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THE
ROBERT

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The Mule Driver and the Colonel.

Bill had finished panning the concentrates from our last clean-up, and now the silver ball of amalgam sizzled and fried on the shovel over the little chip-fire, while we smoked in the sun before the cabin. Removed from the salivating fumes of the quicksilver, we watched the yellow tint grow and brighten in the heat.

"There's two diseases which the doctors ain't got any license to monkey with," began Bill, chewing out blue smoke from his lungs with each word. "and they're both fevers. After they butt into your system they stick cross-ways, like a swallered toothpick; there ain't any patent medicine that can bust their holt."

I settled against the door-jamb and nodded.

"I've had them both, acute and continuous, since I was old enough to know my own mind and the taste of tobacco. I hold them mainly responsible for my present condition." He mournfully viewed his fever ridden frame which sprawled a pitiful six-feet-two from the heels of his gum-boots to the grizzled hair beneath his white Stetson.

"The first and most rabid," he continued, "is horse racing—and t'other is the mining fever, which last is a heap insiduous in its action and more lingering in its effect."

"It wasn't long after that deal in the Territory that I felt the symptoms coming on agin, and this time they panted most emphatic toward prospecting, so me and 'Kink' Martin loaded our kit onto the burros and hit West. 'Kink' was a terrible good prospector, though all-fired unlucky and peculiar. Most people called him crazy, 'cause he had fits of goin' for days without a peep."

"Hostile and ornery to the whole world; sort of bulging out and exploding with silence as it were."

"We'd been out in the hills for a week on our first trip before he got one of them death-watch faces on him, and

boycotted the English langwidge. I stood it for three days, trying to jolly a grin on to him, or rattle a word loose but he just wouldn't jolt."

"One night we packed into camp tired, hungry and dying for a good feed."

"I hustled around and procured a supper fit for old Mr. Eppycure. Knowing that 'Kink' had a weakness for strong coffee that was simply a hinge in him, I pounded up about a quart of coffee beans in the corner of a blanket and boiled out a South American liquid that was nothing but the real Arbuckle mud."

"This wasn't no chafing dish party either, because the wood was wet and the smoke chased me round the fire. Then it blazed up in spurts and fired the bacon-grease, so that when I grabbed the skillet the handle sizzled the life all out of my callouses. I kicked the fire down to a nice bed of coals and then the coffee pot upset and put it out. Ashes got into the bacon, and—Oh! you know how joyful it is to cook on a green fire when you are dead tired and your hoodoo's on vicious."

"When the 'scoffings' were finally ready, I wasn't in what you might exactly call a mollyfying and tactful mood, nor exuding genialness and enthusiasms anyways noticeable."

"I herded the best in camp towards him, watching for a benevolent symp-

tom, but he just dogged in it silence and never changed a hair. That was the limit, so I inquired sort of ominous and gentle, 'Is that coffee strong enough for ye, Mr. Martin?'

"He give a little impecunious grunt, implying, 'Oh! it'll do,' and with that I seen little green specks begin to buck and wing in front of my eyes, reaching back of me, I grabbed the Winchester and throwed it down on him."

"Now you laugh, darn you," I says, 'in a hurry. Just turn it out gleeful and infractious.'

"He stared into the nozzle of that Krupp for a minute, then swallowed twice to a tune up his reeds, and says friendly and perlitte, but serious and wheezy:

"Why, what ails you, William?" "Laugh, you old dong-beater," I yells, rising gradually to the occasion, 'or I'll bust your cupola like a blue-rock.'

"I've got to have merriment," I says. "I pine for warmth and genial smiles, and you're due to furnish the sunshine. You emit a few shreds of mirth with expedition or the upper end of your spinal cord is going to catch cold."

"Say! his jaws squeaked like a screen door when he loosened, but he belched up a beauty, sort of stagey and artificial it was, but a great help. After that we got to know each other a heap better. Yes, sir; soon after that we got real intimate. He knocked the gun out of my hands, and we began to arbitrate. We plumb ruined that spot for a camping place; rooted it up in furrows, and tramped each other's stummicks out of shape. We finally reached an amicable settlement by me getting him agin a log where I could brand him with the coffee pot."

"Right there we drew up a protoplasm, by the terms of which he was to laugh anyways twice at meal-times."

"He told me that he reckoned he was locoed, and always had been since a youngster, when the Injuns run in on them down at Frisbee, the time of the big 'killing.' 'Kink' saw his mother and father both murdered, and other



"AN AMICABLE SETTLEMENT."