death. They had but one chance—to rush the place, in spite of the hail of bullets from the Maxims. In doing this they must, of course, lose heavily, but enough would survive to deal with the five white men and the natives.

Such was the position. The assailants knew it, and they kept on blindly, wildly. They were for the time homicidal maniacs, filled with ferocity and hatred and the desire for a terrible revenge for the losses they had already suffered.

"Heaven help that very young fellow and all with him if they storm the place!" muttered the doctor, with a heavy sigh.

"What can we do to help them, sir?" cried Clive. "Surely—surely we can do something?"

He and Grove had already unslung their rifles, and had added their fire to that which Alec was sending forth; but a few bullets more or less seemed to make hardly any difference just then.

Something more was wanted. And now most of the assailants had reached the base of the rock, where they were comparatively safe for the moment. The overhanging rock itself protected them, and they had a breathing-time to collect their energies for the final rush up the path.

The path was on their left side, so that, in order to gain it, the stormers must pass in full view of the doctor and his companions.

The doctor would have descended to Alec's assistance before this could be done so; but, as has been before explained, the side of the mountain behind the Crow's Nest was a wall of rock which, if not quite perpendicular, was so steep as to be practically unclimbable. Thus the doctor's party had come out on a place where they were themselves virtually prisoners.

They were confined to a hanging terrace on the face of the cliff, a place of considerable extent, sloping, and covered with innumerable boulders and loose pieces of rock of all sorts and sizes and shapes. But beyond the limits of this terrace they could not travel, and if there had not been matters of so much more importance to occupy their thoughts, they would now have been trying to puzzle out how they were going to descend to the shore.

The doctor's glance flashed quickly this way and that, seeking desperately

(Continued overleaf.)

for some way in which to aid the devoted band on the platform below them. Looking for a moment out to sea, he caught sight of a number of specks coming round the distant headland. But he had no time even to consider what they might be, and his glance flashed back to the rocks lying around. And then it was that the idea so anxiously sought came to him. At that moment Alec looked up and waved his hand to his friends above. He meant it, they all knew, as a farewell. Another minute or two, and he and his faithful few would be overwhelmed, and their fate would be sealed.

“Quick! Quick!” cried the doctor to Clive and Grove. Put your rifles aside and help me!”

They obeyed, wondering a little at first; but they quickly grasped the idea. A few moments later the air was filled with the thunder of great rocks crashing down the mountain side in a series of avalanches.

They swept down upon the place where the filibusters had begun to swarm up the path. Here the boulders came rolling down upon them, carrying with them confusion, fear, and death. The natives of the doctor's party lost no time in imitating their leader, and it is needless to say that it was a game at which they could play every bit as well as the white men.

Now just before Alec had, as stated above, waved a good-bye to his friends above. He had known for some minutes that they were there, for the sound of rifle fire overhead had drawn his gaze that way, and he had recognised them with mingled surprise and delight. He had realised, however, that they could not get down to him, nor could they help him to any material extent, situated as they were. He also knew that he and those with him were, in all human probability, doomed.

They could not hope to resist the ferocious crowd clamouring below and thirsting for their blood. There was but one thing left, and that was to sell their lives as dearly as possible. The more they could kill or disable now, the fewer there would be for Captain Barron to contend with afterwards.

Just after Alec had waved his hand to his friends above, the first of the stormers appeared at the top of the path.

Two or three were shot down, and rolled shrieking off the rock; but others took their places, and came on with such fierce and savage determination that the natives were dismayed, and retreated like a flock of frightened sheep—all save Menga and Kalma, who remained with great bravery beside their white friends.

There were but seven real fighters, therefore, all told now left to confront the bloodthirsty swarm who were storming up the path, and were already leaping over the boulders on to the platform. Among these was Pedro Diego himself.

A desperate hand-to-hand fight began. Diego rushed at Alec, a cutlass in one hand and a revolver in the other. Alec sprang aside only just in time, and as Diego swung past and tried to pull up, Alec swung his rifle round and aimed a blow at him sideways.

It missed the ruffian's head, but caught his arm, and the shock caused him to drop his pistol. The next moment Alec found himself mixed up in a fighting, struggling, yelling crowd, in which his two darkies were ever beside him, trying either to aid him in attack or shield him from the blows aimed at him.

(Another thrilling instalment of this grand yarn next week.)